

### ***We Are All People, We're Just in Different Sized Bodies***

Sometimes it's difficult to acknowledge your own successes, but it's important to allow yourself that victory - especially at the beginning of a shiny new go-get-em school year...I'm still working on that.

Last year I had an intern. She was a few years older than I which made me feel a little uncomfortable initially, but after working with her for a few months we became friends and colleagues. I wasn't convinced that I could be a good teacher *for* a teacher because until last year I was unsure if I truly knew what I was doing.

Sometimes, if I'm honest, I still doubt what's going on in my classroom. But let's be real -- who doesn't?? The old adage that a wise person knows that they know nothing rings just as true for educators as anyone else. Yes, we all have our content knowledge, our experience, and our methodology that we *know*, but when we are willing to admit that we are not the end-all-be-all authority on education and classroom management, it sets us apart from those who are not willing to do so. It took some serious reflection on my part to come to this conclusion, and when my intern asked me to answer a few questions for an assignment she had to complete, I realized that I do in fact have some solid ground beneath my teacher-feet. She asked me about being a first year teacher, and what a first year teacher

needs to know and be able to do to have a successful year, as well as what qualities or dispositions are essential to first year teachers in order to ensure that all of his or her students achieve high academic success. In answering these questions for her, I learned a lot about myself. I think the act of writing it down and reading over it was what really did it. So as we begin another year (can you believe it's really the 2016-17 school year already!?), I hope you'll take some of these thoughts to heart. Being a teacher is amazing, so get pumped up for this year because it's going to be just as challenging-fantastic-tough-super-frustratingly-awesome as the last!



### **The Learning Curve**

As our year begins, remember that it's okay to make mistakes. I see a lot of teachers beating themselves up about one or two students who "just don't get it". It's unfair to expect to jump into a classroom full of new kids, who may or may not be just as nervous as you are, and expect to be super crazy awesome at what you're doing. No athlete studies a sport and then is instantly professional-grade without practicing and playing. No lawyer joins a firm and is made partner in the first year without proving that she can do it. Don't expect yourself or your class to be perfect yet, expect to do your best and understand that your best is going to be better tomorrow, next week, and next year.

Secondly, I know a lot of us stress out about what we have to do coming up next week, next month, and even things we want to change for next year - wait, isn't it still August!? Manage your time wisely and don't be afraid to leave work at work! It's okay if you don't get everything graded the day it's

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## *Middle Grades Musings*

turned in. And you don't have to grade every last thing. Be able to use a grading rubric and feel okay with not checking every single possible thing on an assignment. For example, if you have a paper to grade, look for 3-4 specific things and forgo checking each and every little tiny intricacy. Don't stress yourself out about correcting all of the spelling and grammar errors if that's not what you're grading - if it's not your objective, you can let it slide a little bit. Now, that's not to say that if it's terrible you don't want to say anything about it...instead of making thousands of red marks on a paper, write a note to the student about it and offer extra practice, then remember that you need to teach that skill more thoroughly again later. They come to us not knowing yet - that's what we do.

My first reaction to her final question, what qualities or dispositions are essential to teachers in order to insure that all of his or her students achieve high academic success, was "that's a loaded question!" I have learned that in any given year you will have at *least* one or two students who don't achieve high levels of growth, and there's nothing you can do to change that right now. Some of them don't eat at home. Some of them don't have power. Some of them are living in homeless shelters. If a child's basic needs are not fulfilled, then high academic achievement isn't exactly the top of the list, and very likely isn't high on their parents'/guardians' lists, either. Understandable, right?

All that aside, to reach the majority of your kiddos, it's imperative that you form a relationship with them. This is the beginning of the year and is definitely the time to start building bridges with your kids. Learn about them. Connect with them somehow. Joke with the ones who can handle it, be compassionate to the ones who need it, give them tough love, and always



remember that each day is a new day. The kids (9 out of 10 times) will not remember or be affected by the fact that yesterday you gave them silent lunch. Today is a new day - treat it that way! Smile at them when they walk through the door, be honest with them about what you expect. Tell them that your class is going to be challenging and they will have to work hard to succeed. Tell them stories

about yourself when you can, it makes you more of a person. Remember that kids think we live at school and it's always shocking for them to see us outside of school or hear a story about something silly that we did when we were in middle school. And above all, let the students *own* their own educations.

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