Blur the Lines

I am an undergraduate student enrolled at Campbell University. I entered Campbell believing that I was going to be an elementary school teacher. I loved the younger kids and wanted to foster the love of learning as early as possible. However, I soon came to find my interests changing. Campbell University offers a Middle Grades Extension that can be added to the primary degree. I decided that I would spend my first field experience in a middle school math class in order to gain some exposure to the world from which so many educators steer away. I fell in love with middle school after that first experience so, during my next advisement meeting I added the middle school extension in math and that was that.

Now, as a junior, I have learned more than I could have imagined about the world of middle school. Thanks to my junior level course, Teaching in the Middle, I have learned that middle school is truly where I belong as an educator. My initial hesitations to teaching “in the middle” stemmed from my personal experiences, however not in the way you might think. I don’t have any horror stories of being bullied, or teachers who were out to get me. It was more or less that I could not imagine myself teaching in that environment. Come to find out, I did not attend a true middle school; it was in the name, but not in the halls I once walked. The school I attended from 6th to 8th grade by definition was a junior high school. I could talk about the many features that shape a true middle school, but instead I’m going to focus on one thing. The one thing that I am most looking forward to and never knew existed, teaming.

Why teaming?

One of the many reasons I am entering the field of education is the simple, yet wonderful, fact that everywhere we turn there is another connection to be made. We all bring something different to the table and when we are willing to share and collaborate, the students we all love benefit. The concept of teaming was foreign to me prior to college. Now that I have seen middle school teams in action, I wonder how much I missed out on as a middle schooler. There are countless benefits to teaming for both the students and the teachers. A sense of belonging is essential at the middle school age and teaming helps to create that. Teams – let me rephrase that – effective teams create a learning environment that students want to be in.

During the same time I was enrolled in the middle grades course, I was also taking a Writing Across the Curriculum course. This class introduced me to the importance of integrating writing with other content areas. Meanwhile in Teaching in the Middle we were discussing interdisciplinary planning. Things I was learning in one class were becoming applicable in the other! As middle school teachers, we are defined
as experts in our chosen content area. The expectations of effective teaming brings together four experts capable of blurring the lines between their disciplines and fostering a sense of unity for their students. Even as a student in college courses, I found so much more meaning in seeing how my two courses supplemented one another—the lines blurred and the content became that much clearer to me. It is the same, if not more powerful, for the young adolescent.

Seeing is Believing

During one of our classes we were able to participate in an exemplary team workshop lead by my instructor, Dr. Roukema. Five teams from separate schools in the county came together to learn how to plan an interdisciplinary unit. I joined a school during the planning process; it worked out since their math teacher was unable to attend. The beauty of this exposure was more than just being able to observe a team at work; it was feeling as if I were a member of their team. We were able to come up with a theme that was realistic to execute for each content area and even began planning what would be covered throughout the two-three week period. During a previous activity, the team noticed that they have not conducted a service project yet, nor had they planned to. They ran with the idea to incorporate a service project that aligns with their unit. Wheels started turning, and ideas sprung from our mouths; it was all starting to come together. I was part of something great for that short time. My perspective as a new teacher was welcomed. We created something that was relevant to middle school students in that region while simultaneously creating connections between and among content areas.

What Did I Learn?

Through this experience I was able to gain some insight to a world I’ve been eager to venture into. Exemplary teams support one another. They voice opinions. They are masters of their content and can anticipate what is coming next in the year. I witnessed relationships with students without the students being present through the way they discussed student relevance and parent involvement in the service project. In my opinion, the best educators welcome new ideas while continuing to share their own. Through working in a team, teachers have access to a wealth of information and resources. As a professional entering the field within the next few years, I urge you to meet with your colleagues and plan something that will excite your students. I know I will be striving to blur the lines with whomever I will have the privilege to work on my first team.

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