

### **If I Knew Then What I Know Now- Advice to My Teacher Candidate Self**

When I first began my journey as a teacher candidate four years ago, never would I have imagined that I would be teaching during a pandemic. The vast amount of creativity, perseverance, and resilience required to support and maintain student success and well-being is greater now than ever before. 1.5 years into teaching during the pandemic, there are a number of things that I wish I knew more about teaching and learning when I was a teacher candidate. Here is my advice to my teacher candidate self.

### **It's All About the Students!**

I pursued teaching as a career because of my passion for working with students. During my teacher education program, I obtained a lot of knowledge about inclusive education, lesson and unit planning, assessment, and the origins of our education system. All of this knowledge served as the foundation of my teaching practice. However, I felt that the most valuable aspects of the teacher education program were obtained through practicum experiences and working with my students, mentor teachers, and practicum facilitators. It was during my practicum that I was able to bridge theory and practice and quickly realize that teaching is not about checking off curriculum expectations. It is about the students. It is about ensuring that students are understanding what they are learning along with its relevance to the world outside the classroom. In science education, these STSE connections are vital in enabling the students to become socially responsible citizens when they leave our classrooms.

### **What does this look like?**

In Grade 10 Science, there is a climate change unit, and issues related to climate change are current and have a substantial impact on the students' lives outside of the classroom. Teaching students about the natural and anthropogenic factors that affect climate change is important. But what is more important is providing students with opportunities to devise solutions to these problems, and to critically think about what they can do to address these issues. What I wish I had considered as a teacher candidate is providing students with more action-oriented opportunities to delve into issues of climate change at a deeper level. **Climate hack to action** is a great program that provides students with opportunities to devise robotic solutions to climate change through coding, all while meeting the curriculum expectations. What better way to spark the minds of our 21st century learners than this?

### **Collaborate, Reflect, and Collaborate Some More!**

As a teacher candidate, standing in front of a group of students for the first time can be nerve wracking. To make it less nerve wracking, collaborate with your mentor teacher and other members of the department that are teaching the same course! Also, don't take on a full lesson on your first day. Start by leading small group activities,

then large class activities, and then work your way up to leading a full lesson. Yes, you will make mistakes, and you will notice some flaws in your lesson plan. But remember this. No lesson is ever going to go exactly as planned. Referring to my previous point, it is all about the students. Be flexible and willing to learn and reflect on feedback from your mentor teacher and from yourself!

### **As a Teacher, You Are a Lifelong Learner**

The education system was founded upon the notion that the teacher is the “sole holder of knowledge” and that students are blank slates upon which new knowledge can be imparted. This has never held true. Students come with a whole backpack of past experiences and knowledge that will impact their learning. As a teacher, remember that you are also learning with your students. They might tell you something that you didn't know, or they might ask you a question that you don't know the answer to. Don't be afraid to learn with them! It shows students that there is always something to learn, and that we all learn something new every day!

### **Concluding Remarks**

In conclusion, teaching is a profession that requires adaptability and creativity, especially during a pandemic. Teachers have felt more burned out now than ever before, as they have had to find ways to do their job differently. Oddly enough, I started my first teaching position during the pandemic. Having to take on my own classes, ones that I hadn't taught before, was a huge learning curve for me. I continue to learn every day. My advice to current and future teacher candidates: remember that you are not alone. Teaching is a collaborative profession, and you have the support of your colleagues! On the days where it can feel difficult, remember that there is no such thing as “the perfect teacher”. You are embarking on a journey towards becoming the best teacher that you can be!

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