

James Olson

Teaching & Learning II

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Final Summative Reflection

It is hard to get my head around the fact that this is our final week. 5 more days, 18 more class periods to teach, and the practicum will be over. It feels cliché even to write this, but it really seems like only a month ago that this program began. This year has been crazy, memorable, at times deeply challenging, and still at others unspeakably rewarding. I will miss the routine of it all, the classes, teachers, colleagues, and especially the students. Who knows, maybe I will see them all again next year (fingers crossed), or maybe not. Nothing has been settled, at yet there is a profound sense of finality as this week begins.

I never really knew what to expect when I started this program, I never went to a US High School so I could not even paint a mental picture of what the routines and expectations would be, apart from the little I had seen in movies. Worcester was a city I had just moved to a few weeks before classes began, so I knew very little about the city that is not on its wikipedia page. All I knew was that I had decided I wanted to go back to what made me happy. For several years after college I worked a variety of jobs that were, for lack of a better term, spirit crushing. I felt no passion for excel sheets, dealing with arbitrary deadlines, and the cut-throat office politics. I found myself exhausted and

unhappy and ready for a change. Once my wife got into medical school, we knew everything was going to change (moving, selling our house, having a baby). So I decided what the hell, I want in on this upheaval, I want to go back to what makes me happy.

I thought long and hard about what I wanted. I have never really had a singular passion or calling, I have always sort of dabbled in multiple pools in a sort of cosmic ADHD. The clearest memory I had of being happy, in a working sense, was when I coordinated and volunteered in literacy campaigns in rural Mexico. Teaching people who were so marginalized, and empowering them with such seemingly simple yet basic skills was so rewarding. The process of coordinating and planning with colleagues to make actionable plans that were ultimately going to change the lives of these people, was something that invigorated me even at a young age. I decided I wanted to go into teaching, more specifically teaching language. I applied to the Clark program the day before the admissions deadline ended, and scrambled to get my recommendation letters in, even calling a former professor in Mexico to ensure he submitted his on time. I was so relieved, even overjoyed when I got in, because I had a chance to restart, to step away from what was making me so unhappy and start a new life in an area that I actually felt some passion for.

The program at Clark has been incredibly rewarding, all of the professors I have had and administrators have been so warm and knowledgeable. It has been one of those years where pieces seem to simply fit together, to the extent where this harmony almost scares you. You are constantly worried it will fall apart at some point, that you

will somehow mess it up, or simply a door will close just when your hopes began to rise. I have nothing but positives to say about the MAT program, since the beginning the classes I took, the observations, the mentoring, and rounds have all, in my mind, complemented each other and I really felt ready when I started teaching.

Teaching at South High has also been very rewarding, Gustavo, while he is not perfect as a mentor teacher, in a best practice sense, he is a very sincere and caring man. I think he is lonely and can read a little too much into mundane situations, but if you develop a relationship with him and show him that you accept him for who he is, he is eager to help you out (Too eager sometimes!). Throughout this year I have really tried to push students to think, and grow in their language skills. I have tried to engage them through varied content, review games, and building genuine personal relationships with them, and I think they have responded. I am very glad to have been placed in a situation where I had the independence to thrive, and the structure of a functional school to back me up.

I am also very glad I chose to pursue a dual licensure. ESL has been so fun to teach, the students are a riot, the content is so salient to their futures, and the flexibility of creating your own curriculum, while a huge responsibility, is very freeing. I feel like I am making a direct impact on their futures whenever they learn a new concept, internalize vocabulary, or simply understand a joke. I love being their advocate with coaches, and guidance counselors, because I am more than a teacher in that moment. I am simply someone who cares. I am also so glad I got Olga as a mentor teacher, she is so flexible, knowledgeable, and genuinely kind.

In conclusion this has been one of the best years of my life: with the birth of my son, the beginning of new chapter in my wife and my life, and some newfound clarity regarding my professional purpose. I am also very personally grateful to you Heather, I cannot overstate how important you are to the program. Your wise counsel, constructive feedback, calming presence, and sincere interest in our lives has made this year that much more manageable. I do not know the other mentors, but you are one of the major pieces in this MAT year so rewarding, and I am so grateful to you for that. Since my interview I knew I wanted you as my mentor, and I am glad it worked out that way!