

RECOLLECTIONS OF A STUDENT TEACHER

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I completed my student teaching May 1, 1991. I am part of the last class at the University of Tennessee to participate in the student teaching program. From now on, teaching certification applicants will be required to serve a year long internship in the schools. The first half of my experience I spent in a middle school, and the last half I spent in a high school. This is my story of my time in the middle school. I was placed in an average-sized school consisting of children of lower to middle socioeconomic status. The school is located in a small community and is well-supported by its community members. The school building and grounds are clean and well-kept. The principal is intelligent, enthusiastic, and supportive but is also very busy and must be out of the school many days. I taught three seventh-grade math classes and one reading class. (Every middle school teacher must teach one class of reading.) Here is my story.

Wednesday, January 9

Today was my first day of student teaching. It seemed to be a routine day. During homeroom Channel One blared while the seventh-graders raised their voices over the noise to talk with their friends. Roll was taken and sent to the office. First period was an accelerated math class that was generally quiet and well-behaved. Ms. G checked and reviewed their homework and taught dividing fractions and assigned the classwork and homework. Second period was a reading class which seemed to go slower and not accomplish as much. During the third period planning time I met the three other teachers for this pod of seventh-graders, and I talked with Ms. G about her classes and students. Fourth period is a standard math class that is divided by the lunch period. Generally, the same lesson is taught as in the accelerated class,

but less homework is assigned. I helped monitor the classwork. Fifth period is a planning period. Today I met with the principal and my coordinator to review the school policies. The principal asserted that he was there to support the teachers and that I should come to him if I had any problems or questions. He also made certain that I knew to get help if a fight broke out rather than try to break it up myself. Comforting. I left this conference to walk into Ms. G's sixth period remedial class. This group of about 15 is much louder and less well-behaved. In seventh period, another standard class, I called out answers to their homework, recorded their grades, and went over their questions on the board. They were well-behaved and attentive. It was amazingly difficult to hear their grades when I did not know their names or where the answers would be coming from. The last period of the day is activity period which is a type of study hall for the students. After school, Ms. G and I worked on rearranging the room since it was going to become "my" classroom. She wanted **me** to decide how I wanted the room, but I felt unqualified for the task. I did not know how I wanted the room. I just wanted to take her advice, yet I tried to show some initiative and make a decision. Ms. G made the point that the room arrangement must not only be decided based on how it presently appears, but also upon how it will appear after the students have sat in the desks and displaced them. Finally at 5:00 we were through.

Thursday, January 10

Today in homeroom Ms. G left me to supervise the room. On one side of the room were mostly girls discussing when they were going to get their next perm. On my left were mostly boys whose conversations consisted of

challenges and insults regarding each other's level of intelligence and sexual orientation. I did not know whether to intercede or let them work things out. Finally, one boy said something I considered totally offensive, so I called him to my desk. I quietly asked him if he really thought his conversation was appropriate, and after a brief pause he said, "Well no, not with females present." I let it rest, and he returned to his desk and behaved much better. In all the math classes Ms. G gave an oral quiz of word problems which were fairly easy but required the students to think about applications of math. The students hated it and generally did poorly. In first period there is a student named Bryan who was transferred from the remedial math class in hopes of challenging him and improving his behavior. Bryan does not do well in school, but math is his strong subject. He tends to be very loud, talkative, obnoxious, and generally irritating to his teachers; however, Ms. G has developed a friendship with him and placed him in this class where he has been doing better. Today Bryan got frustrated on the first problem on the quiz, so he gave up. He simply wrote the number of each problem down and then marked it wrong. I think he was trying to save his pride. He still does not have much confidence, and it looks better to fail because you did not try rather than because you could not do it. I think it is good to have the students do oral exercises and to work on application skills, but I think Ms. G should have prepared them better for the quiz. Also to improve on those skills, she will need to continue to give them quizzes of that nature. The point of the quiz was that one can not have fractions of buses, skirts, beds, etc. in real life. I think it would have been profitable to bring up statistics such as families having 2.5 children and discussing the meaning of these reports. Later in the day, I covered a bulletin board and spent some time looking at a catalog of educational materials. The books and

posters were very expensive! In general, the students were much louder today since the room had been rearranged and they could sit wherever they wanted.

Friday, January 11

Today was teacher inservice. I felt insecure as I walked into the library where the teachers were congregating. Not knowing exactly what was expected of me and knowing I was a new face among many well-known faces, I found Ms. G as quickly as I could and tried to appear somewhat confident. A speaker presented an interesting talk on different personalities and conversation styles. The principal then spoke. I found it hard to understand much of what he said and the reactions of the teachers. After lunch I sat in on Ms. G's team meeting where they discussed a discipline plan and six weeks awards. I looked over the curriculum guide for the next section on percents and some tests and worksheets, but in general, the day was not as productive as I wanted it to be.

Monday, January 14

Ms. G does well at varying the class routine. She had some students work some problems on the board, and she have them a practice test to start working on while she recorded their grades. The practice test is counted as a quiz score, and the unit test score is counted twice. She said the students at this age want everything they do to count. In reading class, the students answered questions about their reading assignment, and I discussed their answers with them. They seemed to have very little understanding of

literary terms and elements such as plot and theme. In general they stayed quiet and well-behaved. Daniel is a student I have noticed lately. He is fairly tall and lanky with a protruding stomach and big ears. He seems to be somewhat of a social outcast and hyperactive. I greeted him one day, so now he is always doing things to get my attention. The heat went out in the room, so for the last few periods of the day we took the classes to the commons where it was warmer. We had to inform the office of where we were. In remedial math there is a student named Robbie who was suspended for several days and so is behind in math. Eighth period I worked with him on some problems, and he caught on but will need to practice those skills to learn them which, most likely, he will not get to do. At first he was too embarrassed to ask me any questions. Once I started helping him, he started to enjoy the challenge of doing the problems right, and the praise pleased him. When Bryan tried to give him the answers, he told him to shut up and leave. I was able to get Bryan to help him a little though.

Tuesday, January 15

Today the math classes reviewed their practice tests, graded them, and then took their unit test. I was really surprised that in the accelerated class (and basically all the classes) that the students only took 15 minutes to take their tests. It reinforced to me the need to have activities planned for the students to do if they finish early. While they took their tests, I saw no evidence of cheating. Many of them do not care enough to cheat. I went over the practice test with the remedial class. It was difficult to keep them quiet, yet they would not ask me any questions. They did very poorly on

the test and will need to be retaught and retested tomorrow. Some of them are so far behind that even a whole day of reteaching would not be enough. I also helped to review sixth period. It was very difficult to get them quiet. I tried everything from firm general commands, specific commands to specific people, stares, and long pauses, but they did not care. Basically they are well-behaved, but they just would not get quiet. Finally, Ms. G came into the room, and they stopped talking. It will not be that way forever.

Wednesday, January 16

Today I taught a lesson on ratio to first period. They were very attentive and really picked things up quickly and could even make applications on their own. My lesson went well, but I had not really memorized the basic points I wanted to teach. It made me feel a little muddled in the middle. Ms. G suggested that for the other classes I might want to go over applications of ratios first to show them how it is important. I totally agree. The day was very hectic. All day long Ms. G recorded grades on report cards while I handed back unit tests, graded unit tests, handed out ten item tests (for retesting) and graded ten item tests. It was a mess. There is no way to reteach properly before giving ten item tests, so only about five students passed any of the retests. The system is not very effective. One girl named Tanya is very interesting. When she thinks she does not understand something, she is very quick to give up, yet she is fairly bright and can pick things up if she tries.

Thursday, January 17

I taught all day long. First period I reviewed the homework, gave a short quiz which they did well on, talked about the ratio of Iraqi to American troops in the Middle East, and had them make up five problems dealing with ratios. I taught the other classes the lesson I gave first period yesterday. I used colored bits of plastic on the overhead to give them practice with working with ratios. I learned to keep them busy even if it is only working practice problems. I need to start telling them to raise their hand if they have an answer to a question, because now they are just blurting out answers. Seventh period there is a boy and girl who continually talk and flirt and disrupt class, so before class started, I went up to them and told them that I did not want any trouble from them. If there were any problems I would move them and give them comment cards. I think it especially impressed the girl, so she did very well about not turning around and talking. Afterwards I went to them and thanked them.

Friday, January 18

The substitute taught first, second, and seventh periods. First period exchanged their problems and checked them. I took them up and told them they may see them again on a quiz. I ended up teaching fourth although I was unprepared. It was not a great lesson. I got frustrated trying to keep them quiet. I warned them, gave comment cards, and finally gave them a brief speech on my expectations. Sixth period was awful. Only six had done at least half their homework, so I put these on one side of the room and the rest on the other side. I went over the homework with the six who had done

it and gave more work to those who had not. I took up their work at the end of the period, but they will get a zero for their homework. In activity period I helped Tanya with her math. She thinks she is dumb in math although I told her she was not. As soon as she does not understand something, she gets frustrated and gives up. She asked me if I would help her eighth period but then did not say anything about it until I asked her about it. She doubted whether I really wanted to help her. She seems to have a poor self-image, but she responds well to praise and success. Afterwards she made certain to thank me which was very sweet.

Wednesday, January 23

In first, Ms. G gave them a lecture about labeling all answers in word problems, which was good. Because of the prediction of snow, we gave them more homework to do if we were out of school. It reminded me to always be prepared. After lunch Daniel put gum in Craig's hair. When I went into class, Craig had already gotten it out and did not seem to be upset by it, so I just told Daniel to have a seat and gave him a comment card. One girl in fourth named Crystle is very talkative, but as soon as she is corrected, she gets angry and scowls. I talked to her later in the class and told her that I was not trying to pick on her or criticize her, but that I needed her to be quiet in class. She took that better, but I do not know how effective it will be. Sixth got a lecture from Ms. G on doing homework. We may have to go to a reward system.

Thursday, January 24

All the classes got a new seating chart today. It was humorous to see their reactions. Crystal threw a little temper tantrum when we put her in the front corner of the room. She has a major attitude problem, and I do not know what to do with her. She is causing problems in all her classes. First period was wonderfully quiet while I retaught proportions. They did terrible on their homework, so I did not take a grade on it. Seventh period there was a pep rally, so I helped Ms. G put up a bulletin board during that time. Sixth did not have their homework again, so I made them do their worksheets in class. They had questions, so I retaught while I had to practically sit on them to keep them quiet. They **still** did not know how to do the problems when they started on their homework. I do not know what to do with them.

Friday, January 25

First period did well today, so it gave me some time to check on several people who needed extra help. I felt like I was boring though. I could have gone into more detail, but I thought that might have confused them. I do not think I paced myself well in the other classes. I seemed to run out of time and not give them enough examples to work. I also was not able to adequately prepare them for the homework, so I got quite a few questions on it. All of the classes were horrible in behavior. in sixth I have six of the fifteen people comment cards and one boy named Leon got three comments. He is a small black boy who talks with a raspy voice and who blatantly disobeys his teachers. He scares me. I can not figure out how to

deal with him. Sixth did not get a thing of what I said today in class. In activity period I had some of them come up to me and ask me how to do it. All of a sudden I had their attention. One-on-one they are fine, but in a class with everyone else they can not concentrate.

Monday, January 28

Today was a good day. The classes thought the material was easy today, and they listened fairly well. In sixth, the substitute teacher stood in the back of the room to keep them quiet. It helped tremendously. It is impossible to sit on them and teach at the same time. In reading I reviewed their story with them, but it was not a great review because I am not prepared to teach reading and because some of them had not read the story. Today I tried to use more humor with them and be more enthusiastic. It helped me enjoy the day. During activity period I was able to talk with Tanya and Daniel (two troublemakers) about math and life. I think they enjoyed it and felt important talking to me.

Tuesday, January 29

Today went well. Grades were high, and the classes were attentive. In reading I had them read the next story and then discussed it and compared it to the previous story. Again I was not sure what I was supposed to be teaching them. I feel very little purpose in that class. I think it is stupid to have all of the middle school teachers teach a reading class rather than having someone interested and trained in reading to teach all the classes. Seventh period was awful again. They will not settle down. I

gave one comment card, but most of the time I can not tell who is talking. Their quiz scores reflected their inclination to talk rather than listen. I gave them a lecture which was probably ineffective. Tomorrow I may try to pretend to write names down (when I can not tell who is talking) until they get quiet.

Wednesday, January 30

In fourth Crystle had a bad attitude and got angry whenever I told her to get to work. Lately there has been a lot of kicking going on. For some reason they think it is okay to kick each other. Kicking is going to become an automatic comment card. In sixth we introduced cooperative learning. We divided them into groups including low, middle, and high skill levels. We took the troublemakers yet possible leaders and make them the group leaders. Each student will be responsible for their own learning and the learning of each person in their group. The team that exhibits the greatest teamwork will win their choice of a prize at the end of the six weeks. Again seventh was loud. Tanya will **not** behave although I have talked to her several times. I talked to Chad, another loud student, and I think that will help him. Tom has behaved so much better the last couple days since we put him in a third grade book. Now that he knows that I know what level he is on, he is much more receptive to me and will even admit he needs help.

Thursday, January 31

Today I felt boring, but some students did find the material difficult. In first I had a sneezing attack and sneezed about fifteen times. It was

funny because the students did not quite know how to react even though I made a joke about it. I began using the overhead today, and it was an adjustment trying to write large enough so that they could see. Some students seemed to catch on very well today while others seemed confused. Typical.

Monday, February 4

Today was a day to reteach and catch up. It felt good to repeat the stuff because I felt that maybe they were really getting it. Crystle is still a major pain. I think maybe she is disruptive because she is bored. I mentioned it to Ms. G, and we may move her to first period. Her mother is coming in for a conference tomorrow. I got angry with seventh period and stopped answering their questions and told them to get to work on the homework. I apologized to those who had questions and told the class that the ones who were talking owed the others an apology after class. For about the first time they got quiet and worked. Tom has done amazingly better since we put him in a book he can do. We had a parent conference with Tanya's mother and Tanya. The teachers made everyone feel comfortable. Tanya was still loud in math, and I had to move her. I think it is because she feels inadequate in math.

Tuesday, February 5

One student in seventh named Susan seems to have a lot of problems socially. She has been in foster homes all her life and was just recently adopted. She is very immature in her relations with other people. She came

in class today saying that she had to go talk to the guidance counselor because she had a problem with her friend Rachel. I told her that she needed to be in class and could not go. When she complained, I told her that she could not go to the counselor every time she had a problem. She said, "But that's what I do." I finally told her to do her work and not look at Rachel and then she would not have such a problem.

Wednesday, February 6

I had to serve bus duty this morning in order to get the full experience of teaching school. I got to school at 7:15 and simply sat in the commons and watched the students sit at tables and eat breakfast. We had a meeting with Josh and his mother. Josh is in the remedial math class, but he is one of the brightest students in there. Ms. G could not be there, so I went in her place. I did not know what to say, but I tried to appear confident. I told his mother that Josh was very capable in math, but that he had some zeros for not turning in homework. I explained the group work to her and tried to be as clear as possible. Josh's mother was very interested in Josh and wanted to do what she could to help him.

Thursday, February 7

There were many, many absentees today. Seventh was bedlam. One boy's foot was bleeding, so I sent him to first aid. Half of the room was complaining of an odor and had their shirts over their noses. I tried to ignore them and then had someone open a window. Susan was deliberately annoying everyone around her and writing down a list of names of who were bothering her to take to the guidance counselor. Everyone around her

was getting upset about the list. I talked to Susan and told her sternly to get to work and put away her list. Then I told the rest of the girls not to worry about her list, that it could do them no harm, and to try to ignore her behavior as much as possible.

Friday, February 8

Today I let the kids work on some word problems in groups. I let first period choose their groups. In reading, Chris and Athena have a tendency to talk and pass notes. I had them stay after class so that I could talk with them. Tomorrow I will separate them. In fourth I was going to arrange the groups, but they complained so much that I let them choose their own groups given that they kept quiet and worked.

Monday, February 11

Sixth period was depressing. No one had their homework. When they were given work to do in class, one put his head on the desk, one played with his drumsticks, one got out a book to read, and the rest sort of tried to work. I tried to talk to one of them, but he did not want to listen to me. I averaged grades but realized that I placed too much emphasis on the unit test, so I am going to reaverage them.

Tuesday, February 12

In homeroom today Bryan jumped on Chad because he said something about his mother. I firmly told Bryan to sit immediately and later talked to

him at my desk. Ms. G later took the two out in the hall to talk to them. Daniel gave someone the finger while standing right beside my desk, so I gave him a comment card. While grading the tests I found two pairs that were cheating. One student is fairly capable, yet he cheated off the slowest student in the class. It could not have been more obvious. Tomorrow I will talk to them individually, give them a zero, and have them write a letter to their parents explaining what they did to be kept on file. If cheating occurs again, the letter will be mailed along with a letter from me.

Wednesday, February 13

I talked with the cheaters today. They did not deny it. One cheated because he could not do the work. I had to coax him to retake the test. I told him to do what he could, and then I would help him with what he could not do. I told him that I am always here to answer questions if he would take responsibility and ask. The other cheater just got angry at himself. I also told those whose answers were copied that if they knew someone was cheating off of them that they should ask to be moved during the test.

Thursday, February 14

Today was test day. In remedial I had everyone separate, and I went over some examples. Leon refused to stay seated and quiet during the test. I finally put him in Ms. G's office where he could not attract attention. I do not know what to do with him.

Friday, February 15

I taught about propaganda in reading today. I had them get into groups and look through magazines for examples of propaganda in ads. I t was loud and not the most effective. I should have put some instructions on the board. The other classes were bedlam with testing and retesting. I answered too many questions on the test.

Wednesday, February 20

There is one student in fourth named Tony who has the sweetest heart. He is slightly overweight and always disheveled; even the papers he turns in are always smudged and wrinkled. Yet Tony would do anything to help anyone. When I was going into my room during planning period today, I found him coming out. I could not imagine what he would be doing in the empty room. When I went over to my desk, I found four Hershey kisses that looked like they had been in his pockets all day and a little scrap of paper beside them on which he had written "from Tony." Not all students are the same. Today I let a couple of the students teach with me. I made sure that they had their homework. (I learned that you have to **see** it to believe them.) They called out the answers to the homework, wrote notes on the board, worked problems on the board, and passed out worksheets. One decided to take names all period. I ignored his list, but I am going to have to tell them next time that only I take down names.

Thursday, February 21

Today was horrible. Reading was very talkative, and I had to constantly tell them to get quiet. I moved a couple of them at the beginning of the period which helped somewhat. In fourth, I told Daniel to turn around, and he refused. I told him again, and he still refused. I went over to him and whispered that I did not have to accept his behavior and could send him to the office. He then got up and said he would go to the office and walked out of my room. When I told him to come back, he kept walking. I was not going to chase him, so I just went back to class. Later he returned. Ms. G talked to him later, and his behavior will be dealt with by the team.

Friday, February 22

Today the substitute was a real disciplinarian. He allowed no slack and sent several students to the office. The students did not like him. I tried to tell them at the end of the day that they needed to learn to respect authority and obey regardless. If they have an attitude problem, they will be punished and will lose their rights.

Tuesday, February 26

Today I had to give a short lesson so that I could put grades on the report cards. I hate putting grades down because it always makes me feel guilty. I know they earn their grades, but I question their accuracy. I felt like the lesson was boring because it had to be straight to the point.

Wednesday, February 27

I gave quizzes in both reading and math today. Both quizzes had eight questions which made it easier to figure grades. I used the quiz scores to construct a bar graph in the lesson. I moved the seats of a group of guys at the beginning of fourth which helped their behavior. I have adopted more of an attitude lately of not talking over situations with the students but letting what I say go.

Thursday, February 28

Reading class went to an assembly today sponsored by S.A.D.D. The speaker was not the most persuasive, and his speech was not clearly organized. It is still good for the students to hear the information one more time. Some of the students had been talking about a party they had last weekend. An older friend of theirs had brought alcohol, and some of them got drunk and stayed out all night. A lot of these children have very little adult supervision. In fourth the group of guys in the back corner were talking again. I did not realize they were seated there again until well into the period. David and Daniel got comment cards. I will move them permanently tomorrow. David is also having a note go home from all his teachers.

Friday, March 1

I had to teach remedial today because Ms. G was on a field trip. It went much better than I expected. They were quieter than usual. I just

tried to keep the lesson short and to the point and give them plenty of time to work in their groups. As a result, they all finished their work. Seventh was talkative, so I gave out several comment cards at the end of the period and lectured them. I hate to do that, but their behavior was ridiculous.

Monday, March 4

Today was my last day at the middle school. The students were very sweet in telling me good bye. In reading I gave them a quiz where they had to write five sentences with alliteration of specified sounds. One boy cheated off of two people and copied their sentences. I wrote a note on his paper, gave him no credit, and will give him a comment card. The rest of the day was fairly relaxed.

My student teaching is completed. It was a good experience but difficult at times, much like teaching is in "real life." Some days I would leave school feeling like I had given everything I could to those children, yet I wondered if they even noticed. But again, some days were full of rewards of maybe a word, a smile, or a Hershey kiss.