Mr. Christopher Landi

Central York School District

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Student Teaching FINAL REFLECTION

What began as my final semester as a Penn State University undergraduate student on January 4, 2010 turned out to be the very beginning of a lifelong journey of mine—one that will take me many places and one that is built on enriching the lives of others through music. Through my day-to-day experiences in both the elementary general music classroom, as well as the middle school and high school band rooms, I have grown in many ways—as a musician, as a teacher, and as a person. It is in this reflection that I hope to put in words what I have truly gotten from this whole experience.

In thinking of a word that would describe my experience as a student teacher, it would most definitely be “growth”. As I entered this semester, the closest thing to classroom teaching I had was my experiences with peer teaching and “in the schools” observations/10-minute teaching windows. While these were good opportunities to develop skills in executing lesson plans, use of verbal/non-verbal communication and feedback, and practice concepts and theory learned in the classroom, they DID NOT provide the opportunity to know the students and their needs and abilities at the level of which is necessary for lesson planning and instruction. Student teaching provided this opportunity (among *many others*) simply because you were with the students everyday (or at least once every 6 days!). This not only helped me relate to the students because I got to know their personalities and abilities, but also forced me to become comfortable standing up in front of anywhere from 5 to 125 students. For someone like me who is a generally shy person to be able to have complete comfort in standing up in front of a large group of people is a big sign of development and growth.

Throughout my experience in both settings, I was *able to identify both aspects of teaching that I was strong at as well as goals for me to work on*. I put in a great deal of time and effort creating and implementing lesson plans based upon where I observed the students were developmentally and musically. Sometimes things worked, sometimes they didn’t. The important thing was when they did not work, I thought about how I could do that lesson in the future. I was also strong in my conducting work, which is something I am considering pursuing as a Master’s Degree. I needed to adapt my conducting techniques more for the middle school band then the high school band—using clearer gestures, bigger patterns, etc.

Some goals that both my co-ops and myself set for this semester included being clearer and more articulate when I speak (eliminating connectors/not being too wordy/ watching how much the teacher talks in relationship to the amount of music making/etc.). This will be a career goal for me, although I feel like I have made some progress. Classroom management was more of a challenge for me at the elementary school than it was in the band rehearsals, although I did find myself frustrated at times with excessive talking, etc. The main improvement I felt I made in this was being able to ***find and point out the positives.***  As a result of having elementary general music first, I was able to work on relaxing and enjoying the moments that were “smell the roses” moments. Another goal I am continuing to work on is providing more specific feedback.

I was very lucky to be placed in the Central York School District. I have had very unique experiences that I know many other student teachers could only dream about- such as being invited along as a chaperone on the high school band’s California Concert Tour (see my separate journal entry on that trip!), going to district music department meetings where all the music teachers in the district work together and are keeping “up-to-date” with current events in the district, the music department, etc., and working with great co-operating teachers. I’ve learned so much about teaching (and life in general) working with Jill Beck, Rick Worley, and Jim Martini. Anything from using File Maker Pro as a high school band director to organize literally EVERYTHING to trying to think of yourself as losing weight each time you are on the podium of a middle school band because you are exerting that much energy. I could go on and on about what I’ve learned, but the best piece of advice comes at the end of this reflection.

The most important and promising realization I have had throughout this entire experience can be described in 4 words: “**I can do it**!” There were times that I felt overwhelmed and extremely frustrated, and even questioned whether I could make it as a music teacher. A lot of this stemmed from the fact that I am a perfectionist and if something doesn’t go perfectly, I can get easily flustered. I have realized that this will be a career goal, and that through planning for the unexpected (having contingency plans, etc.), I can and have reduced some of this frustration. In fact, going to the PMEA state conference helped me remind myself that we will all be students of music and of education. There will always be more we can know about music, about our students, about the field of music education, and about ourselves. I determined that there are probably very few people who have turned into master teachers during their student teaching experience. I can now say that I accept the fact that I will always be refining and developing my teaching skills, and that through student teaching, I took a HUGE step in the right direction. In the words of my elementary general co-op, “Believe in yourself!” ☺