



TRY BEFORE YOU BUY: A STUDENT REFLECTION ABOUT THE POWER OF FIELD EXPERIENCE

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I AM UNIQUE IN THAT I WAS NOT OVERLY ENTHUSIASTIC ABOUT COLLEGE.

When my acceptance letter came in the mail, I could not understand why there was such a big celebration. Coming from a school with relatively high standards, college seemed like the next natural step, which ultimately led to my apprehension about it. Was it really something that I wanted to do? Before I could answer that question, summer came and went, and I headed to the University of Cincinnati for my first year of college.

When I had received the acceptance letter, I had been accepted into the major of English Literature. I quickly realized that I didn't want that to be my major and consulted my family for advice on what I should do with the rest of my life (because they obviously knew, right?). We flung around the idea of teaching and it sounded fun. I always had a respect for the occupation, and am an avid reader and writer. I figured being an English teacher wouldn't be a bad gig.

So, I spoke with my academic advisor and he set me up with a semester schedule filled with introductory courses in education. I thanked him, and was a little more at ease at the prospect of college.

THEN CLASSES STARTED; I HATED IT.

This was not because of any of my professors, or anything in particular really. It was simply uninteresting to me. Classes were centered around what teaching *would* be like, and it seemed like the time between now and actually teaching was so distant that it didn't matter. In addition to these seemingly trivial classes, there was so much red tape that had to be cut very carefully: background checks, volunteer hours, observational hours and field experience hours.

TIME MARCHED ON, AND I WAS BITING THE BULLET.

I stuck with the classes for a semester, but was eager to jump ship into something new, something different and something more exciting. Halfway through the first semester I decided to knock out some field experience hours. The class in question was "Individuals with Exceptionalities" with the lovely and talented Nicole Birri, a class centered around special education. The field assignment demanded 10 hours

of observation/involvement with individuals with disabilities. It seemed rather simple but a little exciting because it got me out of the classroom and into, well, another classroom.

I reached out to St. Rita's School for the Deaf, located near Cincinnati. I had heard about the school before, and it was honestly the only thing that came to my mind in terms of satisfying my hours. They allowed me to observe some classes, and I thought nothing of it until the day came where I had to observe. Arriving at the school, I could tell almost immediately that I would be out of my comfort zone the entire day.

Upon entering the building and receiving my visitors badge, **I WAS CULTURE SHOCKED. THIS WAS AN ENTIRELY NEW WORLD TO ME.** I looked so out of place, and I was incredibly nervous about offending people as I had never really been around deaf people. The students differed dramatically, in terms of age and level of hearing. I didn't speak to anyone unless they spoke to me first, and it wasn't until I sat down in my very first classroom did the feeling of uneasiness begin to subside, if only a little bit.

My first class of observation was an American Government class. When I went to the room, I introduced myself by saying my name and exchanging pleasantries with the teacher. The most horrible and excruciating pain entered my body when I realized that the teacher herself was also deaf, and seemed rather offended that I had spoken to her. With my mouth firmly shut, she shuffled me to a table in the back of the classroom.

THE NEXT HOUR COMPLETELY CHANGED MY PERSPECTIVE ON THE PROFESSION OF EDUCATION.

There were only three students in the room, which struck me as extremely odd. Coming from Mason, Ohio it was not unusual to have 28-31 students in a single class, and seeing a class this small simply did not make sense in my mind. However, the level of interaction in the room, the pure energy between student and teacher completely fascinated me. It was not like the textbooks.

I had then spent the next four hours traveling around the school, watching each subject taught in a silent beauty. From ocean currents to simple story writing, each classroom seemed to have a tightknit feeling of acceptance and a genuine pursuit of education. **A NEW SIDE OF EDUCATION WAS SHOWN TO ME, ONE THAT WAS IMPOSSIBLE TO SEE FROM READING A BOOK.**

I went home that day feeling completely rejuvenated about the prospect of teaching. The idea that it was some bland boring occupation was completely dispelled with my field experience. Seeing the interaction between student and teacher, the personal connections built between them, reignited my passion for it. It had given me a clear goal to work towards, that all the classes would be worth it.

I am uncertain of my future, I think all of us are—that's okay. However, without experiencing firsthand the environment in which you are pursuing a degree in, you are giving yourself a disadvantage. No one wants to wait four years to discover that what they do is like walking over glass. The odds are that I will switch majors, but I know that **THE FIELD EXPERIENCE THAT I GAINED THAT DAY WILL RESIDE IN ME FOREVER, NO MATTER WHAT I END UP DOING.**