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I have gone through an array of emotions this semester of student teaching. From being excited beyond belief to experience new things and have a classroom of my own in the future, to dreading the thought of being as stressed out and unhappy as some of the teachers I have met along the way. At my first placement I entered at the beginning of the first week of school and could instantly see and feel how overwhelmed the teachers were. Every conversation revolved around teacher evaluations, common core and assessments. The teachers who were typically so confident were worried about the failure of their careers and also frustrated by the newly implemented common core standards.

While I was very happy in the site and learned so much about classroom management, assessments and collaborative efforts, I also found myself struggling to hold onto the luster teaching had for me in the past. I have wanted to become a teacher since kindergarten and midway through my placement I found myself wondering if this was the career for me. Not because I doubted myself as a prospective educator but more because it was not what I had imagined it to be. The rose-colored glasses of being a superhero teacher and changing kids lives was overshadowed by the endless pressures every imaginable angle. I was often left wondering, when do teachers actually get to enjoy teaching? I remember asking my cooperating teachers if they would do it all over again and become teachers knowing what they know now and both, who had been teachers for ten years each, stated they wish they would have known it would turn into what it is now so they could have found an alternate way of helping children. Other teachers in the school would jokingly make comments like “are you sure you want to be a teacher?” or “have we scared you out of this profession yet?’ and while I was uneasy because I felt like there was this pervading unhappiness among them, I also glimmers of what I thought teaching to be throughout the days. When the children would engage in this high level conversations regarding a book or writing topic the teachers faces lit up. When the students published their first writing piece, the teachers were more excited than they were. When the students figured out that bundling in groups of ten in their math inquiry would make counting easier, the teachers actually did a happy dance. While they were stressed out and perhaps unable to see those “Ah-Hah” moments of why they were doing what they do, as an outsider it was easy to notice and remind them of it. When I did my final lesson at their site, I made all of the students honorary police officers based on their reading questioning skills and we all did a salute. At the end of my lesson I was having a conversation with the kids about teaching and how I was still a student like them and asked them how they felt about my lesson. After some “wh” questions from the students one child raised his hand and once he was called on stood up saluted me as we had done at the end of my lesson and said “Ms. Ortiz, you’re officially a teacher now” and it was in that moment, I realized that my lesson and my presence in the classroom was significant, that I too had been feeling discouraged and overwhelmed like the teachers. Perhaps not in the same capacity as the teachers, but regarding my future in the field. That little boy managed to provide me with the “Ah-hah” moment I did not even know I needed.

As I moved into my second placement I was met with the opposite end of the Department of Education school spectrum. The first school had resources and endless administrative support, while this new school was the complete opposite. The classroom I was placed in had some troublesome behaviors, teachers who were disconnected and struggling to work together and an unsupportive administration. I found myself wondering if this was the reality I’d encounter at most schools but I managed, with the support of my classmates and friends, to find a way to support the situation the best I could. I worked with the teacher on countless visual aids for one student and brainstormed a behavior intervention for a student without an IEP. I felt empowered because I knew that even though this was the situation I was handed, I needed to find my niche and help the students. While the situation was challenging and sometimes a bit unnerving, keeping the goal of educating and getting those “ah-hah” moments along the way made everything else okay.

At the end of my experience in the second site, the student I introduced visual supports to was sitting through morning meeting nearly unprompted, the student who had been presenting great behavioral challenges was requesting breaks instead of threatening the teacher or destroying the classroom. And I was a new person, I felt stronger, I felt more capable, more understanding. I felt as though I had developed an entirely new perspective on my expectations as an educator but most of all, I learned how to be silly. I learned that sometimes hanging out at lunch with the kids and just talking about birthday parties, toys and movies was more fun and kept me more motivated than spending my break checking my email and social networks. I learned that recess could be recess for me too. I learned that developing a relationship with my support staff is essential to the advancement of my students, from chatting at lunch to bringing a treat once in a blue for them to know they are appreciated. I learned that the best way to teach my students is to listen to them and find out what they need from me and that they truly can provide the best insight on how I can become a better educator. So on my last day, at my last placement, when the child without an IEP who was using a break strategy I implemented approached me with teary eyes and thanked me for “all of my help” I knew without a shadow of a doubt that I was meant to be an educator and no matter the situation, standards, administration or location, I am capable of finding my way and making that superhero change I have dreamt of since I was a child.