

Final Reflection

My name is Matthew Cannella and I had a practicum experience at Tallwood High School. As these were high school children in 9th grade, it was continuously hard to keep them on task and out of trouble. I had the unfortunate experience of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic, so there were only about 10 students in my class, and they all wore masks. Keeping them from adjusting or taking off their masks was a large hurdle to overcome.

I will use the alias, Ty, to describe a student who had this exact challenge with my practicum teacher. Ty put his mask on his head and walked all around the students with it on like a hat. When the teacher asked him to put it on his face, he used it to cover his eyes and nothing else. Finally, he told Ty sternly that if he didn't put the mask on his mouth and nose, he would not participate in any activities that day, and he finally complied.

Another obstacle my teacher, I'll use the alias, Mr. John, faced was getting the students to walk and jog at the particular time that they were supposed to. I was observing a class where the students were especially sluggish and didn't participate with the run/jog when they should have been. Instead of yelling or blowing his whistle, my teacher kept his calm and did not let the students see his frustration. He then plugged in his Bluetooth speaker and told the students to walk when the music stopped playing, and to jog when the music played. It worked very well as he rectified the situation without losing his cool or having to discipline anyone.

Mr. John had a particularly good authoritarian teaching style. He had a great way of commanding the students' attentions. We were in the gym and about to start a new unit when Mr. John walked to the center of the court and blew his whistle. Many students stopped talking but there were a few students that hung off to the side and didn't come to the middle of the court.

Instead of blowing his whistle again, he stood silent. The students who weren't cooperating looked around and saw that everyone else was quiet. They soon stopped talking and moved to center court with the other students. Mr. John explained to me that sometimes the children who misbehave feel the peer pressure to fit in with the other students.

Another strength Mr. John has is his openness to change, and confidence that he can still do his lesson under different circumstances. Mr. John was teaching a kickball lesson to his class when the adapted P.E. teacher asked if her class could join his. Without hesitation he agreed, and the two teachers set up teams that would be safe but fair. Each class of students had fun while keeping all of them protected.

A strength I found early on is my ability to be compatible with the students. I was able to talk to them and speak to them like a friend but also as a teacher. Some students came to me in confidence if they had a problem, and I was even told by a student that I was her favorite teacher. In one instance, a student came up to me and said he really wasn't liking the activities we had planned for the day and wanted to sit out. I told him he wasn't able to sit out but as a compromise, I could let him walk around the gym in circles if he preferred it. He said thank you, but he would rather do the activities, which is what I figured he'd say.

Another strength I have is the ability to encourage a student who is having trouble. We had a juggling unit and I was teaching the students with handkerchiefs because they floated easier and were easier to handle. When a student asked me for help, I was able to give direct instructions from the lesson plan on how to help her. I said for her to throw the tissue higher in the air and aim for a floating box above her head. With a little practice and encouragement, she was about to do it with ease.

One of the challenges I faced with teaching was making sure I had enough activities to take up the entire 90 minutes of our class. I had a P.E. class where I tried a game I found online called the Spy Game. It was in compliance with COVID-19 regulations where each student had a 6-foot space around them and weren't touching. The game itself required the "spy" to wink at a student to get them out. The problem with this game was students were purposely looking downward or avoiding eye contact with any student to avoid getting out.

I tried different variations with the game to keep it interesting, but the students did not like the game or its concept whatsoever. At this point I got flustered and did not feel in control of the class. It was clear to me that it is always better to overprepare and not get to the last part of the content, then to underprepare and have extra time in class.

Another challenge I faced can be summed up as, "Don't sweat the small stuff." It's amazing what 9th grade students try to get away with. I have seen them wear sandals to class, earbuds to listen to music, and blatantly staring at their phones during activity time.

An instance like this was a challenge I faced while student teaching. It was a nice day outside, so I brought the students outside to exercise before we did an activity inside. I gave an announcement that the students should walk on the track during the straightaways and run on the curves. The students ran on the curves for less than 5 minutes then walked the rest of the way around the track.

I was getting upset and tried to call out for students to run the curves, when my teacher, Mr. John, gave me advice to pick my battles, because if I don't, I'll stress myself out. This is still a practice I have trouble with but have learned to manage the best that I can.

I really enjoyed my practicum experience. My teacher was amazing, and I enjoyed my students as well. It gave me a lot of hands-on experience I can use in the future.