



I grew up down the road in Sanford, NC. My biggest childhood career dreams included being a rock climber, a storm chaser, and a teacher. Looking back, had I known I would end up teaching, I might have assumed that I was going with the least extreme of the three options. Only in my eighth year of teaching, I might have a solid argument challenging this assumption. We pour everything we have into each of our kids, and can somehow come away both empty and full. There's no explanation for why I've chosen this job everyday other than the fact that I love working with kids.

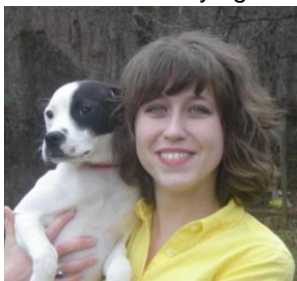
I decided in middle school that I wanted to be a teacher. Thankfully, my teachers saw something in me that I didn't see in myself and helped to bring me out of my shell. I am also fortunate to have been able to attend college at Appalachian State, largely through the support of the North Carolina Teaching Fellows Program.

Nevertheless, about a year before graduating, panic set in. Having had uplifting teachers and hurtful teachers, I was very conscious of the power all teachers have to impact their students, whether they want this level of influence or not. I was terrified that I wouldn't enjoy teaching and that my students would suffer. Thankfully, what happened during my student teaching experience redefined my vision of what this career could be. I'm still grateful for having been placed in Samantha Gallman's ninth-grade Civics classes at T.C. Roberson High School in Asheville. Through her authenticity and passion for education, she helped me find validation for being myself in a classroom and inviting my students to do the same.

I try to look at my students with the attitude that there is a reason we get to spend a year together. I get to have an impact on them and they get to push me, in return. That may be why some of my favorite students tend to be the ones that present me with the most challenges. They push me to grow. While I still have a lot to learn, here's a few thoughts and habits they've helped me pick up along the way that keep me grounded and confident in my purpose:

- Personally and professionally, I am led by an intention to “avoid avoidance” and “get comfortable with being uncomfortable.” Learning can be most meaningful when it happens on the edge of our discomfort -- and the situations we seek to avoid are often the ones we need in order to grow. Engineering opportunities to say “I don't know” and to show our own curiosity can be such a powerful stimulus in our classrooms! When creating those moments, I want to lean in to students' questions, curiosities, and skepticisms -- and empower them to voice these in ways that are meaningful, authentic, and critically-minded.
- I don't really have a desk. I sit amongst the kids and try to engage with them in anything I ask them to do. I want our kids to see me as another learner in our class. It is possible to let kids challenge me while still being the adult in the room -- and it's important! Ultimately, I'm modeling the interactions I want to see them having with each other. Kids have great ideas but don't always have the confidence, experience, language, or appropriate filters to be able to articulate these ideas in a sophisticated and impactful way.
- My biggest strength as an educator is my reflective nature. I find that stepping outside of my own practice, whether to observe another teacher or try a new hobby, acts as a catalyst for personal and professional growth. I love working with students and being a student. I see learning as a process of constant curiosity. My abilities as an educator have grown not just from engaging with the kids in my classroom - but through engaging with opportunities, people, and places that are new to me - and then sharing those experiences with my students.

This job has transformed my life and I hope to use it each day to help positively influence the lives of our kids. All of us make an impact on our kids. Ultimately, I want to use my position in the classroom to empower our kids to see something better in themselves, and to strive to become better each day. Thanks for letting me share, thanks for caring about our kids, and thanks for trying to make DDMS *continuously* better for our kids.



With Abby, my canine child.

Clover, poultry child.

China this summer!!

Brock comforted Abby while I was in China.