

Dream of a Teacher
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Course: Education 654

Instructor: Dr. Cynthia Elliott

Assignment: Reflection

My dream of being an elementary teacher began at an early age. I can recall playing school with my brother and sister when I was little and always wanting to be the teacher. I loved reading books to them and giving them math and spelling tests. The dream of becoming a teacher stayed with me throughout my years of school and into adulthood.

Upon entering college at Southeastern, it was time to determine the career path I would follow. After years of wanting to be a teacher my parents discouraged me from it due to the low salary, so I chose a different path. I had a difficult time deciding on a major because all I had ever wanted to do was be a teacher. I worked for several years as a secretary for a major retail chain and then as a medical secretary at a hospital. Even though I enjoyed office work, my passion was in teaching.

Ten years later, after having two children, I decided it was time to follow my dreams, so I enrolled in classes at Mississippi State University. After encountering many difficulties of going through a divorce and raising two small children on my own, I finally achieved this lifetime dream of becoming a teacher! I remember the struggles of being a single parent and a full-time student as if it were yesterday. It seemed like my kids stayed sick all the time and, with no family nearby, I was the only one to take care of them. I had wonderful school friends and professors that encouraged me and gave me the confidence to keep going when things got tough.

The day that I had waited a lifetime for had finally come. Graduation was an emotional day for me because of all the difficulties I had faced the last two years of college; I didn't think

that day would ever happen for me! Those childhood memories of being a teacher finally became reality when I got my first teaching job. It wasn't exactly as I had envisioned, but it was definitely an experience that prepared me for the years to come. When entering my classroom for the first time I was filled with excitement, but that suddenly changed once I saw the room. It was a large empty room on the third floor back corner of an old school building. As I walked in the room the old wooden floor began to creak and the room felt so cold and dreary. I quickly turned that cold, boring room into a bright happy learning environment. Once school started, it didn't take me long to realize that I was facing problems for which I wasn't prepared. I went home crying every day and kept asking myself, "What have I gotten myself into?"

The first week of school I learned that one of my fifth grade students was HIV positive. Both of her parents had died from AIDS and she lived with her grandparents. This is an age when kids are really cruel and they don't care what they say to hurt others feelings. As classmates started learning of her disease they distanced themselves from her and didn't want to have anything to do with her. I still have the letter she wrote me, begging for my help because everybody was being mean to her and she didn't have any friends. It broke my heart when I read the letter because the pain and loneliness she was feeling were obvious. Her strength, courage, and sweet personality changed my life forever.

A decision was made to implement inclusion and I was going to be the inclusion teacher for fifth grade. It was challenging at first to have all of the special education students in my classroom, but the special education teacher guided me and made this a wonderful experience. I also learned a lot that year from my students about gangs and their exposure to gang life. Many of my students came from single parent homes and they were exposed to drugs and gang life. Their lives were quite different than what I experienced growing up.

My first year as a teacher wasn't as I expected and there were many days I questioned my decision of wanting to be a teacher. I kept thinking there was no way I could do this for twenty years; I would be lucky to make it five years. My students came from diverse backgrounds and they needed much more than a teacher. I felt that I spent more time being a counselor, mother, babysitter, and even a police officer rather than a teacher, and that wasn't what I had in mind. In spite of the many obstacles I faced with an HIV student, gang activities, and inclusion as a first year teacher, I never gave up. Teaching is about making a difference in children's lives. Thirteen years later as I reflect on my first years of teaching I remember the many lives I touched. I succeeded in making a difference in children's lives that year in a school with so many students that needed a positive influence in their lives. After teaching for thirteen years, I am still making an impact on the lives of many young students.