

How has your time volunteering and observing informed your decision to be a teacher?

I began teaching literature and composition during graduate school, but when I left Texas I was unsure if teaching was the direction I wanted to go. During grad school I'd been negotiating with my feelings about education—the conflict between the violence inherent to the system, yet my love of learning and passion for sharing knowledge. After a few years of working outside of academics, I realized that I would be living in an unjust system regardless. My own education has been nontraditional, so initially I thought I would be happier teaching in an independent school.

I began substitute teaching at The Annie Wright School and exploring options as a teaching artist. I thought smaller class sizes and a well-supported student body would be less intimidating, paired with a great deal of oversight in a space where I felt a step behind with regards to the mechanics of the school day. I rapidly found the oversight to be stifling and the drive to perform and execute benchmarks didn't allow for exploration or joy. Existing as a cog in profit driven education did little to dispel my concerns about teaching.

A friend's husband learned that I was subbing and encouraged me to work in the Tacoma School system. My first day subbing in the public schools I chose a half-day as a librarian at Larchmont Elementary in South Tacoma. Another friend (a graduate of Annie Wright) worked there as a kindergarten teacher and the library is a place where I am infinitely comfortable. I spent a morning with the dazzling and dynamic students of Larchmont and left the building feeling electrified. In some ways, I had been an abject failure—my classroom management was terrible and never has a library been so loud—but for four hours I made sure that children who look to their school day for stability and normalcy felt safe and seen.

I went on to sub at Mount Tahoma, which was a phenomenal experience because I was filling-in for a teacher who knew my qualifications and felt comfortable leaving me with targets, but not a regimented plan for how to meet them. Experiencing the freedom of teaching high school *ad hoc* in my area of strength was thrilling. Because Mr. Rang and I share core values, I was able live the experience of combating the structural violence of capitalism and the education system (monitoring, door locking, racist textbooks, food insecurity, etc.) from within. I taught during a modified lockdown and I experienced the fun of a spirit day designed to allow the students to highlight their interests and skills. More than anything, I found that the mindset I brought to the classroom each day meant something to these students.

I have immense respect for the teachers who show up to teach students with diverse and challenging needs and find a way to infuse their classrooms with art and stability. For many students in public schools, the beauty and violence of our education system is their lived reality. In subbing at Mount Tahoma, I found a model for vibrancy and learning that I could be a part of.