

When I completed my observation hours with Eric Jacobs at Olympia High School, I was already quite sure of my decision to teach. My father has been a high school English teacher for twenty years, and whenever he talks about retiring—frequently, of late—I tell him, “You’ve earned it. Pass the torch to me!” He always says he’ll “just have to see how this week shakes out.” But he works in a difficult position: in a district that does not have supports for its teachers and students the way a district like Olympia does. I know he’s fought the good fight, but the good fight is tiring. We talk about it every time I call.

I’ve been considering the issues that face our country’s public education system since the time I was a part of it. I like to believe my thinking has evolved considerably over the years. I’ve thought about pedagogy, detrimental administrative tendencies, education from a sociological perspective, our systems from a structural perspective, and fantasized about sharing my favorite literature with new generations. What observing Eric’s classroom gave me, though, was the concrete realization that all of this philosophical principle is only worth its weight if put into praxis. Otherwise, it’s merely ink on a page.

One thing that struck me was how much class time was dedicated to collaboration. Only the first fifteen minutes or so were led solely by the teacher. Then, there was group discussion or time given in class for students to work on a project or essay. I also got to see a full period of their student-led discussion on Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, an impressive expression of ideas wherein students empowered their peers and challenged their positions in balanced measure. To see students engaging in such robust discourse was inspiring, and it reminded me of rewarding moments from my own high school career.

I also had time to talk with Eric about teaching and pedagogy. One of the most enlightening conversations we had concerned ways educators can practice equity in their grading—and how the typical grading system leaves students struggling against failure and punished academically for what, really, are behavioral standards. This disproportionately affects students who already are disadvantaged by the school system and marginalized by larger structures within our society.

To begin learning, regarding grading and so much more, the ways in which we are able to make measurable changes in our education practices, has reinforced my determination to receive my Masters in Teaching and become an educator. Working in the realm of ideas is incredibly gratifying, but teaching is not just that. Teaching is actively engaging students, helping them develop the skills they need to broaden and challenge their perception of our world. Praxis matters. Fairness and accessibility matters. And I’m eager to learn more about how to make that happen.