

Abstract:

Most of our students would agree that Winter quarter is perhaps the most challenging quarter. To gain a better understanding of their fieldwork experience, their mentors are interviewed to gain their perspectives and insight into how our CalTeach student teachers are experiencing fieldwork. Two of the themes that emerged are shared. They speak to both the growth and development of our student teachers' identities and practices, while also highlighting the challenges they face and learn to navigate.

Themes of Fieldwork Experience

By Naehee Kwum

Most of our students would agree that Winter quarter is perhaps the most challenging quarter due to the significantly increased levels of responsibilities in both coursework and fieldwork. Student teachers are tasked with planning and facilitating daily lessons of their design to two periods of students through the entire 2nd semester, while collaborating with their teaching community to meet district requirements and communicating with their student communities.

To gain a better understanding of the trajectory of their fieldwork experience, the mentors are interviewed midway through each quarter to gain their perspectives and insight into how their CalTeach student teachers are experiencing fieldwork. They were prompted to identify areas of practice in which their student teachers are doing well in addition to an area of focus their student teaching is currently working to improve.

Two of the themes that emerged are shared below. They speak to both the growth and development of our student teachers' identities and practices, while also highlighting the challenges they face and learn to navigate.

Shifting towards Engagement: As our student teachers rose to the commitment of teaching two class periods, mentors report that the student teachers' consistent attendance not only improved their rapport with students, but also their practices of engaging their students. As the "honeymoon phase" of the new semester wore off, student teachers learned to establish routines and procedures in an iterative process to maintain engagement and motivation among their students. They also continue to learn the nuances of understanding students' needs, both individually and as a group, and adjusting their lesson plans and delivery in attempts to meet their needs. One mentor shares that their student teacher shows remarkable improvement each week, "getting better at adapting to the energies of each class of kids". As they work towards engaging their students, our student teachers are learning to recognize and capitalize on teachable moments, in the moment. In what ways will they honor a student's contributions of curiosities and connections and recognize its potential as a prompt for a whole class discussion to help deepen understanding?



Resilience and Commitment: Despite the challenges of teaching during a pandemic, mentors report that CalTeach student teachers are incredibly resilient and deeply committed to their students. They are learning more and more the complexities of teaching beyond lesson design and delivery. They are learning the intricacies of being flexible about their anticipated expectations and responding to students' ways of engaging. They are also learning to find the balance between work-school and life. They recognize the need to prioritize protecting their emotional-mental-physical health. They are working to develop practices that are effective and efficient, but also sustainable. Deeply committed to their career choice, they understand the gravity of their work and are reflective in their practices to improve. They seek and incorporate feedback from their mentor, their supervisors, and their students. This practice of

improvement is a defining characteristic that our mentors use as a marker of a successful student teacher who is committed to the profession but also to improving their practice.

Each mentor noted how particularly challenging this year has been, even for experienced teachers. They acknowledge it as an extremely strange and difficult year for our students to be learning how to become a teacher. Mentors told stories of gratitude for having someone in the class to share moments with, to reflect with, and to grow with. Having a CalTeach student teacher reminds them of why they got into teaching in the first place. As they reflect on their own journey as an educator, one mentor compares her own growth to that of their student teacher: “she is where I was 5 years into teaching”. They credit the CalTeach program for guiding our students to be grounded in their purpose, to honor students’ funds of knowledge, and to be reflective life-long learners.

