

The First Day of School

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During the classes for my doctoral program, I took a course that met on a weekday afternoon. The rest of my didactics took place in the evenings to accommodate adult learners. This was my first experience in a class with younger graduate students. I was looking forward to this course because of the topic – college teaching – but had to work six days a week in order to fulfill my employment obligations. The first day of class was especially memorable.



Figure 1. Blustery Day

I had worked that morning and set off on a rainy, blustery afternoon with my new books and other materials and a sense of expectation. I also brought some first day jitters. After walking a short distance in the rain, I arrived with damp hair and dripping bags. My personal space felt very large with all of my things that were making puddles as I put them down. Being the first person to arrive, I chose a desk on one side of a circular arrangement that I thought would be the most unobtrusive. Self-consciously, I tried to consolidate my belongings under my feet and on my chair and on the desk. As my fellow students came in and sat down, as I had anticipated, they were all much younger and accustomed to the routine of the classroom. I felt very uncomfortable. The other students were quiet and I joined this culture of silence. My discomfort was about to increase even further.



Figure 2. With her (wet) things about her

The instructor arrived and sat at the front of the circle of desks. She was a well-dressed, articulate young woman who may have been slightly older than my children. I did not recognize her. But, she recognized me. She started the introductions with, “I only know one person in the room.” I thought, “Oh no, please, not me”. My fears were realized when she said, “That person is Jo Hanna D’Epiro.” She went on to speak highly of the services provided by our department but the rest of her speech was lost in the haze of my embarrassment. Later, I thought she might have made this introduction because of her own discomfort. My sincere desire had been to blend in with the rest of the students. This was clearly impossible at that moment. I had the right computer, read the right materials on the learning website, went to the right room at the right time, but was the wrong age. I could have been anyone’s mother who was in the room.

After I put my own self-consciousness aside and listened to the rest of the introductions, I was impressed with this group of young people. They came from different disciplines ranging from anatomy to athletic training to Spanish. In taking this class, they were expressing the desire to teach in their discipline. Some of the students were already doing so as graduate assistants. Throughout the course they were very respectful to me and all of the other students.



Figure 3. Just another student

As the semester went on, I had moments of joy and laughter and forgetting of self as the class worked on active learning exercises. One memorable moment was when I drew puppies to complete an assignment whose purpose now escapes me. On another occasion, I recall an instance when my kind desk mate helped me with Internet access as she saw me struggling. Some of the collaborative tools such as Google.docs were new to me but they helped me see how bright and creative my fellow classmates were. I recall seeing two individuals who sat together regularly and my suspicions about a budding romance were later confirmed outside the classroom. I thought - some things never change.

The content of the course was invaluable for my future teaching aspirations. With help, I was able to meet the challenge of new technology uses as well as mastering new topics. Ultimately, my expectations for a class on education about education were fulfilled and I was able to concentrate on being a student. As time went on, not only did both my possessions and my self-consciousness dry out, but I was refreshed among these intelligent and enthusiastic learners.