

Ballinteer Community School, 1st Year - Clay

School placement has been a huge adjustment for me, in that I've never really had the experience of engaging with a place of work on a long term basis, having been freelance since 2011 and otherwise engaged in education since graduating secondary school. Up until 5th year in secondary school I felt like education was a bit of a 'sentence'. I think it would be fair to say that I was quite cynical about education up until I received a letter from Finola Mc Tiernan in 2015 to reapply to NCAD via the ACCESS route. It has been a completely new routine for me to go in to one school each day, Monday to Friday and engage with the education system in a way that abides by a curriculum, thus a certain branch of paths and avenues determined by the state and a bunch of other people who, I would have up until recently said wouldn't have the first clue about my reservations or that of any other adolescent who has felt as I did in school. However it is clear that my own distinct memory of the struggle has served me well in having a real sense of and sensitivity to children in the classrooms in which I have taught.

The unit which I present today has allowed quite a dramatic transformation to occur in terms of my identity as teacher versus this cinder block stigma I have lugged behind me as a 'problem student', what I understand nowadays is referred to as 'at risk' or 'early school leaver'. This change began with discipline. The discipline of clay Unit of Learning planning as well as class preparation has enabled me to learn the skills of classroom (and people) management in a new way. -A way that actually conserves energy or at least uses it economically which I noticed, especially in semester two left me with reserves for other classes and other issues that arose during the school day. Formerly, I was very fixed on 'complete unrestricted freedom' in terms of teaching method when it came to any other extra-curricular or short term project I was involved in or leading. It has only been through the oftentimes excruciating unlearning, growing and accepting pains of teacher education that I have found a wonderful balance and a joy for planning in this new way. My tutors and supports, especially David Cotter and Jenny Corish consistently and patiently helped me to grasp the process, rhythm and structuring that is necessary for creating accessible and fluent Units of Learning. Transitioning from a novice and clay cynic to a has also built my character. This whole course has been character building. The specific unit presented has shown me how I, as a teacher, can be a conduit for lasting change through any medium. If I were to carry out the 'Inside Out' unit again, I would bring it to 3rd or even 4th years. It is possible even something that could be tweaked and pitched to senior students. I would manage the physical classroom in the same way but would handle the documentation slightly differently and manage my time for administrative tasks better. I would not set the bar lower in spite of some feedback I received because the bar being set high is how I was taught most successfully and the outcome of the projects proves that I am capable of teaching in this way and that it is a justifiable approach. I got the best out of every student with some exceptional engagements and powerful responses. Huge growth is apparent in each learner from this unit. Overall I have learned a lot about myself in that I see myself clearer. I see myself as I function in times of weariness and self-doubt. I see myself as I struggle and resist. I see my love for education prevail and I see my fear turned to excitement. I see my personal ebb and flow impact my consistent enthusiasm less and I see my faith in myself as a worthy, unique and exceptional educator rising above the repressive woes of the institution.