



EDUCATION MAJOR JAMIE HALLBERG KEPT A JOURNAL DURING HER STUDENT TEACHING YEAR, AND DISCOVERED THAT LEARNING TO TEACH WAS MORE EXHAUSTING AND EXHILARATING THAN SHE'D EXPECTED.

September 2012: Double duty

Prior to my internship as a student teacher, I was a student through and through. Now I'm learning how to create balance out of chaos, and my role has been altered. I am both a teacher and a student, and managing these dual roles simultaneously is a more complex task than I imagined it would be. I thought everything would be clear-cut: when I was at UAF I would strictly be a student and when I was at Denali Elementary I would only be a teacher. Somewhere along the way, the line I had drawn in my mind dividing the two blurred.

Walking into the classroom at the beginning of the year I felt like I had finally made it. This was the last step before becoming a certified teacher! It was my chance to truly experience what life in an elementary school is like on a day-to-day basis.

I had been enjoying the role of teacher until one of my students informed me that I wasn't a real teacher. That comment really stung.



TEACH ME

By Jamie Hallberg

Even though I am taking on more responsibility in my mentor's classroom everyday, I'm not a "real" teacher yet. During parent-teacher conferences a few of the parents even referred to me as a teacher aide, which was completely deflating. Being an elementary education intern is like working two jobs: I spend my week bouncing between a place where I am the student and another where I am the teacher, and never really settling in either character.

My mentor, Mrs. [Cindy] Kennedy, '81, is in charge of not only educating her class but also guiding me as I learn to be an effective educator. This is tricky because she has to relinquish some of her control in the classroom and watch as I make mistakes, hoping that the benefit of me making mistakes will one day outweigh the costs.

As for me, I'm all over the place. Some days I'm up at UAF planning a lesson or reflecting on one I just taught. I'm not just teaching lessons; I'm learning how to teach them. Mrs. Kennedy is amazing about giving me feedback on things I've taught and is always willing to help me create a seamless lesson.

I suppose I'm not the only one having to adjust to having a dual role. Somewhere along the way all of us — my mentor, my students and I — acquired new and unexpected roles. Some days we are more one than

the other, but I don't think a day goes by when any one of us is just a teacher or just a student. I am truly finding this year what it means and what it takes to be a lifelong learner.

November 2012: Sweat and tears

When I began my journey pursuing a bachelor's of elementary education, I knew it would be challenging, stressful and in the end rewarding. Signing up for the program, I didn't realize track and field training was a prerequisite, but I soon found that I had a lot hurdles to jump to become an educator.

To get to where I am today I needed to test drive two different degree programs, survive a family tragedy and fall on my face, hard. It took me nearly hitting rock bottom to realize that if I was going to make something out of my life, no one was going to pave the way to make it possible. After abandoning my previous academic paths I went in search of a degree that would make me happy. As a child I

had dreamed of being two things: a pet store lady and a teacher.

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The first time I heard myself addressed as Miss Hallberg by a student, it melted my heart, and I knew my life was on the right track. Four years and about 35 classes later, I know no other profession would make me as happy. I'm thrilled to be on the last leg of my journey, student teaching in a fifth-grade classroom at Denali Elementary School [in Fairbanks]. I love being in the classroom, but I have to say the UAF education program has caused me more sweat and tears than I care to admit.



One of the lessons was to get the students to understand that food webs are an essential part of life, and if one part of the food web is eliminated then all parts of that web suffer.

The bachelor of elementary education program is a bit different than other degree programs at UAF. There are the standard four years of classes, plus a set amount of hours in an elementary school class during the semester for every education class taken. This meant juggling work, school and fieldwork every week. [After four years, you have] a required, yearlong student teaching internship, but you're not guaranteed to get one. Near the end of my fourth year I had to fill out a 20-plus-page application in which I had to categorize every class I had ever taken in my college career, describe how my life experiences fit within these groupings, write a resume that chronicled my entire work history, compose two essays, and pay an extra fee to be fingerprinted and get an FBI background check. I had to also be interviewed to ensure I was a good fit for the program. The only thing that kept me going was self-motivation and a strong support system. I told myself over and over I wouldn't be nearly as happy working in any other field, and my stubbornness wouldn't let me get away with not finishing what I had started.

Thankfully I was accepted into the program in April of 2012, but didn't find out what school or grade level I was placed at until nearly the end of July. I'll say this: to survive this program, a deep-seated passion for teaching is the key to success.

December 2012: The end of the beginning

The first semester of my internship was a whirlwind of UAF classes, teaching, and countless hours at home planning lessons and completing my own assignments. My average day during the first semester was

14 hours, Monday through Friday. I feel silly even writing this because it seems like an exaggeration, but that is truly how much time I had to put in to succeed.

My efforts were well worth it because when grades came out I earned a 4.0. This past semester was more exhausting than all my previous college semesters combined. The biggest challenges I had were the weeks of teaching different content areas. I had thought the lesson plans for one subject wouldn't be more than five to 10 pages, or one to two pages per lesson plan. But by the time I was done with everything UAF requires for the week of teaching, I ended up with over 30 pages! It has been far more draining than I could have ever expected. During the first semester I was responsible for a week of teaching math, a week of social studies and a week of language arts, which accumulated into about 200 pages of lesson plans and student work samples!

Overall, I learned more about teaching and what it's like to be in a classroom in these past few months than I have in any of my education classes. Teaching a lesson and watching how the learning process unfolds is a much more effective way to learn how teaching practices work.

January 2013: The beginning of the end

Over the holiday break I thoroughly enjoyed detoxing from school and catching up on much-needed rest! The highlight of my break was purchasing my wedding gown, because not only am I completing this insane internship, I'm also planning my upcoming nuptials.

Now I am a little over a month into the new semester, and I have to be honest. I was sorely mistaken when I thought last semester was challenging, because this semester is the toughest one yet. During the first two weeks alone the interns were assigned so much work I thought I was going to drown in it all. I've spent more time doing homework and crying about stress in the last six weeks than my whole college career combined. Every assignment has to be done just so to achieve a target in each competency, equivalent to an A. Besides that, I am constantly pulled out of my classroom for UAF classes, which weakens my relationship with my students because I am there inconsistently.

There are some nights when I simply lie down on the floor and wonder why I am even doing this. What's the point? Did I completely screw up when I chose this path? But time after time, as soon as I feel like I'm about to quit, a memory of my class comes to mind and completely rejuvenates my drive to finish this program. The way the whole class yells "Hi, Miss Hallberg," or when one of the students asks me for the millionth time when I am going to be teaching again. It's the unknowing, unspoken encouragement from my fifth-graders that keeps me going.

The next big step for me is full-time student teaching. Now, for the first time, I am going to be teaching all the students by myself, and not only do I have to survive, I have to ensure that my learning experience doesn't stand in the way of the students' learning.

"The most empowering lesson I learned from student teaching: learning how to be a support system for children who might not have it at home."

February - March 2013: Head of the class

Full-time student teaching consists of preparing for three weeks of being completely in charge of the classroom without any assistance from my mentor teacher. This is our final test for the entire elementary education program, to see if I have the abilities to create, teach and reflect on lesson plans and activities over the course of those three weeks. I was given full control of the classroom so that I could experience exactly what it is like to be solely in charge.

My favorite part of full-time student teaching had to be when my planned lessons actually came to fruition! I spent countless hours going over my lessons and schedule to ensure that I would have enough time to cover everything during my three weeks of teaching. I even went in every Saturday afternoon for a few hours to prep my materials and double check that I had everything in order so the week would flow seamlessly. In the end, the most valuable thing I learned was that a good amount of the time, things are not going to go

according to plan and that the ability to think on your feet is just as important as organizing and planning.

For instance, I had to plan a three-week oceans unit in such a way that ocean topics were addressed through all content areas. I was teaching about oceans during science, and also through math, reading, writing and social studies.

I created an ocean ecology card for each student with a different ocean organism on it that shows what it eats and what eats it. The students sat in a circle on the floor. I held onto a string of yarn and tossed the yarn ball to a student. That student also held onto the yarn and tossed the ball to a student with a card representing something the first student's card's organism ate or was eaten by. We continued until everyone was holding a piece of the food web. Now the students could see the food web and how even distant organisms are connected. Then I asked the student holding the shrimp card to let go of his yarn, and the students saw how this weakened the food web. This was one of

my lessons that did go almost exactly as planned — until some of my boys decided it would be hilarious to wrap their end of the yarn as tightly as they could around their fingers until their fingers were purple and they were giggling with glee.

April 2013: Trading places

UAF requires interns to participate in what is called trading places for two weeks. I switched with an intern in a first-grade classroom at University Park Elementary School. Initially I was apprehensive about having to spend time in a completely foreign classroom with a whole new group of kids after spending nearly the entire year getting to know my class. However, this was one of the best experiences I

had during the internship. It really tested my teaching skills because I had to go into the classroom and immediately establish myself as the teacher with a brand-new bunch of kids.

I was not prepared for the amount of tattling that went on over the silliest things! It was hard for me to keep in mind that to a first-grader, things like "She won't share the blue crayon" or "He kicked me outside at recess" are big issues, so I had to learn how to adapt the language I use with students.

It felt odd having to lean down to talk to the oh-so-adorable first-graders. Surprisingly it only took them a few days to learn my name, but my first days there they called me "the other Miss Rogers."

The second week of trading places was so much fun! Nearly every day I was pulled out of the first-grade classroom to substitute for a different teacher, and this was such an incredible experience. I met so many different kids in such a short amount of time, and it gave me the affirmation that I can walk into a classroom as a substitute and maintain control.

May 2013: “Challenged in ways I never knew existed”

It was tough at the beginning of the year; it was scary! I didn't know how to be an effective educator, although that's what my goal was. After this year, because I dedicated myself to the challenge, I know that I have the emotional, professional and necessary skills to run a classroom efficiently and effectively. I learned how to identify student needs, parent concerns and professional expectations on a day-to-day basis because of the situations I encountered inside my wonderful fifth-grade classroom and in my time as a substitute. Many of the things I found most challenging I was not prepared for via my university training, such as how do I tend to the educational and emotional needs of a child who is homeless, has been abandoned by their mother, whose best friend has just died? This was probably the most

empowering lesson I learned: how to be a support system for children who might not have it at home.

Experiencing firsthand what teachers go through and do for their students on a daily basis was absolutely mind-blowing. From what I witnessed, teachers are always willing to go the extra mile for their students because they genuinely care about them. They are a prime example of what a good school team should be. I am proud to say that I was part of the Denali team, had the opportunity to learn from some amazing educators, and hopefully will have my own classroom there in the future.

Connecting the dots

One thing I cannot stress enough is developing relationships with your students, because you never know how you might be connected. For example, I am adopted. During the application phase [of the adoption process], my parents were asked to get letters of recommendation. Some of their friends' children decided to write letters attesting to how great my parents would be if they were allowed to adopt a child. After I was adopted, my parents had a party for all the people who had helped them. My mother recently stumbled upon a photo from the party. I was an infant, and there was a young girl holding me in her arms. Turns out, that girl, 25 years later, was the mother of one of the students in my fifth-grade class. I was so excited to show my student the photo and tell her the story of how we were connected, the fact that her mother held me when I was a baby, and now I was her student teacher. It's just amazing how people have connections without even realizing it, and when it comes to fruition it is absolutely beautiful.

This internship tested my dedication to the teaching profession, but I can wholeheartedly say this: There is nothing in the world I would rather do. I love taking the time to plan activities that get kids excited about learning. I adore the looks on my students' faces when they are inspired by something, and I cannot imagine being in any other profession. 🍎

Jamie Hallberg graduated in May 2013 with a bachelor's degree in elementary education. She now works full time teaching and organizing field trips for children ages 6 – 12 at Fairbanks Memorial Hospital's employee day care center.



Hallberg went home with a collection of goodbye cards on her last day of teaching.

