

EoYPSL

While I've taught many things at Elm Street, I've also learned a handful of great things. Elm has been a very valuable experience in shaping who I am currently, as I feel like I've learned much about life there.

One of the students, David, taught me against the first major stereotype I had going in to Elm. Honestly, on the first day going to volunteer, I was saying to myself that I knew that I was going to be annoyed by the antics of little kids, because that's all kids in the elementary school age are, annoying. That idea was stripped in just a day of being there, as they were completely silent for almost the first 30 minutes I was in the classroom. Then, as they slowly stopped being as shy from me, it almost instantly became a competition to find out who I was and why I was there. My teacher told me the next time I came how excited some of the students were knowing that I was coming to their class every Tuesday and Thursday. So probably a month into it, the teacher asked me to line up the boys and take them to the bathroom. I agreed, and while we were standing in line outside the bathroom, David looked up and stare at me for probably 30 seconds. I asked him what was up, and he said "CURTISI, STOP HITTING ME!". My instant thought was Oh wow... This kid is going to get me arrested. He said it again just in time for my teacher to hear it, and I thought "Alright, this will be fun to explain." She asked me what was going on in a very serious voice and then that changed into a laugh and she said "OH I'm just kidding you, David did the same exact thing to me because he wanted the principal to hear." She disciplined David, but I realized that kids never have any intent on harming or doing something bad. They lack the comprehension skills to tell the difference between something safe and dangerous to do. This taught me that I needed to have more patience with the kids and their ways, because if I was susceptible to being annoyed by it, it was going to be a long year. I've applied the patience I've learned at Elm Street in many situations now.

A major thing I think of when I think what I've learned from my experience, and it's via my friend at Elm, Devin. Devin is the single smartest kid in any of my classes. He is fast at math, and reads better than anyone in the class. He is the nicest kid you'll ever meet, as he's always jumping out his seat and volunteering to help out with whatever you need him for. The problem is, however, that that is not how you act in a 2nd grade classroom. He is constantly in trouble, not because he is a trouble maker, but he just can't stay in control in a classroom environment. Then he exacerbates it by asking the teacher what he did wrong, and then he'll throw a fit like any 8 year old does when you tell him he lost 5 minutes worth of recess, which a lot of the time leads to a call home or a complete loss of recess. After one of what seems to be almost daily outbursts and loss of recess, he was crying as the teacher told him to stay in the classroom. I decided to stay in the classroom with him after the rest of the class lined up for the bathroom. I sat next to him and tried to comfort him in whatever way I could, I don't remember the exact details, but I do remember what he said to me. He said, "I hate myself. I'm the worst kid in the entire class and I don't ever know why. I want to die." I was in shock because he is the most eccentric kid in the whole class. He was always smiling and being genuine, but it was the schools rules that made him think he was a bad kid.

I asked the teacher what she thought about that, she said she knows he's a nice kid and she feels terrible every time, but she also said that he has to assimilate into the school environment. She also told me that he didn't have a mother figure in his life due to substance abuse and his dad is physically and emotionally abusive, like whenever there is a "fun" day of school, like a dance or field trip or field day, his dad keeps him out for the day. This all was very shocking to me because the stereotyped kid for that kind of background, the not caring about anything, fending for himself and always trying to bring others down, was the complete opposite of what you see when you see Devin. I then noticed that every day that he got in trouble and would throw a fit, he would ask to see his mom.

Before mother's day, the students were all working on a letter to their mom, like the normal 2nd grade classroom project. I was lurking around reading some of them, and then I read Devin's, which only said this: "Dear mom, I miss you every day. I try my best to be the best person I can be every day, just like you said. I love you and I miss you." Very shortly after, he shouted done, ran up to the box, turned it in and carried on. The entire semester I was wondering what this kid was thinking when he was doing what he was doing, whether it'd be running to the back of the classroom to get something for the teacher or giving people answers on homework, I think that he was just doing it because his mom expected him to be a good kid. This made me realize how lucky I am, that my parents got divorced when I was only 4 and yet both stayed in my life constantly. I've always taken my family for granted, but after the lesson Devin taught me, I realized that through everything, family is all you have and that you need to stick with them.

Service is important because you don't only help people out, you learn lessons that you can't learn elsewhere and you find out things about yourself that you may never have figured out. I always thought I would not like little kids, but I've learned that I do like them. I learned as I taught at Elm, and I know that Thursday isn't the last day I'm going there, I'm going until the end of their school year too because I feel like I'm as big of a part of the students 2nd grade year as they are of my senior year.