

As mentioned throughout my portfolio, I have been teaching health education half time at Bethel Elementary School since late August of 2016. My background is somewhat unusual, in that I have a Masters Degree in Education as well as prior teaching experience, but my previous work involved teaching middle school English at an independent school. Prior to teaching in Bethel, I had experience in the public health field but had not completed coursework in health. Since becoming a health teacher, I have made every effort to take graduate courses and attend workshops to build my background knowledge as well as to understand best practices in teaching elementary health. This work has been arduous but extremely rewarding; I now feel that I have the tools and knowledge I need to develop and implement a robust skills-based health program at my school.

My experiences with mentoring and observation have been somewhat unusual, as well. One definite weakness of my practicum is that I have been unable to access mentoring from a seasoned elementary health educator. During the 2016-17 school year, Donna McCallister served as my mentor and offered invaluable insight via phone meetings and email as I began learning about teaching skills-based health. In the 2017-18 school year, I am being mentored by Melissa Purdy, my licensed colleague in Bethel's junior high and high school. Melissa is more experienced than I and has completed additional coursework, which enriches our discussions and collaboration. She also leads our school's ECO program with elementary classes, so she is familiar both with my students and with some of the challenges and opportunities of teaching health in the younger grades. Melissa and I meet regularly to check in about how our classes are going and to coordinate curriculum. We have a close and productive working relationship and her experience with older students helps guide my focus as I aim to prepare young children for her program. In addition, working with the course instructors through my VT-HEC graduate classes has provided invaluable input into everything from classroom management in health to specific skills-based units I am developing.

Although my teaching has not formally been observed on a regular basis, I travel to different classrooms as I teach and, in at least half of my eleven weekly classes, the teacher opts to stay in the room while I am teaching. These informal observations (while extremely humbling for a novice) have yielded a trove of useful strategies that I implement regularly. I have always taken a "feedback is welcome, you cannot step on my toes" approach and my colleagues know that I am eager to hear their input and corrections. Some classroom teachers choose to interject when behavioral issues arise during health class, modeling a response that is often better than my own. Others provide feedback, both positive and negative, at the end of a class they observe or after school.

Ultimately, I would like to develop a mentoring relationship with another elementary health educator in order to improve my own teaching, my understanding of best practices, and my grasp of the field in general. I am also eager to learn strategies to deal with some of the challenges inherent in being a "specials" teacher who works with the youngest children in my school. As I move into the next phase of my health teaching career, I hope to have more time

and flexibility in my schedule to make mentoring from an elementary health specialist a regular part of my work.