Zachary Slaight

**Final Self-Assessment**

It’s hard to believe that my time as an undergraduate college student has come to close, and it is even harder to believe that my eleven weeks of student teaching have already come and gone. It seems like just last week I was walking around the halls of Ozark wide-eyed and ready for new experiences. Student teaching has been one of the most memorable experiences of my life, and it far exceeded my expectations and hopes for what I thought I was going to get out of it. I was extremely worried coming into these final weeks of college about whether or not I had what it takes to be a teacher, but after the past three months, I am confident when I say that I am definitely ready to become a teaching professional.

When all is said and done at Ozark, I will have taken over Women’s Choir, Men’s Choir, and the JV Girl’s Choir, a choir made-up of mostly freshman and sophomore girls. I also took over a music appreciation class. Of these classes that I took over, I took them over completely by myself for almost 8 weeks, and this is where I feel I learned the most during my student teaching. I was able to apply different teaching ideas and strategies I’ve learned over the past five years and tweak them to work in an actual classroom setting. I struggled the most with the Women’s choir, getting them to listen to me, finding ways to motivate them beyond what they were already doing, etc, but in the end, they ended up being my favorite to choir work with. Men’s choir was fairly to work with, for the simple fact that I related well with the guys and they were willing to work hard for a male teacher and feel like they could relax and just act like a “guy” and not get in trouble. I also feel I had great success with the young girls choir. I think part of this was because they were all pretty new to choir, and they were all wanting to soak up anything they could to get noticed by my cooperating teacher and move up to the top choirs. JV Girls choir made the most improvement from my first day till my final day.

I can’t put a price on the lessons that I have learned over the past eleven weeks, or even try to fully assess each of them. Student teaching help hammer home all of theories we spend so much time discussing, but help make them meaningful by actually being able to apply them to actual students. You also learn so much more then what we’ve been taught in the classrooms at Drury. Sure we learn how to teach different kids with different learning styles and multiple intelligences, and how to be accommodating for our exceptional students, but until you are the classroom teaching, you really cannot understand how much other “stuff” a teacher has to do outside of teaching. The paperwork, and not just grading papers, that a teacher goes through on a daily basis is unbelievable. My choir went on a trip to Chicago while I was student teaching, and putting that together was a quite a site to witness. Release forms have to be signed when you need to take the kids to contest, parent forms have to be signed, emails to fellow teachers have to be sent out if kids have to miss for a competition, etc. Music has to be ordered, scheduling has to be dealt with for the next semester, and for those kids that look to you as a role model you have to be on them to keep up with their grades and to stay focus for the rest of the year. If I’ve learned nothing else, which I can assure I have, it’s that a teacher has to be organized in order to be successful. If you are not able to juggle three or four things at a time, and not get stressed from doing so, being a teacher might not be for you.

Through all of this I’ve picked up a lot of techniques that I am anxious to apply to my own classroom, and I’ve learned some things that I personally will want to try and avoid with my choir. The thing I like best about my cooperating teacher is his ability to motivate students. He knows which students need reassurance and which ones can handle a little extra push. He knows when to be gentle and reaffirming, and he knows when to get tough and expect greatness. These qualities are what I feel make a great choir director, knowing how to work extremely hard, but knowing how to have fun along the way. I’ve learned how to tell which students need what kind of motivation and I’ve learned how to pick up when a large group, like a choir, needs that extra kick from me or when they need to take a moment to catch their breath. The one thing I think I’ve learned not to do as a teacher, is let my students feel like they can come hang out in my room when they are not in class, or skip class and expect me to write them an excusal. I feel this walks a fine line of getting too close to the students and also can distract from the current class I am teaching at the time if a bunch of kids are hanging out in the room while I am trying to teach.

Overall, I had a wonderful experience student teaching at Ozark High School and I feel very validated in my choosing the career path that I have after completing this course. I know the road ahead is a tough one, and nothing is certain, but I know that I am far more prepared to enter the teaching world then I was 4 months ago, and more importantly, I am excited to start teaching. If you had asked me last year if I was ready to teach, I would have told you I was scared to start teaching, but if you asked me that question today, I would tell you I’m excited to teach, touch young people’s lives, and make a difference in people through the wonderful medium of music. I feel blessed to have gotten to work with the fine teachers at Drury University and all of the cooperating teachers that I have, and I look forward to asking them all for advice my first year of teaching.