

From Student to Educator: My Journey as a Teaching Assistant

My name is Morgan Cook, I am a 4th year student at the University of Western Ontario in the Arts and Humanities program. In the summer of 2024, I received an email from my program about an internship opportunity as a teaching assistant with the Thames Valley District School Board. Since I am an aspiring educator, I had to jump at this incredibly opportunity to further my learning experience before I enter Teacher's College. In September, I got placed at Locke's Public School in St. Thomas, and I enjoyed my time so much that I asked to complete another internship with Annandale Public School in Tillsonburg. Looking back on my experience, I've gained more than just knowledge about teaching, I've learned valuable lessons about myself and the type of professional I want to be in the future.

When I first began my education internship, I expected my focus to be primarily on lesson plans, observation, grading assignments, and helping students to complete their work. Kind of like a glorified tutor. However, as I became more involved, I realized there was much more to it than I initially thought. The internship taught me about the teacher I one day want to become, patient, adaptable, and confident in her abilities. First, I discovered how patient I could be when helping student who were struggling. I often had to explain the same concept multiple times in different ways to ensure that the information stuck. I used to believe that I might get frustrated, but instead, I found myself growing more patient and resourceful with each interaction. I learned that teaching isn't just about providing answers, instead its about finding creative ways to make the material accessible and engaging. The joy that I felt when one of my students finally got an understanding of the material, really put into perspective how much fulfillment I can receive with a little bit of patience.

Perhaps the most unexpected lesson was discovering how much I value helping others learn. As a student, I had always appreciated my teachers and professors, but the experience of being in that same position brought me so much insight and fulfillment that it is hard to put into words. Teaching a student something that you may believe is common knowledge (you learned it from somewhere too) is one of the most interesting tasks, which along the way helps you learn in the process as well. The process brings about so much laughter from the students and me, because one second, I am trying to explain the concept and the next I am running to whiteboard to draw it out or running back to wave my hands around to show them. This really shows that everyone learns differently, whether is visually, physically, or audibly. Regardless, when I saw those little light bulbs illuminate above the students heads it always brought a smile to my face.

One piece of advice I could give to future teaching assistant interns would be to be open to learning from the students, not just from the teachers. Like me, you could have envisioned this internship as just completing a supporting role to the teacher, where you observe, grade assignments, and maybe even tutor a few students. While all of that is certainly a part of the job, what I found to be equally important was the interactions with the students themselves. This means that you are not just there to help the teacher, but you're also there to help the students learn, grow, and feel heard. You will learn just as much from the students' unique perspectives, questions, and challenges as you will learn from the teacher's guidance. Whether you're planning

to become a teacher in the future or just looking for an enriching experience, this mindset will serve you well during this internship.

Overall, I wanted to thank the Arts and Humanities Internship program for providing me with this amazing opportunity, as well as thank Locke's Public School and Annandale Public School for allowing me to be taught these valuable lessons and learn from their experienced professionals.

- Morgan Cook