

Teacher, rock star Education fulfills many dreams

By Will Chesher, Special to the Democrat-Gazette

On August 18th I began my second year as a high school English teacher in Hope, Ark. I never envisioned that I'd live in the birthplace of a past president, but then again, I never envisioned myself becoming a teacher.

I'm a fourth-generation educator--a profession that in my family is usually left to women. My mother and grandmother were elementary schoolteachers and my great-grandmother was a librarian. Growing up, I loved to read and was always curious, but I never thought that teaching would be an option.

Instead, I wanted to be a firefighter, a psychologist, an explorer, a professional reader, and on some days, a rock star--and with teaching, I get to be all of those at once.

I graduated from John Brown University with a B.A. in Intercultural Studies, emphasizing in community development. At first glance, this seems unrelated to teaching high school English, but trust me, the overlap is tremendous. Evaluating how a person's perspective, including their biases, shines through their writing is a key component of literature, and understanding and implementing concepts such as appropriate technology and indigenous leadership are essential to creating a cohesive yet diverse culture within any community--especially a classroom.

In college, I glanced at education programs, noted their strict four-year plans, and immediately sought out a different area of study. I decided to pursue Intercultural Studies because I was passionate about people and wanted them to flourish. However, I wasn't entirely sure what I was going to do with Intercultural Studies.

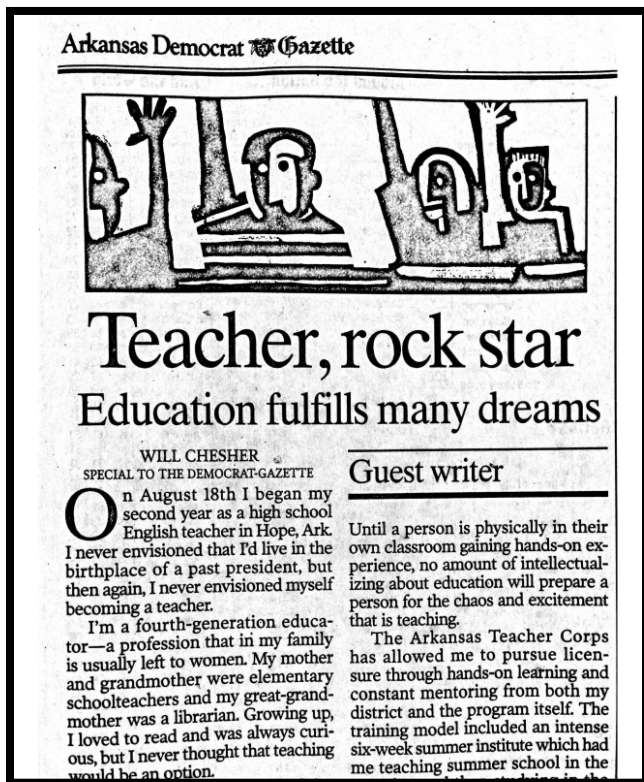
I wanted to invest in people's lives on a daily basis, not just create programming for companies who were about to expand to international markets. The education department

at my school graciously allowed me to take a few education classes, and through those classes I realized that I was interested in teaching, but I didn't want to start a four-year program after I had already been in school for three years.

I was introduced to the Arkansas Teacher Corps, and at first I was skeptical. I had been led to believe that the only way a person could become a good teacher was to go through a traditional education program, do the internship, and then go teach.

I still believe that traditional education programs are important and help prepare students to become teachers, but I no longer believe that these are the only avenues to becoming a great teacher.

Teaching isn't easy. Even friends of mine who spent four or five years in traditional education programs didn't waltz into their classrooms on day one and have everything figured out. Until a person is physically in their own classroom



gaining hands-on experience, no amount of intellectualizing about education will prepare a person for the chaos and excitement that is teaching.

The Arkansas Teacher Corps has allowed me to pursue licensure through hands-on learning and constant mentoring from both my district and the program itself. The training model included an intense six-week summer institute which had me teaching summer school in the morning and then studying in the afternoon. The afternoon sessions included presentations from veteran teachers as well as time spent in professional learning communities exploring the ins and outs of our respective disciplines.

Even though I learned from the veteran teachers and from my fellow Corps members, I learned the most from the students that I taught in summer school. Sure, I read about classroom management, but it was only when I was in an actual classroom did I really *learn* about classroom management.

I wish I could pretend that every day I go to school I feel like I am making a huge difference, but teaching is hard. Most days I feel like Sisyphus, constantly pushing my students up the hill, and a lot of the time, watching them roll right back down.

However, unlike Sisyphus, sometimes the stone doesn't roll back down the hill. When that moment comes, and a student sends you an email about how he read the poem "Musee des Beaux Arts" by W.H. Auden and made the connection between Auden's poem and the discussion we had in class about the human condition--all you can do is sit back and just be thankful you were there to witness the moment.

The Arkansas Teacher Corps helped guide me through my decision to become a teacher. I was interested in education, and through various conversations with the program's leadership, I knew that I was in good hands. I was confident that they weren't going to throw me into a classroom without preparing me.

I look forward to this school year, but also recognize that Arkansas is in need of teachers. So if you've ever wanted to be a firefighter, a psychologist, an explorer, a professional reader, or maybe even a rock star--the Arkansas Teacher Corps can help you do just that.

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<http://www.arkansasonline.com/news/2014/sep/01/teacher-rock-star-20140901/>