

John Boccacino:

Hello and welcome back to the Cues Conversations podcast. I'm John Boccacino, senior internal

John Boccacino:

Tom, when was Bridge to the City created?

Tom Bull:

What was it like for you the first day you walked in as a student teacher?

Abby Horton:

Yeah, they throw you right in. I remember seeing my first day of school, all the kids are coming in and I definitely remember feeling like, "Oh wow. I'm kind of one of the adults in this room right now." But I think the curriculum, the projects that the schools do, I think are what really stood out to me. I remember my first school that I student taught, they were growing trout or raising trout to release on a camping trip. So they had all the fry in the classroom and they brought them up from little eggs. So I just remember thinking, "This is really hands-on stuff." It was really cool to say.

John Boccacino:

How did it match up compared to what you were anticipating when it comes to your student teacher placement? What were some of the similarities that you thought and what were some of the ways it was different than what you anticipated?

Abby Horton:

I think I got to do more than I expected to be able to do. I think the educators were really open to trying new things and open to handing their classroom over a little bit and sharing it. So I felt like I really got to feel like one of the educators in the room and not so much is just like an assistant teacher. I remember feeling really, really empowered and excited to be there.

Tom Bull:

So I think that you bring up a good point, which is that one of the hallmarks of the School of Education and I think that sets us apart and Abby, you could say, "Yay or Nay" to this. We have our students in the field a lot. They get into the field into schools their freshman year. And so by the time they get to student teaching and although in this day and age with COVID, there was a little bit of the Applecart got up upset a little bit there. But for the most part, I know when you were doing your program Abby, they spend a tremendous amount of time in the field at different levels of the program in different classrooms in Central New York. So by the time they get to their student teaching, they have quite a bit of experience working with a wide range of students. So that when they get to their student teaching, they're really capable of jumping in and really contributing from day one.

What's kind of cool about Bridge to the City is that we do work with, one of the things that we've been able to do over the years is we've been able to develop relationships with schools like Abby said that really mirror our inclusive philosophy here at Syracuse and the School of Education in terms of what it means, what are best practices, what does it look like, that type of thing. The schools that we work with mirror that philosophy in practice. And for that reason I think the schools that we work with are often sought out by other colleges and universities in New York City. NYU, Columbia, Hunter, Bank Street.

The thing that we hear from the schools and from the administration and from the teachers is that they want Syracuse University students because our students are so well prepared that by the time they are in their student teaching semester, they are really accomplished and ready to jump in and not only accept responsibility for quite a bit of what's going on, but they're also sponges soaking things up and they really work well with the teachers that are down there.

And so that's something we're really proud of, and that's not just the student teaching semester. That's all of the hard work that's gone into getting students to that point. It's a consistent type of feedback that we get from the schools and from the teachers that we work with. It's how exceptionally prepared our

students are when they get into these school placements where they're really doing innovative and really creative instruction.

John Boccacino:

You should be really proud of the reputation that the School of Education has fostered because-

Tom Bull:

For sure.

John Boccacino:

... the trust factor. The trust in schools, the trust in providing student teachers who can handle this task. What is it about our students that really sets them up for success to handle something that is pretty, it can be a monumental task.

Tom Bull:

Yeah. Well I would say again, I think it's part of... Kudos to the School of Education, which across the board we have professors that have high expectations for our students. Our courses are rigorous, they are not easy. They are challenging. But we understand that for excellence to happen you have to be able to take chances and you have to take risks and you have to challenge yourself. And so I think that's a consistent message that our students here from their freshman year on. I think that by the time they get to their senior year, even though they don't really know it at the time, they are exceptionally prepared to be able to step into that role of a pre-service teacher on paper, but also able to take over with confidence all of the different things that go on in the classroom.

Keep in mind, the classrooms that we're working with are inclusive classrooms. So you've got kids of all sorts of backgrounds and all sorts of needs and all sorts of abilities. Our students are prepared to be able to support students in ways that work best for those students because they've had that experience. So I think it's a tip of the hat to all of the folks that work here in the School of Education. Would you agree with that?

Abby Horton:

Absolutely. Yeah. I think the support is a big part of it. Knowing that you're going down there with a cohort of your peers who are also going through the same thing and it makes you really close. You have each other to lean on, but then the professors are coming to New York too and they're checking in on you daily or weekly. So I think it felt like a big leap and a big challenge like Tom said, but one that felt supported. And so it felt safe to try really tricky things and put yourself out there a little bit knowing that you had some people to fall back on. So I think that going with the support system was also really comforting.

John Boccacino:

You're serving your fourth year now. I guess, how did you learn from this experience and what really challenged you about this role?

Abby Horton:

I think Tom laughed a little bit when you said that, because I think I wasn't so sure of myself when I started. But I think having the vote of confidence from my host teacher of, "You can do this." And Tom

and the other professors pushing. I think this helped me get a lot more confident in my teaching. I don't know. I think the school itself, it's the culture of the schools that we're going to is really positive and it feels safe. So I think that helps boost my confidence and boost my comfortability with teaching. Just knowing that it was okay if I had a flop lesson and people would be there to give me feedback and I try again the next day. But I think this program, or at least Bridge to the City, really showed me I can do a lot more than I thought I could before I started. Yeah, I'm just glad I went. I got my job from it. I love my job. It's my dream school. I think the school's incredible and I think all of the schools that we're partnered with are really special.

John Boccacino:

Take us inside the classroom Abby. What was the relationship with a host teacher and what responsibilities would you carry forward when it came to setting curriculum and doing day-to-day lesson planning?

Abby Horton:

I think first couple of days you're just watching, observing, building relationships. And then by day three you're thrown in. She would start giving me at least one lesson a day. Then the next week we're bumping in up, we're doing two lessons a day leading up to eventually teaching full days or full weeks as the head teacher in the room with just some support, which I think





administrative levels in those schools are like, "When they graduate, come back when they graduate, come back." Kind of thing. Which is, I mean that's pretty heavy praise I think.

John Boccacino:

I know you've both kind of hinted at some of the ways that education has changed, but what do you think Tom might be some ways this program could evolve moving forward? What's next for Bridge to the City?

Tom Bull:

Well again, I think that's a really good question. I think you're right. I think education is ever evolving. What I like about the schools that we work with and have you this is that they are all very student-centered. In other words, the decisions that they make about how they're going to set up their classrooms and how they're going to deliver instruction isn't cookie cutter. It is based on the needs of the students that they have in front of them on a year to year basis. And so the idea of being flexible in responding to the needs of the students in itself creates a dynamic where every year it's slightly different or every day Abby, every day is slightly different based on the needs of the students that are in front of you. And so I think to me that is something that's always going to be evolving because the needs of students change have changed quite a bit over the years.

But the philosophy of making sure that you are inclusive and that you are student centered is at the heart of all of the decisions that they make. And that's really what we talk about in regards to best practice at the School of Education. The other thing too that we do in majority of the schools that we work down there. I know Midtown West doesn't have this particular structure, but they have something called ICT classrooms, which is integrated co-taught classrooms. So you have a general education teacher and a special education teacher that are in the classroom together. So basically it's team teaching throughout the day. And that's pretty common in districts all over the place. But they do it really, really well.

So our students get the opportunity to see really strong collaboration on a day-to-day basis in the schools that they're doing your student teaching in. Which is really important because if you talk about what's down the line, I think again, I think we do a good job of teaching our students how to work with students. Our student teachers, how to work with students. Sometimes the tricky part is how do you work with other adults. So we are giving them an opportunity to be able to see that done at a really high level. And I think that to me is a huge benefit to the program. Would you agree with that Ab?

Abby Horton:

Absolutely. I think that's the hardest part of the job is managing other adults. So I think with adults it requires a lot more collaboration and a lot more communication that doesn't come as naturally, I think as it does communicating with children.

John Boccacino:

Abby, what was that moment like? Why did you want to get into this profession? What made you want to focus on inclusive education and special education?

Abby Horton:

Family of educators. My grandma and both of my parents are teachers. So I grew up valuing it as a profession. So I mean off the bat, I think I was one of those kids that was always saying, "I'm going to be



a teacher when I grow up." And before I think it was so I could use the whiteboard and the cool markers, but now that part's changed. I think

is an opportunity to get better at what you do. So I think that's the way they've looked at it and I think

Tom Bull:

Thanks John, I appreciate it.

John Boccacino:

Thanks for checking out the latest installment of the Cues Conversations podcast. My name is John Boccacino, signing off for the Cues Conversations podcast.