

Abby Ridgeway

Periods 4/5

June 1, 2018

Assignment #3: Mentor Interview

**Mentor Name:** Tenzin Peling

**Company:** Whittier School

**Position:** Lead Teacher

1. **Describe your educational background.**

“I did my bachelors in liberal studies with an emphasis in elementary subject matter at San Marcos State. A couple years later I went to San Diego State for my teaching credential; my moderate to severe teaching credential. After I finished my teaching credential, I got my masters in special education with an emphasis in transition skills at San Diego State.”

2. **Describe how you landed in your current position.**

“Oh man, by a lot of luck. When I was doing my credential at San Diego State, I took a class here at Whittier. Well I took an assessment class and four weeks of it were taught here, at Whittier by their lead teachers at the time, on the different assessment protocols that they use here and when I came for that class I fell in love with it. I was amazed, I was at the time, working for another school district as a paraeducator and I came here and we toured the schools as a part of our class to learn about the assessments. I fell in love with what they did; it was very different than what I saw at my other district and my other classrooms. When it got to student teaching time, I requested to be here at Whittier and I got lucky. They had a position for me, so I started student teaching here, and then in the next school year, I got hired. This is my sixth year here. In my fifth year, the student teachers, both of them actually, got other positions and they reduced the job to one. So I was offered the position my fifth year. There’s a lot of turnover here, so I was one of the

more senior teachers after five years, but also I volunteered a lot during the summer and did extra work with the prior lead teachers on long breaks because they used to work over the summer. So, I would just come in and just work with them and I had really good mentorship long story short. My master teachers started in student teaching and brought me up through my early career. Over the summer, you know, they'd let me come in and work with them and I had really good leadership and models."

3. **What do you like most about your job?**

"I love that it's different every day. I get really bored with redundancy. I used to work at a bank in college, I used to work at a sports center. Even in my old classroom, I found that I would be bored. I would go in for a split shift, so I worked I would say, one o'clock to three thirty, in this classroom with these students and I was so bored. It was just the same activities everyday like I could recite the entire routine and it was the same activity and I knew when the kid would pinch me. It was just really boring. What I really like about here is that not only like in my position, but also in our classrooms, we really promote not doing the same things everyday. We're not trying to work into like automaticity or robotic movements. It's about switching it up, but still giving structure and expectations and everyday, something different. Including for our kids, you know, Monday Wednesday, Friday they may have one assignment and Tuesday and Thursday it changes. I think that's really important because if I as the instructor is falling asleep, the kids are going to be falling asleep. So, I like that it changes everyday. You never know what happens here and I know you've seen that, but I like it; it keeps me on my toes."

4. **What advice can you give to a young person like me?**

"Don't be shy when you know what you want. Like the fact that you're interning, I think is amazing and it's a great opportunity to kind of learn and be able to ask questions. I think that's what I got really lucky with when I came here. I had great lead teachers who I could ask questions

to and ask for extra things to do and they would coach me and give me that advice. I think the most important thing is to ask questions, but also don't take things personally especially in the professional world. Like even if somebody gives you feedback, or says do it differently, it's not about you as a person, it's just about the work and that coaching and training. Sometimes it's hard because you put your heart and soul into a project and then present it and people are like, "Actually I want you to go in this direction and change x, y, z." But it's all about having the shared vision and just knowing *it's not just my vision, it's not just how I want it to be*. I'm working with other people and making sure we have everybody's input or if your boss or somebody else is going to change things that's totally fine and not to be offended by it.

5. **Do you see yourself working here until retirement?**

"I don't know if my body can handle *until retirement*. I see myself working in education until retirement; unless I win the lottery and then I will be a volunteer. Not necessarily at Whittier school, I don't think, because this is a very A-typical setting. I love it, and I want to be here for a lot longer, but do I think physically I could maintain the energy level here? Probably not forever. But, I mean I say that, but also my favorite master teacher retired last year at retirement age and she worked here just fine. So, you never know, but professionally it's not my end goal to stay here. I don't know what my end goal is, but I know I want to to more and have a bigger impact. So I don't think - I don't know, I go back and forth. I love it here, so it'd be hard to leave. But, I don't know. When I first started here, I wanted to become a lead teacher; that was my goal. I really admired my master teachers that were doing this, but my thought was, *I'm gonna work in a classroom for ten years and then maybe they'll be at retirement age and I'll try to get their job*. But then that happened much quicker than I anticipated. In my mind it was like, *Oh if I work in a classroom for ten years, then in maybe twenty years I could be a lead teacher and then do something else after that*. But it happened a lot quicker than I anticipated, so now I'm in it. I

definitely want to stay a few more years because I have projects that I think we're working on that are going to take that amount of time and I want to see those through.”

6. **What did you want to grow up to be as a child?**

“I’ve always wanted to be a teacher. I loved my second grade teacher, I remember her, I adored her, I thought she was amazing. All through elementary school I just liked school. I was that kid on the playground who hung out with the recess teacher. I would come in summer break and volunteer and cut materials and work in the classroom. I babysat from like fifth grade on; I was the neighborhood babysitter so I’ve always enjoyed kids. It’s funny, actually... When I graduated college with my BA and my whole degree was in the area of elementary subject matter and geared toward teaching I freaked out and thought, *I don’t want to be a teacher! I’ve done this!* It seems horrible you know *I don’t want to do this for the rest of my life*. So I left and graduated a year early and I went abroad and joined the peace corps. I wanted to travel and be a free spirit and do amazing volunteer work and I got all the way to Ukraine as a youth development volunteer. I was like, *Great! I get to see all these youth engagement activities!* I ended up being a teacher. I taught English. But I loved it and I was teaching English as a native speaker, but I was teaching it as a second language to them and that’s where I really got interested in moving away from gen ed and looking at other types of teaching. I taught at - there was a college in the city and I taught other teachers there, just on like American practices in the classroom because our education systems are very different and I found that to be really fun like being in more of that training capacity. When I was there, one of my fellow volunteers had a disability from birth and me and her were pretty close because we trained together so we were neighbors for three months in the village - there were just five of us. So we got really close over those three months and then when she went to her own site and I went to my own site, we stayed in touch. Her experience overseas was much different than mine due to her physical nature that showed her disability. That’s when I

realized that I wanted to work in special ed because how they treated her and how my neighbor had a son with autism and said her son died of autism. And for me it was a shock because you don't die of autism. So originally my thought was *I'm going to come back to the U.S. and get my teaching credential in special ed. I'm going to work in special ed for a little bit and I'll go back abroad and work just on special ed programing and development across the world because it's really not developed.* Now that I'm here, I feel like there's still so much work to do here, I don't know if I want to go abroad again. My long term goal, if I ever get there financially, would be over the summers to work in other countries. I have a lot of family in India so I'd like to go there and work in their special needs communities to work on bringing materials and curriculum and developing what the expectations are. As a part of my credential program, I got to go on a study abroad trip to Ghana with some of our professors. So we specifically went to learn about Africana studies in addition to special education. It was really neat to have that historical perspective, as well as how that influences what they do now for special ed. There's a lot of work to do, not only here, but worldwide. I would love to only work worldwide, but I think that's very naive - or it's a very limited perspective for me not to want to put in the work here too because I still think we need that development here. LRE, FAPE, and IDA still has a lot of progress. Our adult programming for people with disabilities is not bad, but it's also not big and broad enough to really support everybody. And I mean like all disabilities, not even our mod severe kids, mental illness, physical disabilities, everything, I mean even just the public mandate for elevators and accessibility for people in wheelchairs is only like ten years old for public buildings. I mean it's insane young all these things are to increase accessibility UDL for all people, so I don't feel like I can only exclusively work abroad. I would like to at one point have my three months off for summer and just go live with my family or friends in India and spend my summer working there.”