

## Little learners and Big lessons

My name is Jean McPherson and I'm a third-year undergraduate student in the studio arts program at Western! During the fall/winter semester of 2024 I did an internship through AHIP. I had the opportunity to take a role as a teaching assistant in a grade 2/3 class at Evelyn Harrison public school. After my bachelors degree I intend on going to teachers college and developing my career as a primary school teacher and this internship opportunity has been very encouraging.

Reflecting on my experience as a teaching assistant I am filled with a mixture of gratitude, growth and insight. This role has not only provided me with a unique opportunity to engage with young learners but has also deepened my understanding of educational environments. From the beginning I was struck by the vibrant energy that filled the classroom and school, the students came into school everyday eager to learn and excited to be there which always made my time at the school joyful. My primary role as the teaching assistant was to complete tasks my supervisor saw fit, I worked with students in small groups focusing on their math and literacy skills, I read aloud to the students during the shared reading time, and also planned and taught an art lesson. Throughout this experience I also had the opportunity to work with children independently which I feel was one of the most valuable aspects of my role, I was able to see firsthand the importance of working with students one on one. The personalized attention and enthusiasm I was able to give the kids I worked with felt especially purposeful.

This internship taught me things about myself both personally and professionally and there are many experiences I will take from it, the ones I enjoyed the most were my experience working with the students who have special needs. The two particular students in the class I was placed in were always a joy to work with, I often worked on math and science worksheets with them which were usually well received... These moments profoundly deepened my understanding of diverse learning styles and the importance of individual support in the classroom and collaborating with my supervisor taught me so much more about this aspect of teaching. Though challenges were certainly present working with the two truly enriched my life in ways I will never forget.

Another experience I will take away from this internship are all the times I was sent to the photocopier. An elementary school's photocopier is truly a different being. The complexity of the machine with all of its bells and whistles was something I had never worked with before. Though it's a vital resource in the daily function of the classroom it is not always the easiest to use. Having to figure out how to use one in a pinch was an experience I will never forget and will take this knowledge with me everywhere I go.

Through these experiences I also gained a greater appreciation for the social and emotional aspects of learning, seeing how students interacted with other students and staff highlighted the importance of building a supportive classroom community. I have not been in an elementary school since I attended one myself, it was a really unique experience coming back to this kind of environment as an adult. There is so much more I still have to learn but ultimately this internship has made me more passionate about childhood education and even more excited for my future. I am grateful for this opportunity

and being a part of the amazing classroom I was placed in, and I look forward to applying the things I have learned to my future endeavours.