

My Role as a Student Teacher

Jennifer Park

Teachers College, Columbia University

A month into the school year, a new kid walks in. Only five years old, it is his first time going to school and everybody is speaking another language. He cries from overwhelming anxiety, but the teacher cannot slow down to comfort him. She is busy managing 24 other students and trying to follow the curriculum as planned. As I administer the math assessment, the teacher assumes that he will do poorly now and improve in a few months with some English acquisition. She says we will test him later. I keep thinking to myself, *this is not how I would do it*, but I also know that I do not face the same responsibilities to the rest of the class, their parents, and school administrators as my CT.

I asked my Spanish-speaking friends to teach me some comforting phrases. I sat next to him every day that I was there and repeated “everything is alright” and “you will see mommy soon” until he began to feel safe. I observed and reported his progress to the teacher. She recognized my commitment to the new student, and allowed me to work one-on-one with him so that she could focus on the whole class. I finally administered the math assessment to him in broken Spanish, and he successfully took it, proving his mathematics comprehension.

A teacher’s role is to help students succeed. By providing emotional support to this new student first, the affective filter was lowered, allowing him to comprehend the input provided. Student teachers must carefully navigate their role in teaching without overstepping. Although it is not my classroom, I still have the responsibility to advocate for and teach all students. Sometimes that means that I must provide extra attention, do more research, or fill in the gaps for individual children. That is my role as a student teacher.

Jennifer Park is a 2nd year graduate student at Teachers College pursuing an MA in TESOL K-12. Park is also certified in early childhood education as well as special education. She hopes to use her knowledge of education to teach and support a diverse array of students.