

**Q: Kim Kelley, tell us a little bit about yourself.**

**A:** So I work at the Goodwill Excel Center. I've been here for five years now. I am a reading teacher. My background though is in special education middle school.

The Goodwill Excel Center is an adult high school that gives students the opportunity who, for whatever reason, weren't able to complete their high school diploma the first time around. And so our students range in age from 16 all the way up to 80 plus. Our current oldest student right now is 84 years old. And her dream is to have her granddaughter watch her walk across the stage.

**Q: How do people find Goodwill Excel? Are they from all over the city? Can anyone participate?**

**A:** So anybody that lives in DC. Our funding is the same as other public schools. They do have to live in DC, but other than that, we have websites, Instagram, we're on bus posters, there are radio clips and different things like that to hopefully help lead them to us. But a lot of our students we get by word of mouth, like their friend or their relative or somebody went here. Sometimes the whole family is in here.

**Q: Is every student kind of on their own journey? Like, some will be there for a couple of years, some, might be there for longer?**

**A:** Yes. Typically if you come in with no credits whatsoever, it takes about two years to get through the program because we are teaching at an accelerated rate. Students still have to meet all of the requirements of Washington, DC to get their high school diploma. But our classes are eight weeks long so that they are able to complete what is an 18-week period in a traditional school, in just 8 weeks here. We do take all of their credits from wherever they came from. So some students come in and they start right into geometry because they already have all their other math credits. It just kind of depends on their own personal journey.

**Q: How long have you been with the school?**

**A:** Five years.

**Q: That's a lot of students over that time period.**

**A:** It is and I love them all. It's definitely my happy place in DC. It's wonderful.

**Q: What's something you're especially proud of from this school year?**

**A:** I'm always super proud of the community that I build inside my classroom and this school year is no exception.

I love that sense of community that students get when they know you, and after week two they're just able to rely on each other.

One thing that I'm super proud of is that in my math class this year, I taught the first two weeks and then after that, I had student teachers that taught the rest of my math class for me for the rest of the year. And that was super fun to watch them. You know, they would practice beforehand with me to make sure they had it down and then they would teach the class the next day.

**Q: How, how did you set something like that up?**

**A:** So my math class is pretty structured. We take notes every day and then after notes, we do some practice and after the practice, we watch like a three or four-minute video on the same thing and then we do some independent practice after that. So because of that routine, they were able to just jump in once they knew the routine and were able to do it, as long as they had the knowledge of how to do the math work beforehand. So we would work a couple of days beforehand on that.

**Q: Being able to teach someone else is the highest level learning for yourself. But what are some of the other benefits that you saw for students in your class with that approach?**

**A:** Well, I think they took a lot of ownership into it. Part of what I learned through you all with Inspired Teaching was to have the first few minutes of math class start with some kind of fun activity. And a lot of them are ideas that I took from you guys. But then students started doing that as well.

You do have to be very brave in this approach because you will see a lot of yourself as you watch students. I didn't realize how much I sat on top of a desk until I started watching my students sitting on top of the desk as they were instructing like, "Oh. That's me."

But it was neat to see them asking questions like, "What do you think I should do to start the class? What activity should we do?" And to see them think through those pieces. And to have that fun time for the first 5 to 10 minutes of class.

**Q: One of the things that I remember talking with you about this summer was the idea that a lot of your work at Goodwill Excel Center is to help students overcome some**

**negative experiences that they had in school. And what's really striking me about what you're sharing is this idea of them reconstructing a school experience where they're actually in the leadership position, they're actually constructing it for themselves and their peers.**

**A:** Absolutely.

**Q: What are some other ways you've seen improvisation and an improvisational mindset be part of your teaching practice and how has that gone for you?**

**A:** So I've definitely embraced play big in my classroom this year in both my reading classes and my math classes. On Thursdays in math class. We have what I call a math lab, which is just some kind of fun thing that happens to go with whatever we were learning in math.

Sometimes it goes with geometry and sometimes it goes with social studies, but it's all tied together.

One of the things that I really enjoyed this past term is I do this escape room where I hide hints all over the school and aliens have invaded the school and only they can save the school. They have to find these hints and solve the problems and it was just super fun to watch adults giggling and running through the school acting like superheroes. They really got into it and I enjoyed it.

I enjoyed seeing that playfulness side that sometimes I think we forget we need as adults. We always focus on the smaller kids for stuff like that. But I think even teachers and like I said, adult students need this "Play Big" idea in their life.

**Q: What are some places where you found joy personally as a teacher this year?**

**A:** think joy is something that I try to create every day in my classroom.

And it is, for me, the smaller things. My personal joy comes from the conversations with students or the fact that I'm trying to push them out the door at the end of class, or that there's always somebody in my room at lunchtime having a conversation or finishing a project or whatever it may be. All of those things bring me joy.

We read a book this year and it was super rewarding to walk through the hallway at lunchtime and hear a group of students discussing that book. Unprompted! They didn't know I was walking through, but they were sitting there and they were discussing that book and that absolutely brought me joy.

**Q: What's something that a student has taught you this year?**

**A:** Oh, man, I feel like I'm always learning from my students. I think the biggest gift that they always give me is to remind me not to give up on dreams and that things can get really, really hard in life and you can still be happy.

**Q: What are you curious about as you look towards the new semester ahead?**

**-A:** Starting last year and then carrying over with a lot of what I learned at Inspiring Teaching I have had the opportunity to help other teachers out and be in their classrooms and they've asked me for advice and support. I've done lesson plans in other folks' rooms, lessons, actual teaching in their rooms.

And I've, really enjoyed that piece of it. And so I am curious as to how I will continue doing that.

**Q: What's a compelling argument for why a teacher might take three days out of their summer to engage in this program?**

**A:** Everybody needs joy in their life and it will bring them joy and I think that's-a good enough reason right there. But it'll bring them joy all year as they implement some of these practices in their classroom as well.

I actually started this year a joy objective for my lesson plans. I just wanted to make sure that I was including joy in my weekly lesson plans. So I made an objective of what we were going to do for joy this week. Whether it's some type of hands-on learning, struggling through and finding the joy that way, or a silly time out type of thing and finding the joy that way. I've always been a joyful teacher but the purposefully planning and putting it in my lesson plans made it up front. And I think the students could feel that purposeful planning of joy.