Evidence of Student Learning in EDUC 384: Reflective Paper

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Pages 2-3: The description of this assignment provided to students in the course syllabus.

Page 4: The scoring rubric used to assess the Reflective Paper. This rubric was made available to the students at the beginning of the term.

Pages 5-9: The Position Paper written by “Chuck” (a pseudonym). As is my practice when grading papers, comments have been inserted into the body of Chuck’s paper using MS Word’s “Insert Comment” feature. The scoring rubric, score, and my final comments are attached at the end of the paper. Chuck’s work is of low quality relative to peers in the class.

Pages 10-15: The Position Paper written by “Brea” (a pseudonym). Once again, my comments are inserted in the margins of this paper. The scoring rubric, score, and my final comments are pasted on the last page. Brea’s work on this paper is considered average relative to peers.

Pages 16-21: The work of “Ava” (a pseudonym) presented in a similar sequence as Chuck and Brea’s work. Ava’s paper was considered to be high quality.
EDUC 384 Reflective Paper Assignment Description

Assignment Description

Most of our time in ED384 will be spent discussing various teaching techniques you may wish to use in your classroom some day. Hopefully you will find some of these techniques valuable, and most likely you will cast aside other techniques.

Your technical skills in the classroom are not as important as your over-arching disposition toward the profession and your underlying reasons for entering the profession, however. If you carefully examine these aspects of your work, and continue to reflect on them throughout your career, you will continue to find ways to acquire the technical skills you need and put them toward good use. If your work has meaning, you will continue to grow and develop into a better teacher. If you are unable to find personal value in your work, it is unlikely that you will last very long. If you do last, you most certainly will not be happy in your job.

This reflective paper is intended to provide an opportunity to reflect on your reasons for entering the mathematics classroom. Our reading of Radical Equations and the related class discussions are intended to initiate these reflections. Bob Moses provides a clear example of a reflective mathematics educator, one who has identified reasons for engaging in the work of mathematics teaching and has found meaning and purpose in the profession. Perhaps you will be inspired by this book and will want to use it as a springboard into your own reflective paper. Perhaps your personal reasons for entering the profession are quite different than those found in Radical Equations, and you will therefore write your paper without referring to the book.

Your paper should be at least 3 pages in length (Times New Roman 12 point font, double-spaced, 1 inch margins on all sides). As this is a reflective essay, you don’t necessarily need to include literature references. You are encouraged use references or quotations, however, if there is a piece (or pieces) of literature out there which has helped shape your outlook (such as a passage from a book, a philosophical statement, a scriptural passage, etc.).

You may structure your paper in any way you see fit, as long as you meet the intended purposes of the paper described above. Below are some potential writing prompts you may (or may not) choose to use:

- A fairly common interview question is, “Why do you want to be a math teacher?” An almost equally common response is, “I love kids and I enjoy the subject matter.” A standard response such as this, of course, is unlikely to distinguish this teacher from other job seekers. Use this paper as an opportunity to reflect on this interview question more deeply, and craft a response which is more detailed and unique to your personal motivations. The book Radical Equations is essentially such an essay written by Bob Moses and his collaborator Charles Cobb. Moses provides many compelling reasons for his decision to be a mathematics educator, reasons rooted in his personal history and philosophy. How does the work of mathematics teaching connect with your deepest values? What causes you to believe it will be worthwhile and meaningful work? Perhaps you value teaching as an opportunity to serve others. There are other ways to serve society, however (via social work, political activism, fundraising, etc.). Why is mathematics teaching the form of service you are choosing to embrace?
EDUC 384 Reflective Paper Assignment Description

- The Algebra Project has been designed to promote and spread mathematical literacy among the “target population” (p. 19) of African American, Latino, and poor White students. Are the principles and goals of the Algebra Project relevant to teachers who work in more affluent settings? If so, elaborate on what makes them relevant. For example, how would a teacher in a wealthy suburban high school benefit from heeding some of the ideas laid out in *Radical Equations*? If you feel this book has no relevance for such a teacher, what are your reasons for feeling this way?

- Our popular culture has a common story about success in urban schools: the heroic, committed individual teacher finds ways to connect with students and, hence, brings about change. Movies such as *The Ron Clark Story, Freedom Writers, Dangerous Minds, Stand and Deliver*, etc., are all variations of this same story. Moses and Cobb’s *Radical Equations* tells a different story, however. *Radical Equations* speaks of community organizing, bringing teachers, parents, and community leaders together in a common enterprise. What are your reflections on these seemingly contrasting storylines? What is your image of an effective teacher? Does this image connect to any of these storylines?
Reflective Paper Scoring Rubric

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**Total Score** /10

*Comments:*
While growing up kids are always asked “what do you want to be when you grow up?” I cannot remember the amount of times I was asked this during my final year in high school. I remember that trying to answer this question was always difficult for me because I was never one on reflection. When I was younger I never really thought or at least formulated the reasons I wanted to go to college to become a teacher. Any educator knows that when you describe yourself as a teacher or educator of any kind, the traditional response from listeners is that they could never do that. I often silently laugh at these responses because many of the people that I know who give such answers have all means to being a great teacher. My roommate for one is a great example, he has terrific speaking skills, he enjoys helping others figure out problems, and he is enthusiastic about the subject he studies (which is math by the way). But any time I have ever suggested to him that he should become a teacher he just gives me that same dull response, “I could never be a teacher.” But now sitting here I am challenged or guided toward describing why I want to become a teacher; a math teacher none the less.

I originally conceived the idea of becoming a math teacher when I was in high school. My mother was a middle school teacher (my middle school which was not fun) and I had always been around that lifestyle. I saw how many of the teachers that I knew enjoyed what they were doing and how much a profound effect that a teacher could have on the outcome of a students’ life. I believe that this idea can be summed up in saying that was stitched on a pillow in our house; to teach is to touch a life forever. By my senior year of high school I had concluded that I wanted to either become an architect or a teacher. It was during my senior year of high school that I had two teachers that helped to affect my decision. That year I took AP Statistics and Earth Sciences. Now my AP Stats teacher Mr. Porter was a great example of a mathematics teacher...
that really related to his students. Since most of the students had plans to enroll in college in the fall, Mr. Porter would often share some of his favorite or funniest experiences with us. But he also told us about the harshness that we may encounter in the real world. He understood where we, his students, were coming from and taught to our needs. This I feel made the content of the course much easier to handle. I enjoyed the class a great deal but also learned a great deal as well. As for my Earth Sciences teacher Mr. Nelson, he was a teacher with a very strange background. Mr. Nelson was originally a nameless worker in the business world. He did not enjoy his job, so he went back to school to become a high school science teacher. Now Mr. Nelson loved being a teacher and a student could really see this. He was energetic and excited about what he was teaching. He found joy in teaching students about content of the class. These were just two teachers that had an effect on my desire to become a teacher. It was because of my teachers that I knew I wanted to become teacher myself. I wanted to have a positive effect on the students that I was teaching, I wanted them to enjoy and not be weary of the learning process. I want to portray to students that they have the power to learn and enrich their lives. The only decision that I had to make now was which subject I wanted to teach in.

As can be suspected mathematics was indeed one of my favorite subjects along with history, and physical education. I think that mathematics always appealed to my very meticulous and rational nature. Everything in mathematics seemed to be governed by overlying laws that mathematicians and those who teach it seem to agree to. I never enjoyed the subjects of English and/or Language Arts since most topics in it seemed to be very ambiguous. So when it came to decide what content area I would like to teach, I elected math because I felt that it held more of a future for my potential students. In a typical social studies curriculum students are repeatedly taught the same content over and over again. Each year it was same topics: American Colonies,
“Chuck’s” Reflective Paper [Relatively Low Quality]

Revolutionary War, Constitution, Slavery, Civil War, Reconstruction, and the Early 20th Century. We never seemed to get anywhere in social studies, at least not until high school. On the other hand mathematics seemed to build upon itself. What a student learns in fourth grade is needed to learn new content in fifth grade or later. As is pointed out by Bob Moses in Radical Equations the world is becoming a very technological place. This is even truer today then in 2001 when the book was published. Since 2001 the number of personal computers has doubled from 500 million to 1 billion (predicted to reach 2 billions by 2014) while the number of cell phones in the world has more than tripled. So as Moses suggest students of all backgrounds need to be prepared to enter a world where students can work new technologies that are replacing many of the manual labor jobs. What Radical Equations has shown me is that many people, including the students, believe that they are entitled to and want to seek out a better education for themselves. I think that this is one of the fundamental ideas that I will bring into my teaching. I want to instill in my students, much like how Bob Moses did, that they are capable of anything they put their mind to. Now some students make take time to get through too; some I may never reach. But even if what I am teaching the students does not produce results in my class, it may in others. This also is important because a student’s education should not be separated into six or seven separate subjects. Teachers should be working together to provide their students with a complete education in which they can share their ideas and knowledge freely.
### “Chuck’s” Reflective Paper Score and Comments

**Name:** “Chuck”

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| Supporting Reasons | 0 = Author fails to provide reasons for his or her desire to become a teacher.  
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| Structure of Paper | 0 = The paper lacks structure and is almost impossible to interpret.  
1 = The paper’s structure requires improvement. The reader must expend a great deal of effort in deciphering the author’s message. There are several places where ideas do not flow logically, arguments are not organized properly in paragraphs, arguments are not defended, etc.  
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3 = The paper flows smoothly from beginning to end. The paper is well organized, and ideas build logically on one another throughout the paper. The positions of the author are easily understood and well supported. Other mathematics teachers would enjoy reading this paper and possibly find inspiration through it. | 2            |
| Writing Mechanics and Style | 0 = More than six spelling/grammatical errors occur throughout the text.  
1 = Author commits 3 to 5 spelling/grammatical errors.  
2 = Author commits no more than 2 spelling/grammatical errors. | 0            |

**Total Score** 7/10
“Chuck’s” Reflective Paper Score and Comments

Comments: Good…you share many relevant reflections and make a convincing case that you are ready to be a math teacher. It is also clear that you are aware of the importance of a quality math education in the lives of students, and that you understand what distinguishes quality math instruction from poor instruction.

While the ideas you shared were solid, clearly there were quite a few spelling and grammatical errors in your paper. Teachers (even math and physics teachers) often need to be writers (e.g., writers of curricular materials, letters to parents, proposals to administrators, etc.), so I do find it necessary to assess the quality of your paper on grammar as well as content. Please take note of the grammatical suggestions in the text above.

The structure of the paper can also be improved. The paper has only 3 indented paragraphs, though more than 3 major themes were presented. Organizing major ideas into separate paragraphs is helpful to the reader…it prepares the reader for a shift in ideas.
The kids of today are the future of tomorrow. When we grow old, the world will change hands and be in control of today’s youth. I personally want to know that I have done everything I can do to be sure the future of this world will be as bright as possible. That clearly answers the question of why I thus want to work with kids. However, I have not yet addressed why I want to teach mathematics. There are countless ways to help kids out; why did I choose teaching math? Obviously, I love math. Equally as obvious, I would love to impact my students in such a way that they will share my enthusiasm for math. I am also a realist and I know that will not happen with every student. Yet, I will teach math and do my best to reach each and every one of my students.

The students of today are going to be the workers of tomorrow. As such, communication skills, technology literacy, and just plain literacy are important skills to have. Mathematical skills are also important for students to have. As any teacher (or prospective teacher) of math knows, math teachers will frequently be asked the question “How does this relate to my future? I want to be a _________. Factoring in no way will help me with this.” All math teachers should have an answer prepared. As unsatisfactory as this answer would have been to me as a student, I would answer my kids by ensuring them that perhaps factoring will not apply directly to what they will be doing with their future. However, the critical thinking skills they gain through factoring will most definitely apply to their future no matter what job they enter.

I have been immersed in a mathematical way of thinking for so long that it is hard for me to grasp what it would be like to go through life without this mindset. I can imagine that non-mathematical minded people would not be as good of problem solvers. Math teaches students to look at a problem from multiple angles. Math teaches students to persevere. My high school math classes did not do this as much, but when I came to Augustana my math classes definitely
encouraged this “do not give up” attitude. Many times I would start a problem or a proof so many times in so many different ways that I would worry about erasing a hole in my paper. This determination and perseverance that I gained through my math classes has slowly leaked into other aspects of my life. My want to excel in math has pushed me to excel in other areas of my life as well.

Math also encourages students to relate different ideas and see connections. I now easily see connections not only between math topics (say, derivatives and integrals), but I can see connections between broader ideas, like citizenship and responsibility. My ability to articulate these connections between math ideas has expanded and has helped me to see connections in other aspects of my life. What’s more, math encourages students to correctly understand models and generalizations. Many times my roommates will struggle to read a chart or a graph and I will understand it in a second. This is because a graph is just simply a model—a different way to represent information. I have worked with graphs before and hence understand them (as well as other models) quickly and without trouble. All of these aforementioned skills I have gained in my math classes. I believe that every other student sitting in my math classes with me, to some extent, gained these skills as well.

This is why I feel math is so important to students. Students should learn math not just for the content of math, but for the other skills they will gain as a result of studying math. I want to be a math teacher to help instill these skills in the future generation of America. Problem solving skills, perseverance, connection-making, and generalizing are all important skills for productive members of society to have. Yes, I’m aware that my impact as a teacher will be small. Just as the Algebra Project started small, its effect was like “bouncing a ball” (Moses 91). The Algebra Project started simply as Bob Moses working with his kids. Then his daughter’s school became
interested in what Bob was doing and from there the Algebra Project hit the ground running (or bouncing, to stick with the above metaphor). Moses details how you first get the students involved in math, then they’ll start talking to their parents about it, and the parents will most likely bring it up with the school administration and others in the community. That is the same way I view my teaching. Yes, I will most likely only affect a small number of students. But those students will have connections with multiple other people, and if even one of them continues on in their life with a renewed outlook on math I will consider my job a job well done.

I also, to a certain degree, want to emulate some of the teachers I had in high school. As Moses mentions in telling the story of Ari, a student who had a significant impact on his view towards math literacy, “there are a lot of well-trained math curriculum experts and others who know a great deal about math, but, I began to tell myself, what is missing from their work is insight into the minds of the young people they are trying to reach” (Moses 102). We have all seen teachers able to relate material well and form good relationships with their students, as well as teachers who struggle in these areas. As a student, I have experienced math teachers everywhere along this spectrum. I have had numerous teachers who have significantly impacted my life—mainly because they were some of the adults I was closest to and I was able to learn and grow a lot through my time spent with them. Just like Moses reached Ari and my high school teachers reached me, I would like to reach some of my students.

To me, building personal relationships with my students and watching them grow over the course of the year is as important as teaching them the content. Kids need strong role models in their lives and I feel teachers fit this bill quite well. Even the kids who hate school and never show an interest in anything that the teacher does will pick up on her character and will be influenced by it. The opportunity to be a positive influence on the lives of my students who may
not have another positive role model in their lives is one too good to pass up for me. I’ve been out of high school for almost three full years and I still think of my high school math teacher Mr. Stone every once in a while. When I’m a teacher, I want to have that influence on my students; I would love for them to think of me even when we’re not in class and hopefully come back and visit me someday. That is a sign of truly impacting your students’ lives.

Hence I would like to become a high school math teacher. I have wanted to teach for the longest time, yet every day my reasons for choosing to do so morph and become deeper instilled in me. I have my moments of doubt, but I hope my persevering, model-building, connection-seeing mathematical brain will get me through and allow me to become an influential and supportive person in the lives of my students.

Works Cited

Name: ‘Brea’

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**Total Score**: 9/10
“Brea’s” Reflective Paper Score and Comments

Comments: I enjoyed reading your paper. It is clear that you have been reflecting on the prospect of being a math teacher for some time now, and some of these reflections came through in this paper.

Most of the comments I wanted to make about your paper are displayed in the margins of the paper itself. I hope you will read through them, and that you view your submission of this paper and my subsequent comments as the beginning of a conversation about mathematics teaching which will continue into the future.

I did feel that one strong comment made in the paper was “left hanging” (e.g., it was unsupported). Details about this are shown on page 2, Comment ME25. This accounted for the lost point in the “structure of paper” section of the rubric.

I did make some grammatical suggestions in the margins as well. I didn’t think you made enough flat-out grammatical errors to warrant deducting points for “mechanics and style.” Still, I hope you’ll consider some of the suggestions as I think they improve the writing a bit.
Reflective Paper

Frequently when I tell people that I want to become a high school math teacher after I graduate college, people respond with a confused look or by asking me if I am crazy. Mathematics is often thought of as the subject every student dreads taking and every parent dreads helping their children with because they never understood it when they were in school. Since I plan on teaching this subject matter to teenagers, people think I am some sort of saint. I have realized there are several reasons for why I decided to pursue this frightening career however my main inspiration came to me in middle school and then again even stronger in high school.

Starting out at a young age, I have always struggled with standardized tests so my scores from those tests continually placed me on the lower-level math course track in middle school. I knew I could handle a higher level math course but never told anyone or complained. So, day in and day out I was bored with the material and eventually began to act out due to my boredom. It wasn’t until my freshman year of high school that my geometry teacher realized regular courses were not challenging enough for me. After several conversations with him, I agreed to take on the challenge of moving into the honors track and the following year did extremely well in Algebra II honors.

Many of the points made by Bob Moses in the book Radical Equations reminded me of this experience. One of the main questions he raises is “whether this generation of young people will begin to demand the literacy in mathematics it is assumed they do not want” (Moses & Cobb 171). This quote relates to my experience because I knew I could succeed in an honors level math course, but I never made enough of a demand from the school to move up since I was
“Ava’s” Reflective Paper [High Quality]

I was convinced I was where I was supposed to be. Therefore, if my geometry teacher never stood up for me, it is possible I would have never been placed in a math course that truly challenged me. This caused me to develop a strong belief that students need to be shown by their teachers that they can and will succeed in difficult math courses as long as they take the first step of demanding placement into them.

After having this experience, I began to lean towards a career as a math teacher so I could be the person that encourages students to make that demand on the school they attend. I know how it feels to be in a course lower than my ability and to not believe I will succeed in a higher course since my test scores displayed I was inadequate. I was lucky to finally be able to jump on the fast track but often students are not supported by the school system and are essentially left behind. I want to be able to help students in situations similar to mine by receiving the math opportunities they deserve. I plan on doing this by developing close relationships with each of my students and challenging them in ways I know they can handle. If there is a student in my classroom who easily becomes bored due to lack of a challenge, I want to be able to talk to them and show them math can be challenging and fun at the same time. I also want to have the power to overrule something such as an inaccurate test score and move a student into a class that matches their true abilities.

Another experience that motivated me to pursue a career as a mathematics teacher took place my senior year of high school. My calculus teacher, Mr. Kaplan caused me to develop a large appreciation for the course and math in general due to his excitement and overall love for math. He showed me how fun math can be and he also developed close relationships with each individual in the class which showed he truly cared about our success.
“Ava’s” Reflective Paper [High Quality]

Towards the end of the course, I found out that he not only taught high level courses such as Calculus but also lower level classes like pre-algebra. I asked him once why he taught classes that were so different and he informed me that he enjoyed the variety of students the classes exposed him to. He also told me that he loved being given the opportunity to have a large influence specifically on the students in the pre-algebra class. Many of the pre-algebra students were considered to be at a fairly low level and therefore never had a teacher who had so much confidence in their success before. So, he made an effort every year to show the pre-algebra students that they too can succeed and eventually work their way up to the Calculus level. Mr. Kaplan was able to successfully boost the confidence of the majority of those students and encourage some of them enough to eventually make it into a Calculus course (often one that he taught). If it weren’t for this one teacher’s efforts, these students could have never been given such a great opportunity. [This was truly inspiring to me and after hearing this from him, I became set on eventually influencing the lives of young people in a similar way.]

Overall, I want to become a math teacher due to my experiences in both middle and high school. I am not a good standardized test taker, so I was continually placed in low-level math classes. It wasn’t until my second year of high school that I was finally given the opportunity to move up to a higher level that fit my abilities. As a future educator I find this very discouraging. I believe students should always be challenged even if a test score may not show a student has high abilities or the student may not believe they are skilled in the mathematical field. I want to become a member of the mathematical community that believes all students can achieve, not just the students that are “gifted” with mathematical talents. I also want to be a part of a group that changes the negative impression continually associated with math that I described earlier. I think this can easily be achieved by incorporating fun activities into math classrooms and showing

Comment [ME31]: Great…I hope you do. I really think that this is one strong factor in our mathematical shortcomings in this country. The tendency is for the best teachers to teach the best students…the best teachers teach honors courses, AP calculus, etc. The less effective teachers often get dumped in the lower level courses. I truly believe that the best teachers are needed in the lower level courses, however. Students who have made it to calculus are likely to do well whether they have a good teacher or not. This isn’t the case for students in the lower level courses…a good teacher can make a huge impact here, and get these students on track to make it to calculus.

Comment [ME32]: a part
students how relatable math is to their own lives. Today, the methods used to teach math are changing by becoming more in tune to student learning and I believe I can help evolve math into having a more positive image by using those methods.
### “Ava’s” Reflective Paper Score and Final Comments

**Name:** “Ava”

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<th>Scoring Scheme</th>
<th>Score Earned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Depth of Reflection** | 0 = Paper is completely devoid of personal reflections about the author’s desire to teach.  
1 = Author provides some connections between his or her personal history and his or her current desire to serve as a teacher. Though reflections seem sincere, the paper utilizes a fair amount of platitudes about teaching and does not seem to reveal the author’s unique voice.  
2 = Author provides clear evidence that he or she has reflected deeply on the prospect of becoming a mathematics teacher, and makes clear and meaningful connections between his or her personal values and the work of teaching mathematics. A clear sense of purpose is detected from the paper. The reader comes away feeling that the author is well-suited to be a mathematics teacher. | 2            |
| **Supporting Reasons** | 0 = Author fails to provide reasons for his or her desire to become a teacher.  
1 = Author provides weak reasons her or his desire to enter the mathematics classroom. The author’s reasons reveal that he or she has little awareness of the importance of the work. The reader comes away uncertain that mathematics teaching is important work.  
2 = Author provides adequate reasons for his or her desire to enter the mathematics classroom. The author’s reasons reveal an awareness of some combination of key factors, including but not limited to current events, personal values, educational issues, personal tastes, social justice, etc. The reader comes away recognizing that mathematics teachers do important work.  
3 = Author provides compelling reasons for his or her desire to enter the mathematics classroom. The author’s reasons reveal a strong awareness of some combination of key factors, including but not limited to current events, personal values, educational issues, personal tastes, social justice, etc. The reader comes away convinced that mathematics teaching is an indispensable profession in society. | 3            |
| **Structure of Paper** | 0 = The paper lacks structure and is almost impossible to interpret.  
1 = The paper’s structure requires improvement. The reader must expend a great deal of effort in deciphering the author’s message. There are several places where ideas do not flow logically, arguments are not organized properly in paragraphs, arguments are not defended, etc.  
2 = The paper is well-structured for the most part. At least one aspect of the paper lacks a logical flow, however (e.g., text connecting one idea logically to another is missing somewhere; the author mistakenly assumes that readers will have a particular piece of necessary background knowledge at some point; too many ideas are presented in a single sentence or paragraph; an argument is not adequately defended; etc.  
3 = The paper flows smoothly from beginning to end. The paper is well organized, and ideas build logically on one another throughout the paper. The positions of the author are easily understood and well supported. Other mathematics teachers would enjoy reading this paper and possibly find inspiration through it. | 3            |
| **Writing Mechanics and Style** | 0 = More than six spelling/grammatical errors occur throughout the text.  
1 = Author commits 3 to 5 spelling/grammatical errors.  
2 = Author commits no more than 2 spelling/grammatical errors. | 2            |

**Total Score** 10/10
“Ava’s” Reflective Paper Score and Final Comments

Comments: I really enjoyed reading this paper. You make some compelling connections between the Moses book and your own experiences in school. The writing is smooth so that these connections come across as natural, not forced.

The insights you’ve shared in this paper convince that you’ve got a powerful disposition toward the work of math teacher which promises to make you effective, particularly if you end up working with students in grades 7-9 or lower tracked students in grades 10 and higher. Few math teachers feel called to work with this age group (most would prefer to work with more self-motivated students). Yet, as I noted in the margins above, this is the age group where teachers can really have the greatest impact.

I look forward to seeing the direction your career takes!