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RIDING THE HIGHS AND LOWS OF ITT – AMY WOOD

Whatever your age, experience or route into teaching, on the first day of your ITT year your stomach will probably be doing flips. That's never mind the first day of placement and never mind the fact we are still in the midst of a worldwide pandemic. Having just completed my ITT year (University of Nottingham PGCE) I'm offering some personal reflections on how to ride out the highs and lows of your teaching training year. This is by no means an A-Z and only stems from my personal experiences. Either way, you've made it this far so buckle up, you're certainly in for a ride!

I'll start off with a little wisdom I heard from uni, my mentors and so many others. It might seem obvious, it might not. There is no 'perfect' teacher. No one size fits all, no exact right or wrong way to do this or that. Now say it louder for the people at the back! Cut yourself some slack and embrace your individuality. The world would be a very boring place if everyone was the same and the teaching profession will be richer for your personality, flair and passion. In uni we learn that students learn in a variety of different ways, and the same goes for teachers! We all teach in different ways and that is what's so brilliant about the profession. Schools are often (and rightfully so) absolutely buzzed to have an ITT student join the team because they are full of enthusiasm and great ideas. Even if you feel like you're going in blind, you'll surprise yourself with what you pick up from uni, your peers and your own creativity.

Perhaps the most daunting part of ITT (for me, anyway) was thinking about myself as an actual teacher. What's my teacher identity? Where do I find it? Can I order it off amazon?! All I can say on that one is trust the process. It will come in time. The best thing you can do is be a sponge and be a magpie. Observe, observe and observe again. Observe teachers similar to you, different to you, more experienced than you and those at NQT/RQT. You will pick up tips, tricks and new ways of seeing and doing- you might even see the type of teacher you absolutely don't want to be. That's not a bad thing! Your teacher identity will evolve through time as you find your feet in school and build relationships with pupils and staff. Take on board feedback and be adaptive to change. One thing that really helped me was surprisingly simple- my school lanyard. As soon as I had it on, I wasn't Amy anymore. I was officially 'Miss Wood'. Fake it till you make it, right?

My next piece of advice is somewhat an oxymoron but important nevertheless- say yes, but also say no. What I mean by that is jump at the opportunities that come your way (if you feel you can, and want to) such as spending a day in inclusion, helping out at an open day or going on a field trip. Absolutely say no to "change the ink cartridge in the printer" (yes, that really did happen) and "deliver this to so and so after school". Help your colleagues by all means (being a team player will always put you in good stead) but don't be afraid to stand your ground and turn down requests that just absolutely aren't in your remit. Know your role and go at your own pace. Don't burn yourself out and don't burden yourself with responsibilities that just aren't yours.



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Next up is a toughie. Get rid of perfection. Don't fixate on it, don't aspire to it, don't even think about it. Two key takeaways from ITT which I still remind myself of every day:

Know when 'good' is 'good enough'
Don't reinvent the wheel!

Don't put pressure on yourself when it's unnecessary. Make use of the brilliant people, resources and help there for you: it might be your mentor, your uni cohort, twitter or TES. Reach out for help and don't go it alone. Don't be afraid to use some lessons already on the school system. Equally, don't be afraid to try something new. With that comes a very important point; learn to be okay with a rubbish lesson. Making mistakes is the best way to grow, and that's what your ITT is all about.

When reflecting on my own ITT journey, it was very much a rollercoaster of the monumental kind. My first placement was amazing- brilliant mentor, department and I quickly felt at home. Fast forward to Feb 2020 and the struggle was real. A different school dynamic and departmental politics led to more than a few tears but looking back, I'm stronger for it. I'm grateful for the challenges even though at the time it felt so overwhelming. That's where uni or your SCITT mentors come in and that's exactly what they are there for. Reach out, have a cry in their office and then scran a bar of chocolate after. Whatever you need to do, put yourself first. How can we expect our students to thrive if we are only surviving? Self care has never been more important.

While I'm on that note, Twitter is great. But remember, it's not the be all and end all and loads of followers don't mean you're the best teacher ever. Dip in when you need it. Don't get hung up.

My biggest takeaway from ITT? Remember why you signed up. Why did you spend that time crafting your personal statement? What made you apply in the first place? Whether it's the kids, your subject or whatever else, remember that and hold it close. That's what will get you through.

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