

June 8, 2009

Dear Sir or Madam:

I know Erin Wopperer very well: she was my advisee, my student in two undergraduate courses: I placed her as a student teacher in the high school where I was a history department chair and principal. I was thrilled that she got hired as a rookie in that same school and then was saddened to learn that she lost her job because of the economic downturn.

In 2008 Erin was my student in a General Methods course and a Social Studies Curriculum and Methods class where she distinguished herself in many ways. In both classes Ms. Wopperer was among the "best and the brightest." All of her written work and presentations were scholarly, imaginative and practical. In both classes, she demonstrated the same passion for teaching and learning as she showed for every area. Erin is delightfully upbeat, incredibly mature, with a terrific sense of humor and has an insatiable quest not only for knowledge.

In our CT 575 General methods class, Erin and her group of four created the most original and authentic interdisciplinary PowerPoint I have ever witnessed, entitled "The Atomic Bomb and its Aftermath." Erin asked these questions of her students who were examining primary sources: "Who is speaking in each primary source document and what side of the war effort do they advocate? What medium is used to express the source? (e.g. Narrative, government document, diary entry) What are the shortcomings or loopholes in each argument? (Remember to avoid "presentism" and act as if 1945 is the reality you live in. The future remains unknown). What are the strong points and solid arguments made within the primary source document? What are the differences between primary source and secondary source documentation? Why are primary source documents important in historical research?"

As a student teacher at Stoughton High School, Erin taught a wide range of students from gifted to emotionally needy from many ethnic, economic and cultural backgrounds, while creating original lessons using a variety of assessments. She incorporates interactive lectures, cooperative group learning activities and essay writing into her lesson plans. She is an expert at using multiple media formats and has a fondness for integrating primary source material, diaries, art history, charts and maps and other critical thinking experiences into her classroom activities.

Erin creates her own individual lesson plans and units to coincide with Massachusetts's standards. She knows the difference between teaching large concepts, like Imperialism and Totalitarianism, returning to them again and again in a different context and building on her students' academic vocabulary, rather than merely emphasizing details that her students are likely to forget.

As a result of her successful practicum, Erin was hired at Stoughton High School for the 2008-2009 academic year. She took on a complete and demanding schedule including 3 US History II courses (2 at the college level and 1 at the college prep level) and a challenging American Studies interdisciplinary class of almost 40 students that she co-taught with an English teacher.

In the beginning of the year, Erin taught in a lecture style offering her notes online for easy accessibility as well as a more simple way for students to make up work if they were absent or sick. Her tests were made primarily of essay questions that covered the entire chapter and provided more thought provoking and difficult questions that challenged the minds and philosophies of each student. Her slideshows and lectures never ran dry, teaching with fervor, excitement, and humor.

She integrated every medium, including music, film, and art. In one unit, she used a hip hop song "Bridging the Gap" co-performed by the rapper, Nas and his father (the renowned jazz singer Olu Dara) to explain how jazz and blues from the 1920s directly influenced the popular music of today. Students were able to "[bridge] the gap from blues, to jazz, to rap" and connect not only to the US II curriculum, but the antebellum teachings of US I as well. Slaves who "were harmonizin' them 'aahs' and 'oos'" brought new history to the misunderstood genre of hip-hop music. Connections such as these helped her students to establish a comfortable yet mentally stimulating atmosphere where the uniquely diverse urban-suburban classes could enjoy history as well as connect to it and remember it.

Erin was similarly inventive later in the semester, creating a unit in American Studies for students who were slated for a field trip to the Newport mansions while learning about the 20s and reading F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. She took full responsibility for creating an activity that seamlessly combined the two disciplines. After reviewing the packet with previous American Studies teachers and receiving many words of praise, she handed them out to her students on the bus. The simple yet necessary lined pages kept students focused on their task at hand, which was to gather as much information as possible about the Vanderbilt family during the guided tour. Some of her students even sketched rooms and pieces of furniture. The class split up into groups of 3-5 students and used the information gathered along with references from *Gatsby* to produce a single scene that could be comical, dramatic, or mysterious. Erin taped each scene and then compiled their work into a collective movie called "We Built This City." The film served two purposes: one purely for entertainment's sake, but more importantly, to show each student how to adequately deliver an oral presentation.

One of her most important triumphs happened with a particular student named Jason who continues to battle autism while also learning to embrace it. During the final American Studies field trip to the ICA's Shepard Fairey exhibit, *Supply and Demand*, Erin asked each student to produce a unique catchphrase and challenged each to construct a stenciled design that mimicked Shepard Fairey's street art. Jason created a puzzle piece in the shape of a man that was filled with smaller puzzle pieces. He entitled the work "Piece by Piece" and took great pride in it. He showed it off to the same class he shied away from at the beginning of the year.

It is a huge loss for Stoughton High School that Erin Wopperer was let go because she lacked seniority. She is one of the most intellectually curious, inventive and thoughtful young teachers I have ever had the privilege of teaching.

As a former department chair and principal, with forty years of classroom experience, I recommend that you take the time to interview this very exciting history teacher.

Sincerely,



Daniel F. Davis, Ph.D.  
Program Coordinator  
Clinical Assistant Professor  
History/Social Science Education  
Boston, MA 02215  
(617) 353-3314  
dfdavis@bu.edu