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University of Washington, Tacoma
Teacher Certification Program
New Student Orientation
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"The most important day I remember in all my life is the one in which my teacher, came to me."

These words, of Helen Keller, describe her first meeting with Anne Mansfield Sullivan, her teacher. Helen was just shy of 7 years old, and this teacher had just completed the long journey from Boston to Alabama, to begin Helen's education, and also to begin what would become a lifelong friendship between the two women.

I would suppose that most of you can remember something significant about your first years in school... and were I to ask, I know that each of you have one special teacher that had something to do with you arriving on our doorstep today. In time, I hope to hear some of these stories...

But, listen to the words again.

"The most important day I remember in all my life is the one in which my teacher, came to me."

She did not say, "The most important day was the day I began my education, or the day I met Teacher. She said, "the day my teacher came to me." I want you to take that seriously.

The field of teaching has changed significantly in recent years. I knew I wanted to be a teacher from a very early age. I played "school", which always included my sitting behind a battered TV tray-desk, giving instruction to willing students (either dolls or stuffed animals or my 3 younger brothers with whom I had bartered playing school today for playing army tomorrow). As a senior in high school I became a T.A. and actually got to teach a few lessons to sophomores. But my teaching and my vision of teaching always involved my standing in front of a large class, giving brilliant lectures as the students looked at me with earnest eyes and inquisitive minds.

That image, if it was ever a reality, has no more to do with teaching today than dunce caps have to do with classroom management. I was always focused on myself as the teacher, and ignored the student as the learner.

You have come to us to learn... whether you know it or not... how to enter into the world of your students. The amount they learn will largely depend on the degree with which you successfully enter their lives, and engage that innate curiosity to learn about the world in which they live.

From us, we hope you will learn that every child has a story to tell, and an ability to tell it. You have much to learn in terms of the content of your teaching--- math, language, social science. You have more to learn about the engagement of the person of the student in the learning process. Every student has impediments to learning, you will learn how to minimize these and take that child's strengths to fight against those risk factors. Helen Keller was blind and deaf, and had no self-discipline when her teacher came to her. But, inside there was a person crying out to learn. It was Teacher's job to unleash that desire, by entering her world.

Today, as you have begun your entry into the TCP program, I want you to know, that here, where you are the student, your teachers also come to you. I am very proud of the dedicated group of professors and supervisors you are going to encounter in your time here. I want to introduce them to you today.

[Introduce faculty]
self?

We know quite a bit about Helen Keller's experiences through her autobiography and other writings she did. We also know a bit about Helen's experience from Anne Sullivan's perspective. Listen to the words Anne wrote in her diary March 20, 1887, the entry from one day, two weeks after they had met.

"My heart is singing for joy this morning. A miracle has happened! The light of understanding has shone upon my little pupil's mind, and behold, all things are changed."

We as your teachers, are going to rejoice with you as you enter our profession. We'll be with you through the challenges that will come. We'll be proud of you when we watch the light of understanding about what it really means to be a teacher, shine in your eyes. We'll be extra proud to see that light flash in the eyes of your students.

Welcome to the program. I hope to meet each of you individually over the next year and I invite you to share your professional journey with me along the way.