

I am honored and privileged to have the opportunity to speak today amongst so many fellow educators, many of whom have devoted their entire lives to education. For that, I sincerely thank you.

Today, I am going to talk about two themes, and how these two ideas have benefitted me in my first two years as a teacher, but before I do, let me tell you a little about myself.

(My name is Grant Kinman). I hail from Washington State, although I am commonly mistaken for a Georgian or a Texan, or any other states associated with a southern twang. "Where does that come from," I get asked often ...and the best explanation I can come up with is that it originated somewhere between the age of 14 and 17, and it is likely to have been highly influenced by my affinity for hip-hop, which combined with my Southern twang, affectionately earned me the nickname "hick-hop."

I attended a liberal arts college in the Northern part of the state, Western Washington University. I began as a business major, then quickly switched after five minutes of Accounting 240, and became an education major. But after sitting through one semester of theory, and a class full of young, highly ambitious women who had their career paths mapped out for as long as they could talk and play pretend teacher, I realized I was not as sure about teaching as they were. So I decided to study what I loved and figure out the rest later. So I studied history. Big shout out to all the history nerds out there.

Upon graduation, I went north to Alaska and began my temporary alternative career choice, a tour-bus driver. After one amazing Alaskan summer, I moved back to Washington and worked for a little over a year-and-a-half as a vocational trainer and on-the-job coach for individuals with disabilities, and then quit everything and took some time to travel. My work experience and my travels helped me form the basis for my personal educational manifesto, "Every social injustice on this earth can be combatted through education." With the manifesto established, my decision concretized. I was going to be a teacher.

I applied to a number of different UCCE programs and after an interesting interview with Edgar, Betty, and Diana where I was stopped mid-sentence by Diana and ridiculed because the "attached resume" was not attached and all the job experience that I just told you all about, she had no idea about, and we had wasted half an hour. She informed me "My resume needed to reflect my robust recent experiences." But, I was smitten with the PLACE Corps staff from the beginning and fortunately they were with me as well. There was a relational nature about the people I'd met, and there were many reassuring instances of thoughtfulness, such as liaisons who helped me through the application process, Edgar's continual prompt response to all of my inquiries, snack jars in the office,

and many free meals. I knew a program that had such an emphasis on keeping us nourished had to have some things right. That relational nature, thoughtfulness and continued support I have learned over the last two years is what anchors this program and has allowed it to become a permanent force for positive change in Los Angeles. PLACE Corps has selected and continues to select bright, passionate individuals, and provides them with tools to become the next generation of leaders in Catholic education. C13s, this is the journey you begin today, and this same journey was what myself and 26 of my peers began two years ago on this fateful weekend...

I was conditional, as some of you are, but rest assured I was placed... at an all girls high-school. It was not what I expected... teaching this strange, bizarre sect of society that is referred to as "high-school girls," and in my situation, better described at times, by a term I learned quickly "Chismosas." However, with time I have come to enjoy and appreciate those girls more than I ever could have imagined, and I am grateful to be exactly where I am.

But like I said... that took time though... The first year of teaching was extremely difficult, more like "excruciatingly" difficult. Teaching is.... a lot.... of work. Then, there was grad school on top of it, and PLACE expectations for me to shed my rebel ways and show up to all meetings, social events, masses, organized service projects, and conduct myself as a professional at all times. By three months in, I was sleeping very little, working out hardly ever, and turning in grad-work assignments that were subpar (sorry Professor Ramos about that "WAMS" assignment, but thanks for understanding). As a student, I was learning about powerful ideas, such as "equitable education," the "sociocultural and constructivist perspective," and "culturally-responsive teaching," and then I was asked to reflect upon how I was integrating these theories in my practice. But truthfully I was just trying to keep my head above water. I felt very "inadequate." This feeling, which I believe characterizes certain points of every first-year teaching experience, continued for some time, but I learned to cope with it. Then, I learned to be honest with myself about it and others and face the music, that I was not a master teacher and that I was not even in the minor leagues yet, I was what is classified as an amateur teacher. And in this process I learned the value of my first point (I know, first point right, you guys are looking at your watch, like good thing this guy's only got two points, can you imagine if he had three?) – but rest assured I'll get to point two quickly. SO here is point number one: give yourself grace. Personal grace was so important for me as a teacher because it allowed me to let go.

When a lesson went horribly wrong, I could modify it, reflect on what could be improved, and, if necessary, scratch it. When I had classroom management issues that I mishandled, I did my best to learn from them and then I let it go. I did the best I could on my graduate assignments, and then... well I just turned them in...

Personal grace allowed me to come up from the muddy waters of regret and inadequacy and I was able to sing a "new song," a joyful song that made me a much more effective teacher and a happier person.

That is point number one, and like I said rest assured, point number two is coming quick.

So here it is... don't go at this alone. One of the greatest blessings of the PLACE Corps program is that such an amazing community of people surrounds you. The faculty, staff, and the entire School of Education here at LMU will provide you with encouragement, support, and an educational foundation that will give you all the tools you need to be successful. They are resources of knowledge, and I highly suggest utilizing those resources to the fullest. Faculty and staff, on behalf of the members of C11 and all PLACERs past and present, I want to formally thank you for all that you have done for us. Let's take a minute to give them a round of applause (applause). The PLACE staff, as I've mentioned, they've got your back and they're great, but what I have not said enough about, and what I cannot say enough about are the PLACERs themselves. The Cohort of C10 who came before us and "modeled" for us in so many ways what it means to be highly-effective teachers, and what it looks like to balance all the requirements of PLACE and still be human, and the meaning of "friendship."

C12s: Your task is before you and I know that all of you are more than up to the challenge because as a Cohort you display the qualities that make strong leaders: confidence, humility, and selflessness.

C11s: What can I say, it has been a joyous season of my life and you all, each in your own way have contributed to the overwhelming joy I have experienced over the past two years. My housemates, you are the best and the times we have shared together, and the many contests St. Alberts has won along the way, has solidified our legacy as the greatest house in the history of PLACE Corps.

So C13's, and all of us here today, I leave us with this... Take every opportunity to live and be present in community. Eat together, more often than just Thursday night community dinners, because laughter and fellowship flow freely around the dinner table. Pray together; challenge each other to grow spiritually, because spiritual growth is an organic process and it requires people of initiative. Learn together, collaborate with other PLACERs and with other colleagues because this is where creativity and problem-solving shine. Live together, have fun because teaching is a vocation that requires you to devote yourself to what you do, yes, but never lose sight of the fact that you are human and you are created for relationship, which means you are called to appreciate one another and have fun together.

After two years of teaching, I believe more than ever that education is the ultimate combatant to every social injustice in our world today. I very much enjoy this profession, and I also believe that living in and embracing community is the ultimate combatant to every obstacle you will face as first and second year teachers.

Thank you and may God bless you all.