



TC Spotlight November 27, 2017

# Caroline Pomietlarz- Yamasaki

***Every day there is a battle to fight--to be successful, you have to always be prepared to fight for someone.***

- **Hometown: Buffalo, NY**
- **TC Tokyo Group 26**
- **Currently: Special Education and Japanese teacher in the Bronx for the NYC Department of Education**

After I left TC, I was accepted into the NYC Teaching Fellows program, did one more masters in Special Education, and am now teaching a variety of subjects and working with students from ninth to twelfth grade. Outside of work, I am an avid reader, quilter, and knitter, and I spend a lot of my free time serving on the board of the NYC Metro Modern Quilters Guild. The marriage of my worlds comes in the form of the Fiber Arts Club, an after school program in which I get to teach our students how to knit, quilt, spin, sew and make beautiful things.

**What drew you to TC?** I had wanted to go to Columbia since I was about 10. When I was living in Tokyo and found I needed to get a master's degree to further develop my career, it was kismet.

**Describe your path since graduating TC until now.** I moved back to NYC with 12 credits to complete, which I did on 120th Street. I knew I wanted to continue teaching, and was fortunate to be selected for the NYC Teaching Fellows program. I started my training the week after TC's commencement, and through that program, I was able to get my NYS teaching certification. I found a placement at my school, and I have stayed there since I was hired by the Department of Ed. I'm in my fourth year of teaching at this site.

**What is your favorite thing about the place you live now?** I live in Forest Hills, Queens. It's a relatively quiet part of New York, with a park about three blocks away, a variety of restaurants, and easy access to Manhattan.

**What did you learn at TC that ensured you would never be the same again?** TC teaches students how to be leaders, to think critically about contexts and details, to base decisions on sound research and study. TC taught me to be confident in my intellectual convictions and how to sharpen those convictions. I understand the value of reflective practice, and can use the skills I learned at TC to grow continually throughout my career.

**What is your favorite memory of TC?** I think back to TC and what most strikes me in the synergy of many creative minds working together--I made many valuable friendships in my time at TC, and they continue to inspire and motivate me today.

**What teacher has had a lasting effect on you?** It's impossible to choose one! I think I can narrow it down to three! I loved taking classes with the trifecta: Greg, Gordon, and Chris. Not only were their classes awesome (especially Greg's Sociolinguistics class), but I always felt inspired by who they were and what they were doing. Having passionate, excited professors who were just a few steps ahead of us in their careers was a great source of inspiration and motivation. They led me to write great papers and see a path into my future that hadn't been there prior to my time at TC.

**What is your favorite thing about your current job?** The hardest thing? My favorite part of my job is working with students in a variety of capacities; as a special education teacher with an ESL/ENL background, a big part of my job is developing my students' literacy. But I also help students develop life skills, meta cognitive skills, executive functioning, and, certainly, academic skills. It's more of a lifestyle than a full-time job. What is most difficult is doing all those things in a school with major budgetary constraints and dubious leadership.

**What is your advice for somebody who is trying to get into your field?** If you want to work in public schools in the US? An alternative certification program like the NYC Teaching Fellows is an expedient way to find yourself in a classroom again.

**Have you found TESOL theory and practice relevant to/useful in any other fields? How?** There are many parallels between language teaching and special education. A lot of the strategies we practice in TESOL can be applied in special education. My TESOL toolkit has helped greatly in working with students who are struggling readers in their native language. But I also work with ENL students at my school, so I'm grateful to have a background in TESOL.

**Share a recent classroom episode.** I have a student named Abraham. He was suspended for an entire school year for bringing a weapon to school. He was put on my caseload at the beginning of the school year, and I took him under my wing not knowing what to expect. Even though he missed all of his instruction for his freshman year, my principal placed him in tenth grade classes. He has been working hard to keep himself on the straight and narrow even though there are dynamics with other students in the school that make it difficult for him. After only a half year in an Algebra Regents Prep class, he was told he had to take the state exam, even though he didn't feel prepared for it. I was proctoring the exam. I knew it wasn't fair for him to have to take the exam, but when he tried to leave after only finishing the first section of the test, I told him that he had to stay and try his best. He sat for the full term of the test, and continued to work through the problems. He looked at me with fifteen minutes left on the clock and said, "If this were a year ago, miss, there is no way I would have stayed here." I said, "Abraham, even if you don't pass the test, you are going to feel good about yourself that you didn't give up." Growth in students comes in so many ways.

**What motivates you?** My students. Every day. They make me want to be better all the time. They force me to be creative to find new solutions. They challenge me in ways I don't expect. And when they reach their goals, I feel like I did my job well.

**What has been the biggest challenge in your career? How did you overcome it?** Every day is a challenge. There is never enough time in a day to give each kid what he or she needs. Sometimes my job feels like academic triage. I spend a lot of time reflecting and prioritizing, and I do my best to get to know each of my students, understand their specific needs, and have all my proverbial hats ready depending on which one they need me to wear at any given moment.

**What is the secret to your success?** Success is elusive in the business of kids' lives. Every day there is a battle to fight--to be successful, you have to always be prepared to fight for someone.

**What would you do if you could take a one-year sabbatical?** So many things! I would indulge in all my other passions! I would finish some of my quilts. I would go to Indonesia and study batik making. I would come back to Tokyo and see my friends and family. I'd hike through Shikoku and see the 88 temples. I'd learn Italian. I'd read dozens of books.

**What advice do you have for others starting at TC now?** Enjoy every minute of it.

**What message would you like to share with the TC community?** Keep in touch!



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