



Lawrie Fitzgerald

Jumpstart Corps Member/Team Leader, 2003-2007
Pearson Teacher Fellow, 2007-2009



Lawrie Fitzgerald has served over 1,200 hours of service with Jumpstart. She was a Corps member and team leader at Simmons College in Boston, MA.

Lawrie joined the Pearson Teacher Fellow to continue her service as an early childhood educator in low-income preschool centers in Chicago.

When I joined Jumpstart my freshmen year of college, I was excited about the idea of playing with children a few hours a week to earn my work study money instead of some administrative assistant position behind a desk on campus. What I didn't realize during those first months was Jumpstart would become a core piece of my educational experience for the next four years.

Cristian, my partner child that first year, could best be described as a glowing ball of energy that would fly throughout the classroom the entire two hour session. He loved any game that kept his body moving and his favorite animals were monkeys. What I quickly discovered was that reading and writing had already been categorized as "boring" activities in Cristian's mind. How was I supposed to engage him in reading and writing activities if every time I approached him with a book he ran away?

I started by carrying paper and a writing utensil with me all the time; when he did something I kept record of it on the paper, continually offering to let him record his own actions. Every few weeks I would pull together all my records into a book all about Cristian and Jumpstart. He loved these books because the sole character was him, he would even draw pictures for each page. We spent many weeks doing this until I decided to introduce him to *Curious George*; from the day I brought that first book into the classroom until our last day of session, Cristian's favorite activity was reading.

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At the end of that first year, I was accepted as a Team Leader and spent the next three years leading groups of children and college students through the ups and downs of the school year. With each passing year, I gained more knowledge of the art of managing a classroom and being a caring and effective teacher, all the while adding to my "teacher bag of tricks." While I missed the one-on-one relationship I developed with Cristian, the opportunity to

work with eight to ten children at any give time was what inspired me to continue on this path and apply for the Pearson Teacher Fellowship. I was accepted as a Pearson Teacher Fellow and I will be teaching in Chicago.

Although I love being in the classroom, the idea of graduating from college and immediately jumping into a preschool teaching position

was a daunting one. Just thinking about it, I felt alone. I knew that if I were going to pursue teaching full time, I would need to have access to a community of other preschool teachers who have the same passion I have, just as I had in my time with Jumpstart. Fortunately, the Pearson Teacher Fellowship creates such a community and fosters the communication necessary for every Fellow to support one another.

I wholeheartedly believe that in order for Cristian to discover his love of books he needed to be in a safe environment where he felt loved and valued as a community member. My time for the next two years will be devoted to creating communities of learners, where each child has the freedom to explore and discover his or her own passion.