Knowing Your Students Individually is Critical to a Teacher’s Success

“All too often, educators forget they have to be lifelong learners. If you ever get to the point where you think you have teaching down, you are not doing your job well.”

Syrita Jackson, M.Ed. ‘05

Prefer working with kids than in an office
Before becoming a teacher, I worked in public relations for 2.5 years for the City of Atlanta’s Housing Office and Turner Enterprises. Once I realized I didn’t like working in offices, I became a substitute teacher at the elementary school I attended. The kids loved me because I’m like the Pied Piper. I found myself coming in early, staying late and looking forward to working with the students and teachers. After subbing for several years, I decided to go back to school to earn a master’s so I could learn how to teach.

Learning to juggle competing priorities
You have to juggle multiple priorities as a teacher, and the UACM program taught me how to do this efficiently and effectively. As a graduate student and student teacher, I taught and worked with the school’s team during the day, attended evening classes with my cohort, and then went home to study, write papers or prepare lesson plans for the next day. It was very intense, however, I realized that if I could teach for a year without getting paid and enjoyed what I was doing, being a teacher was the right career for me.

Being open to multiple perspectives is critical
In addition to learning technical aspects, like classroom management and assessment, the UACM program helped me understand the importance of (a) being open to multiple perspectives and (b) recognizing students as individuals and seeing beyond their ethnicity or language. Over the last 10 years, I’ve taught hundreds of children from a variety of backgrounds who think differently than I do. Rather than ignore or pretend this doesn’t matter, I create a space in the classroom where students can advocate for themselves so they understand their voice is important and what they say can make a difference.