

Always Learning

My reflections on a fast-paced year of education and self-discovery

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When I applied to the Masters of Arts in Education (MAED) program at Michigan State in March of 2012, I was about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way done with my 3rd year of teaching. I knew I wanted to attend Michigan State's masters program and after looking at the concentration areas, I knew I wanted to focus on literacy. I also knew that my entire program would be a fast one, as I had planned to take all my required courses in one year and graduate in August 2013. Yet, my expectations were still high. Sitting down to write my personal goal statement for the application was when I began to truly think about what I wanted to experience out of my higher-level education.

As a relatively new teacher, I believed, and still do, that I have so much more to learn. It was hard for me to put down in words exactly what I wanted to learn because of the sheer volume of things that were still unknown to me. Even now, I feel that there are more skills, tricks, and teaching practices that I need to learn but I realize that this desire to learn is instilled in the hearts of all good teachers. The two main areas that I wanted to focus on during this MAED program included deepening my knowledge of literacy and how to "reach" those difficult to teach students; in other words, how to take my differentiated literacy instruction to the next level. I also hoped to learn more about different ways to incorporate current technologies into my instruction, both literacy and all other content areas.

I can honestly say that my literacy courses have provided me with a fantastic knowledge base for literacy and how to effectively teach all aspects of it. As outlined in my annotated transcript, I have learned how to use different assessments to analyze students' individual needs. I have created numerous individualized lesson plans that were tested out on real students. I have used research-based "best practices" strategies in the areas of comprehension, fluency, vocabulary, and word study instruction to help students develop their literacy skills. Getting the opportunity to critique and analyze different types of literature helped me learn about the types of text my students should be interacting with and how to get them to actually enjoy reading. Something that surprised me was how much my classroom management and discipline course was connected to student motivation and reading ability. I was even able to take some of those things I learned and try them out on my 4th graders and saw great improvements!

Throughout all of my courses, technology was interwoven in subtle, yet useful ways. I learned about several different new tools to try for all subject areas. This is still an area that I want to continue to grow in. I realize with the fast-paced tech world, it is impossible to know about every new tech gadget. However, I now have quite a large

menu of tools to choose from due to collaboration with my peers during the MAED program.

As an elementary teacher, I believe that literacy instruction is one of the most, if not the most, important aspects of a child's day. When starting this program, it was my goal to become the most effective literacy teacher that I can be, while I have gained an extraordinary amount of information, this is still my goal and always will be. I understand now that being a great teacher really lies in the fact that the teacher themselves is always willing to be a learner. My passion is to instill a love of learning and especially for reading to my students. I feel more confident in my abilities to provide each of my students with positive experiences with quality literature after completing my MAED program.