

Looking Back on My Goals as an MSU Learner

Written By: Danielle Couture

It was February, 2012 when I applied to the Master of Arts in Education (MAED) program at Michigan State University. My undergrad degree was in elementary education with a double major in language arts and social studies, and though it was not my first year teaching, it was my first year ever teaching 6th grade social studies. I was nervous, excited, and determined to be the best 6th grade social studies teacher I could be; but to do that, I was going to need some help. This help, I decided, could best be provided by enrolling in the MAED program.

I had one main goal in mind when starting my Masters: to become a more effective, well rounded professional educator overall. For me, that meant specifically that I wanted to:

- 1) Combine content area knowledge with classroom management knowledge to implement a warm, safe, and fair classroom community of learners
- 2) Learn how to more effectively teach my social studies students through furthering my own education in both literacy and social studies
- 3) Keep my language arts skills for both middle and elementary learners up to date so that if I ever moved grades or subject areas in the future, I would be up to date on current best practices

My goals when entering MAED program were very broad, and looking back and reflecting on the last two years, I find that they did not change much. If anything, they simply became more narrowed and specific as I dove into the program and began choosing specific classes to help me reach my goals.

As for my first goal, classroom management has always been a passion of mine, and I feel strongly that children cannot learn unless they are in an environment where they feel safe and respected as individuals. Though many teachers and classrooms are “effective,” they can always improve. This goal for me is an ongoing one. While I learned many beneficial procedures, organizational techniques, teaching strategies, etc. I feel I will never stop working toward building a better classroom community where students feel safe, cared about and respected by both me and their peers, and confident to take risks and become active participants in their own learning.

My second and third goals were focused more around curriculum. These two goals have both narrowed in specificity since my beginning the program in 2012. Now that I have been teaching social studies consistently for a few years, I have been able to narrow the focus of my original second goal from “more effectively teaching social studies and language arts” to “better incorporating middle level reading structures and strategies, and better implementing the steps of the writing as a process in 6th grade social studies.” This goal for me has been narrowed as a direct result of me spending more time with 6th grade learners. Cross-curricular teaching is very important and many 6th grade students have not yet developed the metacognitive processes to realize that what is taught in one content area may be applied to the others.

My third goal also stayed basically the same. However, I ended up choosing to focus most specifically on best practices for elementary reading assessment and instruction, and best practices in accommodating differences in literacy learners at both the elementary and middle level. I don't know what the future holds or what I may be teaching down the road, but whether it is a middle school subject area course or an all-subject elementary classroom, I feel the two areas I specified above will guide me in improving the literacy skills of my students regardless of age and/or disability.

Learning, like anything else, is a journey. We might think we know where we want to go initially, but the more we learn, the more it shapes our choices and our original focus. Though my goals have been met in my completion of the MAED program, my journey is not over. There will always be more to learn, more good work to be done, and more to improve upon. I look forward to the personal and professional growth to come...