

How I Have Become a Better Educator

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As I look back across all of my work during my time in the Michigan State University's MAED program, I think about and reflect upon what I have learned through my courses and coursework as I pursued my master's degree. Earning this degree has allowed for me to become a better educator than I already was and it has forced me to reflect upon what I had been doing and make changes on what I will be doing in the future in my classroom. To begin, I think it is important to highlight the courses that I feel have made the largest impact on my learning and future teachings.

The first course that had a significant impact on my learning was TE 842-Elementary Reading Assessment and Instruction. I took this course during my first semester in the program. I learned many things in this course, but what most stands out is how I should drive my instruction based on the reading assessment data that I receive. A teacher should not assess just to assess or because they are told to. A teacher should assess (this class focused on reading assessment, not math assessment that is equally important but just does not pertain to this class) to know what areas a student is struggling at in terms of reading. For example, if a reading assessment shows that a student is struggling to use picture clues, it is something that I need to reteach in either a whole group or a small reading group. Likewise, reading assessments given to the whole class can help show me where my teaching is lacking. If for example the majority of my class struggles to make connections to either other texts or to themselves, that is something that I need to reteach as a whole class to make my students stronger in that aspect of reading. I am not saying that I did not already know that assessments should drive instruction, but this class showed me how and why it should be done. As a teacher, unless I know the reason I am doing something in my classroom, I am unlikely to give it as much attention and dedication as I would

if I really knew and understood the reasons behind it. This class allowed for me to understand the reasoning behind having assessment data drive my instruction.

The second course that had a significant impact on my learning was TE 846- Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners. This course probably had the most significant impact on my learning. I teach at a school that has a very diverse learning population. I have students who come in that speak fluent English and are coming into Kindergarten reading at a first or second grade level. On the flip side of that, I have students coming in who do not speak any English and cannot even recognize their name or any letters in their name. The rest of my students are somewhere in between these two extremes. As a result, learning more ways to differentiate my literacy instruction to reach all of my students is always something I am trying to learn more about. I had always differentiated my literacy instruction based on reading groups. I group my students based on their reading level and reading needs. However, this class taught me how to differentiate literacy instruction throughout other aspects of my day that do not involve reading groups. For example, if I am reading a story out loud to my students, I should ask differentiated questions that will make all of my students have to think about the answers. So for example, if my question was a simple contextual question I would ask one of my lower achieving students to answer it. However, to reach my higher achieving students I would ask a question that was a higher-level thinking question. For example, I could ask that student to connect what happened in the story to something that had happened in their life. As a result, this class challenged me to try to reach all of my students at their various reading levels.

The third course that had a significant impact on my learning was CEP 832- Educating Students with Challenging Behaviors. All new teachers strive to figure out a good classroom management system. It is essential to have a good system put into place so that students have an

optimal environment to learn in. However, there are always those students who test your limits and do not seem to fit-in to the structure that you have set up. This class was not about setting up a constructive classroom management system, it was about what to do with those students who need that extra support to be an active member of the classroom. In this course we looked at many different student behavior problems and we discussed in length with our classmates about possible solutions to these behavior problems. Then, if the opportunity presented itself within our own classroom we used some of the ideas on our own students. This class gave me ideas to use with not only my students that I have now, but also students that I may have in the future. I may not have a student this year who has emotional problems, however I may in the future and I will be able to look back at some of the ideas offered up in this course to help me help that child fit into the classroom.

As I look back on the courses that had a significant impact on my learning, I reflect upon how these courses in addition to my other courses that I have taken during this master's program I think about how all of these courses have affected my professional goals. One cannot help but ask the question, has this program impacted my professional goals? I believe it has. One of my professional goals going into this program was to learn how to differentiate instruction more. Clearly my course called Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners had a tremendous impact on this goal. As mentioned above it really gave me more tools to be able to reach all of my students at their learning levels. But, in addition to this course other courses were able to help me achieve this professional goal. For example, in a course that I did not care for at the time I was taking it, called ED 800-Concepts of Educational Inquiry taught me to think and write about questions concerning education. It made me look at the most effective ways to study learning and teaching. The course forced me to ponder why I was teaching the way that I was

and as a result helped drive me to question myself about how I was differentiating in my classroom. Therefore, the class did not teach me ways to differentiate within my classroom, but drove me to ponder why I wanted to teach in that way and why it was beneficial to the learning and understanding of my students.

The second professional goal that I had for myself going into this master's program was to learn how to teach reading to my English Second Language Learners in a way that would make them love reading when they left Kindergarten. I feel that so many of my students move onto other grades and begin to hate reading because it gets too difficult for them. Therefore, I feel that if I can have them loving to read before they leave Kindergarten; it will significantly impact them in their future grades because if they hate reading already leaving Kindergarten it will be very difficult for them to bounce back from that in higher grades. The class that had the most significant impact on this professional goal was mentioned above, entitled Elementary Reading Assessment and Instruction. In addition to this course, TE 849-Methods and Materials for Teaching Children's and Adolescent Literature had a significant impact on my second professional goal. This course had me study a wide variety of children's and adolescent literature and allowed for me to compare and contrast different genres that I had not looked at in-depth previously. It gave me a chance to discuss in small groups ways to use the texts within a classroom. Because of my discussions within my small group, I started to appreciate the various texts in a way that I had not done so previously. Since I now appreciate these texts more than I ever have, I can bring that appreciation back to my classroom. Because from my experience, if I do not love something, my Kindergarteners will not love it either. Therefore, now that I can show my students my love for these texts, it will help them learn to love them in return.

Since I completed my entire master's program online, I feel the need to discuss the impacts that has had on my thoughts of online learning. From my analysis of various classes and my obtainment of my professional goals mentioned above, I have learned a lot going through this program. However, that is not to say that I am completely sold on online learning. I loved the fact that I could still work full time and complete a master's program in four semesters. However, I have to ponder whether or not I would have gotten more out of my educational experiences if I was in a traditional classroom. Since I did not take any classes in a traditional classroom I cannot say for sure if I would have learned more from those classes. However, thinking back to when I was in a traditional classroom I think about the social connections that I created within that class that made a significant impact on me in addition to whatever I was learning. A good portion of my friends that I have now were met in a traditional classroom setting. After four semesters of being an online student I have made zero friends. I know this is partly due to it being a master's program and most people are full time employees or have families to go home to and this would be true in a traditional classroom as well. I just do not feel that online learning gives you that opportunity to socialize in a manner that can have a significant impact on your teaching. Personally, I get a lot more out of seeing somebody present something in person then reading about what they did after the fact. As a result, did I enjoy being an online student? Absolutely. Do I enjoy being in a traditional classroom? Absolutely. So, if I learned anything about online learning from this master's program, it's that education would be much more well-rounded if it occurred both online and in a traditional classroom.

In conclusion, looking back across all of my work during the Michigan State University's MAED program, I am happy with how everything turned out. I took three courses that had an enormous impact on how I teach in my classroom today. And in addition to those courses, all of

my courses impacted my professional goals in one way or another. I know after this program that I am not completely sold on online learning. However, I do think online learning can be beneficial and it certainly helped me move towards obtaining my professional goals.