

## Putting Together the Final Pieces to the Puzzle

From a very young age, I knew I wanted to be a teacher. I have never had a back-up plan or a plan B. My whole adult life has been dedicated to becoming a successful educator. Looking back, I realize that it wasn't just my dream of becoming a teacher that motivated me, but it was my love for learning and seeing others learn and grow as well.

As I embarked on my journey through my master's program, I didn't realize just how much I would learn, grow and change and how these changes would impact my students and career. I am so thankful for the opportunity to learn and grow at Michigan State University (MSU).

Through this journey I have learned so much about myself as a learner and a teacher. I have truly learned how much I enjoy learning about other people, cultures, families and ways of life. This love of learning has impacted the way I teach, promoting prosocial and tolerance within my classroom. I have also learned how much your teaching is influenced by the culture you create within your classroom. Of course I knew the importance of creating a great classroom climate, however, I started to truly understand how much classroom management and building relationship goes into creating this culture. After this foundation is

created, all other things are possible, something I started seeing with my students and classroom dynamic.

Reflecting back on the time spent at MSU, there are four courses that have had a significant impact on my learning. Through these courses especially, I have begun to find my niche within my classroom teaching, and I have had the opportunity to learn and grow professionally while refining my teaching strategies.

When I embarked on my journey in my master's program, I knew that I wanted to focus on literacy. During my undergrad experience, I gained exposure and knowledge in science, social studies and geography. For my master's I wanted to continue to become well rounded and knew that literacy was a huge component within elementary teaching. The first two classes that I feel had a significant impact on me was TE 846 Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners and TE 842 Elementary Reading Assessment and Instruction. These classes helped me focus my learning on literacy instruction and accommodation. These classes were critical in helping me to continue to become a better literacy teacher and to truly rely on myself to help all of my students.

TE 846 Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners was my first class in my master's program. I had just finished my first year of teaching and was excited to get back into the classroom myself. Although excited, I was also very

nervous, having been out of the classroom full time for a year and for most of the time during my year-long internship. From the beginning of this course I knew that it would truly help me after my first year of teaching. I had firsthand experience of teaching my own classroom and the struggles I faced with trying to differentiate for all of my students. This class helped me to refine my skills and truly develop a plan in order to help all of my students as literacy learners. The biggest component to this course was to gather data and pin point some areas within a student's literacy learning that needed improvement. It was my opportunity to rely on myself to gather data and to come up with a plan to best benefit the student that I was working with. I worked with reading assessments, surveys and running records. It was my job to get an overall understanding of not only my student's literacy abilities, but also her attitudes regarding literacy learning. Looking back through the case analysis, I reflected why this class was important to me as a teacher.

“I want to experience a class like this to foster my learning and growth as a teacher, in terms of differentiated instruction, specifically in guided reading instruction. I always strive to improve my teaching and will use this experience to aid in the differentiated instruction of my students. This class will help me to continue to assess students, target skills and concepts that they might struggle with, create a plan to help increase ability at that skill, and then continue to monitor their growth. I continue to strive to

differentiate with ease and to create a classroom environment that is centered on each student's learning and growth.” –Shannon Carlson

Through this class I was able to develop my approach to different literacy learners and promote a successful plan of action in order to help my students reading assessments and create literacy plans to help all of my students.

TE 842 Elementary Reading Assessment and Instruction was a class I was very much looking forward to taking. After two years of teaching, I looked forward to a class that would help me to continue to refine my skills as a reading teacher. This class allowed me the opportunity to work with several different cases. It was a great opportunity to learn about different children and how to properly assess their skills, both strengths and weaknesses in order to create a plan to best benefit their learning. The first part of the class was to read about a diverse group of students. We had to read and understand where they were in their learning and reading instruction. Next we needed to create a plan to help them with their deficits as well as prepare a plan to continue to help them push forward. In our final project we had to look at two very different children, analyze their reading assessments, and pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses. Afterwards it was our job, based on the analysis of the student, to create target instruction to help reteach and reinforce

skills based on deficits we had gathered from their reading assessments. This class especially helped me to improve my vocabulary instruction. *Words Their Way: Word Study for Phonics, Vocabulary, and Spelling Instruction* by Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston, was an integral part of my analysis and proved to be an integral part of my revamped vocabulary instruction in the classroom. It has truly changed the way I approach phonics, vocabulary and spelling instruction.

“The more you read the more things you know. The more that you learn the more places you’ll go.” – Dr. Suess

The second two classes that I feel had a significant impact on my learning were: CEP 802 Developing Positive Attitudes toward Learning and CEP 832 Educating Students with Challenging Behaviors. These two classes were centered on classroom management. They truly helped me to continue to learn better strategies to connect with my students and better ways to promote a prosocial community.

CEP 832 Educating Students with Challenging Behaviors was an amazing class. I am firm believer that everything happens for a reason and I believe I took this class when I needed it the most. It was my second year of teaching and I had a very diverse class with a lot of specific needs. One student in particular exhibited

aggressive and angry behaviors and it seemed that no matter what I did, his behaviors seemed to get worse and his triggers were just about everything. I felt like I could not help this student and it was heart breaking. I was enrolled in this class starting in January, just when things were at an all-time low with this student. This class was such a blessing because it allowed me the opportunity to take a step back and truly understand what was happening with this child, what was causing this angry and aggressive behavior, and then to create a plan to help him take control over his behavior and start succeeding in the classroom. Before, I had not understood what was actually happening with this student. After intense observation and research I was better able to understand that his brain was processing social situations differently than other children. Therefore, these small triggers were amplifying the anxiety that he was already feeling. Having the opportunity to learn, observe, conduct research and create a plan helped me to really connect with this student so that he was able to have a successful end of the school year. I am so thankful for opportunities this class gave me, and a wonderful resource to help even my most challenging students. I am now a much more confident teacher because of this class.

“My most proud moment was when this child who struggled with personal space issues walked down the hallway for dismissal and grabbed my hand. It had shown that my time and dedication had paid off.” –Shannon Carlson

CEP 802 Developing Positive Attitudes toward Learning was a really important class in my program. I took this class at the beginning of my third year of teaching. This class gave us the opportunity to look at different ways of motivating students and how to continue to push students to self-motivation and a love for learning. This class was super beneficial to me because I had the opportunity to really understand the different types of motivation, and the scenarios in which to best use them. Again I was able to take a step back and observe my own classroom, and hone in on a student that struggled with motivation. This was again a great class to take at this particular time, because I had a student who was really struggling, having almost no motivation to learn at all. I felt I had tried so many different strategies and nothing was working.

“In this particular case you will meet a young boy named Carter whose lack of confidence, self-efficacy and academic support in the past has scarred his perception of himself in a school setting. This design project focuses on providing Carter with a stable, well managed, and welcoming classroom environment, to promote a change in his perception of himself, his abilities

and his overall confidence and interest in learning, particularly writing, within the classroom.” –Shannon Carlson

Through this class, I was able to observe and create a plan to best cater to his needs. Through this case study I was able to continue to develop my relationship with this student, and create a plan to help this student’s motivation long term. This class also gave me the opportunity to fall and get back up again. If one strategy did not seem to be working, then I was able to tweak it, and come up with either a completely new plan or try smaller strategies within my existing plan. In the end I could see the dramatic change within this child’s overall demeanor and even overheard him saying to another student, “I really like coming to school now.” I am so thankful for this class not only for teaching me new strategies, but also how to take my existing strategies and mold them based on the diversity of my students. This class allowed me to reflect on what I was or was not doing in the classroom, and allowed me time to recognize it and make changes, promoting self- motivation for all of my students. I am a forever changed teacher because of this class.

“Motivation is what gets you started. Habit is what keeps you going.” Jim Ryun



I am so thankful for the opportunities presented to me during my program. I feel that they each impacted me differently, however, they all pushed me out of my comfort zone. It was through these classes that I had to take a step back, redefine who I was as an educator and learner, challenge who I really was as an educator, and use these experiences to help mold me into the teacher I am today. Although I am forever changing with experiences, I am thankful that MSU provided me with an opportunity to bring something new to my teaching, shake things up a bit and really give me a push to become a better educator. I am now able to continually question who I am and push to be the best educator and resource I can be for the students, families and communities that I serve. I am honored to be a teacher and will continue to work to be the best educator for the people that matter the most...my students.