

End of a Chapter

Thinking back to high school, I knew I wanted to be a teacher. Growing up close to East Lansing made it easy, I'm going to attend Michigan State University. It didn't hurt that they had a phenomenal teacher preparation program. I remember going through the different teacher education classes along with my placements where I would observe for a few hours a week. I would learn about different methodology and other useful things that may help me when I had my own classroom. It all made sense, but was hard to really understand because I wasn't really teaching at the time. However, once I got into the Master of Arts in Education (MAED) program, it all started to make much more sense. I had a classroom that I could actually try the things that I learned. When I was reading or having discussions with my classmates, I could actually connect it to experiences I was having. This program has changed me more than I expected. I knew I would learn something from the courses I was taking, but I didn't quite realize just how much they would have an impact on my practices in the classroom. The classes I took during my student teaching really helped prepare me to have my own classroom. The year I spent doing that allowed me to actually feel like what it meant to be a teacher. Once I had my own classroom, that is when I decided to take more classes. Even though I was only a year into my teaching career, I felt that it would be beneficial. I was young and had so much to learn, that I felt it was the best time to pursue my master's degree in education. I figured everything that I learned would be applicable to my classroom and what I would learn could possibly stick with me for the rest of my teaching career. Thinking back on my time in the program, I made the right choice on when to start and I was right that what I would learn would help me in my classroom. Through all the different courses taken, three of them really stood out to me because of how much they helped me grow as a teacher.

The first course that stuck out to me was CEP 883: Psychology of Classroom Discipline. When I did my student teaching, it was at a high school. Three of the four hours that I taught were honors sections, while one was general education. This was a great experience and start to my teaching career. The reason was that I was able to focus on the content and lessons that were being taught. I could put more effort into that because classroom management was not an issue for me. From the first day, all the way to the last, there were basically no classroom issues, which I felt was because of my management and made me not work on new strategies to improve. I quickly learned that I did not have the classroom management I thought I did when I got my first teaching position. I went from having sophomores to teaching sixth graders. During my first year, the school was taken off of the priority school list. That entire year, my classroom management improved, but it still had a long way to go. I didn't really know any tips or tricks and was just going on the advice of what worked for other teachers. However, during my first semester in the program, which was summer 2016, I took CEP 883. This course became more beneficial to me than I would realize. I signed up for it hoping to learn and help me improve for year two in the classroom. The book, *CHAMPS: A Proactive & Positive Approach to Classroom Management* by Randy Sprick was the main book we used and it was very helpful for me. Even though the course was only six weeks long, it opened my eyes. We were given different scenarios to work through each week and would use research based practices to say how we would handle or deal with the issues. We also created a classroom management plan, one that I was able to take with me into the classroom to start my second year of teaching. I was able to have a plan in place from day one, with methods based on research, and it showed tremendously.

My classroom management was improved, and now in my third year it has gotten better. I am not sure if it would be at the level it is if not for the class and it opening my eyes on different ways and methods to run a classroom and do it effectively.

A second course that really had an impact on me was CEP 818: Creativity in Teaching & Learning. I was fortunate enough to take this course in the fall of 2016, which was at the beginning of second year of teaching. During my student and first year of teaching, my lessons were not very creative. I never really did that much thinking outside the box. I think part of the reason for that is I was trying to make sure I really understood the material. Even though I had a pretty good idea of what I was teaching, I always had to refresh my memory to make sure I knew the details, and that time took away from me lesson planning. However, to start my second year of teaching, I took this class. It was exactly what I needed. In my classroom, we do a lot of work with maps because I teach mostly geography. I was able to pick maps as my topic for this class and learn how to be creative with them. I do not consider myself to be that creative, but I definitely feel like my creativity has blossomed because of the class. Our book for that class was *Sparks of Genius: The Thirteen Thinking Tools of the World's Most Creative People* by Robert and Michèle Root-Bernstein. The book was about the different cognitive tools creative people use. Reading this book and taking this course absolutely challenged me. There were times when I had to think of something creative and it really took some time. However, the more I did it, the easier it became. This has translated into my teaching. Not only was I able to take some of the creative things I created from this class into my room for my students to do, but it also helped me in other areas besides maps. I can look back at the different cognitive tools of creative people and relate it to my content. What I think is most important about being more creative in the classroom is that it gives students different ways to learn the material. It is not the same stuff they are used to doing and just like it made me think and try harder when creating new lessons, it does the same for students when actually completing them. It is a great way for students to learn the material and really make it stick because of their experience with it. One of my favorite things I came up with was using the idea of play to come up with an activity. I had students pick five places they want to visit and see the distance from where they live. This helped them learn how to use a scale on a map, but it was also fun for them because they got to see how far away the places actually are and where exactly they are located in the world.

A final course that really stuck out to me because of all I learned was TE 846: *Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners*. Ever since my undergraduate courses in the education program, there is always talk about literacy and the importance of it. I learned that you should incorporate reading when you can into your lessons, no matter the subject, but it never really went that much deeper for me. During my first year of teaching, I was fortunate enough to get some training in Reading Apprenticeship. This gave me new tools to use with the students in my classroom. All of this was useful, but it never really hit me how important it was until I took this class. I took it in the fall of 2017 and it was during the beginning of my third year of teaching. I was able to get much more insight on the struggles students have with reading, but more importantly, why they have these struggles. I never really had that much of a struggle with literacy growing up, so it was hard for me to connect with those particular students and understand what they were going through. There is quite a bit of students who come from a low socioeconomic background in my classroom. I learned that just by growing up in that type of household, it plays a large part in the development of their reading, and they can fall behind quickly relative to their peers. Just learning these different things, as well as ways to help these struggling readers in my classroom was important. As I was taking the class, I was able to

implement new strategies into my classroom, as well as gain more for the future. It also allowed me to really understand the hardships the students face and why they do, making it easier for me to connect with them because I have a better idea where they are coming from. Reading scores are something that is stressed at the school I teach at and we are always trying to get the students to improve their reading in our classrooms. While I would focus on reading, I wasn't always sure how to get the students to improve their reading with a large difference in my classroom. After taking this class, I have learned valuable skills on how to close the gap in my classroom, which will be beneficial for the rest of teaching career as I will always have readers of different levels in there.

When thinking about the program as a whole, I have learned quite a bit from it. Each course I took has played a role in that. I've learned what it takes to be a great teacher. There were times when I thought I had it pretty well figured out and knew what I was doing, but this program really opened my eyes. It let me know that even though I was on the right track, there is so much to do and the learning is never over. I learned what it means to be a leader in the classroom and in the school. I learned just how important formative assessments are and the need to create authentic ones for students. Most importantly, I learned that in order to get where I want to be as a teacher, I have to work hard and dedicate myself to this profession. If not for this program, I'm not sure I would have actually realized what it takes to reach the top and be the great teacher I want to be.

I am grateful for my time in the MAED program. I've always known I wanted to get a master's degree and was not sure what program would be best for me. However, looking back on it, I definitely chose the right program. Being so new into the teaching profession and trying to take classes at the same time was not always easy, but it was definitely worth it. Learning becomes much more fun when it is useful and you can actually see the results of it, and that is what I enjoyed most about this program. I was able to learn from every single course I took and use it in some way in my classroom. I know I still have a long way to go to reach my full potential as a teacher, but this program brought me much closer to that goal. Even though I will be getting my degree at the end of this semester, the learning really never stops. I feel almost like it is just beginning with all I want to explore after everything I have been introduced to and learned over the past couple years. This may be the end of a chapter, but it is definitely not the end of my educational and teaching journey.