

Graduate school comes at a very influential time in many lives. Most students are starting careers and starting families. For me, through graduate school I had three teaching jobs, I got married, I moved to a new part of the state, and I lost my mother to her fight against cancer. Through all of these life changing events the Michigan State University (MSU) master's program was there through it all. These experiences have helped me grow as an individual, and a teacher. Throughout the years of graduate school I have learned not only content and pedagogy but perseverance to continue in the face of a challenge. I have learned to balance busy schedules and prioritize to do lists.

All of these skills have transferred to my classroom and teaching abilities. I bring perseverance to working with challenging students and working with complicated materials. My perseverance shines through to my students encouraging them to persevere through their difficult problems as well. Learning how to balance a busy schedule has transferred to my classroom by learning how to juggle the assortment of school activities while still staying on track with the curriculum.

But more important to my career are all the lessons I have learned about teaching and learning from the courses provided to me through master's program. The courses I chose focused around teaching and learning mathematics and the uses technology in education. All the courses were very helpful but a few stood out above the rest. *Learning Mathematics with Technology* and *Action Research in the K-12 Science or Math Classroom*. These classes stood out for many reasons. They focused me on improving my teaching to enhance student learning. They made me really consider how the presentation of my lessons would impact the ability of my students to learn the concepts. They also helped me determine and set a goal for each of my lessons based on the Common Core State Standards. Additionally, *Psychology of Classroom Management*, focused me on creating a stable and supportive learning atmosphere in my classroom and the importance of consistency to student learning.

*Learning Mathematics with Technology* was one of my favorite courses. As a teacher in the twenty-first century I strongly value the technologies that are always developing. Prior to this course I would implement technology solely because I thought it was "cool" or someone told me I should. I later found that this is considered instrumental thinking and throughout my time in the Master of Arts in Education (MAED) I have transitioned to a missional thinking and that transition was started by the course *Learning Mathematics with Technology*. *Learning Mathematics with Technology* allowed me to explore technologies developed specifically to enhance the teaching and learning of mathematics. I learned how to analyze the resources to determine exactly what standards (based on the Common Core State Standards) each resource would support. I really looked at how each resource would impact student learning and what would be needed for supplemental material to go along with the technologies. For example, some resources are used as notes to explain the topic, other resources are used as interactive practice

where students can work towards mastering a concept and, finally, other resources are able to be used as an introduction to help students make connections to past topics. When used appropriately, technology can really have the opportunity to enhance students' learning and I really enjoyed learning the skills to analyze the available resources to be able to help my students and effectively incorporate technology in my classroom.

Prior to the *Action Research* course, I would make changes on gut instinct or word of mouth and would gauge the results by if my students "seemed to like" the activity or if they "seemed to do better." *Action Research in the K-12 Science or Math Classroom* taught me how to identify a problem or a question, research a possible solution, try the solution, and how to document the transformations to see if the solution worked. I really liked this class because there are always things I want to be able to change in my classroom but I am never sure how to tell if they are working. Through the guidance of the *Action Research in the K-12 Science or Math Classroom* I was able to create a plan to implement Google Classroom with my eighth grade math classes. I learned proper research strategies to see how other researchers had fared with implementing Google Classroom. I then learned how to collect data to support my research by starting with assessments and collecting pre-treatment data. Finding my own data is not something I had done before, so with the guidance of the *Action Research* course was I was able to get first hand experience determining what data is necessary for an accurate analysis and how to analyze the data based on the data sets. I am looking forward to adding these research strategies to my classroom to continue to improve my teaching based on the data I am now able to analyze more accurately.

Another skill I gleaned from the *Action Research* course, is that the research is always evolving. Through various models and diagrams the course explained that action research never reaches a solid conclusion. You choose a topic, you research, you create a plan, you try the plan, you evaluate and then you start again based on the data you found from the previous plan. I found this pattern very encouraging because I often get discouraged when things do not work the first time. Now knowing that action research is a process and you get to continue tweaking your plan over and over encourages and empowers me to keep changing things in my classroom to enhance student learning.

As any young or new teacher can attest to classroom management is always a struggle during the first few years and it was no different for me. I *struggled* with classroom management. I worked with students from broken, low-income homes that were known for pushing boundaries. I was trying everything I could come up with to manage students and nothing would work. As a young teacher the most interesting and informative class I could take was *Psychology of Classroom Management*. Throughout the *Psychology of Classroom Management* course I was able to develop methods to help manage my classroom before students even stepped in the door. I was

able to tweak techniques which I had been given to make them more effective. *Psychology of Classroom Management* taught me how the basic needs of students need to be met before they can learn effectively and part of those needs is for students to feel like they are in a safe and supportive environment. Because of this course I discovered that I needed to make a conscious mental effort to alter the way I would talk to my students switching to a more supportive and positive tone; changing from the negative tones that I heard most often growing up. When I made these conscious shifts in attitudes within myself I found a much more positive response in my students as well. In the years following the *Psychology of Classroom Management* course I could really tell that my classroom management skills had improved and the methods I had gained from this course were enhancing my students ability to learn. My perceived growth was really reinforced when the principal of the school told me that he was impressed with how much I had grown as a teacher and he was glad to see how far my classroom management skills had come and how much they had helped my students grow during the time they were in my room.

Prior to the MAED courses I was just a new naive, idealistic teacher. These are realizations which I came to throughout the program. As I look back at where I was at the beginning of the program I think I was really conceited in thinking that I knew at least most of what it took to be a good teacher, I did not want to admit that it was okay to not know it all as it pertains to life and teaching. As I progressed through the program it became very evident that there is always more to learn in the realm of teaching and learning. Courses like the ones described above really made me think and grow and learn to focus not so much on what I know but on how the students are going to learn, shifting my focus to a more student centered way of teaching. I have heard this shift in thinking phrased many ways but my favorite is saying that I went from the “sage on the stage” to the “guide on the side.” I use technology and classroom management to guide my students to explore the various topics. Now instead of standing in the front of the classroom lecturing and giving notes, I push my students to discover, allowing them to lead the way consistently asking them “why?” and “how?” encouraging them to dig deeper. Without the guidance of the MAED program I do not think this growth in my teaching style would have occurred, or at least not so early on in my career.

Over the last four years many things have impacted my life. The loss of my mother taught me my strength and the challenge of continuing teaching and continuing with my program taught me my perseverance. These things have shaped me as an individual. To shape me as a teacher, the MAED program gets all the credit. I have greatly enjoyed my time with the MAED program and have developed an even stronger hunger for continued growth in my teaching.



