

May of 2012, I was cleaning out my classroom getting ready to close up for the summer. I was covering the bookshelves with sheets to prevent the collecting of dust, taking down bulletin boards that I had worked so hard to put together, and cleaning my desk when I happened to catch a glance at the expiration date on my provisional teaching certificate. Though I was aware of my time frame, I quickly realized that I needed to make some pretty big decisions. If I timed it just right, I could complete my master's degree and apply for my professional teaching certificate without ever having to renew my provisional certificate, which is something that was very important to me. I began searching universities and narrowed my choices down to two. After careful consideration, I decided Michigan State University is where my journey to continue my education would begin. Not only was I pleased with the courses and choices they had to offer, but also the thought of obtaining my master's degree online worked well for this busy working mom of four young kids.

After the shock had worn off about the journey I was about to embark on, the next thing I needed to create was a goal statement. I needed to compile a list of goals I wished to complete, and a plan to achieve the goals desired. I sat down with a notebook and pen in hand and began brainstorming ideas and purposes for taking this big step. I knew I wanted to continue my education to better myself for my family, to improve my teaching skills, and as a service to my district as well. While I was super excited to take this next step, I was also a little overwhelmed and nervous. As a full time wife, mother of four, and teacher, how was I going to fit one more thing into my crazy schedule? After talking with my supportive family, and academic adviser, I was up for the challenge! I quickly set my sights on that master's degree, and began envisioning what doors may open up in the future for me as a professional educator.

Throughout my time at Michigan State I was fortunate enough to have many memorable courses and professors who all helped instill something extra in me as a person and a professional educator. I have always been interested in learning new things, ideas and strategies to use in my classroom and throughout life in general. Thought I have a genuine love for learning, I never took my learning to the next step. In other words, I never inquired upon new ideas in great depth. At least not until I had the opportunity to take **Ed 800, Concepts of Educational Inquiry** in the fall of 2012 with professor Steven Weiland. Ed 800 gave me the confidence and motivation to **ask those deeper meaning questions** about best practices and reasoning behind some our instructional theories. Now, a simple answer isn't enough, I need to know the reasoning behind that answer. This newly developed skill has given me the confidence boost needed to enhance my learning experiences and my instructional methods. At first when reading over the course syllabus I was a little skeptical of the outcome, as it looked as if we were only reading articles and submitting six essays. I wondered how that was "teaching" me anything. I quickly realized that those required readings and essays were so "abstract" in a sense that allowed for valuable deep thinking, and questioning the "best practices" of teaching. This class was also a great introduction as to what the rest of the program would look like being taken entirely online as opposed to a traditional class setting.

Another course and professor that I found to be very beneficial for my academic career

was **TE 846 Accommodating and Differentiating for Literacy Learners** with Professor Erin Jurand during the summer of 2012. Being this was one of my first classes in the MAED program at Michigan State, I was pretty excited to get started. In our classrooms we have so many students with different learning styles, academic abilities, and specific needs. It is important that we as educators implement many different learning strategies and make the **necessary accommodations or modifications** necessary to reach each student at their level. TE 846 offered many strategies to implement and accommodations or modifications that I can use in my classroom to help improve the academic success of all of my students. We also had the opportunity to create our own case study using a struggling literacy student in our classroom. We administered required reading assessments and documented data and results.

**CEP 832, Educating the Students with Challenging Behaviors** with Professors Vicki Mousouli and Evelyn Oka, was another influential class that I participated in during the spring of 2013. Throughout this class we were assigned an ABC project for which we had to choose a specific **struggling learner** to work with and create a system of **accommodations or modifications** to help this student. I chose to work with “forgetful Sam”. Sam is a loving, creative, inattentive, disorganized, wandering fifth grade student that I had gotten the pleasure to meet and work with this past school year. His kind, care free spirit and laid back attitude allow him to enjoy life, yet often times also hinder his academic abilities. My ABC project targeted behavior was the typical “undiagnosed” child with inattentiveness, lack of organization and impulsive behaviors. Throughout my time working with Sam I was able to collaborate with him and his mom to create accommodations that would help keep him organized and focused on the task at hand. I believe this class was one of the most influential courses I have taken while attending the MAED program here at Michigan State because of the “hands on” experience.

The class was set up with many smaller assignments due each week, leading up to a large final project (ABC project) in the end. So each week you would be assigned a small task to complete using your struggling student. This setup allowed for consistent hands on opportunities and learning experiences throughout the term, and the opportunity to reflect on your instructional methods and accommodations at the end of each week’s focus.

**CEP 843 Autism Spectrum Disorder: Characteristics & Educational Implications** was a class I took last fall. We were getting ready to start a new school year, my husband had just been called out of state for work, and this busy mom of four young kids was feeling pretty overwhelmed. Though it was one of my most challenging classes, and taken at a very difficult time for me, it turned out to be one of the most beneficial classes in all of my studies. This class focused on **ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder)** itself, and how to **accommodate those students struggling** with this disability. ASD is something that is very near and dear to my heart, and I was more than delighted to learn more about the disability as an educator, and as a parent struggling to help her own child. When our oldest son was in second grade he was diagnosed with mild attention deficit disorder (specifically inattentiveness) and an anxiety disorder. Though he was not “diagnosed” as autistic, some of his obsessive-compulsive behaviors were very closely similar to that of a child on the spectrum. This class allowed for many research and hands on opportunities to read about, create and implement strategies and

techniques to use for students and parents struggling with an ASD diagnosis.

This past school year I had twenty-eight students in my classroom with seven of the students requiring special needs or accommodations. Two of the seven were diagnosed specifically with ASD. Though they were both at very different ends of the spectrum, they both required many accommodations and modifications to feel successful in the classroom. CEP 843 gave me the confidence needed along with many useful resources to effectively help these students achieve their expectations, and show academic and social growth throughout the school year.

The last class that I would like to focus on as having played a substantial role in my journey here at Michigan State, **was ED 870 our Capstone Seminar** that we are currently wrapping up. This class was very beneficial to me as a student at MSU, because it offered me the opportunity to compile all of my learning and coursework and showcase all of my achievements on a **digital website** accessible to all. It also gave me the chance as an individual to reflect back on my journey through my master's program, and really gain a sense of pride for all of my hard work and accomplishments. With help from professors and fellow classmates, I learned a lot of new ideas about creating a digital website, and more of what technology had to offer. This digital website could be used for many purposes such as career searching, classroom website, or business page. Due to the fact that I already have a reliable teaching assignment, I am going to use my Weebly digital website as a communication tool for parents of my classrooms students to access. My website will offer important news updates pertaining to our class, homework assignments, upcoming events, and as a contact method for questions or concerns. I would also like to incorporate pictures of student learning taking place, and upload links to showcase student work.

This was no easy journey for sure and required many late hours of reading, homework, responding to discussions, and uploading assignments. There were even plenty of times that I was overwhelmed and had to remind myself why I was embarking on this journey to begin with, and remind myself that I had the ability and motivation to complete the process. I have learned so much from my time here at Michigan State University with the help of many important professors as well as cohorts that I have met along the way, and through many valuable courses I had the opportunity to take part in. Though my degree is now almost complete, I am confident that my desire for learning will continue – it does not stop with the acceptance of a degree in hand. I have developed a stronger desire to learn new things, and ask those deeper meaningful questions in life as to why something is, the way it is. The master's program at Michigan State University has given me the knowledge and confidence to be able to do just this. For that, and many other reasons, I thank you!

