

Synthesis Essay
Going the Extra Mile
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After I finished student teaching, I was so excited to jump in a classroom and take on the role of being a teacher. I applied all over the country to hundreds of schools and ended up with a job in Colorado. I quickly found that teaching was much harder and time consuming than I ever imagined. I also found that living so far from home was exciting but challenging. As my first year of teaching ended I decided to move home. I was unsure of the possibility of finding a job in Michigan and thought that it would be great time to start working on my masters.

It was very easy to pick areas of concentration for my masters, Literacy and Special Education. After one year of teaching I found how important Literacy is and I knew that a student's proficiency in literacy determined how they performed in all areas. I knew that to really be an effective teacher I needed to be more knowledgeable and confident teaching literacy to all students, especially struggling readers and writers. After one year of teaching I found out how unprepared I was to teach special education students. Most special education students spend the majority of the time in general education classrooms but I did not have one special education course in my undergraduate study to prepare for working with those students.

I was reluctant about the online learning experience at first. In my undergraduate degree I only had one online class that I barely remembered. By the second master's course I was adjusted to online learning and really enjoyed the format and time flexibility. With less than a month till completion of my masters I could not imagine learning any other way then through online learning. The online learning allowed me to teach full time but still work on my degree. Teaching and learning together I was able to integrate what I learned quickly in my classroom. I found that taking one course at a time I was able to devote more time to the course and dig deeper in the material and learn more.

My second year teaching I had a very challenging classroom of students. Many of the students were academically low, but some were also aggressive, angry, and defiant towards me. I took CEP 832 Teaching Children with Challenging Behaviors because of the classroom I had and it turned out to be one my favorite courses. CEP 832 helped me get through teaching a tough year of students, it provided me help with my most severe behavior problem students, gave me great resources to read, strategies and interventions to use with students, but most importantly a better understanding of the behaviors behind the students.

The content covered in CEP 832 included aggressive, angry, impulsive, active, shy, withdrawn, isolated, and low achieving behaviors of students. I had every type of challenging behavior in my class at the time I took the course. The course used three different texts, BEST Practices: Behavioral and Educational Strategies for Teachers, The Tough Kid Tool Box, and Teaching Problem Students. BEST Practices: Behavioral and Educational Strategies for Teachers and The Tough Kid Tool Box are great resources for quick ideas with lots of reproducible templates to use in the classroom. Teaching Problem Students is a textbook that covers each type of behavior of challenging students. I have found myself going back to this book and rereading about a particular behavior. The final project in the course was a very rewarding experience. It was a case study that I completed on a student in my classroom that had challenging behaviors. During the case study I had to identify the problem, determine proper interventions to be used, implement interventions, and reflect on the experience with a very detailed essay. I created a behavior contract with the student's mother and worked closely with the student for at least a

month. I used many intervention strategies from the course texts and I saw remarkable changes in the student's behavior. I really learned through that experience that going the extra mile and working hard with a student really does pay off in the end.

The first literacy course I took was TE 846 Accommodating Different Literacy Learners. This course really sparked my interest in literacy and got me excited about teaching struggling readers in my classroom. I still have a very strong passion for literacy as a result of TE 846 and I am always looking for new ways to improve my literacy instruction and assessment.

The content in TE 846 covered assessments and instruction in the areas of vocabulary, fluency, comprehension, written language and ELL students. This course did not have any textbooks, all of the readings were downloaded from the course website. In past courses I did not find articles as helpful as textbooks or lectures but I was pleasantly surprised with the readings the instructor provided. By the end of the course I was able to create a binder of assessment tools that I have been able to use in my classroom. Many times schools only use one or two types of assessments and it is great to have this resource when trying to identify specific areas of weakness and target instruction to best help each student. The term project at the end of the course was based on two students that I identified as struggling readers. I started with pre-assessments to narrow in on a skill or area to focus on. After I identified the areas to focus on with the two students I created two lessons that used researched based strategies and activities from the course's reading articles. I then gave my students post tests and analyzed, reflected, and wrote about my experiences with the project and students. This project really changed my views on guided reading groups. I spent a lot of extra time assessing and preparing lessons for only one guided reading group but I found the students more engaged in the group and saw improvements in the students reading skills. I again learned that going the extra mile for students really impacted their learning in a positive way.

The last literacy course I took was TE 842 Elementary Reading Assessments and Instruction. This course was similar to the first literacy course TE 846 I took but I still walked away with a wealth of knowledge and an even stronger passion for integrating literacy in my classroom. This course spent a lot of time devoted to phonological awareness and phonics which were very beneficial to learn. Phonics and phonological awareness were important areas that I was really lacking in both knowledge and confidence. At the end of the course I felt so much better about teaching and using effective strategies in these areas. Although I still may need help at times in these areas, I at least now have a great resource base of books, articles, and websites to refer to when and if I get "stuck."

In addition to phonics and phonological awareness, TE 842 covered instructional strategies, assessments, fluency, vocabulary, and motivation. Assessment for Reading Instruction was used throughout the course as core reading material. I found this book very helpful, especially when I was thrown into DRA testing last year with very little instruction on how to conduct the test. The book explained in great detail how to give the DRA test and explained what it was used for. I also found the meaning of other literacy assessments I had used in the past but did not know what they measured. This course devoted a lot of time to the concept of Inquiry Circles. Inquiry Circles were used for the course format by posting and responding in discussions but it was a concept that the instructor encouraged us to use in our classrooms with our students to increase student engagement and motivation. The second core reading used in the course was Comprehension and Collaboration. I was very hesitant of using Inquiry Circles in my classroom. I slowly started to get more interested in the concept as I read more of the book. This course just touched the surface on Inquiry Circles so there is still a lot I would like to

learn but I do feel confident using them in my classroom. The final project for the course was a self directed study which I chose to focus on reading motivation. This was one of the most in depth projects I worked on, it lasted the duration of the course. I researched the topic, compiled findings of the research, used student interest surveys to determine students with low motivation, implemented interventions, and conducted a post test. I created a wikispace as a way to showcase what I had learned through the project. The interventions that I used were Book Talks, Reading Conferences, and Kid Watches during DEAR time. The students loved them, I found them very easy to implement, and they proved to help both students and I. I found that even in twenty short minutes of self selected reading students can be positively impacted if the teacher is willing to go the extra mile.

Completing my masters online has had a very positive impact on me as both a teacher and an individual. As a teacher I learned and gained so much from these courses which positively impacted me as a teacher, the students I worked with, and the students I will work with in the future. I learned so much more than I had anticipated, everything was relevant, important, useful, helpful and interesting. I also found how important it is to incorporate technology in the classroom. If I provide my students with an opportunity to use technology as a part of their education they may have as positive experience as I have. As an individual I learned how to better use my time and stay organized. This past year I taught full time then had to drive a hour an half home, that did not leave much time during the week for my courses so I had to quickly learn to time manage. As a teacher I am constantly consumed with papers, it was very refreshing for me to have everything on my computer for my courses without adding too many papers to my desk at home and work.

I was very excited to start my Capstone course, not because that was nearing the end of my masters but because I was so excited to create an online portfolio. I had wanted to create an online portfolio ever since student teaching but did not know how to start. I was not sure how much support I would have from my instructors during the Capstone course which worried me because I have little knowledge on creating a web based portfolio. Surprisingly, I was not just thrown into the process. I had a lot of support from my instructors and was provided with great examples each step of the way. I also had a lot of great feedback from my classmates. I am confident that I can create a second website strictly for my students and parents.

The Capstone course was a way to reflect on my courses and the journey I went through to complete my masters while creating a web based portfolio. In the goal statement essay I looked back at where I started and reflected on what I wanted to gain from this experience and what I walked away with. The future as a learner essay reminded me that ending my masters does not mean ending my learning, to be an effective teacher I must continue to be proactive and strive to always be a learner. The synthesis essay was the whole picture of my learning and experiences through MAED program and the strategies, ideas, and knowledge that gained from my coursework. These courses will have a long term benefit to my teaching, each course has instilled something in me to be a better teacher in some way. I am proud to say that I completed my master's through Michigan State University's online MAED program. I truly feel like a better teacher having completed these courses and will always remember going the extra mile for my students is rewarding for my students and myself.

