

Up for the Challenge

By Jessica Eden

As I took my seat in the same arena that the Spartans play, I couldn't help but feel a sense of accomplishment. I had done it, except for summer I was almost done, the amount of time, energy, and work that had gone into all of my courses. But then I also looked around the arena, I was in awe of their dedication to continue on and complete the prestigious degree. I had always wanted to pursue a master's degree but it didn't happen after I graduated with my bachelor's degree. I moved back home and went to work teaching kindergarten. After six years of teaching I got the itch to continue my education and pursue my dream of getting a master's degree from Michigan State. As I scroll through my online portfolio that I have created during this semester, it gives me tingles that this is my work and sometimes I want to walk around with my iPhone showing it to everyone. I am amazed at the depth of the work that was completed and the growth that I see in myself. I look at my showcase page and realize the importance these courses have played within my classroom and myself. But I see the courses that I found the most difficult and taxing taught me the most about myself. These courses pushed me out of my comfort zone asking me to question myself and look at things from a different perspective. These classes asked me to raise the bar and push myself.

CEP 800, Psychology of Learning in School and Other Settings was a course that looked at what and how students learn and know. It was a course that gave me an overall introduction to a variety of technology that was new to me. I felt like I was being thrown into a different world of technology audio, video, editing, etc. Dr. Zach Mural helped me guide the new waters of technology. I was able to use this technology as a reflective piece and to dig deeper into my teaching style and questioning techniques. I was able to teach a lesson to my students with a specific learning style in mind. I delved deeper into social constructionist. After teaching this lesson I realized the importance of utilizing different learning styles. I also was able to see the value of reflection and a way to utilize technology to review a lesson. These tools will help me improve my teaching and learn from my mistakes. I now use my Iphone and Ipad to record lessons and use them as tools to review. Another project I created during the semester allowed me to examine student understanding. I worked one on one with one of my students to delve into a topic and see what he understood about shadows. This audio interview allowed me to go back and look at how much my student understood the topic. But it opened my eyes to the different understanding and background knowledge that my students bring with them into the classroom. The culminating final project was a lesson plan, which incorporated all of the ideas that would provide for the best technology based interventions. With technology and classroom culture changing daily, this new technology will allow me to stay ahead of the curve and utilize new technology within my classroom.

The next course that I found challenging was TE 836, Awards and Classics in Children's Literature. This was the second time I tried to take this course, the first was during summer and I found this course was too much to be taken along with another course. As soon as this course began I knew that I was in for a challenge. The amount of reading was overwhelming. I found myself with a vast amount of reading and writing. I made sure as a student to be well organized and manage my time. With a family, full time teaching job, and taking a class online, it was important for me to plan my time accordingly. This course gave me an in-depth look at what is classic literature and the variety of awards given to children literature. I was allowed to examine the awards and evaluate the way that they are awarded. We also examined what makes a book a "classic" and accumulated a list of what classic literature was to our class. Through the assignments I was able to read a variety of literature but also be more conscious and aware of what I am reading and its significances. As the final project I was asked to look at literary history and examine it through a record of choice. It was a project that allowed me to examine everything that I had learned from the course and thoughtfully look at. This class had a great effect on me as a kindergarten teacher. I think that it has made me more aware of the role that I play in my student's history with literature. I need to share books that I find to be good books in order to expose my students and allow them to form an opinion of what they consider good books. I need to expose my students to award winning books and offer them information about the awards, especially the Caldecott and the multicultural awards such as the Coretta Scott King medal. Another duty after

participating in this class is to introduce my students to classic children's literature. These types of literature still have many things to offer readers of today. My students are part of literary history and the choices they make will influence the history of children's literature.

The next course I took this past spring, TE 848 Methods of Writing Instruction, was another eye opening class. I found this class had narrowed in on my weakness, writing. And went even further to the type of writing that I go out of my way to avoid, poetry. This class asked me to push my limits and improve my writing skills. When I began this class, I was looking to improve my ability to teach writing and help my students become better writers. However, I believe I have not only learned skills and ideas that can be implemented within my classroom, but I have become a better writer with the ability to write different genres with ease. Writing has always been a scary process; I dreaded it as a young child. My writing group has become a semi support group such as Writers Anonymous. They have provided support, encouragement, and constructive suggestions for my writing. Through my writing group I was able to share my writing, I was able to look at my writing through different eyes. This class asked me to write in different genres. By exploring the genres this semester, I was given a greater understanding and appreciation for genres that I would avoid teaching in my classroom because I was afraid or unsure of them. I know specifically I was able to see the possibilities of poetry in the classroom. To me poetry always felt like something others could write but I didn't

understand the rules or know how to use them. The final project for this class was a choice a journal paper about writing or a writing unit. I chose the writing unit, which I could use within my classroom. I chose a topic, which I thought I could expand upon, and was an area of need within my classroom, poetry. This week long unit was an introduction to poetry for kindergarten students. This class taught me a lot about how I work best and how I can help my students do their best writing. I realized that I benefited from working with a group to edit my paper. Every time I looked at the next draft it was like reading it with different eyes, this time I am looking for grammatical errors and reading for the flow. My eyes were opened to the benefits of writing in drafts. It has changed how I want to teach writing, and made me put myself in the shoes of my students when I ask them to write.

The last class ED 800 which is one of the last classes I am taking and as I am taking this class I realize why it was first. It is your introduction to your master's degree and how to use a variety of sources to think critically. Taking this class first would have prepared me for the amount of reading and writing that I would complete during my degree. This class allowed me to examine the lives of John Dewey, Jane Addams, and many more. I am currently in the middle of this class; it has made me more aware of the history of education and how we have gotten to where our schools are today. In addition, I have learned to be aware of cultural traditions and backgrounds. This course also taught me that education could occur anywhere. When I read "A Passion for Learning: The Education of

Seven Eminent Americans” I was able to read about seven extraordinary educators who were able to become Abraham Lincoln, Jane Addams, Benjamin Franklin, etc, they all had something in common “early and serious reading, personal identification with large-scale ideals, autodidacticism, like-minded colleagues, making the most of schooling, guiding mentors, work that realized earlier ideals, the ability to articulate ideas, and emerging leadership.” (via Amazon) These individuals were always working on educating themselves, not always through traditional schooling. I think that by keeping these ideas in mind, it helps me improve myself as an individual.

I think ahead to what life will be like after August 15, I’m currently so used to dedicating my time towards my courses. What will life be like? I realize that I will now be able to dedicate my time to implementing ideas and plans, which I have learned during my Masters. I think back to the summer of 2010 in which I began the MAED program, how different of an educator and an individual I now am. I knew that it was going to be a difficult and challenging road. I didn’t know how much I would learn about the educator I wanted to be. I was also able to learn more about the type of learner I am and be conscious of different learners within my classroom. I have so much to show for what I have accomplished not only a degree and a beautiful online portfolio but I have so many skills and life lessons to apply within my classroom. I think forward to what my plans are and I see myself continuing to grow as a life long learner whether through independent self-study or pursuing another masters degree or doctorate. I think that most

importantly I need to apply the knowledge that I have learned. I need to implement the skills that I have acquired along the way, it is nice to say I have learned this and that but I have to apply my knowledge within the classroom. The challenging road has come to an end but I am on a new path that was opened by the experiences during my masters. I am excited to begin down this new path but I do hope that it is challenging there is always excitement in the unknown. "The more I live, the more I learn. The more I learn, the more I realize, the less I know." –Michel Legrand