

Beginning With What I Knew, Ending With More Than I Could Have Imagined
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When I applied to Michigan State's Master's of Education program in September of 2012, it was an easy and safe decision. Having attended MSU for undergrad, I felt confident that the program would be well suited to my academic goals, and, as an added bonus, I could apply my internship credits to my program. At that point, I thought of this journey in terms of nine credits down, only twenty-one to go. I could continue teaching in my current position while completing my courses with flexibility, and utilize my newly acquired skills with my students.

As I read through my initial goal statement, it was evident that I had good intentions, but it also revealed a lack of real substance and authenticity. I referenced what any reviewer would want to hear; I expressed my interest in becoming a better educator through hands-on lessons and through the integration of technology. I went on to describe my passion for working with children in underprivileged neighborhoods to address the widening education gap. Sure, these were my goals, and I fully intended on making them a reality in my own practice, but at that time, I truly had no idea how I would accomplish these nor how the program would alter my thinking about teaching and education in general. I didn't realize that my courses would grant me the skills to reach the students previously thought of as hopeless or a waste of time. I didn't know I would completely transform my opinion on what makes a teacher successful. Finally, I didn't appreciate the impact I could have on my students by simply learning how to teach according to how they learn.

While I have accomplished many of the goals I entered the program with, they have developed into so much more. Hands-on lessons have transitioned from fun experiments to student-led, problem-based learning designed with the help of formative assessment. My role in the classroom has also drastically changed. Rather than spend the majority of instructional time standing in the front of the classroom teaching my students the right way to accomplish a variety of tasks, I've become more of a facilitator, listening to my students and learning from them. I mentioned wanting to incorporate technology into my practice in my initial statement, but again, I had little knowledge for how to do it successfully, especially considering the lack of resources at my school. I now have the understanding and confidence to utilize technology in a way that enhances and differentiates learning for all of my students according to their unique needs.

Despite the fact I entered this program already teaching, I am leaving it an entirely different teacher. I came in with vague goals and a lack of direction, and in two years, gained the knowledge and skills to become a teacher who truly evokes change and instills a love of learning in my students. I am so grateful to have been granted this opportunity, and I look forward to the next chapter of my journey.