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2019- Capstone ED 870  
MAED

### Self-Reflecting on Self-Reflection

The Chicago Teacher's Union, of which I am a member, just returned to work after a two-week long strike against Chicago Public Schools. Standing through heavy rain and even snow in order to stand in solidarity with the union, was an eye opening and educational experience. Participating in rallies with tens of thousands of fellow Chicago teachers and staff, I marched down the streets of Chicago in order to create awareness of the numerous issues present in public education in our city. While the strike was both exhausting and expensive, and the end result was not perfect by any means, this strike taught me a lot about the profession and activism for public education.

The first school I taught at in Chicago Public Schools was a primarily Hispanic dual language school in the vibrant Pilsen neighborhood of Near South Side Chicago. Student teaching in a split classroom with both first and second graders, I learned an immense amount about differentiation, attention to detail within planning, and of course the ability to adapt at a moment's notice. Moving on to my first year as a solo educator, I was introduced to a neighborhood on the Far South East Side of Chicago, where I taught first grade. In this classroom I was truly on my own, with almost 40 first graders, and I saw with clear eyes what inequitable education looked like. I also witnessed what the pressures of funding, or lack thereof, can do to the moral of a teaching staff. Moving forward through my career and on to my current school, located on the west side of Chicago, I am still able to identify numerous practices in our school community that are not equitable and am saddened by the ways that the students are affected by these. As a second grade teacher in a bilingual classroom, I am able to see the ways that my students are hurt by lack of necessary staffing and program funding at a school level. With this, I have now been in numerous Chicago schools and have seen the ways that equity in education is both so limited and so seriously needed.

I reflect on my time as an educator in Chicago for one important reason, this experience is what has driven me to complete the Master of Arts in Education (MAED) program from Michigan State University. Witnessing a classroom of deserving students go without the necessary resources of counselors, nurses, social workers, and paraprofessionals has changed me as both an educator and a person. I have learned to quickly rotate between the many hats a teacher must wear in order to best meet the needs of my individual students, but I always felt I must do more. Through the MAED experience I have become not only a stronger educator in practice, but also have become much better equipped to discuss, endorse and encourage the need for equity within public education.

Entering the MAED program as a passionate educator striving to create positive change, or at least promote positive growth within their classroom, I now graduate from this program having experienced an insightful change in the ways that I view my place as an educator. In order to explain this shift in viewpoint I must focus in on the specific theme of self-reflection and the way it was present throughout my learning in the MAED program.

### Self-Reflection and Best Practice in Education

As educators, and students of educational practice, we hear this term so frequently. It is thrown around carelessly at staff meetings with colleagues, and can seem threatening or overwhelming when brought in review discussions with administration. Best Practices in education, specifically within literacy education, were a heavy focus present in many of the courses I have completed throughout this program. To put it bluntly, the education that I have received regarding best practices in education has dramatically influenced the ways that I intentionally plan and teach in my second grade classroom. While I

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originally thought I had been implementing best practices in education within my classroom, I found a shift in my thinking occurred throughout the MAED program and the self-reflection completed regarding my own practice.

The MAED is a wonderful program to complete while full time working as an educator for a plethora of reasons. First you are able to actively apply your learning immediately within your own classroom, which allows for a very personalized and relevant learning experience. Following this you are able to almost instantly engage in meaningful self-reflection on the practices utilized within your classroom and their specific effectiveness.

Through courses such as TE 846, Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners, and TE 842, Elementary Reading Assessment Instruction, I was able to truly apply the best practices in literacy education which were showcased to me. These courses focused on the deep analysis of application of best practice techniques in literacy education, and placed a heavy focus on the development of techniques to implement in practice for bilingual literacy education. As a second grade teacher, practicing in a bilingual classroom, these specific MAED courses presented me with numerous new strategies and implementable skills that I was quickly able to use in order to create opportunities for successful growth within my diverse classroom. Migrating from previous notions that best practices will work for all students, and honing in on the specific needs of my own students that would be most supported by a specific best practice strategy, I was able to positively adapt my practice in ways that I previously had not even known were necessary.

Through frequent self-reflection on my teaching strategies within literacy, along with an improved view of assessment and data based intentional planning, I have experience a change in both mindset and confidence within these areas of practice.

#### Self-Reflection and Inquiry in Education

From the beginning of the MAED program, with ED 800 (Concepts of Educational Inquiry) guiding us learners through a variety of forms of educational inquiry, to TE 883 (Seminars in Literacy Instruction) where an application of autobiographical inquiry of one's practice was essential, I have seen the necessity of self-reflection present across many facets of education.

Inquiry is required within educational practice. There is a need for self-education through serious reflection and analysis within the profession of teaching, and through participating in an autobiographical inquiry within the MAED program I was able to witness the ways experiences I have had teaching and learning have changed the ways I view education. Analyzing various practices of inquiry within ED 800, I learned of the benefits of reflection and the ways that consistent observation can help an educator to truly understand the needs of their students.

With this knowledge of the need to self-assess the effectiveness of one's personal practice, I entered other courses such as TE 883. It was within this course where I truly felt for the first time that I had previously been lacking to provide quality instruction my students. Through a deep self-reflection into both my own practice with the instruction of poetry, as well as an inquiry into the varieties of poetry accessible for me to use within my teaching I was able to build and extend opportunities to enrich the literary minds of my young readers and writers.

These courses impacted the ways I will teach literacy in so many ways. Causing me to make huge changes to my practice which will benefit my students exponentially.

#### Self-Reflection and Equitable Education

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As an educator of diverse young students, it is crucial that I am as critically self-reflective as possible so that I can work to be a positive influence and change the harsh realities of privilege and oppression that are currently present in educational society. This is something I have now studied through various courses, been exposed to through various school settings, and stood up against throughout the 2019 Chicago Teachers Union strike.

Equity within education has to begin with the classroom teacher. The educator must self-reflect, adapt their own mental space, and ensure critical consciousness in order to protect and uplift the students that they educate. As displayed to me through courses such as EAD 830 (Urban Issues in Education) and TE 846 (Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners), I have been instructed on the ways I can produce, implement and strengthen learning environments for my students that are equitable and critically conscious.

Through the MAED I have developed a heightened sense of awareness for the issues present in urban education, within my district and also my specific school. This transcends my curricular practice and seeps into the disciplinary practices, and communication practices, that are present within my attitudes as an educator. Through self-reflection I am able to be as culturally responsive as possible and properly lead my students. I have been shown through the MAED program that equitable education truly starts with me as an educator, and I know that making commitments to reflect on my practice, and mindset with intention, will allow me to create more equitable environments for the students that I teach.

### The Beautiful Thing About Teaching

The Master of Arts in Education Program at Michigan State has truly shown me that the beautiful thing about being a teacher is that the entire career is one massive learning process. Commencing with the deep reading of one's first course textbook in undergrad and continuing all throughout one's career, educators are continuously absorbing and acquiring new knowledge from their colleagues, from their students, and also from themselves. As we, as educators, critically self-reflect on educational elements, practice, and politics we are able to foster valuable skills that are easily transferable to our personal classrooms. As I continue to strive to provide my students with equitable differentiated education, I will be able to rely on the renewed knowledge of best practice, strengthened notion of inquiry, and invigorated drive for justness in order to steer my teaching.

The Chicago Teachers Union Strike that has sent my life into a whirlwind these past few weeks reinforced so much of what I have strived to promote throughout my time in the MAED program. Students deserve equitable education. Students deserve resources and support. Students deserve our all as educators, and we must give them just that. Applying the knowledge, I have acquired throughout this program, and also continuing to build off of the energy that accompanies standing up for one's students, I am eager to move forward as an educator and make positive change within my school community. I will be intentional with my planning, focused in my research, and consistent in my practice of self-reflection in order to be an effective, empowering, and engaging educator focused on the growth of my students. I am proud of the various areas of growth I have experienced through the completion of the MAED program. I know that by graduating with this degree I am opening doors in my practice that will allow me to benefit many classrooms of future students throughout my educational career. This program has greatly influenced me as both an educator, and a human being, and I am eager to bring all that I have learned about equitable education into the classroom with me and provide excellent teaching for my students.

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