

Reflective Essay

I believe reflection to be one of the most important and powerful components to teaching. It is essential for teachers to reflect in order to continue enhancing their lessons and making each learning opportunity more and more effective for students. I find myself now reflecting back on my experience in Michigan State's Master of Arts in Education program, thinking about how my goals as an educator have changed and grown with newly acquired knowledge and experiences.

In February of 2011 I wrote about some of the goals I had for myself upon entering this master's program. One goal I had was to become a part of a close online learning community within my first years of teaching. I hoped that there would be many opportunities for me to create professional learning communities with peers online that would help enhance the sharing of ideas, pedagogies, and best practices. It was my hope that information and experiences would be shared from professionals that were coming from varying backgrounds. I feel that within this program and online format I have had extensive opportunities to share and exchange knowledge and ideas with peers through online discussion forums, chats, and group projects. I believe this goal of mine has been met by working with teachers with wide ranging years of experience and degree backgrounds. I have stayed in contact with many peers that I worked closely with over the past few years, along with professors, who have helped me to continue to grow and have pushed my thoughts and ideas as an educator. This has therefore created a larger professional learning community for me, continuing my journey as a lifelong learner of education. Not only do I believe that I have achieved my goal to create this learning community online, but I feel that the opportunities that were given to me through this program to exchange knowledge with other respected and passionate professionals has allowed me to thrive professionally.

Another professional goal I had for myself was to strengthen my teaching of literacy in the early elementary classroom. Language Arts was my undergraduate major and provided me with an amazing base knowledge of children's literature and best practices of teaching reading, writing, speaking, and listening and how to build passion among students. After teaching second grade during for almost three school years, I have realized just how important literacy instruction is. I have also realized how many different approaches to literacy instruction there are, creating a sometimes overwhelming amount of pedagogies. Over the past two and a half years of teaching, I have found literacy instruction to be one of the most overwhelming areas to teach. There are so many approaches, strategies, and beliefs that need to be integrated in order to effectively teach all students. As a young and inexperienced teacher, I found that more professional development was needed to be done in order to increase my level of confidence as an early elementary school literacy teacher. Throughout my master's program I took several literacy courses that have helped me grow and gain confidence as a literacy teacher. After having completed the literacy courses I have expanded my strategies in the area of reading. I have learned the intricacies of various components of literacy learning in early elementary grades, especially in the five pillars of reading. These courses have provided me specific ideas that I am currently using in the

classroom. I feel that I am more successful in differentiating my literacy instruction for students and have already seen positive changes in my students' successes because of my continuing knowledge and confidence.

A final goal I had for myself when applying to this master's program was pushing myself more as an educator through the use of technology integration. I have always taken to technology, knowing that pushing myself to learn new types of technologies could impact my professional career and student achievement. I believe that going through this master's program online has allowed me to embark on some technological challenges and new experiences that have helped me feel vulnerable as a student. This vulnerability has helped me identify with students who have challenges with their learning in my classroom or feel worries about trying new things. It has also allowed me to pass my own knowledge along, such as how to build a website for your classroom, using google docs, and overall navigation through this new technological world to my colleagues. This sharing of technology knowledge has been integrated into my own classroom and I see the communication between school and home improve and the engagement of my students increase.

In reflecting back over the courses I took to get to this point in my educational journey, this program has undeniably made me a better educator, growing in my beliefs and practices. My courses have taught me invaluable lessons about educational policy, how to help struggling readers and writers, how to manage challenging students, how to engage students through the use of technology, and countless others. Although my ultimate goal of achieving my Master's degree will soon be a reality, I look forward always being a determined and self-motivated lifelong learner who strives to develop professionally in hopes to gain confidence as an educator and successes with my students.