Growing through the Master of the Arts in Education (MAED) program

Being a life-long learner is always something I strived for when entering the teaching profession. I remember some of the moments that lead me towards teaching were actions taken by teachers I had growing up. My middle school science teacher was always finding unique ways to present material to us whether it be creating her own powerpoints from scratch or finding ways to intertwine her own life stories into the lessons. My high school soccer coach, who was also the physical education teacher, would constantly share new and exciting methods to engage us in the gym and on the soccer field by collaborating with people outside of our school. The thing that stood out the most was that every class period was new and exciting. I always knew that I would be engaged when entering the classroom or gym. These teachers were life-long learners. I knew that I wanted to do the things they did for me. Those teachers are what drove my teaching philosophy during my first two years teaching 6th grade at Riley Upper Elementary school. I pride myself in my abilities to collaborate with others and find opportunities to never stop learning how to bring the very best to my students. When I entered my 3rd year, I knew that the next step in growing as an educator was to enroll in Michigan State University's Master of the Arts in Education (MAED) program.

The MAED program not only helped me revitalize my love for learning, but it has also helped me become more comfortable finding purpose for technological tools used in my classroom and to become a leader within my school when it comes to collaborating and sharing methods. The program started during my year-long internship in a 4th and 5th grade split classroom in Chicago. Through field experiences and graduate coursework I was able to learn and teach in a community filled with talented teachers from Chicago and Michigan State. Although it was extremely demanding and difficult to maintain a balance between full time teaching and graduate coursework, I truly feel I learned vital skills that I was able to apply to my current teaching practices. After getting my feet wet taking on my first teaching position, I began the rest of my journey through graduate studies and began working through the MAED program. It was there that I was able to see learning in a different scope. Being a full time teacher while also learning how to build my teaching tool kit helped me become a leader and collaborator like never before. There are three courses within the MAED program that played an integral role in how I conduct myself as an educator. The classes that I am referring to are CEP 841: Classroom and Behavior Management in the Inclusive Classroom, TE 861A: Teaching Science for Understanding, TE 831: Teaching School Subject Matter with Technology.

It was not until taking CEP 841: Classroom and Behavior Management in the Inclusive Classroom that I really started to understand what my role was in not only the classroom, but in my school. The course allowed me to conduct my own self-assessment about my beliefs about learners and learning, my existing management practices, and my vision for what an inclusive learning community would and could look like in my own setting. I was able to develop my leadership role in the classroom. A classroom should always be a place where students feel safe and comfortable. It is the foundation of what makes a classroom function well. If students have to worry about their safety or are constantly feeling anxious about what is going to happen

next, they are not going to be able to focus on learning. Through a rigorous study of Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), I was able to develop comprehensive data-bases of interventions and strategies for classroom management and behavioral intervention. I was able to assess what the school culture looked like and create accommodations to meet the diverse learning, behavior, and social needs of my own students. One of the best take-aways from this course was how I was able to transfer my new knowledge about inclusive-community building to my colleagues. I was able to use PBIS taught through the course and blend it with a similar practice used at Riley Upper Elementary school. CEP 841 was all about focusing on an inclusive learning environment and steering away from punishment - first mindsets. This starts with setting up good expectations through motivation and modeling. The goal is to create independent learners. I learned classroom management strategies to prevent behavior and proactively teach. Everything from the physical space of the classroom to lesson and time management play a part in preventing unwanted behavior. I learned how to use consequences and rewards and also different ways to respond to behavior problems. Finally, I was trained on how to best help students become independent in their own behavior through conflict resolution strategies and teaching problem solving and social skills. This class was brought into my own school setting in the form of Restorative Practices. These practices target how to improve and repair relationships between people and communities. The idea is to understand how behavior can have an impact on others. Victims of a behavior issue as well as the initiators are asked to let their voices be heard to talk through the emotions that went into an incident. Members of the community are asked to join so that the relationships and communities can be restored. In a school setting, classmates, parents, teachers, and administrators are brought in to listen to the stories and also provide their own roles in amending the relationships. This practice has made its way through all of the classrooms at Riley Upper Elementary school and a large contributor to this was the studies of inclusive classrooms from CEP 841.

A big push for entering into the MAED program was being able to choose a concentration. After teaching for a few years, I have developed unique teaching philosophies that I wanted to tap into further. Being a 6th grade teacher at Riley put me in a position where I was considered both an elementary education teacher but also a middle school teacher. This meant that I had a homeroom in which I taught literacy but was also teaching science to three classes. This was a huge turning point in my life because my concentration through undergrad was social studies. I knew that I wanted to develop new skills and methods as a science teacher. Luckily, the science and mathematics education concentration would provide me with opportunities to become up to date on the skills needed to improve student learning. This is where TE 861A: Teaching Science for Understanding left its mark. When The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) came through, so did newer discussions around the visions and goals of science education. This course taught me how to focus on what it means to understand science and how to support students' understanding of science. I was able to take this course in a time when my school was also implementing a new science program. The knowledge I was acquiring through the course helped me make sense of how to approach learning a new program most effectively. I learned that students come into the classroom with pre-existing ideas and language about scientific phenomena and that these have a profound impact on how

they interpret instructional activities. All learners make sense of science ideas primarily through engaging with the practices of science and talking with others. TE 861A deepened my vision for science in the classroom and my understanding of the relationships between standards, curricula, formative assessments, teacher practices and student learning. The course also asked me to build a vision statement for science teaching. My goals for science developed into three components. I want science to be interesting enough to where students are thinking critically about whatever they are learning. I want science to be available to all students no matter their background or abilities. Finally, I want science to be fun. I always felt that students who are having fun in school were going to get more out of a lesson than if they were not having fun. Ultimately, TE 861A: Teaching Science for Understanding left a lasting impression on not only how to provide a quality science education for my students but has also helped me become unafraid of trying things out, making mistakes, and making conscious and intentional reflections on teaching.

TE 831: Teaching School Subject Matter with Technology provided me with ways to think about how to integrate digital technologies in the classroom and offered ideas, discussions, opportunities, and tools for how to do it. When I think about how I became a technological leader in my school who has learned how to collaborate on effecting teaching methods and strategies, this is the course that comes to mind. This course introduced me to frameworks for integrating educational technology in school subject matters. This is where I was first exposed to Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK). This theory explains how content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge are equals in constructing learning experiences for students. I always felt comfortable trying new technological tools in the classroom and was always willing to learn about the latest developments. The course taught me how to find the purpose in using technology in the classroom to get the most out of effectively balancing technology into instruction. It is not enough to put students on a laptop and expect students to learn. This is where a lot of fears with technologies stem from and it has definitely caused tension within my school building. By examining and becoming familiar with issues and terminology related to the field of educational technology, I was able to present technological tools to Riley Upper Elementary school. I was able to apply technological knowledge and pedagogical knowledge to construct technology-rich lessons to use in my own classroom setting. One of the most useful take-aways from this course was collaborating with classmates to foster an interactive online community in which we shared technological tools. I learned how to make screencast videos that I have used to enhance my lessons. Overall, I learned that technology integration does not start with identifying the technology tool, but rather, teaching sticks to the learning objective, and determines how technology can be used to help students achieve that goal.

I am both grateful and proud of the work that I was able to complete in Michigan State University's Master of the Arts in Education (MAED) program. This program, which took years of hard work and grit, has transformed who I am as an educator. I highlighted three courses but each of the ten courses played a role in developing my vision and philosophies towards education. Furthermore, the connections and resources that I have gained are permanent. The relationships I have made with professors and colleagues stem beyond the entirety of the k-12 educational field. I have virtually worked with educators from various backgrounds and

experiences around the globe. I have built a community online where I can ask and answer questions. These relationships will continue to help me grow as an educator. I have also built websites that have proven and will continue to prove to be an excellent resource for teaching material to myself and others. They will also be a permanent reminder of the growth I have gone through to be the life-long learner I have always set out to be. The MAED program has made me a better teacher. Most importantly, the program has given me the knowledge and tools to help me provide the very best for my students.