

From Student to Teacher, Teacher to Student

Always Learning to Implement in Teaching

Synthesis Essay

As I approach the completion of my Master's program and ED 870, I reflect on the work that I have done throughout this class and the previous classes I've taken within the last few years. This class has made me cognizant of what I have accomplished and how I would like to implement my works of other classes into my job and role as an elementary school teacher. To start, this class has made me reflect on the goals that I had when entering this program and furthermore this class. My main goal for this program was to find ways in which I could learn how to cater to different students to meet their individual needs within literacy – to educate myself about differentiation in the classroom; supporting students that range from kindergarten to 3rd grade level and higher in reading. Within this process, I have learned how to formulate lesson plans, reading intervention groups to meet each student's needs – transitioning reading groups with stations that will reinforce strengths of the students and provide them support for their weaknesses. When I learn these strategies, I am able to transfer what I've learned and experiment them in the classroom.

In addition, this class helped me reflect on the specific goals that I had written starting the program. It was a relief and a feeling of success, looking at the goals I had wanted to achieve and actually knowing that I have been progressing with some and have fulfilled and succeeded in most of the goals. Within this class, it has also allowed me to look at the outside perspective of how alternative classes helped me use the materials and information from each to better understand my responsibilities of a teacher.

The first class that stood out to me was TE 849, Methods and Materials for Teaching Children's and Adolescent Literature, taught by Dr. Laura Apol. This class focused on discussions on what type of diverse literature could be put into the classroom to make for an inclusive classroom library for our students. This class presented ideas and subjects that teachers might never think to put and discuss in the classroom. For example, within this class, as students, we delved into children's literature about race, ethnicity, LGBTQ issues, incarceration, and many more. The class reflected on how it is advantageous to go out of the comfortable library of classics and add additional books that would be beneficial for students that can relate to situations, experiences, and ideas about their lives that might not be as vocally discussed. It also showed that these experiences are more evident in students' life than a teacher might recognize; and even if it is not relevant, it is important for students to get to the choice of reading to be understanding of these topics.

Followed by those discussions, are preparations of how to deal with a school administrator or parents that are more apprehensive about having these books in the classroom. The class puts direct focus on the students to ultimately have, not only an inclusive environment for the students, but to inform others about less popular children's book as a part of the previous categories shown above. This was the first class that made me think carefully about the books I put in my classroom. Before – I used to pick different genres of books, different leveled books, but I never thought to bring these more mature, or labeled as “mature,” subjects into the classroom. It helped me learn about myself as a teacher and decisions I make for my students, but I also learned about myself. These topics are important to me as a person, so they should be important to give my students the opportunity to read about these too. After I reviewed what I'd taken away from this class, I came to the realization that these subjects can be relevant no matter

the age group. Even after I read these books in my class, I was worried about the repercussions of putting such dense, controversial books, in the classroom. Although, after further contemplation, I felt like I would rather be approached about the questioning of books in the classroom, and be able to justify it, rather than, not helping the students that are dealing with these relevant issues in today's society that get bushed off or put under the rug.

Another class that was a pivotal part of my Master's program was EAD 822 – Diverse Students and Families, taught by Dr. Jada Phelps. This class was one I required to take that was outside of my concentration; however, the information was relatable to teaching within the classroom. Throughout this class, it challenged us to look and research about diversity and how to understand students in our classes with their diverse background. In order to understand students, we had to discover and reflect where we came from and who we are as a person. Other students, and myself, within the class looked at different angles to become knowledgeable about the subject of diversity; as we watched documentaries, read articles, had discussions with other students, and much more. I used resources that I was never knowledgeable about and organized information in different templates that I was not accustomed to, for example, ecomaps, which I had never been exposed to. Throughout this new information I learned about others unlike me and about myself.

This class was especially beneficial for me working in Southwest Detroit with a high Latino/a population. For me to work at a place where many of my students are from a minority group, it provided an eye-opening experience for me on what to be cognizant about within the diversity in my classroom. For example, a problem that has come around the community of my school is immigration. Many of my student's parents are undocumented and situations like this may affect their schooling and how they perform. I had similar experiences in teaching at

previous schools where a parent had been deported. Without knowing this information, I would not have known why the student was less engaged than from the start of the school year. This diversity class gave us the approach to have these discussions, practice understanding, and what actions that we should take in these certain circumstances. In this class, discussions were had online with other classmates to support or come up with suggestions of talks to have with our own students, to make sure that they are still working at their optimum level, or the best they can, regardless of problems outside of the school. This conversation is had to encourage the students and show them that they have the capability to overcome these challenges and be successful.

The third class that made an impact in my Master's program experience was TE 846 – Accommodations in Different Literacy Learners, taught by Dr. Laura Tortorelli. This class gave me the opportunity and ability to focus on individual student's needs with their literacy learning. During the entire semester, I created lesson plans, small group instruction, and activities for one specific student. I tracked his progression in reading throughout several weeks, reflecting on ideas and plans that did or did not work. Once that study took place, it provided me with a much clearer and cohesive idea of how to structure different materials for centers as well as how to properly differentiate. Ultimately, if there were strategies that did not work for my child study, I changed it the next time to benefit my own classroom. This class was all about trying new ideas and I was able to figure out what worked best for me as a teacher and what was helpful for my current students.

This class also catered to implementation and structure of reading intervention groups. In all classrooms, there needs to be instructional reading groups, which requires a lot of different activities working simultaneously. In order to do that, there also needs to be strategies used to

make these flow effectively. This class required me to create plans for each station and later reflect on what was effective for student improvement. Each classroom is also different based on the students themselves, having to make additional accommodations. We focused on stations of fluency, comprehension, vocabulary, and much more. After much planning, this class was the main way I was able to create a prosperous reading intervention group for my classes this year. When I had choices to make, I used those changes, and I was able to move forward and look toward student success.

Finally, this class forced me make reflections about my experiences that I had not personally recognized without these classes. Specifically, ED 870, taught by Dr. Matthew Koehler, assisted by Aric Gaunt and Brooke Thomas, pushed me to reflect on my classes and the successes with each. Moreover, it taught me how to monitor and display these within a website that I did not even know how to start coming into the class. It helped me create my portfolio so any audience can see me as a person and who I am as a teacher. They were thorough and constructive with their feedback about my experiences I shared throughout this program. They made me examine the verbiage used in papers, colors that contrast from backgrounds to fonts and displays to make my website look appealing to the audience and to make sure that it accurately reflects my experiences.

This class additionally mandated that I learn to understand technology and create something from it, knowing that in this day of age, we are reliant on technology and need to be knowledgeable about it. Before this class, I would not have been able to make a website, let alone the one that I have made for this class, and the intricacies within it that the professors had asked for me to make for the best website that represented me and my teaching. Moving forward, I use more technology in my classroom; because I had used my own learning

experiences to then transfer it into the classroom. Something that I felt uncomfortable using because of lack of experience, I now use as a strength in the classroom. Due to society being more technologically driven, I noticed that some students prefer to work with technology; i.e. typing a story up instead of writing it down.

Overall, the program has pushed me to critically think about myself as both a teacher and student. It has made me analyze different strategies to implement in the classroom; and has also made me learn quickly that within the classroom, it is about trial and error. If a lesson succeeds, keep it and do it again next year. If it fails, make alterations and try it again. Nothing is perfect and no teacher teaches exactly the same. In the end, it is all about the success of the students. It doesn't matter how you get to that success, just that the students ultimately succeed. As teachers, we want learning to be a positive idea so that we encourage them to progress in their education, just like my Master's program teachers' supported me with my success.