

An Finished Dream

I was elated the day I received a phone call from my current principal explaining that I was chosen as the best candidate for the middle school English teaching position at Bath Middle School. Perhaps “elated” is an understatement. I had finally been given the opportunity to explore my dream: teaching adolescent students. It was 2014, and I had recently finished up my year of student teaching. A year later, I began the process of applying for the Master of Arts in Education (MAED) program at Michigan State University, and after three years I am now finishing the program.

I entered my master's program as a first year teacher with many questions about how I can best improve my pedagogy to meet students' needs. My primary goals were to “allow for students to use rich literature to explore the world” and “incorporate technology to expose students to a world of global diversity”. Three years later I stand firm behind these ideals; however, my knowledge of its application have drastically improved. As a language arts teacher, I am well versed in the importance of language use, and the power of words and stories. Additionally, I know for better or for worse the platform of technology will continue to be an integral part of my pedagogy.

When I created these goals, I was thinking through the lens of a college student who already possessed many of the skills I’m teaching my students. I knew the Internet had a wealth of information, some of which was useful. I knew how to break down texts and explore the world through a critical lens. However, due to the inexperience of teaching middle school, I was blind to the fact that many 6th - 12th graders needed to explicitly be taught these principles. This program forced me to take the plunge into exposing students to texts that will expand their thinking about the world, and also helped me become aware of the importance of digital literacy.

Three years later, I’m regularly incorporating instruction insistent upon critical use of media, I have secured a 1:1 ratio of chromebooks to students for the English department, and I have expanded the use of colorful literature to reach all students. My lessons have included modern award winning works such as *The Crossover* by Kwame Alexander and *American Born Chinese* by Gene Yang. I regularly use digital resources such as Google Classroom, Weebly, CNN Student News, and Newsela. My students collaborate, possess strong communication skills, and understand the impact of strong literacy skills.

Perhaps the best part of what I have learned through this program is that continuing to be a novice teacher - one who learns, explores, takes risks, and adapts to new situations - is the most important skill I possess. Therefore, my goals remain unchanged. The brand of literacy I teach

today is constantly evolving and shifting. Therefore, a continuous dedication to improve my pedagogy to meet student needs is a top priority for my career as a teacher. My dream is unfinished because tomorrow's students will require a new teacher and new opportunities to experience the world.

Jordan Parks