

## *The Marathon is Over, Now What?*

### *My Educational Journey - By Mixsy Trinidad*

I attained my second Bachelor's Degree in May 2011 in Elementary Education. After student teaching I completed a long-term guest teacher assignment and finished the school year with a great group of 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. I was looking forward to interviews, adding the finishing touches to my portfolio and having my very own elementary classroom. The summer was going to be full of garage sales to stock up on classroom supplies and getting ready to embark on my teaching journey. It is interesting to look back and see where I was going and where I actually ended up. After the commencement ceremonies I was offered the opportunity to teach with my former instructors at the University of Michigan....I could not believe it! And so, the student becomes the teacher....

During the first semester of teaching and being back on campus I was able to enjoy my time not only getting to know the course content from the teaching perspective but I also enjoyed the freedom of getting to know my students on a different level. We spoke about short term and long term goals, we spoke about different concentrations in elementary education, and we spoke about dreams, fears, and the very realistic possibility of having to relocate in order to carry out their dreams of teaching. All the while these conversations prompted me to begin thinking about my own educational advancements. I knew that in order to be the best I could for them, I would have to embark on the Master's Degree journey very quickly. After researching potential programs, course offerings, commuting and other life responsibilities my decision to enroll in Michigan State's MAED program was not a difficult one.

What I particularly valued the most was the flexibility the program offered in regards to assisting courses that were of value to me not only personally but as part of my own educative process. As in any program there were the required courses which serve as a springboard into the program and help you ground your knowledge in the history of teaching like ED 800, Educational Inquiry, but the rest was up to me. As I explored all of the course offerings I became very excited about all of the Literacy courses that were offered. I also began to gravitate toward the courses that spoke directly to what I was doing professionally, teaching at the university level. I could spend some time discussing each course briefly and assignments that impacted my learning but I will not do that here. (If you are interested in reviewing those assignments please double click ShowCase to see them.) I will reserve this space to discuss the courses that really impacted my learning.

The first course that had a great impact on my teaching and learning was EAD 861 – Adult Learning. This course is within the Higher, Adult and Lifelong Education (HALE) program in the Department of Educational Administration and the Educational Leadership concentration of the College of Education Masters Program in Education. I choose to assist this course because it would have a two-fold impact on me one as an adult learner and as a teacher to adult learners. In this course we explored learning both in formal environments and informal environments. In this course I learned the implications of not only being an adult learner but helping my students who are also adult learners.

The course began with an exploration of *who* the adult learner is, is it someone who is of legal age? Is it the traditional-age college student 18-22? Do these adults need to have other responsibilities as well, such as jobs, bills to pay, and possibly children? After our exploration of this topic, I learned that the adult learner is and continues to be a very complicated being encompassing the traditional aged student right out of high school to the older adult who reenters the formal learning environment either as a career changer or as someone who wants to fulfill a life-long dream and finally has the chance. We then explored motivation and the many facets included like intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. We looked at characteristics, challenges and significant factors that should be considered when working with adult learners. We also looked at aspects that can contribute or hinder the success of the adult learner.

The course was a complete game changer for me as a teacher of adults. As I explored these topics with my classmates and the instructor I began to really have a shift in my interactions with my students. I became someone that really tried to understand my students, especially if they reached out to me during a difficult time. I came up with a list of things I can do to help students overcome the many challenges that can arise during a semester of time. I became less skeptical and judgmental of my students. Overall I learned that it is not fair to hold my students to my levels of self-determination and motivation because we are all very individual when it comes to these ideals.

Another game changer was EAD 866 – Teaching in Postsecondary Education. This course is also a part of the university's HALE program. I decided to assist this course because up to this point all of the preparation I had in education had to do with young children and I wanted some insight into my adult students. My interest in taking this course was in large part due to what I was experiencing professionally. I wanted to be sure that I was approaching my adult learners in the best way possible for them and for me. In this course we were pushed to become reflective thinkers about our teaching practices our instructional design, assessments and strategies to encourage active learning and participation.

This course came at the perfect time for me not only in my educational career but as a fairly new instructor. I assisted this course in our Spring 2013 semester which is the Winter semester at the University of Michigan, it was my fifth semester of teaching and while I had had a few memorable challenges this semester would prove to be unforgettable. As teachers we have unforgettable students for many reasons: they are shy, witty, funny, messy, always late, make you smile, because they cause nightmares but they always remain in your heart. This semester this student set out to make teaching and learning a very interesting experience. Without giving too much away, risking anything confidential, let us just say that this student was in his last semester before graduation and was extremely bitter about having to take my course, "because it was dumped on him" and he absolutely has an extreme aversion to Mathematics. Great! Don't we all love Math?!

As the course progressed I had several enlightening moments, not only as a learner but as a teacher to this particular student and to all of my students in general. I learned that fear can move a student to the most extreme edges of their functionality and thus create an environment that could affect others around them. I as the teacher in the room had to learn how to best handle this student so

that those around them could have the most positive experience as well. I had to learn to control my emotions so that I would not alienate him as a student or turn off my other students to their career choice. The weeks progressed and I made a decision that would impact my teaching and my student's learning. This was the perfect opportunity to teach them through modeling that teaching, even young children, is not full of rainbows and unicorns. Many students have the preconceived idea that teaching in elementary education is a "fun job" and while it can be it is certainly has its challenges as well.

The most rewarding part of this course was the interaction I had with the book *What the Best College Teachers Do* by Ken Bain. While interacting with other great books and articles throughout the course this book spoke to me directly because of what I hold dear in my teaching philosophy (click here to read it). "...the best teachers know their subjects inside and out-but they also know how to engage and challenge students and to provoke impassioned responses. Most of all, they believe two things: that teaching matters and that students can learn." This quote is taken from the jacket flap in Bain's book. While reading this book it became clear to me that at the end of my teaching journey I would want to be remembered as one of my student's best college teachers. I want to be remembered as someone who challenged them to bring out the best in them. I want to be remembered as someone who made them think and challenged their own thinking, because that is what is valuable. I want to be remembered as someone who never judged them for their efforts but pushed them to be their very best. And most of all I learned that in order to get there, if I ever do, I have to continue to strive in my own thinking and learning.

TE 849 – Methods and Materials for Teaching Children's and Adolescent Literature is a course that I will always hold close. Why? I thoroughly enjoy reading and really particularly enjoy children and adolescent literature. I have a special interest in this because I believe that especially today, in the world of electronics, where most children seem to use every spare moment to be glued to a screen, reading in a traditional format can and will always transport you to a special place and time.

In this course we explored the value of children's literature, how our history as readers shapes our responses to literature and the role children's literature plays in today's curriculum. By exploring ourselves as reader's first we were able to discover or re-discover how and when our passion for reading developed. By reconnecting with this part of myself I walked away with a much deeper understanding of why more than ever reading in a traditional format is important for this and future generations of young readers. By exploring the content, illustrations and messages contained in these various books we were pushed to go beyond our "teacher" self and really think about what impact books have on us as readers. I understood why books have an inherent value in our whole curriculum and how and why including other formats (such as film and graphic novels) can serve as other means of exploring literature as a whole.

And finally I will discuss the course that has probably had the greatest impact on me as a learner and that is ED 870-The Capstone Course. While this may seem as some sort of "kissing up," hands down this course has impacted me in several ways. I want to start by saying that when I saw in the requirements that I would be doing an online portfolio I had serious doubts about signing up for this particular program at all. I had a similar experience during my undergraduate experience and was

completely underwhelmed by my experience. Could it be that hearing, “I expected something of much higher quality from our Maize and Blue award recipient” from the instructor, probably had something to do with it? Maybe, maybe not, but I can certainly say that as I reach the end of this course, this technology course, I have had a much more satisfying result.

My trepidation about taking the course was mostly the technology aspect. While I am comfortable with general things like writing papers in Word or using Excel, the Internet, Face book and other such things, I had not put together a “successful” website in the past. My concerns and fears quickly began to subside as I realized that only would we be providing substantive feedback to each other, we were also provided with many resources to help guide us along the way. Another comforting aspect was learning that the majority of the other students in the course were in a similar place with their levels of comfort and expertise in the area of technology. It made me feel like we were truly in this together and would be learning a lot from one another as well as from our instructors.

The most rewarding aspect of this course would have to be the reflective aspect of it from the first essay ([click here](#)) where I revisited my initial goals, to reflecting on my future as a learner ([click here](#)) and realizing that learning never really ends and finally to reflecting upon the entire journey by composing this final essay. However, as this formal journey is quickly concluding I have come to the realization that another journey will begin. As I depart from learning in a traditional format, I will now have time to really put to the test all that I have learned, questioned and reasoned about. I will have time to really soak up this very challenging yet remarkably rewarding experience that I have completed in five whirl wind semesters. I will finally be able to say that I am done with my graduate work, and that I may not know what is next for me educationally, but whatever it is I CAN DO IT!!!