

The Benefit of Perspective

Goal Reflection Essay

Reflecting upon my experience in Michigan State's Master of Arts in Education program, I am struck by how some of my initial thoughts going into the program have shifted significantly, and how many of them remain firmly intact. Over time, the courses I have taken in this program have allowed me to develop a greater sense of perspective regarding my thoughts and attitudes about the practice of teaching.

One of my initial goals focused on engaging with the varying literacy levels of students that I interact with on a daily basis. I pointedly discussed that my main goal given this criterion was to reflect on my past practices in regards to literacy education while simultaneously building upon the skills that I already possess to be more confident in my role as a literacy educator. Throughout this program, I have come to understand the value of literacy in the classroom and how I as an educator can tap into the varying levels of literacy that my students possess. So, in short, I would say that this particular goal has largely stayed the same during this program, but I have also come to understand how broadly defined the concept of literacy is and how it encompasses a wide variety of skills that students bring into the classroom on a daily basis.

A second goal I laid out for myself was to develop new strategies for the teaching of reading and writing. As with my first goal, I specifically mentioned how I hoped to gain ground in developing strategies that targeted a wide variety of learners, not simply teaching to a highly specific target audience. I found that throughout my time in this degree program, I had the opportunity to develop my skills in terms of content knowledge rather than teaching strategies for reading and writing. Many courses I took emphasized broadening horizons and trying out new techniques for writing or exploring a new genre of reading, and then critically analyzing that reading or writing through the perspective of a student. In essence, this is at the core of the initial goal I had set out, but the approach I took to get there was quite different from what I had initially envisioned.

Finally, I also mentioned how I wanted to learn more about my students: their cultural backgrounds, their attitudes about learning, their feelings toward my subject area, and how they felt about me, as a teacher, and I hoped that this program would provide me with a framework to delve into these complex issues. Throughout my time in this program, I have had several opportunities to reflect on my experiences interacting with students and to create projects that specifically focused on learning more about the varied backgrounds of the students I work with. Some of my most fulfilling work in this program has been centered on closely working alongside a particular student to develop literacy strategies or critically examining a particular class to discern how best to differentiate instruction. These opportunities have certainly allowed me to further hone my craft as a teacher and have sharpened my skills of student interaction as well. Moving forward, I find this goal to still be extremely relevant, and I have come to realize that it is nearly impossible to find myself completely knowledgeable about each

individual student's needs, but I should always be mindful of how I am developing my rapport with students over time.

As such, my time in the Master of Arts in Education program has been extremely fulfilling, and has given me tools to further hone my craft as an educator. Even though some of my initial goals have shifted, I am still very much aware of my further objectives and a teacher and have the benefit of perspective to shape my experiences as a teacher into the future.