

Over...already?

Kristin Blain

It was three years ago, September 2010, when I wrote my professional goals statement seeking admission from Michigan State University to pursue a master's degree in the Art of Education. I discussed what it meant to be a lifelong learner, an individual passionate for intellectual stimulation. Little did I know that over the next three years I would find myself over stimulated at times by the demands of being a middle school special education teacher, a full-time graduate student, and making quality time for family, friends, and self. It is true, I often times behaved like a duck...above the surface I was composed and unruffled. Below the surface I paddled away like crazy. With five weeks until the completion of my graduate coursework, shocked at how fast it has gone, I can humbly reflect and say with certainty, that I indeed met and surpassed the professional goals I had set.

Staying current in the field of education is a never ending process and one that is vital to student success. Staying current in special education is not only a legal matter but a necessity in being a student advocate and being successful in the teaching role that I have. My undergrad focus was special education. Feeling well versed in the special education realm, I wanted to focus my concentration on core subject areas, thus my emphasis areas originally chosen were mathematics and literacy. I decided to choose special education courses to fulfill my elective requirements but quickly realized how prevalent and helpful the special education courses were to me becoming an even better educator. I also quickly learned that there was even more to learn in the world of special education. More interventions, accommodations, best-practices, and positive intervention supports. With that, half-way through the course I switched emphasis areas to special education and literacy, while mathematics took place as my elective.

Learning requires motivation, patience, and determination. Being a student again I was quickly reminded of this, and it has helped me relate to my students. I often share with them that I am doing homework too, in the evenings and on weekends, and that learning is not instantaneous, but a process. The experience, knowledge gained, and expertise from peers and professors has contributed to my growth as an educator and helped me to go from what I hope was an exceptional teacher to a master teacher. I also feel it has provided me with knowledge and strategies to share with other professionals that I work with especially when it comes to supporting students with unique learning styles in their classrooms.

The online learning of the MAED program has driven me to become more self-motivated and become a master of time management in order to pace myself, meet deadlines, while balancing everything else on my plate. I also learned to expand on my patience as technology is not always what you hope, dream, or conjure it to be. Nevertheless, the online learning platform for obtaining my master's degree pushed me outside of my comfort zone at times and challenged me to perform in ways I thought not possible. Reflection on this experience leaves me feeling empowered at what I have accomplished.

