

Keep Moving Forward

I knew I wanted to become a teacher in my junior year of high school. One of my advisors asked me what I wanted to be and I responded saying, "I have no idea!" In turn, he told me to think about being a teacher. He said my organizational and interactional skills on top of my personality would make me a great teacher. Then, I went into college going through the motions of becoming a teacher. It was not until I entered my first classroom that something clicked and I knew I really wanted to be a teacher. My advisor was spot on! I loved interacting with students, parents and other teachers. I loved exploring new teaching methods and topics. I could not wait to finish my undergraduate degree and be in charge of my own classroom.

Once I earned my first classroom, I knew that I wanted to go back to school and continue learning how to be a better teacher. Walt Disney said, "Around here, however, we don't look backwards for very long. We keep moving forward, opening up new doors and doing new things... and curiosity keeps leading us down new paths." That is exactly what I did throughout my master's program. I kept moving forward, learning new and exciting things.

Looking back over my education, the classes I took helped me to "keep moving forward." After two years of teaching, I craved new knowledge to aid in my classroom teaching. All of the classes I took were helpful and translated directly into my classroom. The following classes are a few that have made an impression on my teaching and future as an educator.

In the spring of 2013, I took a class entitled *Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners (TE 846)*. This class required me to get to know one student with a learning disability. It just so happened that I had been tutoring a student who had a reading challenge and I was in need of assessments and teaching aids to help this student progress to the next level. Throughout this course, I learned about the factors that influence literacy instruction, including developmental processes and assessment strategies that helped me shape my instruction. I also learned a variety of ways to differentiate

instruction to support all the children in my class, no matter their learning ability. With this knowledge, I was able to create a [case study](#) around the student I was tutoring. By reflecting on the data I collected from the skills I learned in this course, I was able to analyze the effectiveness of the lessons I created and to change them when needed in order to have an effective education plan. This is an important skill for me and all educators to learn. By looking into one student's challenges, changing my lessons and learning the appropriate assessments, I was able to be a more effective teacher for all of my students.

In the spring of 2014, I took *Awards & Classics of Children's Literature*. Throughout this course, the class read and discussed books that have been given awards. We looked at Caldecott and Newbery award winning books and talked about why these books were given awards. Each award-winning book seemed so different. The class talked in depth about what makes a piece of children's literature a "good" piece of children's literature. We read books that have won the Newbery Award, such as *Secret of the Andes* and *Charlotte's Web*. We also explored other awards such as the Phoenix Award, Children's Choice Award, Coretta Scott King Award and the Jane Addams Award. The class explored these awards and many others to determine if a book that has won an award is, in fact, award worthy.

Each one of the awards I mentioned focuses on a different aspect or detail of literature. For example, in order to qualify for the Jane Addams Award, a book needs to effectively promote the causes of peace, social justice, world community and the equality of the sexes and all races as well as meeting conventional standards for excellence. The Coretta Scott King award is given to a book that describes an outstanding portrayal of the African American experience in literature for children or teens. Teachers and scholars are constantly talking about these awards and finding ways of integrating them into classrooms because they highlight excellent books, which should be included in the classroom. However, there are a lot of political discussions behind these awards too. Just because a book has an award

stamped on the cover does not necessary mean it belongs in every classroom.

Throughout the course, I participated in discussion groups. My group and I came up with criteria for what we consider what a classic piece of children's literature is. First, the book needs to be at least twenty years old, continuing to survive throughout the years in a changing world. Twenty years may seem like a long time ago, but when our group was discussing this point, we realized that 1999 was only fifteen years ago. Books written in 1999 have potential for being classics in the future. My group also decided that for a book to survive throughout time, being adapted into a movie or show of some kind is very helpful. These adaptations show that the story is still relevant across different time periods.

This class helped me become aware of what and how different types of books are selected for classroom instruction. I now know what a classic piece of literature is and how important it is to choose, as Charlotte Mason says, "living books" for my classroom.

Another class that helped me learn and develop as an educator was *Elementary Reading Assessment and Instruction* (TE 842). For this course, I was once again required to work closely with two students and explore, try out and implement best practices in reading instruction and assessment. I learned how these students I worked with have vast differences in phonological awareness, decoding, and sight word skills. One book we were required to buy was *Words Their Way*. In the this book, the authors teach about different types of reading problems that students may have and then gives creative ideas to help students learn in the area in which they struggle. Along with learning what skills students need to work on, the book also taught me educational games.

One game I discovered is called "Build, Blend and Extend" (p.189). In this game, the teacher prepares a set of cards with "targeted insets and rimes." For one of my students', William, phonics cards, a teacher can include vcv words, such as /ive/ and the word family /ain/. The teacher will then ask William to make the word "dive." William then takes the card that has "ive" on it and the "d"

card. The teacher then asks him to spell "drive" and William would keep the "ive" card and find the "dr" card. This activity "is designed to reinforce phoneme segmentation, phoneme blending, and the use of analogy as a spelling strategy" (189) and in doing this it aided William's fluency and comprehension.

Another example of a game/strategy I discovered was to motivate the students by playing a "simple riddle-guessing game." The teacher begins the game by naming the category and giving a clue: "I'm thinking of an animal that lives in the water and is a /f/ /i/ /sh/. The child who correctly guesses *fish* gives the next riddle: "I'm thinking of an animal that goes 'quack' and is a /d/ /u/ /ck/" (Marrow and Gambrell, p 204). This game can be done using a white board so that the students can write their guesses. It can also be unit based, which is always nice.

During the summer of 2013, I took a course all about classroom management. *Classroom management Psychology of Classroom Discipline (CEP 883)* made me reflect and critique my current style of classroom, management. This greatly impacted my learning and teaching as I worked through the Master's program. This course taught me how to start a year off on the right foot with students and parents. This course will aid me throughout my teaching career, no matter what type of classroom I am teaching in. I was easily able to modify some of the ideas and techniques they gave in the online resources and course text to fit my classroom setting. CEP 883 gave me methods to increase student intrinsic motivation and to foster positive social student behavior. As I explored the resources that the class gave me, I realized that positive reinforcement and intrinsic motivation are better forms of classroom management than negative feedback or punishment. I make sure that my expectations clear to the class whether at the beginning of the year, start of a unit, or just the start of a class period.

I started out this year by clearly communicating to the parents and the students the "class norms," which my students and I created. With the partnerships between myself and the parents and myself and the students, the school year went smoothly. I was very proud of the

reflection and research in this class. My [final paper](#) in this course shows my conclusions and a redemptive form of classroom management.

These classes were helpful in aiding me with understanding specific assessments, instructions, literature, and classroom management. However, one class that opened my eyes to a new way of teaching was *Teaching School Subject Matter with Technology (TE 831)* with Erica Hamilton. Throughout this class, I discovered fun and exciting ways to teach in the ever-changing world of technology. This course taught me that the students I currently teach and will teach in the future are and will be "digital natives" and that I am a "digital immigrant." The main discovery I learned throughout this course was that it is not hard to integrate technology into the classroom. This is not to say that I have learned to depend on technology in my classroom, but rather that it can be helpful in some lesson plans. I also simply discovered different types of technology I never knew I could apply to my classroom; technology such as iMovie, Twitter, and Ted Talks.

Throughout this class, I began thinking about my "technology free" school and the reasons it is technology free. My current school is a private Christian school and one of the reasons we do not use technology is because of all of the scary things that are on the Internet. However, my school is also very avid about finding the redemptive details about everything. I have come to the conclusion that this class has shown the very redemptive and positive qualities that technology has to offer in an elementary school classroom. The theories (TPACK, SCOT and TIK) we talked about help support this redemptive thinking. I believe that if teachers include technology that connects and blends with their content and pedagogy, technology can be used effectively (TPACK). Also, to go along with this thought, it matters how teachers use technology and not that they are just use it for the sake of using technology (SCOT). All of the assignments, articles and discussions I interacted with and participated in have helped me develop deeper understanding for teaching with technology.

To be specific, I have learned that technology in the classroom is something that all educators need to embrace. Not just using or

teaching students how to use a certain type of technology, but how to appropriately use different types of technology for educational purposes. I have learned about all different types of technology and how fun and educational they can be. I really enjoyed learning how to make a vodcast and I also found exploring teaching blogs is really helpful.

As I continue as a classroom teacher, I will use the skills and knowledge I have gained throughout my Master's courses. I will also, as my goal essay stated, keep learning and striving to be a life long learner. I will "keep moving forward" toward the best ways of teaching.