

Creating My Own Path

Being the middle sister, I have always followed in my older sister's footsteps. She played volleyball, so I played volleyball. She did not like pickles, so I did not like pickles. Her favorite number was 24, so my favorite number was 24. I never doubted her decisions and I believed I was doing the right thing, if I was doing what my sister was doing. As we progressed through high school, she started to apply to college, her first pick being Michigan State University. She was very interested in the sciences and she knew she wanted to study medicine. I was one hundred percent sure I did not want to be a doctor, but what did I want to be? Thinking about my life experience thus far, I knew that I was happiest around children. Their positive energy is exactly what I wanted to be around, I wanted to be a teacher.

Like my older sister, I attended Michigan State University for undergrad but I started my own path and chose to study child development and elementary education. I thrived in my classes, I wanted to learn as much as I could in order to be the best teacher I could be. No wonder Michigan State University is nationally recognized for having one of the best education programs. Time flew by and soon after, I had my own preschool classroom in Chicago, IL. I loved every minute of teaching preschool. I really got into a routine and found my teaching rhythm, I stopped following my big sister and I created my own path.

After teaching for three years, I quickly realized I yearned for more. I needed more of a challenge, I wanted to push myself to learn as much as I can to be the best teacher I could be. I was ready to be a student again, so I decided to apply to the Michigan State's Master of Education Program (MAED).

Now as the MAED program is coming to a close, I think back on my classes and how my life is forever changed. All of the courses I have completed in this program are very important to me, but there are three courses that really stand out to me, Leadership and Organizational Development, Engaging Diverse Students and Families, and Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners. These classes have specifically formed me into a better listener, leader, educator, and person.

One of the ways that this Master's program has deeply changed me is my new found ability to reflect and grow as a leader. In EAD801, Leadership and Organizational Development, I studied many different leadership theories and throughout the process, I reflected on my own leadership. I studied leadership theories that I agree with and leadership theories that I believe would make for horrible leaders. After completing this course, I assessed myself as a leader daily to make sure that I am doing my best to align with the theories that I agree with. One of the theories that I really agree with is relational leadership. Relational leadership is the belief that all people should grow and develop as leaders, while working together towards a common vision. To make sure I align with relational leadership, I make sure that I create strong relationships between me and my students, I make sure that all voices are heard, and I treat all of my students like leaders. I also carry out this leadership theory when working with my coworkers and other staff. When working with my grade level team, we all treat each other like leaders to

work toward common goals. I will continue to reflect on my leadership style and make necessary changes to be the best leader I can be. In 2020, I have reflected on the leadership of other people in America. Whether it is the administration at my school or the president of the United States, one thing that I can truly say is what we need more than ever is good leadership. One way to become a better leader is reflecting on your own leadership style and adapting and changing to become a more suitable leader for all people. In my current life, I have strived to be a better leader by being a mentor teacher to two other preschool teachers. We meet weekly to discuss the positive things going on in our classrooms and the areas that need improvement. We brainstorm as a team to find solutions. To create relationships among the staff, I started a co-ed sports league. We would play indoor volleyball every Wednesday against other schools. Of course, this was before the COVID-19 pandemic but it was a great way to create strong relationships between the staff.

From being a teacher in Chicago Public Schools to now being a teacher in a Private Catholic School in Chicago, I can clearly see some of the major differences between the two. From the resources available to the curriculum, there are some major differences that are very apparent. After taking the course, EAD822 Engaging Diverse Students and Families, I am deeply changed as a teacher and strive to be a culturally responsive educator every single day. In this course, we worked in teams to find strategies to best engage diverse students and families and studied ways to achieve social justice and communicated this information through group Vlogs. One of the assignments was to self reflect and assess our own bias. To do this, you can take bias assessments to thoroughly reflect on specific bias that educators may have. This assessment helped me find specific things that I could improve in to grow towards being a culturally responsive educator. These assessments are crucial for educators to help encourage reflection and change when needed. I have brought these assessments to my current school and encourage the administration and my coworkers to use them as well. Besides reflecting on my own potential bias, during this course I learned about social injustices and institutional racism within school systems and the harmful effect on students. After taking the course TE 822 Issues of Culture in Classroom and Curriculum, my eyes are opened to many hidden inequalities and inequities in school systems. In this course, we researched different case studies and school/community-based experiences to explore injustices. I had the opportunity to interview other educators and write about how they are culturally inclusive and responsive. Two of the major challenges for students that these teachers pointed out are standardized testing and assessments. As educators, we need to be aware of the hidden inequalities and make necessary changes. At my current school, we started a social justice committee. We meet once a month to talk about what we can do at our school and within our community to be more culturally responsive. At our last meeting we discussed the books in our library and the curriculum we are using, and are working towards supplying our students with a multicultural education. It starts with a conversation and being more aware of social justice. Change starts with administration and educators, we all need to strive to be culturally responsive every day!

Throughout my life, I have always been very passionate about reading and writing. As a preschool teacher, my favorite part of every day is doing a read aloud with my class. The children are so engaged and they soak up each and every story. In the course TE 846

Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners, I gained a more thorough understanding of literacy development. Throughout this course, I had the opportunity to work one on one with a kindergarten student. I studied the best literacy practices and used various assessments that reflected on her current skills and found strategies, resources, and teaching practices to help her progress. This class demonstrated the importance of higher level thinking and challenging our students, in which I incorporate in my current classroom daily. This course also helped me effectively analyze student work and find resources to help students grow in literacy development. I feel confident with the resources and strategies I now have after taking this course. In my current classroom, I use many of the strategies that I learned in this course. I make sure I am using student interests and use many different assessments depending on the literacy learner I am working with. I also pick the themes that I am teaching based on what my students are interested in. This course demonstrated how important it is to take a closer look and learn about each student individually. Differentiation is crucial in the classroom, I strive to meet each student where they are and to provide them with appropriate material that will help them grow.

Now as this program comes to a close, I leave with a repertoire of strategies, resources, beliefs, philosophies, and skills. I feel confident and believe in myself as an educator and leader. I think back when I followed in my sister's footsteps, every decision I made was based on what my sister was doing. There were so many paths that I could have chosen, but I now know that I chose the path that was meant for me. I have been in a classroom since I was in preschool, whether I was a student or the educator and I would not have it any other way. I am on my way to be the best educator I can be! Through my master's program and experience with students, I am now a responsible leader, a responsive educator, and a more knowledgeable scholar. I am better able to support my students, families, coworkers, and community by being the best listener, learner, and leader I can be.