

## Looking Back: A Reflection on My Past Professional Goals

I was a passionate learner long before I was a teacher, so when I decided to return to school to pursue a master's degree, I was thrilled at the chance to once again step into the role of a student. The Master of Arts in Education (MAED) program at Michigan State University was the perfect fit. It allowed me to concentrate in literacy, an area that held both personal and professional appeal; the program and its institution had a reputation for excellence I was seeking; and the online format was ideal for my location in rural northern Michigan. When I applied to the program, my three primary goals were as follows:

1. To increase my knowledge and skills within my field
2. To improve my teaching practice to better meet the needs of all my students
3. To use my learning in pursuit of more leadership positions in my career

In my fourth year of full-time teaching, I felt like I had enough experience to be past the overwhelming newness of the first years teaching, but I could tell I still had so much to learn. I believed that the MAED program would be a great fit to help move me closer to the kind of educator I wanted to be.

Each course that I took helped me work toward achieving these goals. I have read a variety of informational articles, children's literature, young adult novels, and other texts to deepen my understanding of best practices for English language arts instructors. I have engaged in discussions with my professors and classmates from around the world on important topics and learned about new methods, texts, and technologies I have been able to put into practice to benefit my students. Although I still have far to go, I know that the MAED program at Michigan State has made me a better teacher.

When I think about my current goals in comparison to where I was three years ago, I do not think that much has changed since these are broad goals I will likely always be pursuing; I always want to be an educator actively seeking to improve my practice, and I know that my role as a learner does not end when I receive my diploma. However, once I am no longer enrolled in a specific program, I will have to seek out my own opportunities to increase my knowledge and skills. Keeping up on the latest research, engaging in professional development, and perhaps even taking more courses for the sake of learning are ways I may do this. Professional leadership is still an area I want to work toward, although I have found ways since beginning this program to step up in my school. I have taken on a mentoring a new teacher in our department and taken charge of school initiatives such as SAT preparation and collecting and organizing data on positive contacts between teachers and parents. Above all else, I have grown in confidence as I step into these leadership roles, and I know this confidence will carry me to new heights in the years to come.