

In the race of life are you the tortoise or are you the hare?

Three years ago I was working with urban youth in Metro Detroit for Michigan State University. At that time, I was content in my position, but I wanted to make a larger impact on the youth I served. I had pondered going back to school throughout the seven years since I had left the State University of Buffalo with my bachelor's degree, but it never seemed a realistic goal. Enter my Michigan State position; working at MSU offered me the opportunity to go back to school with only half of the debt so I decided to apply for grad school. I know what you are thinking, I received my acceptance letter from Michigan State University and the rest is history. The real story is that I applied to go back to school at my Alma mater and finish my MSW (Master of Social Work). I was declined. The reason this piece is so key to my current situation is because I didn't give up. I researched other programs and I spoke to many campuses about alternative majors that were not social work, but that would benefit me in my current career and where I saw myself heading. Throughout the entirety of the MAED (Master of Art in Education) program I would struggle and question if I had made a wise choice switching majors in graduate school. I would also have a hard time relating to others situations because of my outside perspective. But through all of that, I would also become a better leader and a more educated professional. In the beginning I might have not been able to see the light at the end of the tunnel, but today I have faith that the path that was laid ahead of me is the right path for me.

"Those that fail to learn from history, are doomed to repeat it." -Winston Churchill

It's always hard for me to describe in words the way something has affected me. As I think back at all of the information I have been given throughout the last year it is amazing to see how far I have grown. One of the items that I feel has impacted me the most is that throughout this process I have gained a solid baseline knowledge of the foundations and historical content of the educational system. Prior to entering this program, I had no idea the vastness of what education had looked like in different regions of not only the United states, but the world. It's funny to me how we spend a large majority of our lives in a system that we know nothing about. Since the education system's background is so vast, it had me looking forward to studying and researching past activists from around the world. It also had me really getting to the bottom of the values of education currently and in the past. One class that allowed me the opportunity to take part in deepening my research was ED 800 Concepts of Educational Inquiry with Dr. Weiland. His class provided many opportunities to inquire about education and learn more about the pillars of the system. The class was also not just one note. He provided numerous hyperlinks to websites, journals, pictures and stories. The media addition to the class provided students with the opportunity to learn more in any area they chose. This meant that I was able to read an array of articles and journals that would aid me in the art of inquiry. So not only was I able to gain appreciation for the history of the educational system, but I was also able to refine my passion for research.

"Self-education is, I firmly believe, the only kind of education there is." - Isaac Asimov

ED 800 would not be the only course in the program that changed me throughout the past two years of graduate school. I would also have my eyes opened by Dr. Heilman in TE 822 Issues of culture in the classroom and curriculum. The content of the class truly inspired me to work harder to provide a more holistic curriculum for my students which included pulling from a more diverse multicultural curriculum. I think I have often believed that I have to play to the students in the classroom meaning that they will only grow from learning about their own culture and heritage. While their heritage should be displayed they should also have a structured curriculum that exposes them to an array of different cultures. They won't just be learning about their history, but the histories of anyone they may come in contact with throughout their lives. While the content of the class made me restructure my own curriculum that wasn't the only thing I got out of the class. Dr. Heilman pushed me to learn more about myself as an educator. For our final project she inspired me to learn more about how I get burned out so fast in careers and how I never stop working even on weekends and evenings. The project allowed me to tie my personality of an empath back to my own working styles and configure a plan of how to grow in my career knowing that information. I did not just grow professionally in her class I grew as a person. Dr. Heilman is a part of my life now and she will continue to be in the future of my career. She wanted the best for me throughout my growth and for her that did not stop once the class stopped. Who wouldn't want a mentor in their professional journey? Especially one that has been through some of the exact same things.

"The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things." - Ronald Reagan

My self-education allowed me to understand a new part of myself that would also help me grow as a leader. I would like to believe I had a lot of leadership traits to begin with, but truly understanding oneself, including weaknesses, helps diagnose the skills of leadership that you may also need to work on. Not only has self-reflection been key in my leadership journey, practice has also been important. EAD 867 Case Studies in Educational Leadership with Dr. Clason challenged me to build on my already available (or not so available) leadership traits. I believe the challenge for me was having to work in what would be a real life situation, groups. The first part of the case study would involve individual discussion on the items you believe needed growth or development. Your group mates would then give their comments and offer additional suggestions. As an introvert and an individual leader I never truly took to the idea of group leadership. The problem is in any setting, whether it be educational or the business world, there are always suggestions from others on how to solve problems in the workplace. As a leader you can choose to listen to those suggestions or continue to work as an individual. Through this class I learned the importance of hearing out people's ideas and also asking questions for clarification. While the case scenarios and discussions helped me grow into a stronger leader Dr. Clason himself really challenged me to grow in my writing abilities. At first I was frustrated not getting positive feedback in my writing because so often during this program I was showered with praise specifically on my essays. Dr. Clason helped me hone in on the weaknesses of my APA formatting and challenged me to try harder to incorporate paraphrased quotes. The shock of not being perfect in my writing was short lived and I believe without that

feedback I would never have gotten better in that specific area. Dr. Clason and this graduate program showed me the importance of continuing to grow as an educator. The program also showed me the importance of taking in feedback and instead of being upset, using the information to make yourself a more effective professional in your field.

“Life is a curriculum unique to every student.” - Joyce Rachelle

Leadership, throughout my educational journey, was an important trait for me to continue to build up. A trait that I did not originally believe was something I needed came out of Dr. Sandro Barro's class TE 818 Curriculum in its' social context. Through this class I was introduced to the development of my own personal curriculum. Let me preface this in saying I don't normally have to develop my own curriculum from scratch. I am lucky enough to buy into research based programming that offers me word by word instruction that I can use in all different types of contexts. When Dr. Barros assigned us the project of developing a flipped classroom I could feel my stomach hit the floor. This would be a turning point in my journey through the graduate program. I needed to have this opportunity to feel uncomfortable because in life I would not always be an expert on everything. What got me through the process was Dr. Barros. He did not allow me to just give up because I didn't know how to write or develop curriculum. He gave me resources, he sent numerous emails following up on my progress and he didn't give up on me. This class and the program changed me because they didn't allow me to just coast along feeling confident in every course. The program challenged me to try new things. I will admit it helped to have support in the program, but in real life settings support is almost always available it just may be a matter of looking a bit harder to find it. As a final note, my flipped classroom went extremely well. In fact, I liked it so much I went ahead and showcased it as a part of my final portfolio.

"Before you are a leader, success is all about growing yourself. When you become a leader, success is all about growing others." - Jack Welch

As the program closes and I head back into the real world, I cannot help but look back and see the progress of my career and the growth of my education. I like to think in metaphors and I think for me I would like to think I started this program off as the hare from the old parable tortoise and the hare. I was confident in my abilities as an educator, sure I was new to the major, but they must have saw something in me to accept me into the program. I was determined to make my way through the program fast just like the hare and I was confident I would come out on top. Fast forward to today being just weeks away from finishing my degree. Today, I would categorize myself as more of a tortoise. I didn't come out on top every class and that was okay. I could not be perfect at everything and that proved to be a learning opportunity for me. I also took my time to get to where I am today. I didn't take any shortcuts and I had many sleepless nights thinking about how I could possibly work full time and get all of my school work done. The end result for me isn't how I got here today, but what I learned in this process. I came out as the winner of the race since I grew as a leader in both my current work and as a leader in wherever my future takes me.