GOAL REFLECTION ESSAY

My original goals when entering the Master of Arts in Education (MAED) at Michigan State University were to:

GOAL 1: Differentiate instruction for all students.

GOAL 2: Teach mathematics in a way that is engaging and relevant for students of diverse backgrounds.

GOAL 3: Develop students who are problem-solvers and questioners.

At the time of beginning my MAED program, I had taught credit recovery in the Detroit neighborhood referred to as "Mexicantown", worked with refugee students in Lansing, and student-taught in rural Owosso, Michigan. Despite the diversity of my students at the time of writing these goals, I had a naive understanding of differentiation; each individual population of students was relatively homogenous, in both culture and mathematical knowledge. Since beginning my master's degree, I have taught two years of 7th and 8th grade math in Washington, DC. In my classroom, I have had students who came to me anywhere between a 2nd and an 8th grade level of mathematical knowledge; students who have never wanted for anything in their lives and students who were homeless; students who read on a college level and students who speak no English at all.

Given the diversity of my students, culturally relevant mathematics both was and remains one of my primary objectives when developing lessons. Mathematics has too long been the subject of "Why are we learning this? When will I use this in the real world?" Traditional textbooks often put the cart before the horse, creating inauthentic contexts to match the mathematics in that chapter. In these problems, students know exactly what strategies to use, because the rest of the page is rote procedural practice. This results in students learning to view mathematics as similarly inauthentic and as an obstacle in their path, rather than as a tool to understand the world around them and overcome the true obstacles they face.

Instead of fitting the context to the mathematics, I believe in teaching my students to identify and shape the mathematics to understand questions that matter to them. Students are natural-born skeptics and questioners, and the modern cultural and political environment uniquely place them as believers in social justice. We should use mathematics to understand and propose solutions for the questions and problems that are meaningful to them, using the standards and required content to support us in this mission.

I do not believe that I have yet mastered these goals, but I have progressed significantly toward them and have refined my understanding of each. As I come to the close of my MAED program, I will continue to devote myself toward each of these missions, but I would also redefine my primary aim as a singular goal: for my students to leave my classroom seeing themselves as capable and belonging in mathematics. My original goals are necessary components of this refined aspiration, but it is also more than the sum of the three. For a student to see herself as

belonging in mathematics, she needs to also feel welcomed into my classroom, valued by her peers, and necessary to the construction of ideas, theories, and knowledge. My mission is supported by differentiation, cultural relevance, and authentic problem-solving, but also by the evolution of growth mindsets, co-creation of classroom norms, and development of a community.

PROFESSIONAL GOALS STATEMENT

My interest in education dates back to high school, where I excelled in math and physics. While being pushed to pursue engineering, I felt a disconnect between myself and this path. A deeper love of mathematics was born from my view of the subject as a language and a medium with which to study, understand, and communicate with the world. The language of mathematics provides us with the tools to analyze our environment and to better ourselves and our world. The ability to speak and understand the language of mathematics is an instrument in breaking down barriers and participating in the modern global society. As a senior, I was given the opportunity to student-teach a freshman class, and came to discover my passion for teaching.

Since then, I have developed a love for teaching and an innate desire to hone my own skills as an educator. I aspire to not only better prepare my students for the challenges that they will face in their lives, but also to imbue in them this sense of mathematics as a creative language. I have been very interested in developing and enacting pedagogical practices which prepare my students to reason both abstractly and quantitatively and to be persistent in the face of challenges. I have found that many students, of all skill levels, often lack the ability to explain why their mathematics works, which has pushed me to pursue a better means of constructing a strong conceptual understanding of mathematics with my students.

To achieve this goal, I hope to enter the Science and Mathematics Education concentration of Michigan State's online Master of Arts in Education degree. Throughout my coursework as an undergraduate and student teaching intern at Michigan State, I have been very impressed with the teaching methods and wide range of knowledge of my Secondary Mathematics Education instructors. I have found that the senior and internship-year courses in Secondary Mathematics Education have been especially significant in shaping my perspectives and attitudes as a young educator, and as a participant in this program I have observed noticeable growth in my skills as an educator. From these experiences, I believe that the concentration in Science and Mathematics Education is particularly suited to continue my professional growth and to further prepare me for the diversity and challenges I will encounter as a young educator. In this program, I hope to improve my ability to differentiate instruction for all students, to teach mathematics in a way that is engaging and relevant for students of diverse backgrounds, and to develop students who are problem-solvers and questioners.

During my student-teaching internship year with Michigan State, I have been working to balance the demands of my coursework and my classroom. I have found that my disposition and focus prepared me well for these demands and the work required to be simultaneously successful in both fields. With this experience, I believe that the online Master of Arts in

Education degree is well-suited to my goals, as I have developed the ability to balance being in the classroom as a new teacher and devoting energy to improving my skills through my coursework. In the coming year, I plan to return to the Washington, DC region to begin my career as an educator, but I wish to continue learning and growing within the Michigan State College of Education.