Rookie Teacher, Veteran Leader

MATC Synthesis Paper

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“Do not confine your children to your own learning, for they were born in another time.”

(Chinese Proverb)

Introduction

My understanding of the teaching career has changed drastically throughout my experience as a teacher in the field and the MATC program. Before my career, I thought that, although it may be challenging at times, teaching would be simple and repetitive once you have begun. I saw the classroom as a place where teachers teach and students listen and mimic procedures and knowledge taught. The rookie teacher in me did not fully understand how ever-evolving the world of education truly is. It was not until I was fully immersed in teaching my own class while taking courses towards completion of my Masters of Arts in Teaching and Curriculum through Michigan State University. As educators, it is our job to prepare our students the best we can for their future, not what we once thought was ours. The world is rapidly changing around us and it is imperative that the education of our students does the same.

In addition to the ever changing curriculum, an educator must possess numerous qualities in order to be effective both inside and outside the classroom. One of these qualities is the ability to be a leader. Throughout my life, I have had many experiences in a leadership role. However, teaching has shown me various new ways to lead. As I continue to grow professionally, I am finding new ways to share my leadership skills. The classes I have taken, as well as the experiences I have had, continuously show me
how I can be a teacher leader within my own district as well as throughout my professional learning network.

As I continue my professional career of teaching, I intend to take the knowledge I have learned over the past year and continue to enhance the learning of my students. As I continue to learn and use effective teaching strategies, I intend to share them with others. By doing this, we all, as educators, can ensure that our 21st century learners are receiving the best education for their futures.

**Discovering My Inner Teacher**

The rookie teacher in me never saw an inquiry side to teaching. I simply thought that I would learn how to teach and that is simply how it would be. I thought inquiry was only for a STEM driven profession. Little did I realize the need to inquire and question constantly regarding my practices and norms that occur in my classroom daily. TE 808: Inquiry into Teaching Curriculum and Learning introduced me to a new way of thinking that has positively impacted my teaching career. I now see the need to question daily practices in my classroom and the great impact they can have. TE 808 also taught me the need to include my students in their own learning. I am there to help them and their input is greatly needed. I first saw this through a task, see **Artifact 1: Mini Project Analysis**, which has changed my interactions and relationships with students. There are deep connections needed in order for students to learn in a classroom. In addition, I now find myself analyzing and adjusting practices often. I enjoy the idea of teachers being able to run mini “experiments” in their classroom in order to effectively teach my
students. Since each group of students is different, it is important to continue inquiring. I often do this through my own research of literature, see Artifact 2: Literature Review, as I strive to implement best practices. While demands of teaching can seem overwhelming, and I may not be able to formally set-up projects each time, I still strive to do my best to analyze my teaching in order to best improve my practices and interactions. While TE 808 began my sense of curiosity and need to question, TE 857: Rethinking and Changing Mathematics, has driven this process further. I now find myself questioning my math practices daily. Am I teaching my students the best way that I can? Am I pushing them to become real-life problem solvers? Are we maximizing our limited learning time? These are questions I ask myself often as I think back and work to better my classroom. I started off my educational profession imagining a career that may possibly become redundant. However, I now seek out challenges and view the education field as an ever changing science. There is no right way to teach, rather different strategies and practices that work best for each group of students. The more I can question, collect data, and analyze, the more I am able to learn and improve on my teaching skills.

**Embracing Failure as Progress**

One aspect of teaching that I have picked up on as a rookie teacher is that I am going to fail. This has been difficult as I am very much a perfectionist at times. While I may fail with a lesson or meeting a student’s needs, it does not mean that my learning is over. Rather, it shows that I have recognized the failure, analyzed what has gone
wrong, and am able to progress forward to improve as an educator. The course, TE 846: Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners, launched this realization for me. Literacy has never been my strength and it is an area I struggle with daily. I am constantly looking at resources and my professional learning network to improve. While I may fail at times, there is always a lesson or positive that results. With TE 846, I feel that I have been able to focus deeply on literacy and the best ways to differentiate for my diverse learners, see Artifact 3: Literacy Learner Analysis.

To add to the progress I have made in effectively teaching literacy, I have also begun to change my mindset with teaching. The technology related courses CEP 810, CEP 811, and CEP 812, have changed my view on my role in the classroom. This year, I have begun to implement a more student-centered environment. Furthermore, I am analyzing ways to improve my curriculum in order to maintain this type of environment in my classroom. Our 21st century learners are growing up much differently than ever before. Their own learning must reflect this, see Artifact 4: Digital Division, as they are no longer sponges that absorb our words, but rather makers and creators. Their future jobs have not been created and it is imperative that I provide an education for them that allows them to problem-solve and have the life skills needed for this century.

Technology is a very hard tool to use. It is important to look at technology as an added resource for teaching, not a replacement of paper and pencil. There have been days when technology has failed me and I was not able to use a presentation. There have been days when the internet is down. There have even been times when I thought I had a great 21st century lesson for my students that did not go as intended. While these
failures have happened, and no doubt will continue to happen, I have learned a great deal. I am able to model flexibility and problem-solving for my students while I also step back and determine how to improve. The failures I continue to face as a rookie teacher continue to develop and improve my future veteran self.

**Educating Current and Future Leaders**

If someone were to ask me whether I viewed myself as a rookie or veteran teacher a year ago, I would have quickly responded with rookie. How can I, with only a year or two of experience, be considered a veteran? Yet, with the guidance of my graduate level courses during Fall 2016 and Spring 2017, I have rapidly realized that I can be in fact a veteran teacher as I am a veteran leader. There is no number of years written that states one has reached a veteran level. Instead, it is the approach and tasks we take on throughout the classroom that lead us to this title. While I am in no way a perfect teacher, and there are still many areas in which I plan to improve, I can see ways in which I can be a leader for others. The numerous activities I have participated in have helped guide me to become a veteran teacher, and my classes have helped to solidify this. One way I realized this was through CEP 812 as we were asked to connect with teachers outside of our district and comfort zone. While I am able to learn a great deal from other teachers, and often try to implement ideas they have, I also realized the impact I could make on others by sharing my ideas, see **Artifact 5: Expanding My Network**. With the age of social media, we are instantaneously connected. This allows
for teachers, who may have previously seen themselves as rookies, to realize that they are able to share influential ideas with others across the country and world.

My classes have also taught me to follow research based practices that are current, not just something that has been repeated for years and not changed. This can be seen through class CEP 812, see Artifact 6: Wicked Website, where we had to research and implement best practices as we worked as a group to determine the best way for our 21st century students to learn. It was an intriguing experience that pushed thinking as I was able to collaborate with peers in my class who worked in a variety of workplaces as we strived to determine how to transform our teaching best. While we determined a possible solution for this wicked problem, it is an area that will continue to perplex and cause great inquiry among educators. Although I am unsure I will ever perfect myself as a teacher or feel like a veteran in the teaching profession, I will be challenged constantly and continuously strive to improve myself as best I can.

Outside of using techniques in the classroom, I have learned and continue to seek ways to become more involved in my career field. TE 872 has opened my eyes to the variety of environments teachers must look at and involve themselves in. While we often look to be leaders inside our schools, we must also remember to lead outside of the school in both our community and government. We must stand up for our students and protect them daily. I have also found that while feeling like a rookie teacher, I can be a leader as I model building relationships with students. I deeply believe in building that foundation and strive to build that foundation with each student. While it is hard with
some, I truly want to establish a connection with each student that will help him or her to grow as a learner.

As I work to help be a leader with other current teachers, I am also eager to help the future rookie teachers as they navigate through their first years. Teaching can be so rewarding but it also has some rough days. While I still have a lot to learn, I hope to mentor rookie teachers and help them adapt to the field. While it is every changing, I know I will need to keep up. Just as our world changes quickly, so do best practices as new research is published. I am hopeful and accepting of this challenge. While I do feel more confidence in my teaching today than a year ago, as I am able to apply my new knowledge directly into my classroom, I know there is still a lot of work to be done. Teaching will not become a career of redundancy and we must make it known it is time to change our mindset. With the help of CEP 811, Adapting Innovative Technologies for Education, I have quickly seen the importance of changing the traditional classroom and the need to rethink our methods as new technology becomes available, see Artifact 7: Making Sound. It is not enough to simply substitute a pencil and paper approach with technology, rather we as educators must integrate technology that is meaningful and transforms the way that our students learn. Through continue professional development both within and outside my district, I am able to critique and enhance my teaching practices that will best help students. This is a challenge that will take much time as there will be many different opinions on the best way this should be done. However, I feel that as a quiet leader in my building I will be able to do this as I try out new ways and work to adapt them as needed. Once I have strategies and implementations that
work, I can share them with my peers both in my district and across the country as we are connected within social media.

**Conclusion**

As I look back on the past year, I see myself as a rookie teacher who has embraced the constant change of the teaching field. While at one point I had the notion that I would perfect my daily practices, which quite possibly stems from the need to excel at most things I try out, I have come to realize that this is not, nor should it ever be, the case as an effective educator. Teaching requires a constant sense of inquiry and development. As our world around us changes, so must we. Our future children will be living in a different world that requires a different knowledge and skill set than what was needed when we were students. It is imperative to remember this as I navigate my way throughout the next few years. Although my courses will soon end, I still plan and look forward to learning new ideas and strategies through the resources I have gained. As I find ones that work well for me, I hope to share them with other teachers who may be looking for ideas and strategies for their own classroom. While each individual teacher has their own teaching style and student needs, I can still help lead others to valuable practices that may work for them. In addition, I have also learned to embrace the leader qualities I do possess and have realized there are still many ways that I can lead although I am just beginning my teaching career. Leaders come in many forms at various levels, and all have valuable ideas to share. While I still see myself as a rookie teacher often, I feel that I continue to gain new knowledge that helps me to improve my practice and lead others to improve as well.