

January 31, 2018

Oh, How Far I've Come

From the time I graduated from Northern Michigan University and began teaching, I knew that I would one day pursue a master's degree. I am currently in my fifth year of teaching, and the time for that endeavor felt right. Pursuing this degree has been an incredibly challenging experience; setting goals for this program has helped to keep me going when things get tough, and to remind myself why I am going to grad school in the first place.

When I applied to Michigan State University, the primary goal of getting my master's degree is that I found myself in a strange place among my colleagues in the English department, all of whom have higher degrees and present themselves as very educated individuals. As one of the youngest teachers in the school, I often felt as though I was not at the same level as my colleagues; that developed into a goal of getting a master's degree to feel "on par" with the people I work with.

Another important goal has been to take things I am learning from my classes directly into my classroom to enrich my teaching. I was serious about this goal to the extent that I included this in my evaluative goals for the 2016-2017 school year - implement research based activities and assignments in the classroom (instead of saying, "take what I learn from grad school and use it"). Setting this goal personally and as a measure of my state evaluations really made me think about what I was learning as I worked with material to adapt to an array of classes and student needs. I remember feeling excited as I learned because I knew I would be taking material directly to my students. For example, I took material that I learned in TE 848 (Writing Instruction and Assessment) and developed a research project as a summative assessment for my Composition class; it may not seem like much, but it felt great to be actively implementing what I was learning. Additionally, it felt good to be implementing new lessons and shaking up what I do in my classroom.

I can't say that my goals have changed a lot; all of my original motivations remained consistent. However, I have certainly adjusted my mindset regarding why I am pursuing this degree. I have recognized that I don't need a master's degree to feel "on par" with my colleagues; I don't need to compare myself to others to be confident about my abilities. Instead, I know that it is my teaching and my connection with my students that sets me apart from the rest of the people I work with. I need to remind myself that my primary goal of getting this degree is for me, and my future. In that goal, I will remain steadfast. Additionally, I know that I will accomplish the goal of finishing this degree with pride, and the satisfaction of knowing that all of the hard work and effort along the way was worth it in the end.