

Goals provide insight on the future. Without goals in life, you have nothing to work towards. My career goal is simply to grow and expand my knowledge to better the education that my students receive. More specifically, my two main goals are to be open and experimental when teaching mathematics and incorporate up-to-date technology in the classroom. Through constant research, application and reflection, I try to find ways to improve how I teach and whether or not the changes I made were effective.

The graduate program at Michigan State University allows teachers to come together to discuss strategies, try new methods and even conduct research on how students learn. Now that I have completed my first year of teaching, I realize how prepared that MSU has made me. But in the chaos of a teacher's everyday "normal" life, I have found myself falling into a rhythm of teaching without thinking about new methods of teaching. It is too easy to stay inside my comfort zone of teaching, which only hinders the education of the students that need stimulation. The Mathematics Education Concentration will help me accomplish my goal of becoming more open in order to step outside the cookie cutter idea of what a classroom should be, get my hands dirty and experiment with education. This graduate program will force me to change my way of teaching, constantly think about new research and even conduct my own research.

Falling into a rhythm of teaching can be detrimental for some students, however not introducing the students to up-to-date technology could be detrimental to all students. Technology changes everyday, so it is mandatory that I know about the latest resources to ensure my students have exposure to new advancements. In an age of "MySpace," "YouTube," text messaging and on-line chat rooms, students need to be comfortable with alternate ways of communication. Telephone conferencing in the workplace is a thing of the past and video conferencing has taken its place. Students need to be confident with the technology that is easily accessible. By selecting the on-line program, I will gain confidence in communicating over hundreds of miles with merely a click. When students learn about and feel comfortable with the technology around them, it opens up a world of opportunities for them. This program is an excellent example, since my career gave me the opportunity to move to North Carolina. A mere ten to fifteen years ago, that move would have closed the door to Michigan State's graduate program. With the internet available 24/7, distance is no longer a limitation, but an opportunity to expand your options to create a more flexible world. By completing the on-line program, I will become an advocate for long-distance learning in order to prove to students how convenient the internet is.

Communication is not the only purpose of technology. Technology allows students to visualize what they are learning. Tools are not made to draw attention to themselves, but give the illusion of simplicity. For example, in geometry, net shapes are an area of difficulty to students. Students who do not have strong artistic ability struggle in seeing how three-dimensional shapes are constructed. With the help of simple applet programs, students can watch several shapes fold and unfold themselves to form the net shapes. The purpose of the applet program was to create the illusion of the shape actually unfolding itself. A task that seemed daunting at first became simple when technology was added. The Technology and Learning Concentration will show me many more ways to incorporate technology in the classroom in order to help students visualize the world of mathematics.

In closing, Michigan State University will provide me an excellent opportunity to expand my knowledge in how students learn mathematics and what tools can assist in the process. In a world that is constantly changing, one has to make a choice, grow with the change or be left behind. I am dedicated to staying one step ahead and a graduate degree is only the first step. Once this career goal is accomplished I plan to move towards my second goal, which is earning a National Board Certification. I will not stop learning and expanding in my career. Thank you, Michigan State University and all of its Teacher Education Staff members for providing me with every opportunity to grow.