

Big Impacts Don't Need a Big Stage

Reflecting on My Professional Goals

After watching “Legally Blonde” for the first time in middle school, I was in awe of the way Elle Woods worked hard to achieve something no one thought she could and how she fought for justice in and out of the courtroom. I, too, wanted to fight for justice. I thought law was for me. But, instead, I became a high school English teacher. After finishing my undergraduate degree at Michigan State University and my student teaching year at a struggling urban school, I accepted a job at an affluent private school. Moving so quickly from one extreme to another illuminated to me the issues with educational opportunity in the US, and I felt invigorated to make a change.

Law was on my mind again—specifically, educational policy. I came upon the MAED program at MSU and felt that it offered me a variety of courses that would help me achieve the goals I had developed in the past four years I spent in the classroom: to fight for equitable education for all students, to become an advocate for educators and to foster and maintain continual growth as an educator.

Looking back on my time spent in this program, I believe that my goals are still similar, but have morphed a bit. At first, my vision was lofty; I couldn't shake the image of how powerful it would be to work in the department of education, making big sweeping changes on a big level. However, the MAED program provided me with opportunities to explore making important changes in a different way. Taking certain courses—such as Multicultural Education, Adult Career Development, and Education Finance & Policy—showed me other paths that will still allow me to work towards equitable and supportive environments for students and teachers. These courses even pushed me to take on leadership roles and join committees with improvement initiatives, showing me that small steps too can have enduring effects.

Now, my goals have shifted slightly: I have thought about working as an instructional coach or in curriculum development. I also strive to continually reflect on and adjust curriculum to better address diversity and inclusion and to work towards helping all students believe they can love reading and learning, no matter where they're from. I even understand now that I can create a change simply by attending a school-board meeting and voicing my beliefs. No longer do I have to wait for the “big stage” to achieve lasting change.

Of course, I will never lose sight of my goal for life-long learning. My experiences in the MAED program have taught me how to be continually critical of what I do in the classroom. Each year, the students change. I change. Our world changes. To teach each student how they deserve to be taught, I must commit to my continual education. Will I always be in the classroom? I am not 100% sure. But I do know that whether the scope of my work in education is large or small, I do possess the ability to affect the positive change I've always sought.

(514 words)