

Stepping Out of the Arena The Evolution of My Goals

Growing up around horses, there was a word for young horses in training who knew what to do in the riding arena and were gaining confidence in themselves under saddle. However, outside of the arena, they did not yet have enough grounding in their training to make the best decisions to handle unexpected occurrences, nor were they consistent in their habits. We called these novice [horses 'green.'](#) And this is how I would characterize myself at the outset of my journey at [Michigan State University](#) (MSU) in the [Master of Arts in Education Degree \(MAED\) program](#).

My decision to pursue this degree was both personal and pragmatic. It was time for course work to maintain my teaching credentials and, with a toddler and a life immersed at a boarding school in northern Michigan, I needed to have access to a program online. I found the MAED program during my first year in the classroom. I had spent four years as the school's disciplinarian and found myself longing to use my undergraduate training more formally. Under the guidance of a wonderful Head of School, I was encouraged to pursue my compulsion. However, the position I was offered was a little more than I expected. I was asked to be a learning specialist and to accept the department's chair in a learning skills program that needed to be designed and restructured. If I am being honest, I was underconfident, overwhelmed, and unclear about my vision.

As I began the MAED program at the end of my first year of teaching, my goals were driven by this lack of confidence. I hoped to validate the confidence the administrators had placed in my abilities. More earnestly, though, I wanted to build my skills to be the teacher I felt my students deserved. The best way to do this, I decided, was to concentrate my degree in Technology and Learning. Through this program and with this concentration, I wanted to develop my skills as a department chair by better understanding best practice in the theory of learning and I wanted to develop my ability as a technology leader among my colleagues. Green and novice? Yes. Idealistic? Absolutely!

As my learning at MSU culminates, I recognize that while my idealism has not changed much, I no longer feel overwhelmed or underconfident, and my vision is no longer opaque. I found that my goal of being a technology leader was not the essence of my calling. Rather than expertise in technology tools, I decided to develop my skills to teach and connect with my students and colleagues through creative design in teaching and assessment while integrating the affordances of educational technology. Instead of

striving to develop the learning skills program myself, I wanted to learn how to better include the collective expertise of my team. I started out to have better practice, but found myself compelled to participate in the global dialogue about best practice in education.

No longer green, I have such gratitude for the opportunity to spend this time immersed in new knowledge among talented colleagues in the MAED program through MSU. I feel ready to take my next step, grounded as a teacher and reconnected as a learner, and ready to be immersed in the educational leadership of my School.