

## The Power of Education

By Andrea Hunt

Two years ago, I was finishing up my first year as a second grade teacher. I was also applying for the master's program at Michigan State University. Being aware of the positive impact my MSU undergraduate degree made in my first year of teaching, I was able to decisively choose MSU for my master's degree. At the time, my school had little technology and lacked support for special education. Both of these elements were large changes from the MSU experiences to which I was accustomed. At MSU I worked at the Education Technology Department and my student teaching experience was in a district with tremendous special education support. With these two ideas in mind, I applied for the Master's of Arts in Education program with a focus on becoming a better technology integrator and special education supporter within my own general education classroom.

My first concentration and goal were centered on special education. My goal was to continue my knowledge of teaching children with special needs within the general education setting. Graduating with an undergrad degree in Special Education Learning Disabilities greatly impacted my teaching philosophy, style and classroom management. I hoped that continuing down the special education road would lead me to become an even stronger teacher in these areas.

When I reflect on the course work I completed while in the program, I can confidently say my teaching philosophy, style and classroom management skills have all deepened and developed because of the course work I have done. The greatest influence has been within my classroom management skills and techniques. This past semester I completed a course on students with challenging behaviors. This class opened my eyes to new ideas and viewpoints that had not occurred to me prior to the course. With the skills from the class I was able to help a student within my own second grade classroom to better him and his needs while at school and home. We created a positive behavior plan and worked closely with his mother to create a positive learning environment. This goal, along with the many others, has strengthened my teaching. My goal to become a stronger supporter of special education in my classroom has been reached, however, next year brings on a new set of children, which will bring in new learning and challenges for me.

My second concentration of my master's degree was education technology. My passion for technology led me to my college job as a technology intern, which continued into my master's

degree. My classroom at the time had a large and very outdated television and an overhead projector. My own grade school classes had more technology in them when I was in grade school. Without tools and support I was still determined to find ways to integrate technology into my classroom and expose my students to a variety of technology based skills.

When I reflect on the course work I have done for this I realize how little I actually knew going into to my first year of teaching. Although I was confident with what I knew, I later realized that without the same tools those skills became very hard show. I had to be creative. Talking with other students in my MSU classes and discussing ways they integrated technology was very helpful when starting off on this quest. Through coursework I developed and explored various websites and web designs, which I then incorporated into my classroom. My goal to integrate technology into my classroom continues. I have introduced a little at a time, but I know I am far from done!

Overall, I feel I have made great progress towards my goals. My colleagues, along with myself, consider me to be a technology leader for the school. My principle has recognized my work with students with special needs, which has led to her purposely-placing students in my classroom. The biggest surprise to me is the impact my master's education has had on others. As I began my new adventure I started sharing my new knowledge with coworkers and colleagues. I began to see what a difference I could make within my grade-level team and school, not just my own classroom. I have learned the true power of education.