

MATC Synthesis Paper

Goldilocks Syndrome:  
How MATC Was "Just Right"

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
the Master of Arts Degree in Teaching and Curriculum  
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*Goldilocks and the Three Bears* is a timeless children's story about a young girl who finds her way into the home of three bears. As she rummages through their house, she comes upon various aspects of the bears' lives that she wishes to try out, including their food, their chairs, and their beds. As she tests each, she finds that some do not meet her criteria of perfection, and one manages to be "just right." When the bears return home and find that there has been an intruder, Goldilocks runs away to never return again.

Towards the end of my second year in the classroom, I felt like Goldilocks within the world of education. I was unsure about what was going to be the right fit for me for the future - Teacher? Administrator? Curriculum specialist? College/university professor? In order to hold a majority of these, more education is needed, so I looked to my alma mater, Michigan State University, to explore possible options of higher education.

I graduated from Michigan State University in 2014 with a Bachelor of Arts in English, a Bachelor of Arts in History Education, and a Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies: Social Science Education, along with a minor in music. MSU's teaching program is unique because after graduating teacher candidates complete their teaching internship (student teaching) for an entire school year and take graduate courses. These graduate courses can be applied to masters degree programs, which is why I wished to return to MSU to use these credits.

Regardless of my intended future, learning has always been in the forefront, especially when it concerns something I am passionate about. More higher education had the ability to help me realize what it was I was interested in as I struggled to find something that was "just right" for my future.

Since completing my teaching internship, there has been a lingering hunger for knowledge. I became a National Writing Project Teacher Consultant through the Red Cedar Writing Project Invitational Summer Institute and was continuing to network with like minded individuals who already had their masters degree. Working with these people in professional organizations, at youth programs, and for conference presentations showed me the access and potential careers that a masters degree could unlock. It was up to me to decide if it was going to be the right fit and if the hunger and thirst for knowledge quenched and fulfilled.

As it turns out, the Master in Arts in Teaching and Curriculum (MATC) ended up being "just right" and exactly what I needed in order to figure out what I wanted to do. It took a while to shake off the Goldilocks persona, but through it all, I was able to continue connect with like minded individuals, uncover what tools I already had in my toolbox for teaching and discover new ones, and enhance my understanding of teaching and curriculum and how both are necessary to be a teacher leader.

### **Continuing to Network within Education**

Networking is an important element for an educator to do. Being alone in the world of education can be debilitating because one feels like they are helpless and unable to find their way. Being a member of a professional learning community, like the Master of Arts in Teaching and Curriculum program, can assist one with connecting with other like minded educators. The first course that I enrolled in, TE 808: Inquiry into Classroom Teaching and Learning provided a sense of community for me, and allowed me to connect with a professor, Joanne Marciano, that cared about her students' interests and well being.

The idea of a teacher being a researcher was at the forefront of this course. The reading material, assignments, and action research project motivated course members to truly understand how and why action research is a staple in a successful classroom. The framework valued literature reviews, personal reflections, and the collection of quantitative and qualitative to fuel the search into the best practice to instruct the students we were hired to teach and be a part of discussions happening in academia that I thought were reserved for doctoral students.

The final project in TE 808 was a cumulative action research project that was focused on an element of our teaching. I decided to focus on vocabulary instruction and assessment with a paper titled [Action Research Project – Exploring Best Practices of Vocabulary Instruction](#) (Artifact 1). The project was meaningful because it directly impacted my practice and my students, especially as I was destined to have the same students year after year in the small, rural school I was teaching in at the time. In addition to the action research focused course, educational technology was also on my mind as a potential concentration, but I was skeptical and unsure if it was going to be "just right" for me as a learner.

The Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) program is a direct competitor to the MATC program within the College of Education at Michigan State. The MAET program had been more visible on social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter as colleagues were passionate about their program and were frequently posting about it. This publicity, whether intentional or not, was intriguing, but only highlighted, in my opinion, the flashy aspects of the program, like creating a circuit to make a light illuminate through a banana. A career in educational technology was not in the list of potential careers I was stuck between, but I enrolled

in the educational technology concentration due to the high demand and understanding of 21st century skills in education.

The first course of this concentration was CEP 810: Teaching for Understanding with Computers. This course was introductory in nature for students to create a Twitter account and blog and then utilize these mediums to share and learn from each other and the greater communities that are involved. If one was already well versed in the technologies and implications that it went over, students could reflect on their current use of them, which is what I did. I embraced the material and tried to find nuances of the material within my practice as an educator, while improving the way I blogged about education.

Joining the professional communities of both the MAET and MATC was beneficial to my Professional Learning Network (PLN). I was able to map out my connections using Popplet on a blog post for CEP 810 titled [My Professional Learning Network \(PLN\)](#) (Artifact 2). This post was an overview PLN's and Popplet, two tools in my toolbox that I was able to learn more about.

### **Concentrating on My Toolbox**

Hip hop education was a framework and tool that I thought was in my toolbox, but I was quick to learn that it was not. TE 891: Special Topics: Hip Hop Education was a rare offering from the College of Education that I knew I wanted to take. The flexibility of the program to fit in personal interests was utilized to its full advantage.

The professor, Vaughn Watson, utilized his expertise and passion for hip hop education to push students' thinking beyond the usual hook that teachers use to get students into the canon or required literature (guilty!). He established frameworks through readings and discussion posts

to get the students in the course to think about how to fruitfully yet authentically teach hip hop within educational contexts.

The two papers that were required in this class focused on using hip hop educational frameworks authentically. The first paper was titled [Hip Hop Education Framework Application](#) (Artifact 4). It applied frameworks and pedagogies to the school district I was currently teaching in who were resistant to change and new ways of thinking (i.e. hip hop education). With a bit of creative thinking, I was able to fit the new pedagogies and frameworks within the mold I was required to teach in. The other paper, [Raising Student Voice Through 21st Century Skills, Activism, and Remix](#) (Artifact 3) introduced a way to remix existing projects and assessments within the existing curriculum

I found this course to be extremely rewarding, especially after the fact when I was able to join one of my classmates, Vaughn, and colleagues from MSU and beyond in a panel presentation at the National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention. This was a way that the MATC program assisted in unlocking opportunities for its students, and allowed me to network within the field. I also was able to utilize tools in my tool kit, old and new, to teach with hip hop in my classroom.

Throughout the second semester of the MATC program, suspicions were becoming a reality in terms of the education technology concentration. It had lost its charm and, for me, was beginning to be more of a chore than an enjoyment. Most of the tools were already in my tool box or they were not useful for me as an English educator. Despite being taught how and why to use Twitter and blogs for new ideas and connecting, it was easy to note that colleagues were only using these tools for the CEP courses and nothing else, which made it difficult to connect and

continue learning from others. The Goldilocks syndrome set back in as the semester ended. Arguments were made to complete the concentration with the final course out of three, but I did not want to waste my time and money with an area of education that was not as meaningful as I thought.

After taking a summer to mull over the other concentration options, I found the literacy instruction concentration to be more in line with my career goals and intended outcomes. Reading and writing are two of the three pillars within the English curriculum I have developed and enacted, so having a better understanding of literacy was what I was seeking as I embarked within this new concentration.

The reading, course materials, assessments, and projects in both TE 846 Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners and TE 849: Methods and Materials for Teaching Children's and Adolescent Literature were "just right" for me as a learner. Structured in a similar way due to the same instructor, both courses were challenging as I maneuvered the courses AND a new teaching position. The courses provided its learners with best practices to add to our educational toolboxes that could be implemented in all grade levels and pushed us to think about how to teach literacy no matter who are students were in terms of ability, race, and/or interest.

Building in literacy supports was tricky at first because I had to think about all of my students in my classroom and the various abilities they were walking in with. Best practices show that basing instruction and assessments on prior knowledge and strengths, instead of the deficit model, is better for student growth and obtaining new information. As time went on, rethinking lesson plans and units became second nature. Each of the final projects gave me an opportunity to showcase what I had learned.

TE 846's final project, [Revision for Literacy Support Project](#) (Artifact 6) was a revision on a nonfiction unit that is assigned and assessed on a weekly basis. Providing students with more than one way to read the text, gave my students a leg up when it came to understanding the material. TE 849's final project, [The Hate U Give Text Set](#) (Artifact 5) allowed me to build in more than one way to analyze the themes of activism and identity before, during, and after the reading of *The Hate U Give*. I found both literacy instruction courses to be extremely worthwhile, intellectually stimulating, and "just right."

### **Teaching & Curriculum**

Knowing that the correct choice was made in concentrations, the final semester of the MATC program was about to begin. TE 843: Secondary Reading Assessment and Instruction was a continuation of the positive outcomes from the semester before. This course's requirements associated with readings, discussions, reflections, and connections to the classroom allowed students to find meaningful purpose to how and why reading is vital to a classroom, especially as standards and assessments focus more and more on new and varied literacies. Being on top of the game will only help current and future students moving forward.

TE 872: Teachers as Teacher Leaders has been an eye opening course. The interactive discussions that are cultivated among colleagues closing in on the completion of their masters degree programs is astounding, especially with such a variety of teaching backgrounds and experiences. Realizing how a teacher can become a leader within their own department, building, district, professional organization, etc. is empowering. This course challenges thinking with the readings, discussions, and assessments. Leaving this course until the end is well worth it due to its positive yet powerful impact on educators.

**Final Reflection**

Overall, I am thankful for the opportunity to continue my education at Michigan State University in the Master of Arts in Teaching and Curriculum. Similar to Goldilocks, I had an ideal outcome in mind - I knew that I wanted to continue my education to explore the future's possibilities within education. I needed to go through a few trials and errors in order to find what was "just right" for me and my needs.

The MATC program has provided me with a network of colleagues and professional organizations that I can look to for help and assistance as I continue on my journey within education. The tools within my toolbox are well established with a strong understanding in blogging and sharing learning on Twitter, along with a newfound love for literacy instruction. The final courses in the MATC program solidified and rejuvenated a passion for teaching that has led me to be more knowledgeable about best practices and how and why curriculum is made and can be altered and adapted to fit the needs of all students.

At the conclusion of this program, I wish to stay in the classroom as an English educator and continue to join in the academic conversations both online and in person at conferences and conventions. I think that's "just right."