

## **In Conclusion**

My least favorite start to a conclusion paragraph, "in conclusion". It's so lazy. In class, I make a very dramatic speech about how much I hate "in conclusion". Anytime a student dares to put in the vetoed phrase gets little sad faces drawn next to it.

So, when I thought about how to word everything that I've learned at Michigan State during this master's program, the first thing I thought of was "in conclusion". In dedication to all the hundreds of kids I've annoyed with my sense of humor, this is where I will begin.

In conclusion, I don't know if this program has changed me or if I've reacted to it in different ways through the different people I've been during my time here. Likely, it's both. Recently, I was watching a comedian, Taylor Tomlinson, and she made a joke about how when you get married, your husband should have to marry every different version of you to come. I feel like MSU should graduate every different version of me that I've been here. There are three distinct Jessicas who have been through this program.

### **Jessica #1**



I want to start by saying I have loved every version of myself, and I mean no disrespect to Jessica #1. That being said, Jessica #1 had a lot of unearned confidence. Look at that confident pose, showing off the Honor's College sweatshirt. This picture fully embodies how I entered this program. I was fresh out of college and was required to take graduate level courses during my internship year. I took four courses that I actually really enjoyed because I was finally able to connect what I was learning in the classroom to actual teaching with real kids. What went a little wrong for me here was that I was in a kindergarten/first grade split, and I focused a lot of my learning in lower elementary and didn't focus too much in

higher grades that I would later realize I really belong in. I know what you are thinking, this really sarcastic woman doesn't belong with five year olds? I know, it's shocking. In these first four courses, I tried to connect lesson planning in a college classroom setting to what I would actually do as a teacher. They didn't always match. I learned that I did not enjoy planning units and was more of a flexible teacher who planned just a few days ahead. I was likely to scrap all of those things too when a kid asked something interesting, and that was OK. One of the best things I learned in phase one was that you don't get to fly by the seat of your pants in terms of differentiation. For every lesson that I planned, I outlined how I was going to challenge students and how I would support them. This proved invaluable to me and I still practice this skill with every lesson. The problem with Jessica #1 is that she was still young, didn't know what she wanted yet, and was really kind of sick of school at this point. I could have learned more from my classes if I had taken them a little more seriously.

## Jessica #2



Flash forward two years and I have changed dramatically. I spent my first two years teaching in a sixth grade classroom with many different kinds of students. I had 5 students with IEPs my first year and 3 my second year. I loved it. I started to recognize the holes that I had in my education and decided Michigan State's Special Education program was the way that I would fill those holes. My first course that I enrolled in for the program was CEP 840 "Policies, Practices, and Perspectives in Special Education" with Dr. Emily Bouck.

This course changed everything for me. I learned about IDEA and Section 504. I learned about a plethora of disabilities that a student could have, and what kinds of support that I could provide to be a better teacher for ALL my students. The class was small and was about half and half general educators and special educators. I learned how to work with a special educator to help a shared student. I worked with Emily

Kuiper on my first IEP that I would ever write. I became fascinated with the law behind special education and annoyed all my colleagues by making sure that we were following correct timelines for student referrals. I took a lot of what I learned in that class and taught it to my general education peers. They said that it helped them a lot as well. I realized that a lot of times there is a disconnect between general educators and special educators. I developed a mini-mission to bridge this gap. I started this website as a tool for general educators who have special education students and didn't know where to start. I started to doubt myself in this course. Was I meant to be a special educator? Or a general educator who just knew a lot about special education? Either way, I had already started this journey and I was determined to stick to my original plan. I continued on in the Special Education program. The plan was, two years in courses, an additional internship opportunity, and I would become a special educator.

Fall semester, I took the course that absolutely changed my teaching forever. I don't mean to be dramatic, but truly, how can I say enough about Dr. Carol Sue Englert and her course "Advanced Diagnostic Remediation for Students with Learning Disabilities"? First of all, Dr. Englert is a genius. Her course was the most challenging, overload of information, beautiful, crazy thing I've ever done. It was tough. Really, really tough. Every week she had a new idea to work with like writing techniques or reading interventions. Her work was so detailed that you couldn't help but learn so many new ways to teach ELA. Each project was an in depth lesson plan that was pages and pages long. It's the only project like this that didn't annoy me. It was not the way that I teach, at all, but I loved it because I learned so much from how she thinks and how she plans. We recorded ourselves teaching intervention lessons to a student. These projects not only taught me how to be a better ELA teacher and interventionist, but it also helped me develop a relationship with the student I chose that would make me her personal champion for life. She needed that and I adored her because of all this extra time we spent working on her reading and writing. If you ever get the chance to take a course from Dr. Englert or hear her speak, go for it. She is brilliant and you will learn so much. I wish that I still had access to her course as I make this new journey into motherhood because I would love to work with my child the way that Dr. Englert would.

Where Jessica #1 was confident without reason, Jessica #2 was full of doubt. Time was running out on my earlier credits and I had to finish my degree soon, but I wasn't 100% sure of what I wanted to be yet. I played around with the idea of becoming a Board Certified Behavior Analyst for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder. I still didn't know if I was "supposed" to be a special or general educator. I was happy to be learning and growing, but I still couldn't see the end goal.

### Jessica #3



At the end of my second semester into the Special Education program, I made a big decision. I decided that I didn't know what I wanted, and that was fine. I changed paths to the Education program with a focus in Special Education. I decided to become a teacher at 17 years old. I was so sure that this was the path for me. At 26 years old, I realize that any decision I make right now will apply to "right now Jessica" and maybe not "in ten years Jessica". The only goal I have is to learn, to grow, and to do what makes me happy and the world better. All of the things I have done in this program have achieved that. I have learned so much, I'm a better teacher, and I've helped a lot of kids. I've gotten married, and we are starting a family. My path has shifted and I see myself raising kids for the foreseeable future. A lot of people have asked me if I regret getting my master's because I'm "not going to use it". The problem is, that isn't true. You don't have to be in the classroom to be an educator.

Jessica #3 is just enjoying learning. I am currently taking two courses. The first is "Concepts of Educational Inquiry" with Dr. Steven Weiland and Nathan Clason. This course, to me, is just fun. It goes into what the foundation of education is, and what teacher inquiry means. I like that it plays around with ideas of education and it has inspired me to think of how we can change education to be better. With COVID-19 wreaking havoc across the United States, this class couldn't have come

at a better time. I'm questioning everything about what we do, how we do it, why we do it. I wonder how I'll take this information forward in this new section of my life.

Finally, I'm taking the course that this website is largely built on, the "Capstone Portfolio Course" with Dr. Matthew Koehler and Aric Gaunt. This class might have taught me the most. I say that, not because those two men are reading this right now and grading me, but because it forced me to look back and actually think about this experience as a whole. Someone, somewhere, taught me that the only way that students learn is by analyzing what they have done at the end of the lesson. Well, it's been a long lesson, but we are at the end of it now and this class has given me the chance to step back and say "in conclusion"...

## **In Conclusion**

I have no idea what I want to do with my career. I've never been more excited about it.

I am a lifelong learner and doubt that this course will be my last.

I have learned so much about being a teacher and what that even means.

I am Dr. Englert's #1 fan.

I look forward to the challenges and opportunities that my life still has to bring, and I am grateful for all that I have experienced and learned at Michigan State University.