

Look Back...Don't Stare

Coming into the Master of Arts in Education (MAED), my primary goal was to set myself up nicely for an international teaching role. I saw a rapid course of study, coming out the other end with my pick of international school jobs throughout Hong Kong and Asia. Looking at the course curriculum, I wanted the program, in particular the Educational Administration (EAD) courses, to both complement and ratify my international experience. Yet even within these somewhat selfish and mercenary objectives, within me I felt a calling, a sense of responsibility, to contribute through the teaching profession. This course would be the vehicle for that.

As is frequently the case, I might plan, but life has a way of intervening. A one-year hiatus for personal reasons forced me to extend my studies (and retake one course.) While regaining my footing, I found myself called back to swim coaching, something I had done when much younger, a development that encouraged me to pursue a concurrent Graduate Certificate in Sports Coaching and Leadership, a direction I had not contemplated before.

But even this enforced delay proved fortuitous; given time and different opportunities, I was able to consider new course and career options. With swim coaching experience, I joined a local charity that brings learn to swim (LTS) programs to disadvantaged persons in Hong Kong. Without even realizing it, there it was, that underlying motivation in my teaching pursuit: giving back where my skills and experience could contribute.

Back to the career front, soon after entering the MAED program, I learned that my earlier presumptions about this program and my career were wildly optimistic. A master's DOES NOT set one up for international school teaching tenure (at least not right away.) The teaching profession has its own strictures; despite a master's and years of professional experience, I still need to follow the course of every other teacher and gain proper teaching certification (which I am currently undertaking.) And finally, while certain classes in the EAD curriculum presented as

exploring 'diversity' and 'multiculturalism', it was more US-specific and not the direct application to an Asian educational environment that I expected.

Somewhere in this process, the motivation to contribute, the goal that was something an afterthought in my initial MAED considerations, soon became pre-eminent. I found that a prime teaching job, acclamation for my Asian experience, and a 4.0 GPA were all external to what I hoped to accomplish; the internal was what mattered. In my original goal essay, I put forth the following statement:

"...Teaching is also a way to 'give back,' to share my own opportunities and experience... This is a responsibility to 'pay back' the opportunities I have been granted..."

This idea drives my teaching practice:

- Understanding the challenges that English Language learners (ELLs) and children from various socioeconomic backgrounds face;
- Engaging in reflective practice to draw parallels to my Asian environment and apply good teaching practice, regardless of my students' backgrounds;
- Working with children in an aquatic, Learn to Swim (LTS) environment and in volunteer swim coaching roles.

To continue to work toward this goal – that is what this program is about.