Derek Jackson

October 19, 2018

MAFLT Program Reflective Essay

Upon entering the MAFLT program, I was ecstatic, to say the least, to further my knowledge in pedagogical norms of teaching world language. I chose this program because I felt that my undergraduate experience did not offer me the best foundation for asserting myself as a knowledgeable educator within FLT. Everything that I did within my classroom for the first few years was based on practices that I remembered from my own language learning experiences.

My first class was the Methods course, and I cannot describe the number of times that I cried. It was not because the course was difficult! It had everything to do with the self-doubt and apprehensions as a teacher that I mentioned in the introduction! I felt like a fraud; the Larsen-Freeman (2014) text opened my eyes, literally, to some of the teachings that I missed out on in my undergraduate methods courses. Personally, it made my desire to finish the program and sink my teeth deeper into the content stronger than ever. My expectations from that course solidified my choice in selecting the MAFLT program at MSU.

Overall, my experiences in the course were refreshing. I think that I expected to cruise through the material and “jump through the hoops” as I often tell my own students. This was not the case for some courses! Admittedly, I thought that an online degree would allow me to work at my own pace and chunk the materials what would match my calendar. Looking back, I’m glad that I had to dedicate several hours during the weekends to focus on my studies. I learned more organization and time-management skills in this program than I have anywhere else. One particular assignment proved to be difficult for me to conceptualize, but with constant feedback and assistance from Dr. Lanier, I found success with the Intercultural Investigation project. Albeit one of the most time-consuming projects that I have had the pleasure of completing, I found the intimate interviews with my informant to be rewarding and brought us closer together as colleagues. More importantly, this project made me go beyond the 3 P’s traditionally taught within “cultural” activities and explore the individual in relation to her external environments. This project makes me very proud as a scholar and educator. I feel that the time and effort that I put into this project with several revisions to the thesis and demonstration of content material makes this project one of my most favorites within the MAFLT program.

This leads me to my favorite and most-informing course within the MAFLT program: Teaching Culture. This is by far the course that I thought I could breeze through, but it often left me shaking my head in embarrassment for my own misunderstandings and ill-formed ideas about culture. I think that I will constantly reflect and review my own thoughts and practices as a global citizen moving forward. I found myself reading and re-reading the articles and course texts to find more information about teaching culture. Additionally, I think it is important for students to take this course closer to the end of their program studies. I think that the other courses provided me a solid foundation for better understanding of this content, and I could not imagine taking this course within the first two semesters of study; I am not sure that I would have had the appreciation for the course as I do now.

Prior to completing the MAFLT program, I feel that I was very ignorant and naïve as a Spanish teacher. I thought that I could teach in the same ways that I learned and that my students would learn and enjoy my classroom environment. I think that this course taught me to be more resilient as an educator and to keep looking for new ways to inspire and engage students. This year, I am teaching in a new school district, and I have contemplated resigning from teaching altogether. Thankfully, reflecting on my work within the MAFLT program and seeing the ups and downs that I had learning and exploring best-practices and alternative assessments among other topics is the best source of inspiration to continue to educate others throughout my career. As a first generation college student and to add a Masters degree to my name, I am immensely proud of the person I am today as I continue to make a difference in the lives of students as a Spanish educator.