

## **The journey worth traveled on -how the MAED Program impacted my life...**

By Pearl Alimo. Michigan State University

*'If you think education is expensive, try ignorance' – anonymous*

In the year 2013, one of my life goals was to pursue my Master's Degree program. Why? I have always dreamed of climbing higher the academic ladder because of my strong passion for learning, teaching and leading change. I knew to grow as a person I needed to acquire in-depth knowledge. To increase career advancement opportunities It was essential that I learn more, improve on my professional skills, find ways to unearth my talents and abilities. In short, I believed graduate studies would quench my thirst for advanced knowledge, satisfy my intellectual curiosity, stimulate my creativity, give me prospects into the future and improve on the quality of my life. Hence, I embarked on this journey in the summer of 2013 with excitement, expectations and with a goal of interacting with new ideas, adding to existing concepts as an intellectual and creating an opportunity for myself to steer my career in the direction that I want.

### **Courses That Changed The Course of My Life**

At the time of enrollment into the Master of Arts in Education (MAED) program at Michigan State University, I was working as an Education Technician for the Navy Child and Youth programs. My key roles included designing, implementing and evaluating recreational and educational activities for school age children between the ages of 5-12. As an Education Technician my chief aim was to introduce new and exciting learning activities for the youth I worked with and for. This desire affected my choice of a concentration area and particular courses. I decided to concentrate on **Technology and Learning**, after all aren't we in the 21st century? I was also at a point where I was confused about the direction of my career. All of these influenced the choice of my very first two sets of courses-**Technology and Leadership** as well as **Adult Career Development**.

**Technology and Leadership** was dedicated to exploring the various trends in technology, leadership characteristics, the critical roles leaders play in using technology to cause positive impact in society. I was curious about technology and zealous to know what connection technology and leadership have together. This curiosity led me into probing questions, thinking critically and analyzing ideas in the course. This impacted my thinking greatly. For example, at the end of this course my initial thoughts about leadership and technology had changed. How? At the end of the course I could clearly understand and distinguish between the difference between a leader and a manager. My take home for instance was that a leader was someone who envisions for any organization and works with his or her team to achieve the vision of that organization. Whereas a manager oversees to the frugal and wise use of an organizations resources to achieve a driven vision. Being able to understand and identify the key roles each of them played is very important to me being the head of an organization. In addition, I learned project management skills such as identifying a problem, brainstorming on solutions, strategizing how and when to implement a project as well as how to evaluate a project. These skills inspired me to create a sustainable technology project called **girlSpace** to solve a learning problem in communities in five developing countries via [www.greightfoundation.com](http://www.greightfoundation.com).

Again, weaving courses like **Teaching Students Online** later on in the course affected my thinking and practice. For example, understanding that strong leadership is key to the development of any organization, community, country and generation I created an **online youth leadership course** titled **'Community Change Initiatives Course'** which has the goal of inspiring young people to be the change they want to see in their communities. Recognizing the power of technology for example led to this course is being hosted online and available to all young people around the world.

Another course in my Master's Degree Program that affected my thinking and impacted my practice was **EAD 864 - Adult Career Development**. This course gave me the opportunity to explore the various forms and nature of work that humans engage in as a means of earning a living. Through readings and writings, I could clearly understand and differentiate between a job and a career and most importantly decided for myself the career path I wanted to take. For instance, by presenting a long essay which compared the nature of work to the seasons of nature through the inspiration of Palmer Parker's work *'Let Your Life Speak'*, I had the opportunity to examine my own career path and learned how to make my work life more meaningful and gratifying. I started keeping a journal of my work experiences and writing down my career goals. At the end of this course, I had evaluated my own career path and decided where I wanted to head on in life. I realized I have a strong passion to grow people and nurture ideas. I dream of providing career services and programs for adults with the aim of helping every working adult to have a successful career life and make work more meaningful and satisfying. It was for this reason that I chose to study **EAD 863- Training & Professional Development**.

My goal for pursuing **EAD 863 - Training & Professional Development** was to learn to identify professional development needs for working adults and how to design, implement and evaluate training and professional development programs for professionals in the workforce. The major aim of this is to help individuals to be productive and organizations to grow. At the end of this course for example, I designed a **60 minute training program** using the Stand-up or lecture delivery method. This impacted my practice in the sense that I started analyzing critically the training and professional development program in my field and providing suggestions to improve our training programs. I worked in close relation with our Training Specialist for example to identify which of my staff needed which training and how it should be carried out based on the individual's unique learning styles and taste.

Throughout my Master's program, I knew that in order to succeed I needed to be creative. For example I was convinced that it was important to find creative ways of solving problems, improving on the quality of my Pre-school program and most importantly passing on creative strategies and ideas to my team by inspiring and challenging them to design stimulating learning environment. This is why I could not resist the temptation to pursue courses like CEP 818 - **Creativity in Teaching and Learning** alongside CEP 817- **Learning Technology through design**. As an educator, learner and a leader I am challenged to live, think and breathe creativity. For me it is critical that I learn to light the fire of ingenuity and creativity in others by thinking differently, observing widely, perceiving critically, recognizing and forming patterns, abstracting and analogizing, thinking with my body, modeling and playing with ideas.

In order to succeed as a designer of Training and Professional Development Programs for example, I have to learn to design products, places and services with an empathetic research

approach. This means stepping into and out of the world of the user for example is essential in helping me design programs, services and places from the heart of the user and with eyes of the consumer. In this case using the Stanford design guidelines such as *empathize*, *define*, *ideate*, *prototype* and *test* are indispensable. It is important practice all of these ideas on my design journey. This will help to design something that is not only esthetic but meaning, useful and beneficial to the user. The process of design includes defining or identifying a problem, brainstorming and incubating ideas and testing ideas. These two courses have changed my line of thoughts and my approach to dealing with difficult situations in my field of work. For example, I am working on '**How to effectively teach Pre-school with behavioral problems**'. This piece is a white paper documenting research findings on children with difficult behaviors attending pre-school programs in child development centers. This project also includes a 60 minute training on strategies to reduce the incidence of difficult behaviors in children participating in child development programs as a way of supporting my staff.

In sum, pursuing a Master's Degree, Program at Michigan State University was not only a goal achieved but a life changing experience. The program has provided the opportunity for me to interact deep knowledge, exposed me to diverse ideas, enlightened me with 21st century educational concepts, challenged me to think outside and beyond the box by providing the platform to share and exchanged ideas, support other classmates by participating in discussion forums, changed my perspectives on education in general and molded me into a stronger and wiser person.

I also learned to become an innovative thinker and designer in education. Researching sharing and communicating ideas as well as keeping up with the challenge of online education has helped me develop positive attitude in life such as thinking as a winner at all times, finding creative ways to surmount challenges and solving problems. New knowledge, skills, abilities learnt and attitude cultivated has already challenged me to start a business, design and publish websites and make improvements at work. For example, I am designing new classrooms with creative lenses and designing training and professional development programs to help my staff to succeed in their work and my work as a supervisor.

In conclusion, I can proudly say that my masters degree program has been a life changing experience. It has touched every aspect of my being. I have learned to manage my time wisely by learning to balance school and family life. I have also learned to live on a budget so I could pay tuition fees financially and most of all cultivate positive attitude in life and carving creative ways to solve problems. My key take aways are critical technology skills such as website creation tools, learning classroom management tools, sparking the light of literacy in students through creative teaching and learning skills and strategies. Indeed this is journey worth traveling on.