

A Stronger Math Teacher Through an Education in Literacy

By Paul Booth

In the spring of 2012 when I applied to Michigan State University's master's degree program, my primary goal was to become a better teacher. Having not studied teaching as an undergraduate, and after entering the teaching profession through the side door, I was looking for a more formal education. I also wanted to use these two years to work on things that I had noticed inside of my classroom.

In the years that I had taught and been around educators, I had noticed that a student's ability to read affected his or her learning in every subject. I thought that if I was able to focus my education on reading instruction I would be better prepared to teach my students anything, including math.

When I entered this program I had three initial goals, as follows:

- 1) To focus on Literacy
- 2) To find a community to help me to learn and to grow as a teacher
- 3) To strengthen my understanding of technology

Looking at my transcripts, my focus on literacy is evident and never wavering. Five out of the ten classes that I took while in the program had a literacy bent to them. Even in the three math classes, I was able to direct my learning toward incorporating reading strategies in to the math classroom. In the two years of studying and practicing what I have learned, I have strengthened my resolve on the importance of literacy; however, this was never my only goal.

Having taught in four countries - and this summer that total will increase to five - I would like to set up a professional community which can keep in touch with me and help me to grow as a teacher. Through this program I have started to fulfill this need through technology. While in this program I have learned that my learning and development as a teacher is not confined to the school district and the professional development that it offers or for the books that I can find on Amazon. I have found that through the internet and social media, there are communities of teachers that share my commitment to math and respect for reading.

When I started this master's program, the state of North Carolina was giving a twelve percent raise to teachers with master's degrees in education. In the last year, our legislators decided that I or anyone would not be better teachers with what we have gained from this program and so they have stopped giving out the pay increase. I am sure that what I have learned in this program will translate into an increase in test scores, but that is not my primary concern. I will

be looking at the larger group of children that I am now able to reach because of my increased understanding of technology and different literacy learners. I will be most proud of the group that will learn strategies in my class that will help them in other classes, future classes, and their future jobs. All of these things coming from what I learned in the two years that I was in this master's program.