Excited for Something Unknown

In 2008, after earning my undergraduate degree and teaching certificate, I was eager to have my own classroom and begin my teaching career. I knew that I eventually wanted to further my education, but was ready have my own classroom. I worked hard throughout college toward the pursuit of a specific goal, which was to teach young adults and inspire them to learn. After graduation, I moved from Michigan to North Carolina and found a job at an excellent charter school, where I was finally able to put all of my passion and exciting ideas into practice. Over the past few years I have been able to gain experience in teaching and have developed a better understanding of who I am as an educator. As I began to think about the direction in which I would like to continue my career, I was brought back to a phrase that I commonly tell my students, which is "Education is the key to all your doorways." Although cheesy and a bit cliché, it was true that in order to become a better teacher I needed to further my own education. Although my undergraduate degrees are in English and biology, I wanted to expand my depth of knowledge in the field of education and pursue a degree that I could use to strengthen my teaching, but also be applied to opportunities outside of the classroom. Therefore, I decided to learn more about the types of technology that could be used to help all types of students learn and share new ideas.

After researching different master's programs in education technology, it was clear that the program at Michigan State University is one of the best in the country. Although I did not attend MSU for my undergraduate degree, many of my family members have graduated from the university, so I already had a little bit of green and white blood running through my veins. Living in North Carolina, I knew that I could not attend class in person. Therefore, when I saw that MSU also offered an online version of the Master's in Education Technology (MAET). I knew that this was the right step to take. Now that I am on the verge of graduating again, I can look back at what I have learned over the past couple of years and am validated that I made the correct choice. I have accomplished the goal that I originally set for myself and have also set new ones along the way. The courses that I took throughout the program have helped me learn how to use technology in order to become a better teacher, leader, and navigate the future of my career.

The first two courses that I took in the program were *Teaching Understanding with Technology* (CEP 810) & *Adapting Innovative Technology to Education* (CEP 111). Upon entered a program in education technology, I was interested and excited to learn about the types of websites, tools, and other technological resources that I could use to teach my students content and help ignite their passion for learning. These first introductory courses were the perfect start to the program. Both of these classes introduced me to new technologies. I was required to push myself in order to learn new skills and ways to incorporate technology into classroom lessons. I learned how to teach students content through different types of media and how to help them become better learners in the digitally connected 21st century. Learning about theories such as the Maker

Movement, as described in this TED Talk, "*We are Makers*," by Dale Dougherty, fulfilled my need to play with hands-on technology. I discovered tools such as the Makey-Makey (http://makeymakey.com), which allows students to unleash their creativity and learn about electric circuits, by connecting everyday object to the Internet. Throughout these courses I also learned how to edit video, upload YouTube clips, start a blog, use software design programs, and develop an online course. I have used all of this technology, as well as many other skills that were taught through these courses in my own teaching.

Another important concept that these courses introduced to me was the TPACK framework (tpack.org). TPACK, which was developed by Dr. Matthew Koehler and Dr. Punya Mishra, stands for Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge. This concept changed my own understanding of how to apply technology into my classroom and teaching philosophy. Essentially, I learned that the most effective instruction happens when there is a harmony between the content being taught, the technology used to convey information, and the pedagogy behind the teaching methods. Upon entering into the MAET program I believed that I would be given a list of websites, tools, and resources that I should be using in my classroom to best utilize technology. However, learning about TPACK made me realize that there is not a master list of technologies that are guaranteed to work for every teacher or every classroom. Each teacher must decide how to best integrate technology in a way that is purposeful and meaningful for their unique group of students. Education technology is about transforming resources into useful tools for both teacher and student.

The second course in the MAET program that has greatly affected me is *Technology & Leadership* (CEP 815). While first couple of classes made me really excited about using technology in my classroom, this class pushed me to think about ways, beyond a traditional classroom setting, in which can teach and inspire people. This class, above all others, helped me reflect upon how I want to use my degree beyond classroom teaching. Although, I do love teaching my middle school science students, I am also interested in leading other educators. An administration role, such as a principal, is not necessarily my ideal leadership position. However, I would like to pursue a career that would allow me to reimagine how people learn and develop ways in which technology can be used to educate others. One of the most influential assignments from this course included reading "*7 Transformations of Leadership*," an article by David Rooke and William Torbert. This article described seven different types of leadership styles and the characteristics of people associated with each. Reading this helped me to reflect on the type of leadership qualities I currently possess and the skills that I want to develop. Before beginning the MAET program I thought of myself as a leader in my classroom. However, this course changed my perspective of the type of leader I could be in other areas of education. I began to see myself as someone who could teach other educators how to effectively utilize technology in their own classrooms. Another reading, "*Managing Complex Change*," by Andrew Churches helped me to understand that an effective leader in an education (or any) setting has to have a vision for the future,

build a team of people that have the skills to carry out this vision, provide incentives for the team to make the change, and is able to delegate the resources available in the most advantageous way to reach the common goal. Learning about the types of leaders that are most effective, along with how to develop an action plan gave me more courage to use my leadership skills. For example, a couple of years before I enrolled in the MAET program I was given the additional responsibility of grade team chair. This meant that I scheduled parent meetings and helped to coordinate field trips and other events within the 7th grade. However, the information and skills I learned in the *Technology & Leadership* course pushed me to take more of an active leadership role within my school. For example, one of the assignments of this course was to research a "thorny issue." In other words, I had to research a problem that does not have a simple answer and could be the topic of debate. I chose a very pertinent issue to my school at the time, which was the grading scale. Ever since the school opened in 2001, a 7-point grading scale had been used in grades K-12. However, in 2014, North Carolina legislature required all publicly funded schools to begin using a 10-point grading scale in grades 9-12. Not only did I research the pros and cons of the new scale for the class assignment, but also presented my findings and recommendations to fellow teachers during this year's professional development sessions.

A final course that has been most impactful in the MAET program was my final course the *Capstone Portfolio Course* (CEP 807). This class has been a fitting and satisfying way to end the MAET program. This course required me to make a digital portfolio that showcases my work as an educator and student. The portfolio could be viewed by students, parents, current and future employers. It is also a space for me to continually evolve as teacher and learn more about education. Whereas, at the beginning of the program I was interested in knowing how I could use technology as a fun way to get my students to learn, this course has helped me to teach my students to be leaders of their own education. For example, I have recently started to help my students create their own online portfolios. Although they are only in 7th grade, they will use this digital space as a collection of some of their best work in science class. Hopefully, students continue adding artifacts after they leave my class. Then, be able to submit a portfolio that they have worked on over their entire secondary education with their college applications.

The capstone course also allowed me to reflect upon where I see myself in the next phase of my career. One of my favorite aspects of the course was that it connected me with many other people who are interested in education and technology, but had so many different interests and specialties. The course helped me to imagine and research ways in which I can use the skills that I have obtained through the MAET program in other areas, outside of traditional education. The most beneficial aspect of the Capstone course is being connected with a network of people who are utilizing technology in so many ways. Reflecting upon all that I have accomplished has allowed me to recognize that I have the potential to use my degree in almost any field imaginable, not only in education, but also in business, graphic design, medicine, advertising, and product development, just to name a few.

When I think about my original intentions of entering the MAET program I feel accomplished in the goals that I have met, but even more proud of how my future aspirations have evolved. I know that I have changed the way I teach in order to utilize more effective methods and technological tools. However, I don't think I'll ever completely reach my original goal of knowing all the types of technologies that are most beneficial in education. I have come to realize that this is an impossible feat. Instead I have learned how to find inspiration and information through a connected network of educators. The MAET program has also helped me learn not only how to use the latest gadgets or websites in my classroom, but also how to use technology to lead other educators. Lastly, I have learned how to use technology to best market my strengths and skills for future endeavors.

In 2008, when I completed my undergraduate program I was eager to leave the role of a student to become a teacher. Now in 2015, as I finish my master's program, I realize that being a student has made me a better educator. I know that I must keep pursuing new information, skills, and technology, in education or any other field in which my career path may lead me. Seven years ago I was excited to accomplish one specific goal and begin my career as a teacher. As I graduate from MSU and the MAET program I am also excited, but not necessarily because I know the next step I want to take, but because having a degree in education technology allows so many possibilities for my future.

Resources

Dougherty, D. (2001, Jan.) We Are Makers [Video file]. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/dale_dougherty_we_are_makers

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