

Looking Back

Synthesis Essay

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It's hard to believe I am writing this paper because my journey through Michigan State's Master of Arts in Education Technology (MAET) program is done. Especially since I am currently working on projects for three classes! But, somehow, I am at the end. Whenever you complete something, whether it is a classroom lesson, a project around the house, or a move across the country, it can be powerful to look back and see what you've done. In my experience it can be shocking and amazing to see what you have accomplished when you take the time to step back and think about where you are now.

During my second year of teaching I decided it was time to further myself as an educator by beginning a master's degree program. I was unsure whether or not my husband and I would be moving, so I felt that the flexibility of online courses would be best for me. I had quickly become comfortable with the technology available to me at my current position, and loved when other teachers would come to me for help in regards to educational technology. I wanted to further my expertise in the field, and decided to look for master's programs that offered a focus on educational technology. I looked at a few schools, but I quickly chose Michigan State University because not only did the MAET program provide excellent coursework, but I knew I had to return to my roots at Michigan State University. I come from a long line of MSU Spartans. I was born in East Lansing to parents who met while obtaining degrees at MSU. My grandmother also has a degree from MSU, and my grandfather worked for many years in the public relations department at MSU. Growing up in a house with a whole room decorated in Spartan gear, how could I not go green?

So, what have I learned in my MAET journey? I have picked up so many classroom tools and gained an understanding of so many web 2.0 tools, that I didn't realize how much I had gained until I stopped to put together my technology showcase. CEP 810 was the first class I took and it's where I took the plunge into the educational technology world. I felt that as a younger educator, I had a pretty firm understanding of technology. I maintained my classroom webpage, created newsletters, and felt very comfortable with programs such as powerpoint. But now, all of a sudden things like blogging, screencasts, and Google Docs were being discussed. These were not programs I was familiar with, and it was a bit scary to think I was expected to be able to use these tools. However, through CEP 810, and with the guidance of my instructors, Amy Pietrowski and Ben Rimes, I was gradually introduced to a wide range of educational technology. It turned out that these tools were not so scary after all. I was amazed by the opportunities presented by the range of Google Applications, especially after doing group work with classmates across the globe. We were able to chat, work on a document, and share our writing all in the same space. This first step in the MAET program cemented my desire to go beyond the Educational Technology Certificate, and complete my master's degree.

Over the next year, I took many other classes, and continued to build my educational technology repertoire. When I reflect over the most meaningful experiences in my courses, they are often related to a specific tool I was able to create, and use, in my own teaching. One of the final projects I am most proud of is my Stand Alone Instructional Resource (StAIR). In CEP 811, Tammy Maginity led us in an exploration of creating lessons through the lens of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). When creating lessons with UDL, the goal is to make lessons that are accessible to all students regardless of the diverse population they are presented to. Throughout the course we worked on developing our StAIR. As the title suggests, a StAIR is a program that students can do independently as either a preview to a lesson, practice on a topic, or a review. All links and feedback are provided in one easily accessible program. As this was a summer course, it was more condensed than a regular class, and I was a bit nervous about the amount of work needed to complete a StAIR. However, piece by piece, I created my StAIR, learning how to complete hyperlinks to different pages and sound effects within powerpoint. I chose to create a lesson on triangle geometry, and have used it several times with my fourth and fifth grade math students. They loved the sound effects and interactive nature of the lesson. After working diligently on creating a useful project, I was ecstatic to hear the positive feedback from both my professor and students.

In CEP 820, Teaching K-12 Students Online, I once again found myself challenged. I had been very interested by online classes for K-12 students, and so I was very eager to start the course. Reading through the syllabus, I learned we would be creating our very own online class module. I thought this would be very interesting, but also initially found the idea to be a bit overwhelming. I had no experience teaching online, and found myself starting from scratch as to what kind of course I wished to design. Through the coaching of April Niemela, and the other course instructors, I gradually developed a plan for what I wanted my course to look like. I decided to create a hybrid geometry course for fifth grade students. I felt a hybrid situation would be ideal as it would allow for students to practice skills in class, while progressing through the course at their own pace, using the specific resources they needed, at home. Once I decided upon the topic, I created a shell for my class using Haiku Learning. I was very happy with Haiku, as it provided me an easy to use format allowing for a lot of multimedia and accessibility for students. The design of the actual content was a wonderful learning experience for me. I spent a great deal of time thinking about what would be the most meaningful way for students to interact with the material. I took care in selecting resources, as well as creating my own videos and presentations. In the end, I was able to create an online module that I feel would be effective to use in a hybrid online setting, but also a great wealth of resources I was able to pull into my own math classroom.

In one short year, I have gained a wide range of knowledge in educational technology. Not only do I feel comfortable with a variety of tools, but I have been able to spend time reflecting on what makes technology beneficial. One theme throughout the MAET program was to consider whether or not the technology we are using is an asset to ourselves and our students. This was examined closely in CEP 815, Technology and Leadership, with Nick Sheltroun. One concept we discussed was missional versus instrumental thinking. In short, missional thinking considers

the goals, or mission, for your school, and chooses technology that would help meet those goals. Instrumental thinking finds a tool that is new and interesting, and focuses on bringing that specific tool into the classroom. When I am choosing technology to use in my classroom, I try to keep this idea in mind. Technology can be very expensive to bring into classrooms, but it can also be used to enhance our students' learning experiences, and thus must be considered carefully. I have seen the pin to the right on many pinterest accounts, and I have to agree with the creator's viewpoint that technology should be a tool for reaching learning goals. While I feel learning specific technology skills is useful for students in their adult lives, I feel that the learning goal is then to prepare students to use technology after leaving school or, to help students compete globally, not to just simply be able to build websites. Learning to make a powerpoint is useful, but it is even more useful when that powerpoint demonstrates a student's understanding of a specific concept.

In this final course, CEP 807, I have looked back at what I've gained in the MAET program. There is no quick and easy answer to that question. Instead, if I was now asked, "What did you learn?" I can simply show my online portfolio. This site has been designed to showcase the courses I've taken, the technology I have learned, and the knowledge I've gained. It's been a short, but action-packed, journey that's taken me to where I am today. As I mentioned in my goal reflection essay, I did not expect to write this essay in Texas, or to be starting my second year at a charter school in San Antonio, but here I am. I've made it through the program, and am proud of what I have learned along the way.