

A Look Back

Knowing from a young age that teaching was a passion of mine, choosing to enter into the education field, as a freshman in college, was easy. Never doubting my major, I graduated within four and a half years and accepted a long-term subbing placement within the following months. Continuing from there, I was offered a job within the same school district and became one of the youngest teachers there. Fresh out of college, I quickly became a go-to for my colleagues when it came to technology help. Priding myself in my different uses of technology within my classroom, I saw my interest in teaching mesh together with my love and understanding of technology.

Right around the time of needing to renew my provisional teaching certificate, my district had just passed a new technology bond to update and expand our technology resources. Being someone who was naturally good with technology and someone who enjoyed using it, I knew that this was an area that I wanted to focus on and expand my learning in. I decided to join my district's technology committee to help pilot technology programs and resources. This would help make decisions to ensure the best results for these huge changes that were taking place in the district. I also chose to look into master's programs that were related to technology in education seeing as this seemed to be becoming a huge part in my teaching.

Through my searching, I came across the Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) program at Michigan State University (MSU). This seemed to be the type of program I was looking for and it even gave the option of taking all of the classes online, which was something that definitely interested me since it would give me the flexibility to work around my busy schedule, and at a pace that would work best for me. The program specialized in technology and I knew this could help me grow in my love of technology education. I knew that I had a good starting point for using technology in my classroom, but I also knew there was more to learn. I decided that this would be the perfect avenue for me, so I signed up to take the first three classes (CEP 810, 811, 812). These classes were required to be taken before getting into the master's program.

CEP 810: Teaching for Understanding with Technology, CEP 811: Adapting Innovative Technologies in Education, and CEP 812: Applying Educational Technology to Issues of Practice were perfect introductory courses because they helped introduce me to the program and gave me insight into just how many new forms of technology were out there that could be used in teaching. I was blown away by how many technology resources are available for use in the classroom and I learned so much about all of the creative uses for these technologies. For example, blogging and twitter, and although I had seen and used these tools before, I had not in the classroom. I learned these two specific things could be used for students to collaborate with each other. Or, for another example, I learned how to use a presentation program called "Prezi". I liked how creative it was and how it gave me a different avenue to present information to students. I was able to take what I had learned back to my district's technology committee and share what resources I had discovered. These three courses helped me create a mindset for teaching with technology and allowed me to decide that this was definitely the

path I wanted to take to continue my master's journey. As a result, I applied for the MAET program and was accepted. The next step would be to continue taking more classes.

I decided to take a few classes during the summer, while I was not teaching, so I could focus more on my master's work and not feel overwhelmed by having to balance teaching and class work at the same time. It was a great advantage to be able to learn so much in the summer and then be able to apply it the following school year. It was also fun to learn side by side my students to see what worked best for not only them, but me as well. Applying things I learned within the program gave me a stronger understanding of my own learning and gave me the opportunity to introduce students to more tools they could use within their own world. It was also nice to have time to focus primarily on my own learning. It provided me the time and environment to be able to learn within my own boundaries.

Specifically, one class that stood out during my experience through the MAET program was CEP 820: Teaching Students Online. In this class I was given the opportunity to explore many different Content Management Systems (CMS) to choose a platform for the creation of an online course. I chose to create an online course on animal adaptations because this is one of the science units I teach in third grade. This assignment stands out as one of the most beneficial things I created in the master's program because I spent so much time and energy to create something I am really proud of that I use in my classroom every school year. It is really rewarding to see that something you created is being used by students to help them learn and grow. Each time I introduce this unit to my students, and show them the website for the first time, they are so excited and impressed that their teacher created it. Every time, it is a rewarding feeling to know that I chose to learn something new that is now bettering my students. This class helped give me the knowledge and time to create something I am very proud of and I'm so glad this class was part of my master's journey. I will continue to use this unit as I am able to update, and modify it.

CEP 815: Technology and Leadership was another memorable class, but not because of what I created. This class was memorable because of what it taught me about myself and how I could become a leader. CEP 815 was probably the hardest class for me in the entire MAET program because my professor pushed me out of my comfort zone and expected a lot out of his students. I found that each assignment in this class forced me to dig deep into my learning and even then, once I thought I had completed an assignment, the professor pushed me even harder to stretch my thinking more. The class gave me the opportunity to look at how far I had come in the master's program and how the knowledge I had gained from this program could help me transform from being a teacher to also being a leader in my school and district. The class was helpful in looking closely at yourself and finding out that everyone has leadership qualities you just need to find out how to use them in the way that works best for your personality. I now know that I have the qualities to be a leader in my school and district and feel more comfortable and confident taking on these leadership roles. From pushing me beyond my comfort zone, I learned more from my professor than I thought possible. Although a tough class at the time, I look back on this class as one I learned a lot from, and as one that I will remember while I grow as a teacher.

The final course that stands out to me is the capstone course: CEP 807. This course is probably one of my favorite courses in the MAET program because I have really enjoyed creating an online portfolio that displays my work. Being someone who is creative and artistic, I loved being able to create a portfolio that was personalized and allowed me to be creative and fun. I think the portfolio is not only a great opportunity for me to put together and display everything that I have learned throughout the MAET program, but it is also a great way for me to look back at my entire master's journey and reflect on what I have learned and accomplished. I have also found that creating the portfolio is a culmination of using many of the technical skills I learned throughout the program. I would not have been able to create a website like this without the knowledge and tools I learned about in the master's program. I look forward to being able to show this portfolio to parents and administration so they can learn more about me and gain insight into my technological knowledge and abilities.

Looking back over the whole program, I can reflect on how much I thought I knew before beginning this journey and all of the new things I have come to learn throughout my courses. These things include such programs as Twitter, blogging, and Prezi and concepts such as TPACK which teach you how to incorporate technology into the classroom a meaningful way. Not only have I been able to incorporate my learnings into my own classroom, I have also been able to help my school enhance its overall use of technology. While taking what I have learned and sharing it within my own school, and district, I have seen the technology within many classrooms expand just throughout the course of the past couple of years. Knowing that I was part of this progress is exciting and promising, and I know that my school will continue to grow along with me.

As I have mentioned in previous essays for this class, I have had an interest in possibly becoming a media specialist. Although for now I plan on staying put, I know what I have learned in this program would help me with that as well. If the future pushes me in that direction, I think having taken this master's program will help me find success in a media specialist position. However, I also know that what I have learned will help me in the position I am in now. While I continue in a classroom setting, I plan to incorporate more technology into my teaching. Throughout my time within this master's program, I have learned the importance of technology in the classroom along with the different avenues technology presents. I am thankful for the opportunity to learn more in this area and allow myself to experience new technologies I can use in my future teaching.