

### Tip of the Iceberg

When I decided to pursue my Master's I wanted it to be in an area I felt strongly about while still advancing my growth in teaching. I found technology to be a skill I had a natural strength in early in my teaching. I saw it is necessary skill that my students would need as they grew up in a digital world and one that teachers would need to lead the charge in. Wanting to pursue my higher education from a school like Michigan State I was thrilled to see the Master's in Educational Technology program (MAET) available as a completely online agenda. Living in Colorado attending an in person program was not a realistic option and utilizing technology to expand my depth of knowledge in teaching with technology seemed like an ideal way to improve my teaching.

Once I stepped into the classroom I knew that teaching was a career I would be excited to go to each and everyday. I found technology a great way to enhance the material I was teaching students and helpful in letting them reach their learning goals. Using technology like Instant messaging and blogging I was able to take my class into digital environment that kept them engaged and learning. Though I really enjoyed technology I knew that I would need to take it up a level if I wanted my students to be exposed to the latest edtech and incorporate it into my teaching in a way that made me better at my job.

When starting the MAET program I felt a certain confidence in my abilities and I wasn't sure how it would end up translating in the course work. I sometimes even drifted into the thought that I must know everything there is to know about combining education and technology and I wouldn't gain much from the program except more credits. I am blown away by the growth I've experienced and what type of teacher I have grown into. Wrapping up the program I can look back at my experiences and projects and document what a journey this has been. My world and career have been altered by my experience and I am excited to watch the positive impacts on my current and future students.

Thought process was such a big element of my work in the program. Right from the beginning I was taught to critically review technology and make sure that it was being used in a way that was helping me achieve my ultimate learning goal and not there simply to keep kids engaged. I quickly realized that some of my past experiences with technology were simply attention grabbers and it changed my attitude towards using tech in the classroom. I wanted to use it, but it needed to be well thought out and useful if I really wanted to justify the bells and whistles.

This skill was honed in CEP 812: Applying Educational Technology to Issues of Practice when I had to develop and design a Wicked Problem Project that I hoped to solve by the end of the semester. My first step was to look at a problem I had experienced in the classroom that could be helped or approached differently with the help of technology. This was the first time I was

really looking at technology as a tool in the education process instead of its own entity. I took the very real issue of trying to teach several state standards about the Solar System in a little to none time window and materials that were completely thrown together from years of collecting and looked to technology to make it possible.

I looked at some of the most basic technology we had available which was computer labs, unplanned lab time, and the internet and worked to develop a project-based learning experience that would allow the students to reach the learning goals I had set for them in a way that better utilized the materials we had and what could be accessed for free on the web. I chose to create a WebQuest that used free online materials and what was available in my classroom to guide a group project which would create a resource that could be used by current and future students to accomplish the learning goals based around the Solar System set by our newly written academic standards.

The WebQuest ended up being a fantastic tool to facilitate the learning for my students. I was able to use the technology to fill in the holes that existed in our curriculum to teach important science standards. The end result was a collaborative project that all my students had a hand in and were extremely proud of. The project is still in use and will be updated as needed in order to continue making it relevant and useful to myself and fellow teachers.

Another important takeaway I had from the MAET program was taking a leadership role in education, especially when looking at instituting technology. CEP 815: Technology and Leadership was an eye-opening course in looking at what leadership looked like in an educational environment and what I could do to facilitate that in my own school. Many of the class readings were from business journals which I think provided a great perspective at what a great leader looks like and how that business model can be adapted to a school. We looked at different classifications of leadership as defined by the Harvard Business Review and it created an amazing revelation in my view of what a good leader is and could be, especially in an educational setting.

The discussion revolved around how leaders are not born, but made and molded into their roles and there are distinct differences that can inhibit or advance their success. It categorized leaders into seven categories: Opportunist, Diplomat, Expert, Achiever, Individualist, Strategist, and Alchemist. Each one has specific strengths and the ability to transform themselves into the next step up in order to become a more effective leader. The goal is to move into the realm of Strategist or Alchemist as they are leaders who end up having the greatest impact on change within their organizations. They are transformational leaders which can drive their organizations to becoming better than thought possible.

One of the most important points that was driven home was that it isn't always individuals who are leaders. Groups and whole organizations can take on those roles and either struggle or become successful. I have made this connection with the field of education where even though there is a leadership structure (teachers, principals, superintendent, and Board of Education) the

whole organization from bottom to top is what will drive change in that particular school or school district. The classroom teacher can be just as impactful as a superintendent in the proper circumstances. Education needs to strive to create Alchemist leadership which is capable of creating society-wide transformations. It's these type of transformations that are needed to improve the quality of our education system.

Where does technology fit in? Technology is not necessarily a key element for good leadership, but it can provide a foundation to build on. Using tools like Twitter, Facebook, and other social media can help connect teachers and leaders in ways never thought possible before. These connections can then ensure a more united front when looking to institute positive change and provide people with ideas in how to make those transformations possible. Collaboration tools like Google docs can help leaders work with the people in their organizations as efficiently as possible to get the best results. The technology is again simply a tool and it's up to the user to find the best ways to utilize it.

My work in CEP 815 challenged me to try and be that leader and ask myself how can I and my colleagues do things better? I want to lead the charge in innovation within my school and even throughout education, but I'm not afraid to look to others who may have already figured it out. Educational and technology leadership is something that I view as extremely important and it was amazing to see the MAET program have a course that did a fantastic job of looking through that keyhole in a way that changed my perception of leadership for the better.

How and why do my students learn? This was a question I had never given as deep of thought to as I should have. As a teacher I want my students to learn, but the need to analyze how they are learning and what can be done to help them succeed is the foundation of what it takes to be a great teacher. Taking the course CEP 800: Learning in School and other Settings I was tasked with that very question and provided with support in how to look at it thoughtfully in a way to help me, help my students succeed.

My goals were to better understand how exactly my students' understanding was developed. The work I completed throughout the course helped tie together all my knowledge of pedagogy, TPACK, types of learners, UDL (Universal Design for Learning) and other elements of teaching and student learning. The course walked me through creating a lesson for my students and documenting my progress from start to finish using podcasting, blogging, and digital storytelling. This was an astonishing experience that altered my view of what my students were capable of and how I could get them there.

This course was important to me because I felt like it got to the heart of great teaching and helped me realize how I could recognize it in my own classroom and make sure my students could all walk away with a deep understanding of something they didn't know until stepping through my door. In this case technology was the way I could better analyze and identify what was happening in my classroom and what next steps would need to be taken. I've changed the way I look at what my students are learning and how I am trying to teach them. I feel like I have

gone back to the early days in my teaching profession when I was more idealistic, but I have the skill set to make those idealistic goals and ideas well within reach.

Touching on some of my biggest take-aways from this program has only stirred up how many more great things I've learned on this amazing journey. My thought process in critically looking at technology and how I can use it effectively, what good leadership looks like and how I can achieve it, and better understanding how my students learn are things I hold closest to me when moving on. They are the pieces that are forefront in my mind anytime I look to move forward in my teaching and learning. I came into the program excited, but cautious about how effective it would be. I am leaving with such an expanded skill and mindset when it comes to technology and the advancement of education.

The most important thing I am leaving with when graduating with a Master's in Educational Technology is that my learning never stops. The digital world we live in is constantly changing and if I want to continue to hang my hat on being an educator that uses technology to create more enriching learning experiences for my students then I also need to enrich my own learning in new and improved methods and tools that are introduced.

I feel like I have only seen the "tip of iceberg" when it comes to my potential teaching and using technology and what's yet to be discovered under the surface holds so much promise. Moving forward I know I have what it takes to continue to grow and lead the charge into the undiscovered depths of education.