

### **Where did I come from? Where am I now?**

Before starting my journey within the Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) program, I had thoughts about my future in education, but I was not sure which path I would take in order to obtain my degree. Without a doubt in my mind, I knew that I belonged at Michigan State University. This school represents everything I am as a teacher now, and everything I hope to become. My collegiate journey began at Michigan State as an undergraduate student, and after being a part of this phenomenal university, I knew it was the perfect fit. My next step was finding a degree that would enhance my teaching abilities and allow me to accomplish my goals. After digging in and learning about the different programs offered at MSU, I had a strong attraction to a degree within the realm of technology, which led me to this program. The MAET program means more to me than “the degree.” It shows my growth as a student, an educator, and as a hopeful leader.

#### **Student**

When a new experience pushes your boundaries, you develop a feeling of growth and learning. These are the feelings I have had throughout my courses within the MAET program. From making personalized videos, to web-chat meetings, and even providing constructive feedback to my peers, I have felt pushed outside of my comfort zone throughout this journey to receive my degree. I am defined as an introvert through and through. However, because this program was completely virtual, I have had to adapt to a different learning environment and communicate in new ways with my peers. This transformation began when I started taking the Counseling and Educational Psychology (CEP) courses for my degree. One of my first triumphs was in CEP 810 *Teaching for Understanding with Technology*, when I had to make a video of myself struggling to use kitchen tools while explaining the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) model. As this was happening I was trying my best to avoid looking like a complete fool on camera. This was a true test of my confidence and ability to express my thought process through a video. When I look back and reflect on this moment, I can see how much I have matured while participating in these activities of reimagining thinking and learning.

The next CEP courses provided an environment that was flexible in which I was able to learn from my mistakes. As frustrating as it was, I had to try new technologies, fail, try again, and repeat the cycle multiple times before I understood how to use the technology tool for the purpose at hand. Failing is not something anyone feels comfortable with, but for me it seems to hit at a deeper level, and forces me to bring out another more powerful form within my personality. There are very few people in my life who have seen me at this level and work with such ferocity, but it is a very important part of who I am as a learner. A specific example of this was in CEP 811 *Adapting Innovative Technologies to Education*, when I used the Circuit Scribe kit to make a battery-operated blueprint that included batteries, switches, lights, buzzers, and fans in order to power the room. I would post on discussion forums my frustrations, email my professors with questions about my work, and tinker away with miniature light bulbs and fans until I realized the day had passed me by. The CEP courses forced me to struggle, but

encouraged me to gain knowledge from the obstacles that were ahead of me. As I look back on the work I have completed within the program, I can honestly say I am proud of who I have become as a learner, and I cannot believe how much I have accomplished within my graduate studies at Michigan State University.

Does this end my journey in education as a student? Absolutely not. If anything, the MAET program has helped me to see that what I am able to accomplish is such a short period of time, and I now know that I need to reach higher. I am no longer afraid to share my aspirations for the future with others because I have already accomplished so much by obtaining my master's degree. I am a lifelong learner. The world is constantly changing, so why not evolve with it?

### **Teacher**

Within his book *The Anti-Education Era*, James Paul Gee stated, "We are exceedingly good at believing what we want and need to believe, even in the face of counterevidence" (Gee, 2013, p. 1). This quote defines who I was as a teacher before beginning the Master of Arts in Educational Technology program at Michigan State. I am still considered a "new" teacher as I will begin my fifth year of teaching for the upcoming school year. This naive curiosity and drive has impacted my teaching style and interactions with students in the past. I have been exposed to many different teaching methods and techniques, and I have tried to absorb as much information about each as possible in order to implement them in my practice. As I look back, I understand that I was seeing what I wanted to believe with each teaching method, rather than focusing on what actually fits with my learners. In the past, I would learn a new teaching method during professional development in my building, and try it the next day in my class. It would end up not working, and I would place the blame on myself. However, I was failing to look at the bigger picture. The journey through my master's program has made me reflect on these experiences and really understand what works best for me, and most importantly what actually benefits my students.

I have learned that critical analysis of teaching methods is very important when determining whether or not a new strategy or technology should be implemented in the classroom. Each class within the MAET program has had me problem solve regarding current issues in education. These "wicked problems" have been directly connected to my daily teaching practice, and at times, encourage me to push my colleagues' thinking before trying something new. One of these assignments was completed during CEP 812 *Applying Educational Technology to Issues of Practice*, where my group focused on the issue of "failure as a learning mode." In this project I worked to specifically identify and analyze the problem, present the issue through an infographic, and conclude the project by working with a group of peers on a proposal with multiple solutions for the problem. Each of these assignments, discussions, video chats, and readings within my classes have allowed me to use a new lens when considering teaching and learning. I no longer just try the newest technology or teaching method with my

students. I look into the research behind the “next best thing” and see if it holds value in the classroom.

Finally, and most importantly, I have been able to share the importance of learning with my students as I completed the journey through my master’s program. My students were curious about my homework and assignments, and each one of them wanted to be a part of my literacy learner studies. They knew that this was hard work, they understood that I was teaching full time, and yet encouraged me during the entire process. As a teacher, it is crucial that students see your motivation to learn and grow with them. By allowing myself to struggle through this process in front of my students, I know that they developed a feeling of comfort and respect for me, as a teacher and as a learner. Hopefully this positive mindset of learning will follow them as they make their way to middle school and high school in the upcoming years.

### **Leader**

What honestly makes a leader? A strong personality? The ability to command a room? These questions have flooded my mind since I have started the MAET program at Michigan State. My administrators and colleagues would continuously tell me I had the potential to become a leader in the district someday. I couldn’t see it. I never had the desire to move past the realm of teaching, and I had a difficult time believing them when they would encourage me to engage in leadership opportunities. The courses in my MAET program have made me reconsider these words of encouragement. I have felt a desire to raise the bar in my teaching, but also in my expectations for the future. This program has changed the way I analyze new information and how I communicate with others. I have developed a confidence in my thoughts and opinions, and I truly find value in my work and my ideas. Since starting this program, I have joined multiple committees in my building that show my strengths and the work I have accomplished during my graduate courses. In the past I would always think to myself, “I am not a leader.” However, saying that statement now no longer seems accurate. I lead twenty-eight minds everyday in my career. I lead conferences, meetings and phone calls with parents. I lead discussions with other students in my courses and with teachers in professional learning communities (PLC). I am a leader because I have a passion to grow, and I want others to grow with me.

One course in particular, *CEP 815 Technology and Leadership*, allowed me to reflect on the definition of a leader and what that person looks like in an educational setting. Some of the assignments required me to problem solve as different forms of leaders on Twitter, and others have enabled me work through problems that were close to home. My biggest gain from this course was developing a proposal for creating authentic learning opportunities in my building. This was something I had hoped to complete anyway for my school, but this course made sure I followed the steps a leader would take in order to solve the thorny issue. By researching a problem that needs to be solved in my building, I know that I really want to make a difference. I could have chosen a simple problem with unlimited solutions to choose from, but I truly believe

that I can change the way my district thinks about learning. I can be a technology leader in my district because I am willing to put in the time and the effort.

The Master of Arts in Educational Technology graduate program has helped me to consider goals for myself that I never knew existed. I have been inspired to set new expectations by my professors, course readings, and through the work I have accomplished while taking part in this program. As I reflect on all of the work I have done, I know what I am capable of, and I am ready to prove my worth to the world beyond the MAET program. When I look into my future, I can see myself using my MAET degree to become a technology coach within my district. I see myself working with other teachers on how to integrate the technology that fits best with their content and teaching style. In the distant future, I know I will apply what I have learned in this program to my doctorate degree at an accredited university, while continuing to fill my knowledge with words of wisdom regarding the educational profession. As I continue to learn and grow, I hope to share my experiences and ideas with pre service teachers that have the same spark for teaching and learning that I have always had. By choosing the MAET program and working through each obstacle along the way, I know that I have become a well-rounded individual, and I am ready to learn more.

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### **References:**

Gee, James Paul. (2013). *The Anti-Education Era: Creating Smarter Students Through Digital Learning*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.