Learning to Lead: My EduTech Journey
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I remember the day I interviewed for my teaching job at the school where I am now a teacher. I was asked to be specific about my goals as a teacher and where I see myself in the future. I answered honestly and excitedly that I planned to one day get my masters degree in educational technology so that I could learn how to best utilize technology for students. I knew that I got excited about learning when new technologies were used and I knew that getting students excited about learning was key to making students lifelong learners. I also knew that technology was constantly evolving and if teachers wanted to really get through to all kids, they needed to learn to evolve as well. At the time, that was enough of a reason for me to be committed to earning my masters in educational technology. I taught at my school for over two years before beginning on my journey as a graduate student. In that time, I saw that my hunch was right. Even the most reluctant and struggling students worked harder and accomplished more when using technology to accomplish the goal. I had a feeling that what I saw in my students was just the beginning of what I would come to know about how technology impacts the education field and students' academic success.

My journey through my masters classes was a combination of learning about really exciting ways to incorporate Web 2.0 into the classroom, reading and researching the many different theories and approaches to educational technology, learning about how to be an ed-tech leader, and putting all of these things, and more, into practice. With each course I took, I learned something new and valuable that I could really use in a practical way. I took many of these ideas with me to my classroom and was amazed at how they changed my classes. The MSU MAET program provided me with the opportunity and education to become a stronger educator, learner, and integrator of technology.

Hands-On Learning

From the very first course I took as part of the MAET program, I knew that I had found exactly what I was hoping for. The first course, **CEP 810: Teaching for Understanding with Computers**, was exactly what I had hoped a masters in educational technology program would be like when I had talked about it a few years earlier at my job interview. This course focused on both how to use technology as a productive professional and ways to incorporate it within the classroom. I learned how to organize files in the online bookmarking program, Diigo, how to stay up to date and organize online information with RSS feeds, ways to communicate with other professionals on forums like Classroom 2.0 and Macul, and how to develop a professional learning network. Furthermore, this class helped me to view technology in a different way. Prior to taking this course I viewed technology as something I had to find ways to incorporate into lessons because of my school's focus on technology. Thanks to this course I learned to start looking at technology as a tool that supports learning. Rather than trying to create lessons that centered on technology, I used technology to support my lessons. Students began using their iPod Touches daily as a formative assessment of their on-going learning. Edmodo and blogs were incorporated as ways to allow for more collaborative communication among my students when they discussed novels or writing projects. I learned how to use technology to aid learning and lesson planning rather than to drive it.

Another course that really gave me concrete, hands-on learning experience was **CEP 812: Applying Educational Technology to Practice**. This course taught me everything from screencasting to podcasting, and the hands-on applications were truly tools that changed my classroom. This course required me to identify something that I wanted to change or adapt in

my classroom to make it better. The result of this was my [wicked problem project](#). In this project, I examined an essay and Power Point presentation that my students made each year and found ways to make the assignment more engaging, authentic, and meaningful. Instead of simply having students take information they had researched and written centering on the topic "you must be the change you wish to see in the world," and repeating the same information on Power Point slides, I had the students analyze their research and create engaging public service announcements that would call the audience to action. This change created the exact effect I was hoping for. It was more engaging, authentic and meaningful. My students created public service announcements that incorporated their researched information in such a way that the audience was informed about the problem and ways they could make a change. One important concept that I studied more in-depth in this course was the TPACK framework. While creating my Wicked Problem Project, I studied how the TPACK framework guided my planning of the lesson. This framework guides all educators to ensure that lessons that incorporate technology integrate technology, pedagogy, and content in such a way that the lesson is purposeful and meaningful. You can see more about the specifics of TPACK and how it was part of my Wicked Problem Project on my [blog](#).

In this course, I also had the opportunity to work with other course members around the United States to examine how wikis could be used for collaborative communication in the classroom. We were able to meet through live video chat and by text chat on Google Docs to discuss and plan our [group leadership project](#), which elements of wikis we wanted to focus on, who would work on each part of the project and to put it all together. Both our presentation topic and the act of participating in group work online opened my eyes to the possibilities of online group work and how truly collaborative it can make us all. After completing these two courses, I was given a toolbox of skills to use in my classroom. Knowing that this was just the beginning of the MAET program let me so excited to see what was to come.

Putting it Into Practice

I also received many practical tools for teaching with technology in the course **CEP 820: Teaching K-12 Students Online**. In this course, I learned how to create an online course. I created an online unit for my 8th grade language arts classes using Haiku. My online course focused on a poetry unit with a specific focus in identifying figurative language in poetry and writing poems. Through the course I learned about all of the ways that students can participate and communicate online. The online course that I created is something that I could use in my current classroom or for a hypothetical online class. I found this course very useful because it seems that online education is an expanding educational trend in K-12 classrooms. Furthermore, more classrooms are using the flipped classroom method than ever before. The ability to create an online course on a site like Haiku would be very useful for that method of teaching.

From Student to Leader

While the previous courses helped to give me tools to navigate Web 2.0 technologies better and analyze my lessons, one course in particular really helped to change the way I view technology use in education and view technology use as it impacts entire schools and school districts. That course was **CEP 815: Technology and Leadership**. One of the lessons with the most impact that I learned from this course was the difference between [instrumental and missional thinking.](#) It is a lesson that I was briefly introduced to in previous

courses, but was able to study more deeply and really put a name to it in this course. It is the difference between adding technology to a school just for the sake of adding technology (instrumental thinking) versus adding technology to a school only after identifying the learning goals of the school and deciding how that technology can support those learning goals (missional thinking). I have to say that before this course, I was guilty of just wanting the latest and greatest forms of technology in my classroom without having any idea of how that would support the learning goals. I know now that whether you are a leader of a classroom, school, or district, it is imperative that you focus on the learning goals and school vision first and the technology that can support those missions second. Such thinking will lead to investments in technology that are practical and purposeful to many.

This course also gave me an opportunity to examine all different types of leaders. From leaders in technology to leaders in business, I was able to learn about what makes someone a great leader. This has already proven useful to me as a teacher in how I approach my students. Certainly studying the best can only help to make me better as a leader in my own school. One assignment in this course allowed me to consider the TPACK framework again and how to use it when deciding how to do something in my classroom that I couldn't do without the use of technology. This led me to make literature circles even more of a collaborative experience for my students by creating blogs for them to write about the novels they were reading. It also allowed them to communicate with students in other classes who were reading the same novel. This opened the students up to much more varied discussions. This, along with other assignments, caused me to constantly question how I can use technology in the most effective manner and lead others to do the same.

Reflecting Back and Looking Forward

After being immersed in the different MAET courses, one of my final courses, **CEP 807: Capstone Portfolio Course**, offered me a chance to reflect on my journey through the program. It allowed me to see how far I have come as a student, teacher, and leader. The main way that it did this was through the creation of my online portfolio. On my technology showcase page, I had the opportunity to highlight many of the projects and papers I completed for each course. In doing so, I was able to see just how much I had learned about educational technology. I also wrote essays for this course that not only allowed me to reflect on my past, but also provided me the chance to look towards my future. In my Goal Statement Reflection essay, I considered the goals I had set for myself when applying to the MAET program and considered what my goals are now that I've neared the end of that journey. In my Future as a Learner essay, I was able to focus on those goals for the future and consider how I might reach them, and how I would continue to progress as a lifelong learner of educational technology. Both essays, along with this Synthesis essay, provide me with insight on where I started, how far I've gone, and how much further I can go in the future.

Final Thoughts

Thinking back to that job interview where I earnestly described my desire and reasoning for wanting to get my masters degree in educational technology, I had no idea how much my

vision of what a degree in educational technology would change. I went from wanting to learn how to add more technology to my class because I thought it was cool and fun for the kids, to understanding that technology is merely a tool used to aid in reaching learning goals. At the same time, I learned a variety of ways to use technology as a tool and to solve problems in my classroom. I also learned how to continue my education in this ever-changing field. Although my time in the MAET program is coming to an end, it is clear that my journey learning about educational technology has just begun.