

My Experience in the Masters of Arts in Education Technology (MAET) Program

Day one of the MAET program was very nerve-wreaking for me. I felt like I was back in high school as a freshman, taking a bunch of classes with people I didn't know. I felt like I was in high school and not college because there were only 7 of us, whereas in college there are hundreds of other students. I was also very nervous because I doubted my ability in a master's program. Studying mathematics as an undergrad had turned me off of more schooling because it was not a fun experience. To be honest, I initially started the program to get a pay raise. I am so glad I pushed myself out of my comfort zone and did this master's program. I grew as an educator, a leader, and a person because of this program. I have my classmates, my instructors, and the advising team to thank for that.

Before I began the program, I researched what I could get my masters in. I didn't want to learn about curriculum since I never saw myself leaving the classroom. I wanted something was impactful to my current position and what I could use now in my classroom. When I saw the MAET program, I thought it was perfect. Since my student teaching, I wanted to learn how to incorporate more technology into the classroom. I was also drawn to this program because it offered a hybrid option. I knew myself enough to know that taking classes only online isn't the best learning environment for me, even though it provides the flexibility to take classes and still work full time. Living near East Lansing allowed me the ability to take part in the face-to-face portion of the classes and interact with other educators.

I truly appreciated the structure of the program. Interacting with other educators allowed me to learn from everyone in the room. It was great to learn new techniques and technology from teachers from other states, different contents and grade levels, and types of schools (i.e. private). Interacting with educators with different teaching and learning experiences from my own also helped me grow as an educator. I was able to take all of those experiences from those two summer hybrid classes and incorporate the wealth of knowledge I gained into my classroom to positively impact my students.

My first year in the program was at first nerve-wreaking but grew to be this innovative, creative, and fun experience with my six other classmates and two instructors. It challenged me intellectually and creatively that has pushed me to become a better educator. It was an intense experience to say the least, but it was worth it. My second year in the program was thought-provoking, collaborative, and inspiring. It was during that summer that I was allowed the creative freedom to push myself in an area that interests and inspires me. My instructors and classmates encouraged me and to think deeply about what it means to be a leader and the many different shapes and ways one can be a leader. This motivated me to take initiative and create my own leadership position within my building, with support from my administrator.

There were four classes that were the most impactful on my learning and growth as an educator in the educational technology program.

CEP 810: Teaching for Understanding with Technology & CEP 811: Adapting Innovative Technologies in Education

During these classes, I learned about TPACK. TPACK is technology, pedagogical, and content knowledge. It is the foundation for educational technology. It is how we can incorporate technology into the classroom in a way that fosters learning and increases a student's understanding. The goal is to find the sweet spot where content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge overlap to create the ideal learning environment for the student. When I first began this program, I wanted to incorporate technology just to incorporate it. I thought it would be cool to use computers in the classroom. I quickly learned from this class that incorporating technology just for technology sake was not the point. I began to think more deeply about what technology I was using and the purpose it was serving. What were the students to learn? How does the technology foster this growth in knowledge better than direct instruction, group discussion, or exploratory assignment? What technology do I want to use? Is this the best fit or is there something else that works better? All of these questions go through my mind now as I begin to plan lessons that incorporate technology.

I also am picky about what technology I chose to use. The biggest takeaway from these classes is rethinking what is technology. When we think about technology, we usually think about digital technology that require the use of an iPad or a computer. However, these classes have expanded my thinking to technology outside of just digital technology. Consider this: most math classes have students practice example problems with pencil and paper. A change in pace would be to have students use mini whiteboards to show their work and thinking. In this instance, the whiteboard would be the technology that helps foster student thinking and learning. It doesn't take away from it because just as they would with pencil and paper, they are practicing the math problems and critical thinking skills. And what student doesn't enjoy writing on a whiteboard? I am an advocate for using technology and providing students with hands-on learning; thus I spend a lot of time researching and playing around with a new piece before I present it to my students. Because sometimes we as educators get so caught up feeling like we have to use digital technology that we forget about other things that are also considered technology that will enhance our students learning.

Gifted with a set of thirty Chromebooks, my focus began to be on how to thoughtfully incorporate digital technology into my classroom. The content knowledge I want to them to understand and gain mastery in determines what piece of technology I use. If the goal is for students to learn a new topic, Desmos allows them to work at their own pace and explore, but also allows for teacher intervention to focus them in on a particular topic. If I want to survey students on what they understand, Plickers is more useful. If I want students to be able to play a game but still work at their own pace, Quizizz or Gimkit is more appropriate than Kahoot. For a more hands on application, we used TinkerCAD to create scale dimensions and models of an object. At the end of the day, the goal is for student learning and understanding to increase with the addition of technology. If it takes away from it, then technology is not appropriate the lesson.

CEP 822: Approaches to Educational Research & CEP 815: Technology and Leadership

These two classes had the greatest impact on my future as an educator. Prior to these classes, I had never thought about being a leader. My only goal was to become Teacher of the Year (which it still is). I mostly focused on my relationships with students and teaching my content knowledge. I didn't think further past this or about being a leader. I didn't see myself as a leader. I didn't think I could be without being an administrator. These classes pushed me to discover what it meant to be a leader without leaving the classroom. I have no aspirations to be an administrator or to leave the classroom. I aspire to be that teacher that is passionate about their students and refuses to retire. Yes, I want to be that teacher that the entire building says they will die in their classroom because they care so much about their students. As I took these classes, that was always at the back of my mind. I thought about the relationships I had built with my students. I have great relationship with my students because I have genuine conversations with them on a more personal level. Most of my female students come to me when they want advice, need guidance, or support. I want to do more to help them blossom and grow into the successful women they aspire to be. However, during class my job is to teach the content. I don't get to spend days just talking to them. I realized that I wanted to mentor them since we already had a relationship.

I am grateful to my instructors to allowing me to freedom to explore this more. It had been an idea that had been stirring around in my head for a few months. These two classes allowed me the time and space to do though-provoking research into this. This is where my idea to start a mentoring program formed. My research paper was about the impact mentoring has on my demographic: at-risk, inner city, female students of color. In a TED Talk style of presentation, I presented my ideas about how I wish to be a leader within my school and community. The feedback and response from my instructors and classmates motivated me even more to see myself as a leader. I felt that much more inspired to being laying the foundation to start this program in my building. They even gave me the idea of potentially expanding the program to all of the high schools within my district. I appreciate these classes, my instructors, and my classmates because I was able to take a seed of an idea and grow it. After I graduate, the goal is to start the program with a small group of students.

Not only did the freedom to research and being to formulate a mentoring program help me to feel inspired about being a leader, but a class discussion also pushed me to see me as a leader. In one of our discussions, Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (MACUL) was mentioned as great organization to join for leaders in educational technology. I began to look into it and saw they were having a conference coming up in Detroit. Without hesitation, I signed up to attend. This invaluable experience was something that inspired me even more. I not only walked away with new tech tools to add to my ever growing toolbox, I felt like I needed to share all of this knowledge with my colleagues. Before school started, I approached my administrator to see if I would be allowed time during professional development meetings to give "tech talks." With enthusiasm, he built it into the schedule twice a month for this to happen. I believe that without being in these classes during the summer, and not having heard about MACUL, I would have never taken the initiative to become a leader within my building. I now regularly help my colleagues with questions about technology and am known as the "tech guru" for my building. Even before I graduated with my degree, I am putting my degree to work and working towards a new goal of being a technology coach.

This program has taught me so much and opened my eyes to so many possibilities and opportunities I had never considered before. Again, I only went into the program with the intention of a pay raise. As I approach graduation, I am looking for the next program I can start to continue my education and learning. I realized I enjoyed being a student when I had control over what I wanted to learn and how I learned it. This program allowed me to possibility to try new things, to fail and learn from my failure, and to take risks. This is something that has stuck with me and has influenced my teaching. I feel inspired to be a leader the goal of giving back to my community and helping my building and district grow. I am forever grateful to the MAET program for allowing me the opportunity to be a part of the program. This program has inspired me in ways I could never have imagined and pushed me out of my comfort zone to become a better educator.