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Embrace the Change

CHANGE [CHEYNJ]: TO MAKE OR BECOME DIFFERENT. This one word sparks fear in many individuals, including myself. Why do we fear change? Some people don't like being taken out of their comfort zone, while others fear the unknown outcomes of change. Change is inevitable in most aspects of our lives, including education. Without change one does not truly learn. However, education as a whole is a big culprit of dreading change. On a positive note, there is a big shift to integrate technology effectively into the classroom. This is one of the reasons why I decided to pursue a second Master's degree in Educational Technology. I was already a computer teacher, but I wanted to learn how to effectively present my class content. I was also interested in teaching other teachers how to incorporate technology into their instruction. This change promoted self growth in my own content area and widened my future career possibilities.

In 2012, I applied to the Master of Arts in Teaching and Curriculum (MATC) program at Michigan State University. At the time it seemed like a reasonable decision because I wanted to learn more about education. I was a substitute teacher and believed I would eventually be a traditional classroom teacher. Once again, change is inevitable and I was hired as a computer teacher in grades kindergarten through 8th. Change is usually feared, but this awakened my passion for educational technology. Afterwards, I decided to specialize in Educational Technology in the MATC program. I took several CEP courses and found that my original goals changed; I didn't want to just learn about education as a whole anymore. I wanted to be part of the change in education by promoting the integration of technology into my schools' traditional classrooms. The CEP courses introduced concepts and uses for technology in ways that I was never exposed to before. Technology isn't just a simple tool anymore; it can be life changing.

For this reason, I decided to officially apply to the Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) program at Michigan State University in 2014. I completed the majority of the requirements by then, but wanted to learn more. My passion for technology manifested within the three Educational Technology certification courses, CEP 810, 811, and 812, when I started to see all the possibilities technology opens up in the classroom. I struggled at times with coursework because some assignments were better suited for traditional classroom teachers. It wasn't hard to find ways to creatively integrate technology into my instruction since I taught technology. Regardless, I soon discovered that technology integration isn't only about the teacher's instruction, but it is also essential for students to be active participants. I started to focus my technology integration around my students. My first opportunity to concentrate on this idea was in CEP 810.

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CEP 810, *Teaching for Understanding with Technology*, promoted Personal Learning Networks (PLN) and introduced Special Interest Groups (SIG) and Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework for the first time. The course utilized Google Drive as a medium to develop and reflect on my own <u>Personal Growth Plan</u>. I was encouraged to be creative in my coursework and understand that technology is ever changing. The SIG presentation was the first time I was asked to collaborate with others solely online for a project. My group created a website that discussed the benefits of <u>Game Based Learning</u> for teachers, students, content, and context. Much of my research in the MAET program focused on Game Based Learning and how to integrate it effectively in my technology classroom because of this initial group project.

This course taught me about the large array of technology tools available and to not be afraid to test them out. I learned that I need to find tools that suit my needs as a technology teacher and the needs of my students. Contrary to popular belief, teachers don't know everything. Before this course I felt isolated as the only technology teacher in my schools. CEP 810 showed me that I was not alone! I learned how to connect with other educators using my PLN. I now use LinkedIn, Twitter, Pinterest, Google+, and multiple blogs/websites to connect me with other educators that are interested in Educational Technology. My learning expanded from four physical walls around me to people in other states and countries. I soon realized that PLNs didn't only widen my radius of learning, but my students as well. I could connect my students with people who can't come to Lansing, Michigan to talk to them but have an internet connection and a webcam. I continued to deepened my understanding on how to effectively integrate technology in CEP 811.

CEP 811, *Adapting Innovative Technology to Education*, focused on Web 2.0 and the Universal Design for Learning (UDL). I explored various ways technology tools could be utilized to promote student achievement in the classroom. My passion for Game Based Learning (GBL) strengthened through the goal-directed instructional design plan I created. I focused on how GBL supports problem solving and critical thinking skills among students. I learned that UDL is a set of three principles (representation, action/ expression, and engagement) for developing a curriculum and each principle addresses a different part of the brain's learning centers. I used the UDL to address issues that might arise for my students for the curriculum I created. Unfortunately, the curriculum I developed using Alien Rescue was never used in my classroom because I later discovered my students didn't learn about that content in science until high school. It was a learning experience that allowed me to understand that there are different ways I

can present content, different ways my students can approach a learning task, and different choices for students that can stimulate interest and motivation.

This course gave me the chance locate and create my own resources to integrate directly into my instruction. I created a Stand Alone Instructional Resource (StAIR) to supplement my third grade students' science unit on Earth Surfaces. StAIR is used for students to learn specific content completely independently online. I collaborated with the classroom teacher on the content she was teaching and how I could provide support with a resource the students would be able to access at home. Being able to implement what I learned in the MAET program directly into my instruction provided me with confidence in myself as an educator. The use of Merlot, a multimedia educational online sharing resource, provided me with what seemed like an endless supply of resources at my fingertips. Through the examination of multiple WebQuests I was able to successfully create my own and implement it in my instruction during the same semester! The ability to create and share my own resources with other teachers allowed me to be creative as I made my lessons. The real world application of my coursework continued in CEP 813.

CEP 813, *Electronic Assessment for Teaching and Learning*, was a revamped course that took a critical look at assessment design, Content Management Systems (CMS), and MinecraftEDU as a formative assessment tool. By using the backwards design method I was able to create a unit for students to understand the role of a game developer, experience having an initial idea and making it a reality through game design, and taking ownership of one's learning through reflection. Formative assessment provides teachers with the ability to gage students' current progress while engaging them in additional learning. This allows for adjustments in one's instructions to accommodate a diverse student body before the unit is over. I learned that formative assessments can come in a multitude of forms and finding what best suits my classroom is key. One possible way to present formative assessments is through a CMS. I had previous experience with CMSs (e.g. Edmodo) as a way to supply content materials, but never embraced its assessment capabilities. Being able to provide a centralized area for content material, assessments, and communication benefits both the teacher and student. I found that the use of a CMS in my 45 minute classes could be quite efficient. I am now able to provide thoughtful formative assessments and save paper while doing it.

This course also expanded my thinking of formative assessment beyond a check for progress to a way to give my students control of their learning and the opportunity to make mistakes in the hope of them being addressed in class. I was able to use a very

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popular game among my students called Minecraft for the first time as a unique assessment tool. The use of MinecraftEDU not only motivates students to participate, it allows them to be creative while doing it. The game comes in both "survival" and "creative" modules (mods). I used a creative mod to make a virtual assessment on the basic parts of a computer along with the flow of input/output data of those specific devices (e.g. keyboard). This experience reminded me how important creativity is for not only students but teachers too. The theme of designing and creativity extended into CEP 817.

CEP 817, *Learning Technology through Design,* opened my eyes to the world of design thinking. I selected a problem of practice I personally experienced and used Stanford's Design Model to go through the steps to develop my own solution. The stages of Stanford's Design Model are Emphasize —> Define —> Ideate —> Prototype —> Test. My problem of practice was the lack of a technology curriculum provided by my schools; I decided to take the initiative and create my own. By emphasizing with my students I was able to learn they yearned for lessons that allowed them to be creative. On the other hand teachers wanted their students to know more practical uses for technology such as word processing skills and internet literacy. Luckily, I wanted to make a curriculum that is a creative approach to practical skills. By defining my problem I was able to figure out that the root of my problem was the lack of funding due to special/elective courses like technology not being part of any national or statewide proficiency standardized tests that receive federal funding or recognition. This motivated me to make a change! Through ideation I was able to reflect on how I would make my curriculum flexible to accommodate different mediums of technology. By taking all the information I gathered I created a prototype of my technology curriculum and tested a few lessons with my kindergarten and fourth grade classes.

This course allowed me to analyze the content I presented my students and take the necessary steps towards organizing it into a thoughtful curriculum. I discovered that the stages through the Design Model are not linear but rather a continuous cycle; this allows for numerous changes to the possible solution. I was able to create a rough framework and will continue to use design thinking in the future to build upon it.

During my journey through the Master of Arts in Educational Technology many things have changed. My career changed. My program changed. My goals as a learner changed. My outlook at technology integration changed. The MAET program gave me the environment I needed to transform into the person I am today. I look back at the experiences and I embrace my role as an educator. May it be children or adults, I will make a difference and I have Michigan State University to thank for the skills and

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knowledge they provided me through this program. I will continue my journey as a life long learner knowing the importance of balance between technology, content, and pedagogy. Change is inevitable and I take my first step away from the MAET program embracing the unknown and allowing life to continue surprising me.