

Stepping Stones towards Growth

By, Miranda Bender

I knew I was going to be a teacher from the moment I understood the word. My mom told me that she once tried to convince me to be a lawyer but I insisted that helping children develop into the adults they would become was more important to me. Growing up, I was the child who dreaded snow days because it meant I had to miss a day of school. Going to school was my safe place; my constant. Each year ended with tears because I had to say goodbye to my teacher and a piece of my heart was going to be gone. Today, that love of teachers has transformed into who I am as an educator. My job is to do so much more than teach. My goal each school year is to bring out the creative, curious, and ever growing side of my students. I want them to know that they are not just students, but people who are compassionate, innovative, and collaborative. This goal is only achievable if I, myself, model to my students how to be those things. That is why I chose to get my master's degree in educational technology. By going back to school I was able to show my students that you can keep learning even after you become an adult and with more learning comes greater understanding.

I attended Michigan State University as an undergraduate where I received my Bachelors of Arts degree. To say I bleed green would be an understatement. My time at MSU was vital to the person I am today and I will forever be impacted by the skills and knowledge I got while attending there. Being a Michigan State University Spartan already, I knew there was no where else I wanted to get my master's degree so I set out to find the program that would help me achieve my educational goals. I chose to join the Master's of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) program where I would be able to take my courses online in order to earn my degree while continuing to teach. Throughout the program I was engrossed in technology and how to integrate it within my classroom to enhance my students' learning and engagement. I learned the time and place to use technology but most of all I learned that technology should not be used just for the sake of using it but it should be used for and with a purpose. This understanding has impacted the educator that I am today and has allowed me to challenge my own thinking in order to enhance the learning done in my classroom. To say I am the same teacher I was when I began this journey would be a lie. I have learned and applied the things from this program into my teaching practice and that has only made me a more successful, and effective teacher.

A course that particularly impacted me, as an educator was the CEP 820: Teaching Students Online course. This course pushed me to view technology tools as not just resources but a way to enhance student learning so that the teacher role was now the student role. Through this course I was able to create my own online course focusing on a unit that I was currently teaching with my own students in my classroom. This provided me the guidance and practice for transforming my teaching into more engaging and interactive lessons for students. I was able to see how using these online tools could provide a deeper purpose and understanding for my students and could allow them to take control of what, how, and why they were learning things.

I have changed the way I view teaching based on this class in the following ways. First, I have been able to integrate more technology into my lessons so that my students can be more engaged in their learning. Second, this course has allowed me to use

technology to differentiate lessons for students who may struggle with reading by providing an online listening feature for students. Lastly, this course has allowed me to teach students at their own pace so students who are ready to move on can and students who need more time with a lesson can spend more time reviewing and understanding the material. This has greatly impacted my teaching because it has allowed me to help all of my students in the classroom and not just a majority of them.

A second course that has impacted me, as an educator was the CEP 813: Electronic Assessment course. This course pushed me to think about assessments and their purpose in the classroom. In this course I created a rubric of criterion that I thought was the most important things to look at when scoring students' formative and summative assessments. I then explored media tools such as Minecraft where I was able to create online assessments through a game and test it against my assessment rubric to see how the assessment stood up to the criteria. This course challenged me to go outside of my comfort zone and push my thinking to see past the idea of a paper and pencil assessment to an assessment online.

I have changed the way I teach based on this course in the following ways. First, this course pushed me to see that students should be able to demonstrate what they have learned through more than just a paper and pencil assessment by using their own strengths and tools to show what they know. Second, this course has taught me that assessments are only beneficial if you know why you are giving it. Therefore, using the criteria I have set up in my own assessment rubric, I am able to make assessments work as a learning process throughout a unit or lesson and not just a final piece for students to do. Lastly, this course has helped me provide more meaningful feedback to my students so that they can build on what they have already learned and continue to develop skills within a lesson or unit. Therefore, the feedback given to my students has allowed them to go back and look at things again and sometimes in a different way based on new questions I have given them in order to master a standard they may have needed more time with.

A third course that has impacted me, as an educator was the CEP 822: Approaches to Educational Research. This course was one of the hardest courses I took in my MAET program. The reasons for this were because I was pushed beyond my own thinking and ideas and I had to learn new strategies in order to design a research paper based on educational articles that I found for a particular topic. As an educator I have read educational articles online as well as educational blogs and ideas in order to get a better idea about a particular approach in my own classroom but until this course, I did not put much thought into the validity of the work I was reading.

This course has changed the way I teach in the following ways. First, my research was on the affects of homework and student engagement. After researching, my findings showed that homework is not necessarily a key factor in education and while it can help students practice skills and materials in class, without any support at home, or a purpose with the work when it is returned to school, it is just taking time away from children being children. Therefore, I now see that just like adults, children do not want to work all day and then take work home with them. With that idea, homework does not always serve as a beneficial way to help students practice what they are learning in class. Second, I have changed the way I address homework in my own classroom. Before this course I gave homework daily and scored it for the grade book. Now, I assign very little

homework and when I do assign it, the work consists of spelling practice and reading logs for students to use to help them at home but it is not mandatory and it does not go towards their grade. Lastly, with many of my students having little to no support with schoolwork at home it is unfair to my struggling students who will also struggle with their work at home. It also allows for those students who do have support at home to help them with their work and therefore does not give an honest idea of where the student is with their understanding.

Thinking back to when I began the MAET program I had several goals that I wanted to accomplish that included individual as well as educator goals. As an individual I wanted to develop stronger technology skills and learn how to use new tools. I also wanted to continue my learning so that I could learn about the new ideas and practices that have developed since I was last a student. As an educator I wanted to look at tools that I already knew how to use and learn how to enhance and integrate them into my teaching practice. I also wanted to develop skills that would allow me to become a technology leader in my title one school. These goals were important to me because they gave me a purpose for why I was getting my master's degree. They also gave me something to work towards as I went through the courses of the MAET program. Looking over my work from my courses in the program I can full-heartedly say that I am not the person I was when I entered the MAET program. In fact, because of the courses in my master's program I am a stronger educator in my classroom, a fiercer leader in my school, and a woman who wants to continue to learn out of the classroom.

Through my courses I have learned that teaching is much more than just giving students information through a book or a piece of paper. I now view teaching as pushing students in directions based on their own strengths and showing them the way to learn while also questioning their learning and using their curiosity and creativity to engage and interact with each other in their learning adventure. The MAET courses have helped me develop technology skills that allow me to use media tools within my teaching practice in a way to enhance student learning. I no longer just add technology for the sake of adding it or because I have the tools to use, but I integrate technology with meaningful approaches that benefit my students.

In conclusion, being part of the MAET program at Michigan State University has impact me greatly in both my individual life as well as my educational journey. Through the courses of this program I have learned to step out of my comfort zone and think more critically and meaningfully in order to enrich my students learning. Each course helped me learn about new technology tools and platforms that could be used within my teaching practice in order for my students to better engage and interact in their learning. The new media tools that I learned helped me think beyond a smartboard or a computer and showed me how to use the tools with a purpose so that I was not just using technology just to use it but so it had a framework for use. This program allowed me to put all of the courses together to see the different aspects that technology can have in the classroom and in school as well as look at each courses independently to see the impacts it has had on my teaching. Each course showed me something new while also building on the knowledge from the other courses. Each course was a stepping-stone into my growth as an educational technology user and leader.