

Growth and Learning through Educational Technology

When I began this program, I was teaching fourth grade in a charter school. In this position, I was becoming increasingly unhappy and dissatisfied. Don't get me wrong; I loved teaching and I enjoyed my students. I reflected back on my time in the undergraduate education program, my time as an intern, and as a first year teacher. I thought about why I wanted to become a teacher. The answer was, and always will be, to make a difference; to inspire. While it was true that I still felt I was making a difference in my fourth graders' lives, I knew there was more I could be doing. I felt ready for a change. I wanted to grow as an educator and advance my role in the world of education. I had been working closely with the technology specialist in my school for some time, helping to introduce new technology to the classroom, as well as working with other teachers in increasing their technology use. This is when I decided to take the plunge into the [Master's of Arts in Educational Technology](#). As I've mentioned in my goal reflection essay, I expected to learn about new and innovative technologies, and how to integrate these into the classroom. However, I got so much more than this. The MAET program has really transformed my views on education, leadership, technology, and where I see myself fitting into all of this.

Though every class was valuable, I find that there are several courses that have had a particular impact on how I now see myself as an educator and leader. CEP 815, Technology and Leadership was an incredibly worthwhile class that altered my ideas on the complexity of leadership. CEP 820, Teaching K12 Students Online was another fantastic class. Sometimes this class confirmed already-held beliefs about online education, while other times it pushed me to scrutinize online learning more closely. The theme of intentional technology use is one that has continued with me throughout the MAET program. Finally, CEP 812 pushed me to see failure in a whole new light, through an intensive collaborative research project on a "wicked" problem of practice.

Leadership

The class that has had the most impact on how I view myself in the world of education is [CEP 815](#), Technology and Leadership. It transformed my views on leadership, and forced me to examine the many complexities of being a technology leader--from professional development to ethics, and funding to equity. Throughout my seven years of teaching, I had the opportunity to take on many leadership roles. I have served on a hiring committee with school administration, served as team captain for fourth grade teams at two different schools over four years, led a parent-school outreach committee for three years, and planned and implemented a school-wide science fair several years in a row. I also was a member of my school's teacher leadership committee for three years. Unofficially, I was also a leader in technology use, often providing guidance to fellow staff members in integrating technology and solving technology issues. Throughout my career, I have been a confident leader, and have thought (and still do!) that transitioning to a technology leader in some capacity was a natural next step. Going into CEP 815, I thought I had a fairly good grasp on the magnitude of being a leader. This class, however, challenged my current thoughts and widened the breadth of the meaning of leadership.

The goal of Technology and Leadership was to create an identity as a technology leader; to develop leadership skills, and to examine the complexities of education, technology, and leadership. Through a broad study into seven vastly different leadership styles, I was forced to dissect my own leadership styles to see where I fit, and what growth could be made to improve. This was an eye-opening exercise; I found I fit very centrally into these leadership styles, which much room to grow. As a born people pleaser, I found myself to be a “diplomat”--someone who works to bring people together in positive ways, but also someone who is hesitant to rock the boat and create meaningful change. This is still something I am working at, in increasing my level of assertiveness as a leader.

This course required a lot of introspection and self-reflection. In particular, I was often asked to examine my strengths and weaknesses in relation to leadership. In one particular assignment, I had to identify several areas of growth, and create a manifesto with resources helping myself improve these areas. This exercise helped shape my views of not only myself as a leader, but also what is required to be a strong leader, including strong communication skills and the importance of feedback.

In growing as a leader, I worked throughout the semester to create my own identity as a technology leader and form my own [vision statement](#). From beginning to end, my ideas evolved as my understanding of the complexities of being a leader grew. My vision statement really focused on the ethical and social implications of technology integration. In it, I explain how effective, targeted, and meaningful technology use can propel student achievement, and discuss the need for equitable access to resources for both teachers and students.

Intentional Technology Use

Another impactful course was [CEP 820](#), Teaching K12 Students Online. The focus of this course was on examining different online teaching platforms, analyzing their effectiveness, and determining best practices for online teaching. Throughout the class, the overarching theme that transcended our work was the importance of intentional technology use and integration. This theme really struck me, and has been a guiding force throughout my time in the MAET program.

Over the course of this semester, I built an online course module through Schoology that exemplified excellent online teaching. This course module was a science unit for fourth grades on animal adaptations (the lesson can be found [here](#), and you will need the code XV7N8-PZTNV to access it). During this, a valuable amount of time was spent getting to know the [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) framework. This framework helps educators infuse their lessons with flexibility in the ways students access material, engage with it and show what they know. In my own course module, I was very intentional in providing multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression to encompass all learners. The UDL framework is an invaluable tool that I will continue to carry with me.

As I said, this course really focused on intentional technology use. This means that technology isn't being integrated into classrooms just for the sake of technology use. Rather, meaningful technology use requires planning and a knowledge of technology tools. In creating an online module, I spent a lot of time determining the value of technology tools, and the appropriate time to use them. Ultimately, technology use should be aligned to teaching goals, should be effective, appropriate, and meaningful. Technology use shouldn't just be engaging, it should enhance learning and allow students to develop their skills.

Learning from Failure

[CEP 812](#), Applying Educational Technology to Issues of Practice had a great impact on how I view failure, and how it can be leveraged as a learning tool. Along with a think tank of fellow peers, I spent a lot of time in CEP 812 analyzing a "wicked problem." The wicked problem of practice we focused on was "failure as a learning mode." Often in the classroom, failures are seen as a negative thing, something to be ashamed of, rather than seen as an opportunity to grow. Learning, naturally, is about risk-taking. However, schools are often not open to risk-taking. Our think tank scrutinized this idea and created a plan of action.

After reviewing research and case studies related to failure, my group honed our focus in on risk-taking. Specifically, that risk-taking will "[instill in students the drive to learn and help them see the vital role of failure in discovery.](#)" This research project highlighted the need for safe spaces in education that allow for students to take measured risks, fail, and ultimately grow by learning from those failures. In my own teaching, I continue to strive to meet this standard, and work to create innovative thinkers through learning as a failure mode.

Conclusion

My time in the MAET program has gone quickly. As I reach the end of this journey, I have had ample opportunities to look back and reflect on this time. I often think about the countless opportunities I've had to learn and grow. I have learned about new technology tools, but more than that, I have obtained the skills I need to be a confident, adept technology leader. I have pushed myself outside of my comfort zone, to be more creative, more analytical, and to constantly grow.

Who I am as an educator has evolved. I am no longer a classroom teacher; I now have the aspirations and skills to become an educational leader. I want to inspire others in education to want to learn, create, and innovate. I am excited to put into practice all that I have learned in a leadership role. Whether it be working with elementary school students or fellow educators (or both!), ultimately, my goal as an educator is still the same. I still want to make a difference and inspire. I want to help shape the future of education in our country.