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The Big Picture

The beginning of my journey through the Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) program coincided with the beginning of my journey as an educator. I was initially somewhat worried that my lack of experience would become apparent in the MAET program. Would I have anything to contribute? Would it be more challenging to complete the required assignments without the experience to support my thinking? I quickly discovered that the other students in the program came from such diverse backgrounds, with some not even in the field of education! It was the diversity of the community and the multitude of perspectives that allowed me to make the most growth as an educator.

There was at least one aspect of peer communication and/or collaboration in each course throughout the program. It was so advantageous for my growth to communicate with other teachers – whether they had more experience or simply different types of experience. Even the aforementioned non-teachers allowed me to view different topics from another perspective. These individuals, and of course the educators as well, helped to push my thinking forward. This opportunity for communication also continued to raise my confidence in myself as an educator and in myself as an MAET student. As I responded to peers' work, I began to feel that I had valuable contributions to make. I could also be one that pushed others' thinking or expose them to an idea that had worked in my classroom. The apprehension that I had initially felt toward my position in the program began to fade away.

I found that the first year of teaching can be a rude awakening to how much you **don't** know. Again, the feeling of inadequacy is not the biggest confidence booster. I do feel that my undergraduate experience and teaching internship prepared me as much as possible, but there are so many aspects of teaching that cannot be taught or anticipated. The MAET program came at a time where I was gaining a little more life experience and gaining teaching experience in my own classroom. I believe the combination of the three happening concurrently greatly contributed to my professional (and individual) growth.

The entire program altered who I am as an educator, but the following courses were a few of the most transformative for my career:

CEP 812: Applying Educational Technology to Problems of Practice

With the rate of change in our society and in education, for every solution there is a new challenge to overcome. It is much easier to identify the issues, but far more difficult to come up with solutions. This course allowed me to collaborate with others in order to brainstorm viable solutions to such problems. The course also helped me with how to approach a wicked problem of practice and how to use educational technology in an effort to improve it. The specific problem of practice that I focused on throughout CEP 812 was the use of failure in the classroom to allow students to learn. My peers and I reviewed research on the necessary components of successful learning and on examples of failure emphasized in a learning environment to promote greater understanding before brainstorming our own solutions to the problem.

As aforementioned, new challenges will always arise in education or just in an individual classroom. This course increased my confidence for how I will overcome these challenges in my own classroom. Even with education and experience, I fully acknowledge that I will never have or be able to find all the answers on my own. This course, and really the entire MAET program, allowed me to better collaborate online and in-person in order to come up with solutions. Teaching can feel isolating, but doesn't have to and shouldn't when there are so many resources in which to communicate and collaborate. I ultimately want to provide my students with the best educational experience possible – CEP 812 provided me with tools that allow me to consistently work toward this goal.

CEP 822: Approaches to Educational Research

This course was more impactful to my professional role than I was expecting, to be honest. Throughout the semester, I researched a topic within education and wrote a research plan that could be executed. I chose to focus on student engagement. It was the topic of student engagement that made this class so meaningful to me.

Let me explain. I was experiencing issues with behavior and academic growth in my classroom. As I began to reflect on the cause of these issues, I started to realize the lack of student engagement was often partly or largely responsible for the effect. It was CEP 822 that allowed me to consider student engagement in my assignments and be more cognizant of its presence (or lack thereof) in my own classroom. If you look at my [Showcase](#), you'll notice that student engagement was a major theme in many projects I created throughout the program. It wasn't until this course that I realized how many issues in my classroom were spreading from one root cause and thus, how important it was

for me to facilitate an environment for my students that truly supported their engagement. While I didn't execute the research plan I designed, I learned so much about student engagement in the process. I likely will not execute such extensive research in my classroom, but I now have the knowledge on how to create an "experiment" of sorts to test the effectiveness of something in the classroom.

CEP 800: Psychology of Learning in School and Other Settings

As an educator, I think it goes without saying that it is important for me to understand how individuals learn. While I did have a basic understanding of the concept of learning from my own personal experiences, my undergraduate education, and my experience thus far in teaching, this course increased the depth of my knowledge on the subject.

For CEP 800, I wrote a Personal Theory of Learning at the beginning of the course. As I continued to learn more about the process of learning and read research on the subject, I began to revise my personal theory. There were some components of my theory that I maintained throughout the course, but I now had research to back up my claims. I felt more confident in the choices I made while teaching knowing that they were justified through extensive research on the topic of learning. While it wasn't necessarily the intention of the course, I also felt more confident and capable of making meaningful contributions within my school environment. By having research-based rationale behind my thinking, I was often able to provide an alternate perspective to discussions amongst my colleagues. While this does not refer to having a right versus wrong way of thinking, I felt that the conversation allowed strategic, thought-out decisions to be made that better supported students and student learning.

CEP 820: Teaching Students Online

This course had such practical value for my present and future classrooms. Within my first two years of teaching, I encountered multiple problems of practice, such as frequent absences, the need for differentiation, and students (and parents) needing access to instruction after I had taught the content. As a result, I had created a website with videos covering each math lesson or concept we had done in class. This was wonderful for students that had been absent or for students to access again if needed, but it did not help with my efforts to differentiate learning for students.

This is where CEP 820 provided insight as to how I might address this problem of practice as well. In it, I created an online course designed for fifth grade students. The course consisted of one mathematics unit that covered fifth grade

Common Core State Standards. While this was only one unit, it made me realize how one relatively small change to my classroom could completely alter student success in mathematics. Using a tool like this in my classroom would allow students to work at their own pace, have the opportunity to try again, and potentially allow for students to demonstrate their understanding in different ways. This would be a blended model – online and in person – therefore, I would be able to spend more time with individual students. Because this course was at the end of my program, I was also able to take everything I had learned about educational technology in my other courses and apply it to this course to make it as beneficial as possible for student learning.

Overall, I have been dissatisfied with the way my fifth grade students have responded to the more traditional form of mathematics instruction. It was not as effective for many of the students that were at very different levels of mathematical understanding. This course revitalized my passion for teaching mathematics in a way that would allow students to find individual success.

CEP 807: Capstone in Educational Technology

I knew that I had put a lot of effort and thought into my courses throughout the program. I also knew that I had grown as an educator and as a technology leader, but I had not realized the extent of the growth I had made until CEP 807. By putting together my online portfolio, I revisited all of the courses I had taken and what I had accomplished in each course. Because I was working as a teacher full time, I typically took one course at a time throughout the program. As such, my focus was limited to the current course at the time. I had not been looking at the big picture of how I had been evolving as an individual, a professional, and an educator.

With the plethora of knowledge I had obtained throughout the ten courses of my MAET program, it was (and still is) difficult to keep all of it at the forefront of the mind at once. CEP 807 not only allowed me to look back on my work, but required that I be introspective about how the work influenced me as an educator. As I write this and continue to reflect, it is because of CEP 807 that I have done so in the first place.

As I mentioned initially, I was somewhat apprehensive about the timing in which I chose to begin the MAET program. I chose to begin the program right after obtaining my teaching certificate because I wanted to maintain the status of student that I was already accustomed to and to also better myself as an educator. While I know that I would have grown as an educator no matter

when I went through the MAET program during my career, I do think my timing allowed me to be more comfortable taking risks and trying new things. As a new teacher, I was constantly trying new things in mathematics, ELA, or with classroom management anyway. Trying new technologies in my classroom was another trial run, not unlike what I was already doing. Typically, the use of educational technology allowed me to better engage and support student learning so it went over well with my students. I was always and continue to be transparent with the students when I am trying something new. As fifth graders, their feedback also continues to guide my teaching decisions and allows me to better determine what is effective and what is not.

Taking risks and trying new things in my classroom has become a natural part of teaching for me since I have been doing so since I first stepped foot into my own classroom. The MAET program has given me the tools to continue to take risks in my classroom and justify how these risks can better support student learning. I look forward to seeing where taking these risks lead me – whether it's growth in my own classroom or other opportunities in the field of education.