

Confidence and Cachet

When I applied for the [Masters of Arts in Educational Technology](#) (MAET) program at [Michigan State University \(MSU\)](#), I was interested in finally earning a degree in education and to finally become a legitimate MSU Spartan! Little did I know that this four-year process would take me on a journey of personal and professional discovery. Through these seven semesters and ten courses I learned that the only constant in the worlds of education and technology is change. That I need to continue to be a lifelong learner, be flexible in my teaching practices and most importantly I CAN do anything I put my mind to!

I knew that earning a degree in Educational Technology would stretch my knowledge base in both my pedagogical practices and in my technological know-how. I certainly gained both a bunch of technical knowledge and have come away with a wide variety of new ideas and teaching practices. A few of the courses that stood out to me centered around online technology, school community and educational understanding.

CEP 820: Teaching Students Online was one course that I was specifically excited to take. I selected it purposefully as an elective because of the nature of my current teaching job. I have taught at a virtual charter school for the past six years and I knew that I wanted to learn specific tips, tricks and tools to further my online career. This course allowed me to learn about different online learning platforms and course management systems and to create my own course from scratch. I was also able to learn about Universal Design for Learning for the first time. The information and skills I learned in this course have proved incredibly valuable ever since. My confidence and ability to navigate online technology used specifically for my current job is exactly what I hoped for and what I received during this course.

Little did I know that CEP 812: Applying Educational Technology to Issues of Practice would broaden my view point on several issues that I haven't had personal experience with. This course, by design, was full of problems, questions and ideas. I eventually came away with a greater educational understanding of the 'system' as a whole. And of the unique trials and difficulties that students, families and educators face. The first major task required me to think about a special learning need. For me it was dyslexia. I was able to deep-dive into a world in which I had very little understanding. I came away with a deeper knowledge of the struggles people with dyslexia face, but also tools and programs available for students that I had never heard of before! What [wonderful resources](#) are now available to help with the issues surrounding dyslexia! Then I had to find and work a solution for a 'wicked problem'. I decided to research and study social promotion and retention in K-12 schools. That [research project](#) will stay with me and has changed the way I look at and understand my own principal. I naively thought I knew the answer, and the 'right way,' however I

learned that there is no one answer and there is not one correct way. Education is one of those nearly impossible jobs, and we can only do the best we can do. Of course there are things that can help improve a teaching and learning system, but in the end we, as teachers, can only do what we feel is in the best interest of our students. (And hope that we have the support of the students, families and colleagues around us).

Last, but certainly not least was one of my very first experiences in the MAET program. Back in the summer of 2019, I had the amazing opportunity to participate in the Summer Hybrid Program. This experience includes a total of three separate courses mixed together into one amazing summer! The group of hybrid students along with two instructors met together in person, on MSU's campus for two weeks, then followed up with an additional four weeks of coursework online. The courses completed were CEP 800 Learning in School and Other Settings, CEP 815 Technology and Leadership, and CEP 822 Approaches to Educational Leadership. One of the most profound academic tasks was reading the entirety of Daniel Willingham's book, *When Can You Trust The Experts?* Not only did we work our tails off to complete a tremendous amount of coursework, but what I believe to be more important is that we gained a sense of community. Not only as members of the same program and the same university. But also as a group of educators and lifelong learners. The experiences and memories we got to take away from those weeks, those lunches spent together roaming campus, the weekend fun out in East Lansing, and the countless hours spent thinking, learning and creating together were priceless. We all left with a sense of community that we didn't have when we began. And I am able to walk away from this experience with friends and colleagues all across the country who I know I can turn to for help and a fantastic knowledge of teaching practices and experience.

Throughout this experience, I have learned that technology is ever changing and that teachers need to continually adapt. It's not enough to take ten masters courses and learn all the coolest, latest and greatest technologies. I do have an abundance of tools, tricks and technological tips, but what I learned about and worked with in 2017 has definitely changed by 2021! The takeaway for me is that I will have to continue on my path as a lifelong learner. It's not enough to say that I have earned my Master degree and think that I have all the knowledge. There will always be a new tech tool, or a new pedagogical approach to learn about. It's ok to be flexible in my teaching practices and that I don't have all the answers. I will keep on learning and changing to be the best educator that I can be!

This is the perfect segway into my biggest ah-ha experience that I gained from completing my MAET degree. And that is that *I can do anything* that I put my mind to! This journey started out as something more personal in nature. To fulfil a life-long dream of mine to have a degree in education and become a Spartan. I knew that I wouldn't earn any additional money from my current employer for having a masters degree. I knew that it would take time, effort and money. I knew that I would be pushed to my

limit. Not only intellectually but also professionally and personally. And you know what? I did it!...I *can* do anything, with enough time and effort. And if I can do it, then so can you!

The overall impact that my MAET experience has had on me has been positive in all aspects. I have grown in my teaching and technology skills. As well as in my own personal life and confidence. The experiences that I have had over the past four years have shaped who I am and who I can be in the future! I will be forever grateful for the opportunity to earn my MAET degree. Go Green!