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Final Reflection Paper

Part I - Looking Back

As a whole, the Educational Technology Master's Program has truly been an incredible experience and journey for me thus far. I have always felt that while technology should not replace classroom instruction, it can be used to supplement classroom instruction. Incorporating various technologies into classroom activities often enhances the activities and keeps students motivated and engaged. Furthermore, as we live in a world run by technology, it is crucial to not only expose students to multiple types of technologies, but also teach them how to use the technologies to enhance their educations and everyday lives as well. I feel that by integrating technology into classroom activities and teaching students how to use the technologies safely and appropriately, we are empowering and inspiring students, as well as letting them take responsibility for their own learning. Moreover, while I have always felt very strongly about integrating technologies into the classroom, my coursework experiences as part of the MAET program, specifically this summer cohort, as really helped me to view technology integration, and teaching in general, in a whole new way.

When I reflect back over the past six weeks of the summer cohort, one overall theme comes to mind -- "Learning is least useful when it is private and hidden; it is most powerful when it becomes public and communal. Learning flourishes when we take what we think we know and offer it as community property among fellow learners so that it can be tested, examined, challenged, and improved before we internalize it." Truly, the most powerful part of the summer cohort was the two weeks we spent as a whole group. While I learned a tremendous amount from the readings, PowerPoints, lectures and projects, the most profound learning came from my peers.

Initially, I was worried that being someone with limited technology skills and also being one of the only course members who worked in an elementary setting would severely limit my summer cohort experience, as well as what I had to offer my peers. By the end of the first couple of class sessions and whole group discussions, however, my fears had been completely alleviated. One of the things I loved most about this experience was that the participants in the program were not just elementary or secondary teachers, they were people from all walks of life, with vastly differing technology knowledge and skills. In my small group alone there were two high school teachers, a middle school teacher, an elementary teacher and a technology specialist. This wide variety of people, their differing

viewpoints, and their varying technology skills truly enriched the overall experience for me.

The learning community created during those first two weeks of the summer cohort was very profound for me for many reasons. First of all, it made me think back to the educational leadership tension of online learning vs. face-to-face learning. Up until now, all of the courses I have taken for the MAET program have been online. While I have enjoyed the courses and learned a lot, I always missed the comfort and experience of physically interacting with my peers and instructors. For me, having those face-to-face human interactions creates a very “personal” experience and gives a different meaning to the courses and assignments for me. While I do believe online learning can be very powerful, the opportunity to be in a classroom, collaborate face-to-face with peers and create a strong learning community provides a very enriching experience. This is something I have thought a lot about, especially in terms of the learning community I strive to create in my classroom.

When I reflect back on what I have learned from the summer cohort in terms of technology as it relates to education, one strong image and thought come to mind... TPACK. Although it was introduced in several other MAET courses, I truly felt that everything we learned, discussed, read about, created, and explored throughout the past six weeks were examples of and directly related to TPACK. This is where my views on technology integration have changed. I, like many other teachers, love learning about new technologies and using them in my classroom to engage and motivate my students. It wasn't until learning about and exploring the concept of TPACK, however, that I truly began questioning the use of every technology in my classroom and its relevance to my students' educations. Two articles that were particularly influential to the way I viewed technology and its role in education, were *Teaching that Sticks* and *Media for Inquiry, Communication, Construction and Expression*. As a first year teacher this past year, it was often easy to become so overwhelmed with the amount of curriculum I had to teach, in such little time. Both of these readings, however, made me stop and reflect back on my own teaching and ask myself two questions:

1. What teaching strategies am I using/will I use in the future to ensure that my students are actually understanding, retaining, and will be able to apply the information I am giving them?
2. What technologies am I using to assist in my students' learning? And, am I using these technologies effectively and to their full potential?

The reading, *Teaching that Sticks* provided me with the six traits that make ideas “stickier” for students and helped me to think about how I can apply these traits to teaching strategies I already use in the classroom. Furthermore, the reading,

Media for Inquiry, Communication, Construction and Expression, helped me develop a foundation and structure of sorts for the wide variety of ways to use technologies innovatively as it relates to the four impulses of learning (inquiry, communication, construction and expression).

Another "big idea" I took away from the summer cohort and believe is directly related to the concept of TPACK, was the notion that most technologies are not meant for education, and that we must repurpose them to fit our needs in the classroom. This idea heavily influenced my Dream IT project; both the technologies I chose to use for the implementation of the Dream IT project and how I was going to use these technologies. This is further explained in the Total PACKage portion of my Dream It project.

All in all, the Year 2 East Lansing Summer Cohort has provided me with a rich learning community experience and has truly helped me to reevaluate how I integrate technology into my classroom. I am very grateful to have had this experience.

Part II – Looking Forward

Looking ahead to the future, there are many things I am looking forward to and many things I will be focusing on in regards to my professional development. First of all, I am greatly looking forward to my continued journey through the MAET program. This fall I will take my final two courses (CEP 820 and CEP 807), in order to complete the program by December. I began the program in the summer of 2010 and it's hard to believe I am nearing the end of my journey already. I am really looking forward to CEP 820 (Teaching K-12 Students Online) and the opportunity to create my own online classroom. As stated in the "Looking Back..." section, one of my frustrations with online learning is the lack of that "personal" feel and comfort. Therefore, the main challenge I will face in creating my own online classroom as part of CEP 820 will be fostering the type of personal learning community one gets out of the face-to-face learning experience. I look forward to all this course has to offer, as well as the insight my past and present peers will have to offer. CEP 807 (Proseminar in Educational Technology, the Capstone course), will be very bittersweet as it will be my last course in the program. While I look forward to the feeling of accomplishment once I have completed the program, I will also be saddened to see it all end. Through this course, I look forward to completing my online portfolio and will again use past and present peers as resources to get insight on my portfolio. More than anything, I am so grateful for the learning experiences and opportunities given to me through the MAET program, as well as the abundance of resources I have learned about. I have used many of these resources in my own classroom already and will continue to do so throughout the years.

A topic that will be particularly important to me, especially within the next few years of my teaching career will be the implementation of my Dream IT project. The implementation and success of my Dream IT project is very important to me as it is centered around the new reading program our district has adopted (Reading Street), and is directly related to my future students' literacy success. Using SMART Boards, SMART Response Clickers, the Reading Street online components, MP3 players, audio books, and other various technologies, it will be my goal to motivate and engage my students in literacy activities, so as to foster a love and appreciation for literacy within my students and to inspire them to be lifelong literacy learners. This, I realize, can prove to be a very difficult task and I know I will need a lot of help along the way. Thus, my key resources for ensuring the success of my Dream IT project will include my colleagues, past course instructors and classmates, teachers who have experience with the reading program, our district's technology department, online resources, as well as professional development opportunities.

This year especially, my colleagues will be a huge part of my support system for the implementation of the reading program. For example, as a first grade team we are already working on creating SMART Board lessons to go along with every unit of the reading program. With twelve first grade teachers all working on the same project, it will prove to be a great source of support throughout the year. Past course instructors and classmates will also prove to be a great resource. One of my course instructors (Susan Wright, from CEP 812) and I will keep in touch via Skype throughout the year to keep tabs on the implementation of my Wick Problem Project. As I tied my Wicked Problem Project into my Dream IT project, I am sure she will have great insight to offer on both projects. Another great resource will be school districts that have already adopted Reading Streets. I am already planning on visiting and observing in several first grade classrooms throughout the district. Our district's technology department also serves as a great resource. Our instructor of technology is very knowledgeable when it comes to SMART technologies and I look forward to learning from him, especially when it comes to the SMART Response Clickers. The Reading Street website offers a wide variety of online resources and help. I also plan on using Classroom 2.0 to connect with other educators who have used the program/technologies I will be using. Finally, I look forward to taking advantage of professional development opportunities such as the MACUL Conference, the Annual SMART Technologies Conference, sessions our district will offer, etc.

Overall, in regards to integrating technology into the classroom, the proper implementation of TPACK will be my ultimate goal and perhaps, one of my greatest challenges. It will take a lot of time, dedication, creativity, and passion to find the balance that is TPACK and ensure I am repurposing technologies effectively to make them educational and best meet the needs of my students. This, especially, is where my past and present instructors and classmates from the

MAET program will serve as terrific resources. It will be my intention to take full advantage of the available online resources, professional development opportunities, technology conferences, etc., to ensure the proper implementation of TPACK in my classroom.

I look forward to my continued journey through the MAET program and the learning opportunities that lie ahead of me!