

From Faking it to Making it
An Exploration of my Journey through the MAET Program

I love to be the one with the answers. As discussed in a previous essay, my friends and colleagues frequently rely on me for information or ideas for their classroom, and I relish the opportunity to support my peers and brainstorm new ideas alongside them. My grandfather taught me early in life that in order to truly know something you should “see one, do one, teach one.” In other words he would show me how to do something once, ask me to do it the second time, and when I felt confident enough to teach someone else, I had truly mastered the skill. Such is true with my pre-MAET experience with educational technology--I would see something used or done online or in a conference, try it out for myself, then pass on the information. As expected, I always learned more in this final teaching stage than in the other two combined, leading to my desire to further my knowledge and understanding of educational technology and add to my metaphorical bag of tricks. The decision to pursue a degree in educational technology, therefore, was an easy one, and one that in two short years has led to a transformation of my teaching style, pedagogical beliefs, and future education and career goals. It is astounding to consider how ten courses over two years have challenged me and pushed me beyond my comfort zone so dramatically, but as I consider my growth and development as both a learner and teacher I recognize how impactful the program has been and how it will continue to shape my thinking and teaching over the coming years.

“Without a struggle, there can be no progress”
-Frederick Douglass

Upon receiving my first ‘welcome’ email from my first course in the MAET program (**CEP 811**) I thought I had made a terrible mistake. The instructions of the opening communication were to purchase a Maker kit in lieu of a textbook so that we could create and play with technology throughout the course. As an English teacher, this terrified me to my core--how could I possibly incorporate the Maker movement (whatever that was!) into my teaching in a meaningful way? Upon receiving my kit in the mail, I was even more concerned. I stared at the circuit stickers for what seemed like days pondering what I had gotten myself into and how I was going to survive two years of feeling lost and unprepared. What I discovered in the coming weeks, however, was that educational technology and its many iterations (even the Maker movement) have a place in all classes and all classrooms, and that with an open mind and a willingness to make a few mistakes, I could find ways to meaningfully incorporate just about anything into my learning environment. My project for this class remains one of my favorites throughout the program, as I feel it not only represents the ability to bring technology into any classroom, but also underscores my

personal development throughout this program, from fear and uncertainty to wholehearted enthusiasm and commitment.

“There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning.”

-Jiddu Krishnamurti

One of my primary emphases throughout the program has been an increasing self-awareness of my own learning. Beginning with my first courses and continuing through **CEP 800** (Learning in School and Other Settings) which focused specifically on the nature of learning and various learning environments, I have relished the opportunity to consider who I am as a *learner* as well as a teacher. Being able to frame my thinking in this context has increased my awareness in the classroom as well, helping me to see how my students’ learning is impacted by their environments and the multitude of other factors they face each day. This exploration, blending out-of-school learning with classroom activities, has carried into my life as a coach as well, as I think to the strategies I employ leading the varsity dance team and how those can support student learning and growth. I have always been a proponent of bringing students’ passions and interests into the classroom, but I have primarily focused on *content* in this case, rather than trying to get to the core of how those activities and interests function or are manifested and how I can blend the learning that students do at home while figuring out the latest level of a video game and the learning I want them to do to analyze characters in a novel. This program helped me to see that this learning can be the same when experiences are designed to blend multiple styles of teaching and when students have voice and choice in what they are doing.

“In order to create an engaging learning experience, the role of instructor is optional, but the role of learner is essential.”

- Bernard Bull

While I have wholeheartedly appreciated my journey through the MAET program, that does not mean it was without struggle. I have already mentioned my initial apprehension with individual courses, wondering if I had the technical knowledge to be successful in the program, but it also took some time for me to accept the *style* of the program. This was my first experience with online or blended learning; in fact, the concept of taking or teaching an online course scared me before beginning this program. Ultimately, however, given my schedule and responsibilities at home, online learning was the best choice for me at this stage in my life. I also considered the nature of the program and decided that, as

uncomfortable as I was, experiencing an educational technology program by participating in technology-based work (i.e. online courses) would maximize my growth and understanding. This was great in theory, but it took me some time to get used to the format and to find an organizational method that worked for me. Ultimately, by redefining and understanding my preferred work environment (Starbucks) and setting aside specific times to focus on my coursework, I was able to match my learning and working style to the demands of the program and set myself up to do well. Acknowledging that the “work any time” mindset would do me no favors allowed me to see how blended learning can work for any learning style as long as learners maintain a self-awareness about their own needs and styles. What began as a struggle, therefore, can ultimately be classified as a learning opportunity and another way to transfer the knowledge gained in the MAET program to my teaching.

“Our greatest strength lies in collaboration, not competition.”

— Joseph Rain

What I have found through reflection is that all of the experiences in the MAET program, be they formal or informal, intended or accidental, have led to changes and development in my own teaching. For example, as a student in an online class, group work concerned me greatly. Given my students’ often negative response to group work in the classroom, I could not imagine how collaboration would be feasible in an online environment. Varying schedules, varying teaching experience, varying grade levels, and varying subject specialties all led me to believe that group work or collaborative experiences in this online program would be impossible or ineffective--luckily, I was wrong. While I do admit that coordinating schedules posed a problem at first, I soon discovered that with collaborative programs like Google Drive and a willingness to give up a bit of control (let’s be honest, that was clearly my real concern), group work required neither physical proximity or common teaching experiences. As we were all learners in the same program, group mates and I were able to use this as our common ground and work collaboratively throughout the program. This openness has worked its way into my professional life as well, as my building has recently adopted a learning community model for tenth grade, which I teach. As a member of a learning community, I share a group of students with a US History teacher, a geometry teacher, and a chemistry teacher. We are encouraged to design and implement interdisciplinary experiences for our students and to collaborate to support the success of our learning community. At first, I was apprehensive about how meaningful my collaboration could be with teachers of differing subjects; however, with my collaborative work in the MAET program fresh in my mind, I was able to pursue collaborative experiences and create interdisciplinary opportunities for my students regardless of differences in content.

“Education is learning what you didn’t even know you didn’t know.”

- Daniel J. Boorstin

One of the benefits to pursuing this degree while working as a full-time teacher is that I have been able to immediately apply the strategies and concepts from class with my students and had 130 available test-subjects on a daily basis. For this reason, courses taken over the summer were always more of a challenge for me, as I would design learning experiences and be unable to “test” them on a live audience until the fall. Because of this, I have started the past two school years with too many ideas and not enough days in the week, discovering that I needed to blend my ideas where possible and prioritize my planning to the best of my ability. The authenticity of my work in this program has been transformative, as too often advanced degrees or program requirements feature abstract work and research, completed for credit and not for the pursuit of knowledge.

Throughout the course of the program, many courses have held that high degree of authenticity for me, as evidenced by my immediate and frequent use of course content and projects designed through the program in my classes. In reviewing my portfolio and the work I have included in its pages, my students and their work is featured prominently, in hopes that I am able to demonstrate the extent to which I have embraced the concepts explored as a student in the MAET program and their influence on my curriculum and instructional design. Most recently, a class exploring the very nature of the texts used in school and how redefining text can redefine a student’s experience and engagement has transformed the classes I teach and the way I facilitate them. The course, **CEP 816**, was on my list of ‘must take’ courses from the beginning of the program. Although at the time I was frustrated that it was not offered certain semesters, I ultimately am thankful that it was one of my final experiences in the program, as it, along with the Capstone Portfolio Course in which I designed and created this portfolio, has served as an ideal culmination of the philosophies, research, strategies, and ideologies explored throughout the MAET program. CEP 816, Teaching and Learning Across the Curriculum, focuses on the use of New Media (i.e. Media and ‘text’ that is presented and consumed digitally), and how teachers in any subject can incorporate New Media and New Media Technology Tools (MNTT) into their classrooms in order to lower students’ cognitive loads, increase engagement, and increase the relevance of the material presented in class. My excitement throughout this class was palpable, as I immediately reconsidered the nature of text in my classroom and how offering material in a variety of ways (videos, photography, song lyrics, etc.) can benefit my students. This course also led to the creation of my first hyperdoc (a full lesson contained

within a Google Doc), which is a format and strategy that my students, my co-teachers, and I find great value in and have now adopted wholeheartedly in our classrooms.

In reflecting on my time spent in the MAET program, both the exciting successes and the occasionally discouraging failures, it is evident how impactful the program has been on my teaching and my development as a learner and lover of technology.

“The real man smiles in trouble, gathers strength from distress, and grows brave by reflection.”

-Thomas Paine

Looking back, I am so thankful that my first experience in the MAET program was both challenging and successful, as this set the tone for my work throughout the remaining semesters. When faced with new methods, new technologies, or new expectations, I was able to remind myself that while I may be uncomfortable or out of my element, I can ultimately learn and grow not only from the unfamiliar content but also from the experience of being challenged and pushed out of my comfort zone. This was a personal theme throughout the program as I focused on my own failure and how I can utilize the experience of failing to become a better teacher and practitioner of educational technology. Moving forward, I feel endlessly more confident in my understanding of educational technology, instructional design, and how I can continue to pursue new ideas and pedagogy in my classroom and in my ensuing personal and professional life.