Starting Out

Life looked a lot different in 2019 when I started the Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) Program. I had waited on starting my masters and didn't do it within a few years of graduating from Michigan State with my undergraduate degree, but finally by the fall of 2018 felt I had reached a place personally and professionally where I was ready to learn more, grow in my teaching and take on the experience of another degree. I had heard good things about MAET from previous students I knew that completed the program, but didn't expect it to be such an impactful experience on me, my teaching and the trajectory of my career. Prior to starting this program, I had always enjoyed learning and playing around with new technologies, apps and tools. I was known as a "techy" person in the high school I work at, and would offer assistance to others, but never really outwardly shared my knowledge at a larger level. Part of my reasoning for starting this program was to learn more about being a technology leader and developing my leadership abilities. I elected to participate in the Hybrid Summer option offered in person by MAET. One thing I did remember from college is that I didn't love fully online classes and I also viewed the opportunity to be back on campus in East Lansing and taking classes in Erickson Hall as a great chance to connect with new people and educators. Reflecting back on my experiences with MAET allowed me to confirm what I already knew - MAET has been one of the most rewarding experiences of my career, thus far.

Technology Summer Camp

At times our Hybrid cohort felt like a technology summer camp for educators. We had a lot of fun in our small, year one cohort. Altogether I was enrolled in three separate courses, but because they were run concurrently, sometimes it was hard to distinguish what concepts came from what courses. In year one, during CEP 810 we learned all about the TPACK framework (the relationship and overlap between technology knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge) and I felt so interested and inspired by the ideas behind this and how I could fit it into my classroom. Learning about TPACK provided me a framework to consider while creating lessons and activities for my students, but also helped me verbalize what I felt I had been trying to do for a while - find the sweet spot for the use of technology in the classroom and make sure it was purposeful and engaging. During this course we also completed our 'Networked Learning Project' which allowed us to learn and use strategies similar to those of students. I was pretty resistant to this at first. I like to read instructions and have lists when I am completing a project or figuring out how to do something. However, I completely redid a small bathroom in my house based on the advice of people from Pintrest, Youtube and DIY blogs. It gave me a much better understanding on how students like to learn and process content - and I actually found that I can tolerate learning on Youtube or via video better than I used to. In the past I would get impatient and skip ahead to the parts I felt I needed. I also liked that I could pick something practical for this project that allowed me to complete a task at my house!

CEP 811 and CEP 812 were the other two courses featured during our hybrid summer and I felt the elements from those classes were extremely intertwined. Two of the big ideas from those courses were the idea of questioning "why?" and looking at things in a different light. As we explored different problems surrounding education and technology integration, many questions that came up during the summer didn't always have easy or correct answers, which led to the creation of our 'Wicked Problem Project'. My group surveyed teachers and researched problems associated with teacher burnout. This problem is one that isn't going away and hit home for me because I have had friends leave the profession and felt the effects of burnout myself. It is a problem that didn't prove to have any easy answers. My favorite part of the summer was when we talked about "remixing" and looked at ideas and lessons we already had with our MAET "lenses". During this experience we explored maker technology and I used Ozobots and completely redesigned an activity I use in my Spanish 2 classes every year. It was nice to know that what I was learning and creating would have instant applications in my classroom.

There are not many summers that I wish away, but going into the Fall of 2019 I was genuinely looking forward to being back in my classroom and trying different activities with my students. I had never been a teacher to shy away from an activity that I thought might not work out, because I always decided it would be a learning experience for me and students. However, even more so after year one I wanted to try everything and anything and get feedback from students. They liked being advocates and giving feedback on their own learning process. Inspired by a different idea involving google tour creator and using virtual reality over the summer, During the winter months, from November 2019 to January 2020, I also planned and started a Donor's Choose campaign for virtual reality cardboard glasses that was fully funded. I was really excited to be able to talk to my students about Spain and then genuinely be able to show them in virtual reality the places we were discussing. We had just started with that unit when March 2020 happened.

virtual/remote/hybrid/distance/online learning

No matter what it was called, the first months of teaching and learning during a pandemic were an adventure and are also an important part of my story. Along with the rest of the world, my district didn't quite know what to do about educating students virtually. As our plan started emerging, it was very clear that our veteran staff would need some training on how to use Google Classroom (our chosen platform) and tools associated with it to provide some sense or normalcy and learning for students as we moved forward. Very suddenly, I became the technology guru and leader in our building and throughout the district. I led training, answered questions, gave input on decisions and all of a sudden became a person that was relied on heavily. The TPACK framework provided such a steady foundation for the coursework in the MAET program and also for me when it came time to work through various ideas with teachers for use in pandemic teaching. While at first it was overwhelming to suddenly be relied on at such a critical juncture, as the months moved on I became increasingly intrigued with the idea of helping teachers to help their students and really cemented my long term career goal of becoming a technology coach. Summer 2020 was approaching and as July drew closer and things were not improving, it became clear that we would be unable to meet in person for classes during the summer in East Lansing. While I was very disappointed, it made me more

grateful for the experience from the summer before. Despite being a virtual teacher and then becoming a virtual student in the summer, I found myself still really drawn and interested in what I was learning. Specifically, CEP 815, Leadership and Technology, struck a lot of chords and was extremely relatable to me based on my experiences from the Spring. We identified what types of leaders we were surrounded with and what types of leaders we were ourselves. Using different action logics, we "stepped in" throughout various scenarios and came up with different ways to solve problems creatively and use technology in different capacities. I really enjoyed reading the case study about the 1:1 district because my district itself had made the decision to go to 1:1 in the spring and I think many of the steps and decisions were similar. I knew I would also be heavily involved in our technology team and plan this fall and was looking forward to learning more about being a leader vs. a manager and applying those skills and ideas this fall as I worked with fellow teachers. I feel I gained a lot of insight and confidence from a combination of CEP 815 along with becoming a teacher leader in my building. It all seemed to happen at the right time.

Keep Going, Keep Learning

Things are still pretty uncertain and day to day in education right now. My district returned to school this fall in a hybrid model with students. There are a lot of lingering questions regarding how we will deliver content in the coming weeks and months, if we will be forced to go back to full virtual learning and how long these scenarios could go on for - are they permanent? Similar to the wicked problem project, there are no easy answers here. However, while last spring was a lot of uncertainty and fear, I do feel the tide has changed a little bit as teachers are becoming more and more intune and welcoming to technology in their practice and classrooms. This pandemic has been an awful experience, but professionally has allowed me to grow a lot. I feel strongly that with MAET coinciding with my real life experience at the same time made me a more deliberate thinker, questioner and leader. In this final capstone course, I have enjoyed being able to reflect on this experience with MAET and in turn, last March to now. It has been a good exercise in self assessment and in reflection on how far I have come and where I want to go. While I don't know exactly what is next for me, CEP 807 has helped me set future goals for myself to continue growing my personal learning network (PLN) and taking the steps to pursue a job as an instructional technology coach. In the meantime, I intend to keep using technology in new and creative ways with my students, trying to remix and evaluate my lessons and instructional strategies I use and assist my fellow teachers in developing their own sense of what TPACK looks like for them. Even with the uncertainty in education, we are in a unique position right now to "remix" a lot of what we know and see what works best for administrators, educators and students moving forward.