

The Exploration during my Journey with Educational Technology

By Regan Kwong

I have always had a great passion for exploring the world and learning of different cultures. I decided to become a social studies teacher to share that passion with others and help younger generations develop an understanding of how the world came to be the way it is currently. As a social studies teacher the content I teach allows me to teach about different cultures and values of people throughout time and around the world. I have been successful in utilizing my skills as a social studies teacher to help my students make connections to the past through the study of history. However, I felt that my skillset was lacking in helping my students connect to content of the past with the skills of the future. I have always felt a great need to use technology in my classroom more effectively. I had a fear wondering how I can help my students develop 21st century critical thinking skills if my teaching practices were not up to date for the 21st century. My fear of failing my students, my determination to improve as a teacher, and my passion for exploring the world led me to apply to Michigan State University's Master of Arts in Educational Technology program (MAET). By applying to the program, I was hoping to find out about new technologies that I could bring into my classroom and learn how to better use technology to inform my teaching practices to guide students to develop 21st century skills. However, my new journey through the MAET program has helped me discover so much more. It has completely changed and evolved my teaching philosophy.

CEP 810: Teaching and Understanding with Technology was the first course along my journey towards evolving my teaching philosophy. The course has changed the way I view teaching and technology by introducing me to Punya Mishra and Matthew Koehler's TPACK (Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge) framework. TPACK has changed my teaching philosophy and the way that I approach building a learning experience for my students. The TPACK framework has taught me that technology will not improve a learning experience alone. It is more important for me to focus on the pedagogy. I must use the best teaching practices and creativity to inform the way that I incorporate technology into the classroom. I must find the best way to use the technology in my classroom and ensure that I am not taking away from purpose of the lesson. The end goal of utilizing technology should be to help students develop their understanding of the content and skills. It is easy to get caught up on using a technology because it is the latest trending tool, or it is the latest tool to be mandated by administrators. However, if it distracts from the purpose of the lesson or hinders the learning of the content and skills then it is better to not use the technology since it is not the best tool for the job. TPACK has taught me that as educators using technology we must find the "sweet spot" of using the technology in a way that will enhance the learning experience, use the best teaching strategies to guide and reach the students, while ensuring that our students are mastering the content and skills in the objective of the lesson. I now understand that the tool is not as important as using the best teaching practices and creativity to ensure that a learning objective is met.

Another course that greatly impacted the way that I approach my teaching was CEP 811: Adapting Innovative Technology to Education. This course changed the way that I think about designing my learning experiences for my students. In CEP811, I deepened my understanding of TPACK from the CEP 810 course by combining it with the maker education framework. The course further deepened my understanding of finding creative ways to repurpose tools, technology, and resources that I had laying

around. It showed me the flexibility of educational technology and TPACK. Anything could be used to create an engaging lesson if it was used in a creative way along with the best teaching practices.

The flexibility and affinity for creativity in the idea of maker education extended to more than just the teacher being innovative. The research I conducted during the course on maker education changed the way that I thought about student activities in the classroom. The research showed me that students learn best when they can take content knowledge and use it to create a project. The course has made me think about how students can repurpose the tools and technology in the classroom to create something meaningful to show their knowledge. I now fully believe that students should be allowed time to explore, conduct meaningful play, and participate in the classroom.

The concept of maker education is more than just the idea of students making something. The foundation of the maker education is based on differentiation, creativity, innovation, collaboration, and immediate feedback. I understood that good educators already incorporate these practices in the classroom, but the major piece that I took away from this course was that maker education put these practices into the hands of the students. Using this framework, I could differentiate assignments to cater to students needs and ensure that the learning activity met the students' skill level. I can improve motivation by ensuring that assignments meet student interests. Students have choice in what they create and how they show their understanding. Students can collaborate, share ideas, and teach each other. Having students create allows a chance for me to provide immediate feedback as students create something to show their mastery of the content. It also allows students to provide feedback to each other and collaborate as they plan and make as well. The flexibility allows me to put the exploring and participation into the hands of students. It allows students to truly make something they are proud of and allow each student to show their knowledge.

This idea of giving students a space to explore and collaborate was brought to an even deeper level for me as I progressed through the MAET program. CEP 812: Applying Educational Technology to Practice introduced me to Warren Berger's book "A More Beautiful Question", which discussed in detail how questioning can spark innovative ideas. "A More Beautiful Question" introduced me to the concept of having students do the questioning. This idea of having students do the questioning forced me to reflect on how educators do most of the questioning and that our current school system in the U.S. focuses on having students know the right answers. This is a problem since teachers push knowledge onto students and does not allow room in the classroom for students to create their own interest in the content that they learn. This not only hinders student motivation and curiosity, but also does not allow students to develop the skills necessary to pursue lifelong learning. The realization that I might have been failing to allow students to follow their own curiosity and develop the skills of inquiry made me immediately want to rethink my teaching practices. As a social studies teacher, one of the most important skills students should learn from the course is to question the world around them and have them develop their own solutions to problems they see around them. I have changed the way I approach the start of each new concept in my class. I have students engage in questioning social issues and question the development of history.

These experiences have changed the way I develop my learning experiences for my students. I have students go through the process of questioning first and try to turn activities in my social studies class into inquiry based learning. I want students to question before going out to discover their own answers and construct a way to show their learning. I have discovered that using inquiry allows me to put the

responsibility of discovery back to my students and motivate students by using their own natural curiosity created through their inquiry. This allows all students to participate, engage with the content, and construct their representation of their knowledge.

My journey in the MAET program also allowed me to explore a different route. CEP815: Technology and Leadership gave me the opportunity to develop my skills and focus as a leader and educator outside of developing learning experiences for my classroom. It took me away from the online coursework path and provided me with a literal journey studying abroad in Galway, Ireland. I learned about educational leadership, how to continue learning through a world of rapid technological change, and pushed me to collaborate heavily with other educators who I had just met at the time in an unfamiliar setting. My colleagues and I planned, facilitated, and presented at an international educational technology conference (GREAT17). I presented in a session at the conference on Differentiation and Data Driven learning to educators who attended the conference. This gave me the opportunity to hone my communication, collaboration, and leadership skills. This experience in the MAET program has helped me realize that being a school leader is about knowing how to work together with colleagues and communicate effectively to ensure the success of everyone in the school. It is important that I share my knowledge and skillset to help build a positive learning environment and community for everyone in the school. I understand that a school's success involves sharing collective knowledge to ensure that best practices are used to reach every student.

My development of the skills necessary to clearly communicate data, ideas, and research with other educators has given me the chance to improve upon my role back at my school. I put the communication, collaboration, and leadership skills to use as the data team leader for the social studies department at my school. Every week, I present and discuss student test data with my department. I collaborate with my department to create a plan to implement to meet the needs of students who are struggling in the high school social studies classes. The ability to use technology to assist in the analyzation of data and being able to communicate effectively the important objectives that must be met to assist our students has been highly valuable in helping problem solve within my school.

As I approach the end of my journey through the MAET program, I am incredibly proud of all the work and experiences I have had. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to collaborate with and learn from so many incredible educators to develop my understanding of educational technology. The unexpected knowledge that I have gained through this journey has completely evolved my teaching philosophy. My understanding of TPACK has shown me that using "sweet spot" of the best teaching practices, content knowledge, and creative uses of technology will ensure that I am not just using technology superficially, but enhancing the learning experiences of my students. My new focus on utilizing TPACK, student generated inquiry, and incorporating maker education into designing the learning experiences for my students has given me the tools needed to improve as a teacher and create a much more engaging learning environment for my students. My journey studying abroad has given me a chance to further develop my leadership skills. It has given me confidence in my ability to be able to reach out and lead other educators in developing solutions in their schools.

Even though I am near the completion of my journey through the MAET program, I am reminded that there is always much more to explore and learn. There are always new innovative ways to evolve my teaching practices. The technologies available to educators is rapidly changing just like how the world is always rapidly changing. I must continue my exploration to ensure that I have the skills to be an

effective 21st century teacher that can help lead both my students and other educators to be successful in today's world.