# The Long and Winding Road

Even before becoming an educator I have always considered myself a lifelong learner who looks ahead toward my next learning experience, which most recently was pursuing a masters degree. I had five years of experience teaching out of state and one year under my belt teaching at my current school in Michigan. When selecting a graduate program I was definitely intrigued by the idea of learning more about technology. This seemed like an especially good idea based on the future of education and the increasing amount of technology being utilized in schools. A high school friend of mine had completed Michigan State University's Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) program through the abroad classes in Ireland and had amazing things to say about the program. While I wasn't able to experience the abroad version, I decided to enroll in the MAET program.

I had pictured the program courses sharing a multitude of digital resources and teaching me how to serve as a technology coordinator in a school. I felt that this degree would be a good choice for me because technology is an area of interest for me and I wanted to know more about intentional integration of technology. I was often sought out by colleagues to assist with technology and served as the grade level technology representative, but haven't felt as if I had adequate training to be as helpful as I could have been. From the very first course, I quickly found that the MAET program would address that and so much more, but most importantly provided an opportunity to reflect on my beliefs about learning and education. Each course presented new ways to challenge my thinking about learning and technology's place in educational experiences. My learning experiences in the MAET program answered three major questions that will impact how I teach in the future: 1) What is educational technology? 2) What is creativity? and 3) What does the position of technology coordinator entail?

**What is educational technology?**

My first course in the MAET program was CEP 810, Teaching for Understanding with Technology. The format of this course was an awakening for me, not only about how much work was going to go into earning this degree, but also how relevant and applicable my learning would be. Through this course I was able to explore what it means to learn and understand, but also reflect on this process for 21st century learners. My learning experiences in this course emulated what I was trying to provide for my own students. Through being in the position of a student I was able to identify my

own strengths and weaknesses as a learner and reflect on how that may be impacting the way I teach and the way I develop learning experiences for my students.

This course was my introduction to the Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework which demonstrates the importance of integrating pedagogy, content knowledge, and technology when creating learning experiences. My introduction to this framework also presented the idea that there is no such thing as educational technology, but rather the importance should be placed on how the tool is influencing the learning experience. I would identify this concept as a turning point in my learning experience. This course allowed me to reflect on what it means to be a teacher in the 21st Century and rethink the way technology should be incorporated in my classroom. This connected really well with my goal of learning more about intentional integration of technology and provided a great foundation to build upon throughout the MAET program. Through learning more about an informed approach to incorporate technology into my lesson plans I can help my students with 21st Century skills for their future as well as enhance their understanding of content.

**What is creativity?**

I specifically enrolled in CEP 818, Creativity in Teaching and Learning, because I knew this was an area that I potentially needed the most growth. I have never considered myself as a creative person, which is partly why I ended up teaching the subject of science, however recently I have recognized that the field of science is about innovation and creativity in order to solve problems. In order to inspire more creativity and innovative thinking by my students who are required to develop solutions to real-world problems, I wanted to take this course to learn more about how I could support creative thinking by my students. By taking this course I was able to explore several different forms such as abstraction, modeling, and patterning to demonstrate creativity and apply it to my subject matter.

The infographic pictured to the right demonstrates some of the activities and representations I created in this course on the topic of Genetics. For example, in order to encourage patterning skills students would have the opportunity to learn about punnett squares and compare and contrast the patterns between monohybrid crosses, dihybrid crosses, codominance, and incomplete dominance. An example of modeling would be having students build a strand of DNA using various types of candy to represent the base pairs and phosphates.

I used to think strictly of works of art like paintings and sculptures when I thought about creativity and creative individuals, but through my learning in this course I realized there are many ways in which one can explore creative outlets even in the field of science. Due to my experiences, I realized I was able to demonstrate my own individual form of creativity through my assignments in this course so my identification as a creative individual has changed. Not only was I able to develop my creativity skills, but I was able to brainstorm ways that I could allow my students to be creative while demonstrating their knowledge.

Moving forward, I plan on intentionally thinking about how I can adjust my curriculum to provide these types of experiences for my students who will hopefully realize that they can be creative in their own way as well. If students can demonstrate their understanding through creative thinking activities like the ones I have experienced in this course it means that they have a solid understanding of the concept. While my department is implementing new curricula this provides the perfect opportunity to identify ways to adjust the lesson plans and allow students the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways that allow them to explore their creativity. This will be especially helpful for students at the conclusion of each unit when students are asked to develop a creative solution to a real-world problem. Supporting creativity in the classroom will correspond to students developing their innovation and problem solving skills.

**What does the position of technology coordinator entail?**

One of the most influential courses I took in the MAET program was CEP 815, Technology and Leadership, because it allowed me to explore my leadership style, determine my vision as a technology leader, and consider a future career as a school technology coordinator. One of the most valuable learning experiences for me in this course was attempting to address a "thorny issue" that may arise for a technology coordinator. I acknowledge that controversial issues are inevitably going to arise and when working with a large staff, one needs to learn how to bring everyone on board and come to a decision. I struggle to address conflict and was able to think through how I would realistically address the issue based on my leadership style. At the conclusion of this course I was able to determine not only my vision as a technology leader, but began determining how I would accomplish implementing this vision.

My vision, which was influenced by my learning experiences, centers around the idea that curricula that are rich in authentic, challenging tasks provide opportunities for students to engage in problem solving and innovative thinking. Schools should make

sure they are providing opportunities, especially in the age of the Internet, to allow students to evaluate information and attempt to solve problems that aren't the typical "one right answer" scenarios so often found in classrooms. This is a belief that has also influenced my decisions regarding learning experiences for my students. Each unit I teach is centered around a real-world problem that requires students to apply their learning in order to develop a solution to the problem scenario. After my experiences in this course, I am also considering a position as a technology coordinator in a school in the future. I believe I could serve as a valuable resource for colleagues regarding integration of technology based on their curriculum.

In conclusion, my learning experiences in the MAET program have made me feel more confident in my ability to integrate technology in a more informed manner, but also feel a renewed sense of my understanding about how people learn and develop quality learning experiences. Enrolling in the MAET program gave me the opportunity to view things from a student perspective again, which in turn gave me insight into the learning experiences I develop for my students. I appreciate my professors developing learning experiences that would both push my thinking, but also presenting the learning in a manner that I aspire to emulate for my own students. Moving forward I want to focus on intentionally integrating technology into my curriculum to prepare my students for their future while keeping in mind the way that the brain works. I am dedicated to sharing my gained knowledge with colleagues while staying committed to being a lifelong learner and continuing to learn more about educational technology. I would highly recommend the MAET program to anyone interested in reflecting on their pedagogical beliefs and learning more about the integration of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and technology to develop quality learning experiences for students.