

Synthesis Essay

It was springtime of 2019, I can vividly remember sitting in an upstairs classroom at Erickson Hall on Michigan State University's campus. It was the last week of classes as I was wrapping up my year of student teaching and my professor said that we were having guest speakers coming to inform us about Michigan State University masters options to continue our education. At that time, I zoned out and thought after completing five years of my undergraduate degree, I am not interested. I thought this is something I could approach later in my educational career. At that moment in time I was focusing on job interviews, thinking about what grade I was hoping to teach and picturing what my classroom would look like.

Skip forward to the following year, winter of 2020, there I was a second grade teacher with my dream classroom, asking my teaching colleagues to write me letters of recommendation for the Michigan State University's Masters of Art and Educational Technology (MAET) program. I told myself I could take it slow and steady and take classes during the summers to finish within the next three years. I felt that I needed to continue my education and start completing classes before I lost my studying and school mentality.

Here I am, at the end of summer 2021, graduating from Michigan State University's MAET program and heading into my third year of teaching. What happened to me taking this program slow and steady? As 2020 was a trying year for all, I felt that during these uncharted times where we were safe at home and had minimal activities on our schedules I had to take advantage of this opportunity. This provided me with a great period of time to complete several courses in the summer as well as take courses while I was virtually teaching my second grade students. The year of 2020 provided me the chance to complete this masters program sooner than I could've ever imagined, as well as, gave me a much needed community and support system

outside of my school district. My colleagues of the MAET program and I bonded as we were continuing to work toward our masters degree despite the teaching expectations that were given as we were either remote teaching, hybrid teaching or in-person with new protocols. I never felt that I was alone or was overwhelmed for taking an abundant amount of classes during such a chaotic school year, thanks to my MAET peers. I also couldn't have done it without the support of my professors I had along the way, my second grade level colleagues who believed in me as well as my family who challenged me to be the best individual and educator daily.

As our world is constantly evolving and technology is becoming a large part of our daily lives, I knew that this program would be a perfect fit for me as well as learning knowledge to share with other teachers that I work with. As one of the youngest teachers in my current elementary school, I feel that there is an expectation that I am a useful resource with technology due to the times I have grown up. I wanted to be that useful tool and learn more to help others as well as continue to support the students in my classroom as technology is prevalent and evolving during their lives. I had no hesitation that this Masters of Art and Educational Technology (MAET) program would provide me with useful experiences and tools that I could incorporate into my work place.

Each course taken to complete this program challenged me and my current teaching practices. I feel that I have grown not only as an individual, but every assignment I approached with the thought of how this can benefit my teaching practices and my students. The MAET program was very well organized and many of the classes provided similar structures and often built off each other. I was often able to recall readings or assignments from previous courses to support new learnings in others. I felt that this set me up for success as I worked through my classes and clearly knew the expectations and plan for each course. Three main courses that have

provided me with knowledge that I will continue to build off of were CEP 800, CEP 822 and TE 846.

CEP 800, Learning in School and Other Settings, provided me with the main takeaway that no matter how much we may think we know, we are all lifelong learners. As an educator I embrace the fact that my students are intaking information and learning daily, however, at the same time I am also learning and progressing as an individual. CEP 800's main assignment included a Personal Theory of Learning, which encompassed several big ideas from this course and helped me as a master student compile my findings and thoughts into one final draft paper.

The main takeaways that I discussed within my Personal Theory of Learning included informal learning, scaffolding, self-assessment, operant conditioning and motivation. These big ideas can all be directly applied to my classroom and the learning environment that I provide to my students daily. I dove into a variety of resources to learn more about each of these topics as well as thought about all of these big ideas through my teacher lens. As an elementary educator it is important that I realize how useful movement based learning can be as well as modeling work and behavior expectations to my students at their young age.

The learning environment for individuals can have a large impact on how one comprehends information and learning, therefore, it is important that I provide these experiences and learning opportunities to set my students up for success in their future. Learning is a lifelong journey that takes time and drive. Having this mindset from my master course, CEP 800, will provide me with an open mind during my educational career knowing that there is always more to learn and explore.

CEP 822, Approaches to Educational Research, taught me an abundance of tools and provided me with a variety of experiences within a short period of time. Some of the main

assignments I completed during this course included writing a mock letter to my school board about 21st century learning and the importance of providing the best practices to the students in our district. I also created a Google form to find more information on the usefulness of the reading curriculum my school uses and had real feedback from educators in my districts and districts in neighboring areas. As well as, I created a Critical Making Project which provided my students with a hands-on learning experience that tied into big ideas that we were currently working on within my classroom. These assignments were impactful because they connected to my work place, my students and I can use all of these assignments within my teaching career as I move forward.

After having the opportunity to complete the research and these assignments, I now can use Google forms. I have gained knowledge through research about the more useful strategies to share with parents for feedback that could be used such as learning about their children in the beginning of the school year, mid-year feedback, and form for in class parent helpers. Another tool I look forward to implementing into my classroom and adding to my lesson plans is called the Makey Makey. The Makey Makey was a key component to my Critical Making Project that supports the idea of incorporating a technology based intervention kit that connects to computer keys. This tool can support a variety of subject areas and lessons as well as be used across a wide variety of students and ages. I feel that the Makey Makey can incorporate the idea of 21st century learning which many of my masters class discussed as technology is growing rapidly and as educators it's important that we strive to work to stay with the times to support the students in our classrooms.

TE 846, Accommodating Differences in Literacy Learners, provided me with the experience of truly connecting this program to my current students. The assignments had me

work with a specific student in my classroom, thanks to prior consent from the parents. The routine built right into my individual small group lessons that I taught to this particular student one-on-one. During the course of the semester I worked toward completing a Literacy Case Study pertaining to my particular students and the process I took to plan lessons and support her literacy needs. Having this useful experience of breaking down to pre-assess and find the gaps, learn tools to support these gaps and then find growth in a short period of time inspired me. A big part of teaching is supporting the different needs of each individual student, which opened my eyes to resources, tools and confidence that I need to help support and see growth for my second grade students now and in the future.

My finished case study is a great tool to show what I learned and how I found success with providing direct instruction to a particular student in my class. As an elementary educator I learned more about the crucial time for students to intake essential literacy skills. Part of my job is to make sure they have these skills when leaving second grade and if they seem to lack some essential literacy skills, then this is where I can provide a small group or one on one instruction to help fill these gaps. The artifacts from this course I will use in my classroom to help evaluate students' understandings and find these holes sooner rather than later.

Overall, these three courses plus the seven others that I took to complete my masters program have truly impacted me as an educator. I look forward to implementing all of these new tools and experiences in my classroom, as well as supporting educators that I work with daily and providing my students with engaging and successful lessons while incorporating technology. I feel that I had a positive learning experience while completing my masters and will continue to encourage other educators to be lifelong learners and support them to continue their educational careers whether it's through college courses or professional development. Thank you Masters of

Arts and Educational Technology (MAET) program and thank you Michigan State University for an outstanding opportunity not only for my undergraduate program but also for my master program. I look forward to walking across the Breslin Student Events Center stage for a second time, trading my green graduation gown in for a black masters gown. I am proud to have my master program and will forever be proud to be a Spartan, Go Green!