

A Transformed View

Change. It is a word that may invoke fear into individuals. Why do people fear change? It can be argued that it is because it takes a person out of their comfort zone. When presented with the directive of change, what do you do? While I admit that I have occasionally jumped into something without thinking (for better or worse), I typically like to analyze the options before me. Ultimately, though, I fall back on Yoda's words of wisdom: "Try not. Do, or do not. There is no try." Regardless of how you look at it, change is inevitable. In today's educational communities, technology is becoming more and more integrated into the classroom's instruction. When presented with this shift in instructional pedagogy, how will the teachers respond? This was one reason why I decided to make the change to my daily life and begin working on a Master's in Educational Technology. I wanted to be prepared to best implement technology into my classroom. I also wanted to be able to help other staff members with incorporating technology into their own lessons. I knew this change would affect my life on several fronts. This journey would change my views of education, technology, and collaboration. It would not be a change for the worse, it would be a change for the best.

In the summer of 2009, I began my journey toward completing a Master's in Educational Technology from MSU. This began as a way to renew my teaching certificate and possibly open new doors of employment within the schools. My school had recently had an influx of technology into the district, and I wanted to be at the forefront of using this technology. The first steps into this program were daunting. Incorporating coursework into my daily life of teaching, coaching, and raising 3 little children was an eye-opener. With an incredibly supportive wife, I decided to take the leap and begin the courses. Change is often feared, but this was a change that was exciting and new. Concepts and uses of technology were presented in ways that I had not thought of; it led to new ways of teaching and applying technology. Now, that I am finishing up my final course within this program, I am eager to see where the hard work will lead myself and my family.

At the time that I began this program, I had completed a Master's in Educational Leadership only 4 years prior. I was happily teaching middle school science, and coaching basketball. I had always looked to find new ways to incorporate technology into my lessons, and to find creative ways to have the students apply technology to their studies. In my district this can be difficult, as many families do not have access to computers, or the internet while at home. When I began with the first three courses, CEP 810, 811, and 812, I became very excited at the potential applications of these technologies in the classroom. A major dilemma came after the completion of these three courses. Due to several unfortunate variables, I decided to stop at this point in the program. Two years later, I was now a principal within the same district, and was given the title of *Director of District Technology*. I remember asking my superintendent if he recommended I restart and complete the MAET program. He recommended I do so, thus began my jump back into the world of MAET...game on!

While I found the initial three courses entertaining, and useful, the real impact of the program became apparent after being accepted into the graduate program. Course work became a little more difficult, as it seemed to better fit teachers. However, in borrowing a common theme from the program, I **repurposed** my education. I began to view the instruction from the lens of: *How can I apply this lesson to help my staff, and the staff of other buildings within my district?* The first step in this process came with CEP 820.

In CEP 820, *Teaching Students Online*, the affordances and constraints of online instruction were analyzed in depth. The instructors, Sandra Sawaya and Anne Heintz, utilized a Developer Log to foster reflection. It so happened that this coincided with our current school improvement plan. We had just started making better use of student reflections within our school, and here I was doing the same thing within my coursework! Throughout the course, I was able to see how, through the use of Google Docs, student and staff could work together to foster the students' learning and comprehension of the curriculum. Much like a grade school student, I found that I craved feedback. It became crucial in the development of my course projects. As I sat working on this developer log, I found that I often discovered ways to apply this to the students in my building and even my staff. This alone, demonstrated the importance of immediate feedback, and how beneficial it can be for student and staff.

This course involved the deep analysis of online instruction. The use of Course Management Systems (CMS) was investigated and the decision was made to pick one to develop a course module for use in the classroom. At this point, I began to feel the pressure, as I no longer had a class to instruct. However, in discussing what direction to take with my instructors and my staff, I settled on developing a course module that would serve to help my 4th grade teachers. Information gathered from the staff helped form a module that could be picked up and used in a blended classroom. The development of this unit brought to my attention the importance of effective classroom instruction. Technology was not going to enhance student outcomes by itself. The real learning came when the teacher's knowledge of instruction and content provided a companion light to the implementation of the technology. When this happened, the classroom instruction took on a different dimension. The learning became more tactile. The students became more involved...the instruction became...more **meaningful**. It was at this point that I began to wish that I was back in a classroom again, so I could first handedly apply this new-found knowledge. The change in my instructional tactics was beginning to occur.

As the year progressed, I moved into CEP 817. *Learning Technology by Design* introduced me to Punya Mishra and Jon Good. From here on out, my approach to technology and its uses were challenged in new and exciting ways. This is where the concept of **backwards design** really began to make sense. Instead of beginning with which activities to include on the lesson, the lens of focus was shifted toward the outcomes you hoped to achieve. This made sense. Working back from the outcome seemed to better frame the focus of the activities, so they become more relevant. The instructors also pushed the concept of subverting technology. The idea that the original use of technology may not necessarily be the *best* use for the technology. This is where I really began to see how my view of education would change.

Subverting technology takes a lot of "thinking outside the box." In the *Subverting Genre Presentation*, the focus was on how well can you take an established technology and push it to its limits. The use of Google Presentation limited what could be done with the slideshow we were to create, as PowerPoint has more powerful features. This, however, is exactly what Punya and Jon wanted to demonstrate. How can you be resourceful when you have limited technology at your disposal? Basically, you have to "MacGyver" your way through the assignment...creating a sustainable product out of technology that may not be best suited for your final outcome. In the end, you learned to change your way of thinking to accommodate the task. In doing this, you begin to find ways to address this final outcome, to twist and morph the technology to meet your needs.

In the summer of 2014, I chose to take the summer cohort at MSU, and I have never been happier. The coursework was grueling. The instructors pushed you to hone your technological

skills. You were grouped with people whom you have just met, and the outcome of your coursework would depend heavily on your fellow group members. Fortunately for me, I found an excellent group to work with. (Truth be told, every group in that class was a great group.) I found that this was what collaboration was meant to be; a cohesive group that respected one another and worked well together. With a solid group at my back, I jumped into CEP 800.

Learning in Schools and Other Settings introduced the different concepts of learning. Learning styles were examined and discussed thoroughly in class. TPACK (Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge) played a heavy part within this course. Projects developed in this course focused on meeting the needs of different learning styles and abilities. Projects, such as the 3x3x3 pushed us to find ways to present information within tight parameters. This was where the lessons of CEP 817 came into play. With no restrictions on how to present the information, collaboration and creativity were key to a good outcome. As we worked on this, I began to see its application in the classroom. It was fun, and it was entertaining. The final videos were meaningful. Instead of having student in a classroom write down a summary to turn into the teacher, why not utilize a method such as this? Combine this with a group read, like this course did, and the curriculum becomes interactive to the students. They invest time to create a meaningful representation of their knowledge. This is where real learning takes place.

In order for teachers to provide students with the chance to utilize technology to enhance the learning, technology has to be available. I addressed this dilemma during my DreamIT project. I wanted this project to push my staff. I wanted to use this to ultimately cause them to focus on how to best utilize technology in a manner that will use the TPACK framework to provide the best learning experience possible. It also examines how the SAMR model which looks at how technology enhances and transforms classroom activities through substitution, augmentation, modification, and redefinition. In creating this project, I was able to take a long, hard look at the direction our district is headed. I feel that there is a strong need for collaboration between students both within the district and outside of the district. This collaboration will serve to help students expand their view of their community and the world. It will allow them to use technology in a fashion that will allow them to learn like never before. Now, as I complete this essay, I am using this project as the backbone for a grant to pilot chromebooks within a 5th grade classroom. As I have formulated my application's narrative, all of the lessons from previous coursework are showing their importance. I am now fully realizing the full application of the wealth of information that came from the MAET program. The lightbulb is turning on!

When I look back upon my time in the MAET program I find that I am very impressed by the program as a whole. It has opened my eyes to different way to approach education. It has shown guidance into how to best utilize technology within the classroom. The summer cohort was an amazing experience. Had I known how much fun it would be, I would have done this with the initial three courses. The courses have pushed my understanding of social media. While many schools have come to look at these as a boon to their institution, I have learned how to leverage these technologies to best serve our district. I feel that as I leave this program, I am prepared to bring technology to my building and my district in a meaningful manner. I can serve as a resource to help teachers find their way in implementing effective teaching through interactive and engaging lessons. I will help my staff find ways to interact with the students' prior knowledge, so that they will have a meaningful experience within their classes. This will be made possible due to my new understanding of the interweaving connection between education and technology. An understanding that was made possible as I journeyed through the MAET program.