Putting Seven Years into Practice

Synthesis Essay

By Lauren E. Pate

When I finished my student teaching internship, I was immediately on the hunt for a job. I was ready and willing to take on the world with my new degree at a highly accredited college in education. Michigan State had given me an abundance of lessons, projects, readings, and other tools to use and I was eager to put them to use. I filled out application after application. There were a few phone calls and final round interviews, but nothing that fit. I was tired of working three jobs as a substitute teacher, special needs in-home aid, and leasing agent when all I wanted to do was teach. Fall was just around the corner when I decided I wanted to put my graduate credits I earned during my internship year to use. I was not going to the economic times keep me stagnant in my learning. There is no time like the present to make a change and continue the journey forward.

After researching several options for graduate programs, my interest was easily attracted to technology. With my background, it just made sense to apply to the MAET program. I had recently moved to Ann Arbor so the convenience of an entirely online program was extra appealing. I discussed my options with my family who were the first to influence my curiosity in technology. My father and brother have been in the technical field since I can remember. From a young age, my brother was always fidgeting around with our computer, mp3 players, iPods, phones, etc. As I grew older, I began to take a similar interest. We discuss the latest technologies during family get-togethers, chat about them over the phone, or email. I have been able to share with them much of what I have learned through my journey to my masters.

I accepted my first position as a Title 1 interventionist in Southwest Detroit during my first semester in the MAET program. This gave me an opportunity to have a consistent classroom to implement what I had learned versus an inconsistent setting when I was substitute teaching. I could set long term goals and see them through.

Applying Educational Technology to Practice

In CEP 812, we completed many experiments and assignments in the classroom with students using new technologies. For one assignment, we conducted an audio recording where we interviewed students to pre-assess their learning. This gave me insight into what the students knew and what I still needed to teach them to have a mastered understanding. My topic was on coordinate planes and graphing linear and proportional relationships. The audio interview provided a scope for an assessment. The students and I were able to have a conversation with them thoroughly explaining their thoughts rather than just writing them down on paper. This gave me the chance to ask follow up questions on the spot instead of trying to figure out a student's thought process on a written assignment. The fact that it

was recorded also allowed me to take my time to analyze their answers and make informed decisions for the next unit.

I had little to no experience working with digital editing programs before this assignment. This was an amazing opportunity to learn how to use such a valuable tool and to use it with a pedagogical purpose. Since then, I have continued to use these programs today in the classroom and for personal use. I have made many slideshows using Audacity and iMovie maker to creatively put together audio and visual files.

In the beginning of the MAET program, my courses were more of a review of tools that I was familiar working with. I had taken online classes before and knew how to navigate Angel and other Course Management Sites (CMS), sometimes called Learning Management System (LMS). I had been using email for years. I knew how to Skype and create Google Docs and digital stories. But with these unfamiliar yet exciting software tools, CEP 812 was beginning of many new learning experiences to come.

Technology and Leadership

CEP 815 is a course that should be required for all graduate programs. It focused less on technologies and more on how to be a great leader. During this class, I learned the difference between management and leadership. Management is encompassed by organizing and maintaining whereas leadership consists of taking a team beyond the goals set forth. Leadership is taking someone past their comfort zone, knowing what they need before they even need it. Leadership is having a vision, knowing how to present an idea to make it meaningful, and diffusing the plan among others to see it through. For one of the projects we had to design a project that would be self-sustainable. My project involved adding on solar panels to the computer room to help with energy costs. We had to come up with a plan and draft up an email to provide evidence of our vision to others. This was a great experience in understanding the strategies to carry out such a large project idea to a wide-range audience.

Leading up to the final project, we were required to make several Facebook and Twitter posts about the readings from each lesson. I had to think creatively because of the limited about of words we were allotted. I also had to be direct to get my point across and crafty in the language to engage the reader.

Over the years, I have taken on more leadership roles. I am the grade level representative for updating curriculum maps in alignment with the Common Core Standards. I coordinated Career Day, and Family Math Night. I also coach volleyball at the middle school and high school level and soccer at the middle school level. And the opportunities continue to open up as I was recently elected to coordinate the summer school math session. This class gave me a new perspective on leadership. It taught me how to be a supportive, progressive, and successful leader.

Approaches to Educational Research

At the beginning of CEP 812, I felt like an expert with the technologies addressed in the graduate program so far, but I quickly learned that was not the case. With the change of seasons, I transitioned from expert to novice. In CEP 822, I learned a tremendous amount, but I was not so fond of the research aspect initially. This class took a lot of trial and error, but the results were invaluable. I learned how to search for and identify qualities of well conducted studies. In practice, I piloted many research experiments myself and evaluated the data.

As I was completing my final research study on year round schools, I learned an important lesson. After working out all the variables and making sure all the pieces were as consistent possible, I learned that although there is good research out there, no two schools are the exact same. This comes down to demographics, funding, quality of staff, etc. This idea parallels within the classroom as well. What works at one school may not work at another just as what strategy works for one student may not work for another. As an educator, I am not perfect, but I am on a journey to be a better teacher than yesterday. I will take every opportunity to continue the learning process and the MAET program is a large part of that process of moving forward.

Teaching Students Online

With an online course, the student works through web-based material organized by the instructor. In CEP 820, we shift from the role of a student to the instructor. I am figuring out how to teach students online by designing my very own course. I chose Coursesites as my Course Management System and my module topic is operations with scientific notation. The most familiar CMS to me is Angel, the designated CMS for Michigan State University. All of the courses I have taken through Angel have been accessible, structured, and easy to navigate. These qualities are necessary to ensure competency in the student. An incredible amount of detail is required to make sure an online course functions successfully and learning takes place.

One of the readings we read titled "Asynchronous and synchronous online teaching; Perspectives of Canadian high school distance education teachers" discussed two teaching methods in online learning (Murphy, Rodríguez-Manzanares and Barbour 2011). The first type was asynchronous, which puts the responsibility on the student to find their way through the course. Much of the material is text based and often necessitates critical thinking skills. The second setting is synchronous where the student is dependent on the instructor's lectures and collaboration between peers. For my class design, I have created a hybrid course where the majority of material is learned online with some parts completed in the classroom. I am also incorporating both asynchronous and synchronous methods to develop a more well-round learning experience. I have recorded instructional lessons along with text based information. I have provided a variety of assessments including individual and collaborative journal entries, quizzes and assignments. In addition, technical support is available through online chat, video tutorials, or emailing. This is a work in progress making sure the students have all the tools necessary to access and apply the instructed technologies. This course has opened up my eyes to other end of the spectrum of e-learning and career opportunities.

Putting it all together - Capstone Educational Technology

CEP 807 is the final reflective piece of the puzzle. I started out by looking at my original goals in my Goal Statement Reflection essay. After taking two semesters off in the middle of my coursework, it was refreshing to reread my plans I wrote two years and check off all that I have accomplished. Looking back, I cannot believe how much has changed in two years. I moved to a new city where I substitute taught until I landed my first full-time job as a Title 1 interventionist in seventh grade. The following year I was offered the eighth grade math position in my very own classroom. I am able to use everything I have learned in my physical middle school classroom and my virtual graduate classroom to move forward as an educator. I used these experiences to write my Future as a Learner essay.

During my student teaching year, we took graduate courses towards our masters. At this time we begin designing our first version of our online portfolio. As a part of CEP 807, I have had the opportunity to extended and revise my portfolio making it more marketable and professional. Now that I am in a different position than I was two years ago, I want employers, colleagues, and parents to see me in a different light. This portfolio allows me tailor my website to fit the current stage in my career while putting on display everything I learned in one accessible place.

Throughout my journey I moved from an expert to a novice and I can confidently say I am moving back into the role of an expert. Jumping right into a master's program did not give me much time to try out what I had learned during my undergraduate study. With all the resources, lessons, projects, and readings the MAET program has given me I feel eager to apply what I have learned again just as I did when I finished my student teaching. With the high demand of technology in the classroom supported by my education and background, I have been given the tools to be a leader in my community and share with my colleagues how to effectively integrate technology in their classrooms. Now that I have completed my masters, I have never been more excited to put the past seven years of schooling into practice preparing our future professionals for a technology-driven society.