Stephanie Houts

Spring 2019

The Journey Ahead

Deciding on the program I wanted to pursue for a master's degree was a long and well-researched process. Knowing that whichever program I chose would require hard work and much of my time and money, I wanted to choose something that would be beneficial to my practice, my students, and to my future. As I considered my passions and interests, I knew science and technology were on the top of my list of areas I wanted to grow in. I thought about the direction that education was heading in my district and those around me, what was being encouraged in professional development and articles I was reading, and I decided on applying for the Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) degree at Michigan State University. I wanted to be able to make educated decisions about how to best use technology in my classroom as well as share techniques and strategies with my colleagues. My experience during my master's program at Michigan State University has been challenging, rewarding, and influential toward my profession in numerous ways. As I near the end of my last semester in the program, I am proud of the progress I have made toward my goals and of the skills and knowledge I have gained. Every course in the MAET program has challenged me and inspired me, but there are a few courses that stand out in my mind that have truly changed my practice as an educator. These courses challenged me in different ways, but all have had direct impacts on how I plan and implement learning experiences in my classroom. Of all of the aspects in my education I have shown grown in, these courses have pushed me most in creativity, leadership, and educational practice and design.

--------------------Creativity----------------------

I have always admired those who were creative, and have always enjoyed designing creative experiences for my students but never really thought of myself as a creative person. Adopting Innovative Technology to Education (CEP 811) helped me realize that all educators are creative in the way they adapt and remix tools to best fit their needs and the needs of their students. This course focused on challenging students to see through the eyes of makers and find tools that may not necessarily be for education but will fit perfectly with an activity or lesson. A lot of the content of this course was designed around play and sharing technology tools and ways you can use them in the classroom. Even though technology was the main focus throughout my program of study, being mindful of the the way I choose technology and how I use it, incorporating the technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPACK) strategy was first introduced in

this course. This way of thinking, incorporates all three areas of lesson planning so instead of using technology just for the sake of using technology, it is used if it supports the pedagogical and content knowledge needed for the learning experience.

Throughout this course I designed and implemented creative, inspiring lessons using technology to better support my students and their learning. My students enjoyed these lessons and were able to get more from the experiences and I think a large factor in that was from the strategies I learned in CEP 811. This course has taught me valuable strategies and has inspired me to continue to find resources and technology that will best support my students. I have been inspired by the thought of imagining myself as a maker, and I want to encourage my students to see themselves as makers too. This idea that we can all adapt what is currently available to meet our needs and interests makes being creative a trait that we all share. Not only has this course changed the way I design and implement lessons in my classroom, but it has also provided me with resources to continue my learning through a professional learning network of colleagues and other educators.

--------------------------Leadership--------------------------

One of my goals as I began my master's program was to become a teacher leader in my district. This goal was a big challenge for me, because I have never been one to seek out leadership opportunities. I have always been much more comfortable being part of the team and working toward shared and personal goals, not the one setting the goals and leading the team. Technology and Leadership (CEP 815) challenged me to not only see myself as a leader and really dig deep to define what that means, but it also allowed me to see just how challenging being a leader can be. Of all of the courses I have taken in my master's program, this was probably the most challenging, because it required me to leave my comfort zone on the sidelines and really see myself as a leader. In addition to seeing myself as a leader, this course made me see the current leaders and administrators in my professional life in a new light and with a new level of respect. I now have a greater knowledge of what it takes to be a good leader and just how difficult a task it really is.

Throughout this course, I was able to analyze what my core values are as a leader, find ways to communicate professional goals and build relationships with my team. I was able to see examples of great leaders in many different professions as well as leaders who were not perceived as great and really analyze what the differences between them were. I was pushed to

really define myself as a leader and understand that being a part of a team trying to reach a common goal can be motivating and truly amazing when you have a leader you believe in. One of the projects in this course was to design an professional development experience that was engaging and informative. I thought this was a great exercise in helping me reach my goal to be the type of leader that can influence and inspire my colleagues. Though I don't necessarily see administration in my future, I do see the importance of being a teacher leader and helping colleagues reach their goals. After learning ways to communicate to my team, set goals, and make plans to delegate and follow through to reach those goals I feel more confident and capable as a leader in my district and profession.

-----------------Practice and Design--------------------

The courses that have had the most impact on my everyday experience as an educator have been Technology and Learning Across the Curriculum (CEP 816) and Teaching Students Online (CEP 820). These courses have given me strategies and techniques, with sources to continue my research, that have had immediate influence on my teaching. I use the skills I developed in these courses daily and am incredibly grateful for the experiences that I had. They have shaped me into a better educator and have allowed me to help other educators in my district as we begin to use more technology in our classrooms.

CEP 816 opened my eyes to the struggles of cognitive load that lessons with technology can have on students. By researching cognitive load I am now able to identify where students may be overwhelmed by resources and tools that I have used in my classroom. I had the opportunity to redesign texts for students to reduce the cognitive load and provide more enriching experiences that all of my students can benefit from. I have been able to recognize critical information and better communicate that information using new tools and technologies. In addition to being able to identify where students can be bogged down with over stimulation, I have found that I am also able to teach students to recognize this phenomena on their own. I have researched and found tools and applications that I can share with my students to help them be advocates and leaders of their own learning. I have encouraged my students to use these tools to reduce cognitive load and help them understand text and other information in ways that are easier for them as individuals. I have seen the impact this has on my students and the sense of empowerment they feel over their own learning. This method of not only using tools to differentiate learning, but teaching students how to differentiate materials on their own is something I am very proud of and something that I really believe in.

Though much of this course was focused on reading and text information for students, I was also able to find and develop science specific resources for my classes. I was able to design and develop interactive lessons that included technology tools that were new to me and that I could implement immediately with my students. In addition to the individual work that I did for this course, I was also very appreciative of the support I received from my classmates. I was able to add valuable resources to my professional learning network and learn from other wonderful educators. This aspect of the course made it enjoyable and changed my practice in immediate and clear ways.

CEP 820 was also a huge impact on my teaching practice and the timing of this course was perfect. When I learned that I would be developing a unit of study in learning management system (LMS) of my choosing I was so excited to get started. Only a few months before, my current school district announced that we would be adopting Schoology as a LMS as we moved forward with the adoption of 1:1 technology. Therefore, Schoology was the clear choice for my unit project in CEP 820. In this course I was able to research ways that students learn effectively online and apply those strategies to my own online course. I chose to work on a unit that I had done in the past for an enrichment class I teach on engineering and design. I learned ways to communicate effectively and clearly online with students, set expectations, and figure out the technical aspects of a digital LMS. By the end of the course, I had an enriching, engaging, and functional unit that I could actually use as I began the school year in the Fall. Now that I am nearing the end of my first year implementing an LMS in the classroom, I have called upon the knowledge I gained from this course frequently and it shows. Not only am I comfortable designing and developing online components in my LMS, but I am excited to help my colleagues as they learn to use more online learning in their classes.

----------------Continuing my Education----------------

As I near the finish line of my master's program experience, I know that I made the right choice with the MAET program. The experiences I have had have already impacted my professional practice. Technology is an amazing tool that I am fortunate to have access to in my school district. Now that I have had these educational experiences, I understand how to implement technology in ways that are positive and impactful. I feel that I am a more conscious educator and can identify better ways to design learning experiences for my students. I know how important it is to analyze the tools that I choose to use in the classroom and how to be an

effective leader in my district. I have always valued my outlook on being a lifelong learner and this step in my journey has just reinforced the importance of continuing my education to better myself and my practice. I have come a long way, but I know that there is still room for improvement and growth. I am excited to see where this journey will take me, but even more exciting for me, is the inspiration and motivation this experience has given me to better myself and inspire my students and colleagues.