Synthesis Essay

In the summer of 2011, as I decided to begin my Master's program after putting it off long enough to become acclimated to the teaching profession, I searched diligently through a variety of choices hoping to find the best fit for me. I thought about counseling, English and journalism, but when I happened upon the Masters of Educational Technology program out of my undergraduate alma mater, one that would allow some of my graduate TE courses during my student teaching to transfer, I thought that this would be a program in which I could be interested. It turned out I wasn't just interested in it because it wouldn't be quite as expensive as starting over without any credits to count towards my Masters. I found it interested me because it was something different, something I hadn't considered at any point prior.

As a new teacher a few years ago, especially as an English teacher, I struggled to balance the extensive amount of grading with a second job, but what the MAET online program offered made it not only possible, but doable. I have always loved MSU, and I've found my home there, but what I didn't expect was that I continued to feel at home despite having not truly met my teachers or classmates face to face. The online educational technology courses were interesting, the professors and the students were knowledgeable, and I felt that they were truly worthwhile. This was a course that would respect my profession, would acknowledge its ability to help me in any way possible grow in my profession, and would deem my time worthwhile. Although the initial draw was MSU, it being online, and my TE credits transferring, the real reason I have felt this program to be exceptional because it seems to be about teachers helping teachers. We can relate because, whether we are elementary or secondary, PE or English, we can all connect to one another.

As an, now, 8-year Michigan Stater (I started college in 2005), being a teacher originally wasn't something I thought I would be interested in. Now, it's the only thing I can think of being interested in, and Michigan State's undergraduate and graduate programs have helped me to see that. I took all the normal requirements for an English major and journalism minor, and yes, those classes helped me to see why I love those subjects, but the teacher education courses allowed me to see how my knowledge could be transferred to others, and how I could do it well.

Being a teacher has been the most challenging but also the most rewarding position I have ever held. I've been a gymnastics and soccer coach, I've been a camp counselor, but nothing compares to being a teacher. We may not be paid what we deem as fair, and as I sit here right now, it's already 6:30 and I'm still sitting at my desk because once I finish my work, I still have essays to grade, a chapter of a novel to re-read and lesson plans to look over. Yet, I'm sitting here, tired but content. I'm content because it is in small moments with a student sharing their inner demons and the struggles within their broken home in a personal narrative, or a student staying after to have me help with their 5-paragraph essay, as they explain that this will be the first essay they've ever turned in in high school. These are the moments that make teaching so worthwhile. The moments that make me want to be the best, most effective teacher I can possibly be. The moments where I understand how important it is to be someone they can count on, someone they can learn from, and someone who can influence them to be contributing, kind, and hard-working members of society.

Now we're always forced to go to conferences, meetings galore, and of course, we must complete our masters by a certain time in order to maintain our teaching license, but when we as teachers take our own learning seriously so will our students. As a continuing learner in this masters' program, I've learned that when given the chance, certain things can be more valuable than what one may have first ascertained. Courses like CEP 810 that gave me the opportunity to redesign my *Catcher in the Rye* unit and use "class time" to devise

a working website for my students, or CEP 811, which allowed me to reconsider the way I go about teaching grammar, or CEP 800 which gave me the push I needed to write a grant-proposal for something I so desperately needed in the journalism newsroom, have been amazing to experience as something in our online classes can be critiqued, discussed, graded, and thus implemented after receiving necessary feedback we might not normally have gotten on a regular basis. These classes gave me the opportunity to be able to create something useful. We didn't have to write papers only our professors would see, or turn in our work to an email address that would never provide feedback. We had working documents, group assignments, and professors who could and would address our ideas with thoughtful concern and helpfulness in making this something that could be utilized for the benefit of our students.

The courses CEP 800, 815 and 822 worked in conjunction with one another. As indicated in my **showcase of work** section of this ePortfolio, there were major assignments that were extremely important in getting us thinking about ed tech as an important movement in teaching when done with enough knowledge and conviction for making lessons, and thus learning, meaningful. Each day in Galway, Ireland was filled with different activities to get us thinking about the different aspects of ed tech, and how to consider thinking about and implementing technology in the classroom. The importance rang clear as, unlike my previous online classes, this gave me and my fellow Year 2 classmates the ability to work literally alongside one another, share ideas, lessons, things that worked well and those that didn't. We learned iMovie, Movie Maker, website creation, digital photography, and we were able to talk about why students don't like school, and how we can work our hardest to get them there. Our book for the summer was titled, *Why Don't Students Like School: A Cognitive Scientist Answers Questions About How the Mind Works and What It Means for the Classroom* by Daniel T. Willingham, and he discussed a lot about students' abilities to learn, the way the mind and the memory worked, and how we as teachers can better prepare our students' minds for learning. The discussions surrounding these notions each day rang true with how we wanted to be as teachers, how we wanted to reach as many students as possible through as many mediums as could be done effectively and meaningfully.

In these courses, the conference we set-up and the web-based grant proposal we wrote were the most meaningful for me. I appreciated the ability to decide what I wanted to learn and focus on because I could tailor it to my schools' needs and the needs of my students, specifically. In all of these courses, it has been extremely beneficial and easy to be able to tailor assignments to what we are interested in learning and what our content or age level is. Working with others who are teachers, whether over a computer screen or in person overseas, this has been an extremely worthwhile endeavor.

In this Capstone course I have been able to reflect on my learning as teacher, how my goals for myself have changed, and how I want to continue to be a learner. Every day I learn something new about my students, about teaching, about the courses I teach, and often times I'm trying to learn on my own, or someone else, whether it is a colleague or a student, is teaching me. The future as a learner essay allowed me to reflect on my ability to continue to be a student despite being a teacher. As I was sitting in class today, listening to my honors English 11th graders discuss a critical essay regarding Shakespeare's Macbeth, they were coming up with claims and ideas in terms of the text itself and making connection to pieces we had read prior in ways I hadn't yet considered. We are learners just as much as we are teachers, and this Capstone CEP 807 course gave us the opportunity to reflect and connect and grow.

For the last year and a half, I have learned so much through self-reflection, professor and classmate feedback and trial and error. I had not made a website until the MAET program, and now it seems like the

possibilities are endless in terms of what I am capable of technologically, and thus in conjunction, educationally.