

## **Still Growing**

**By: Ariel Myers**

As I look back on my time spent going through Michigan State's MAET Program, I can recall several times when I was required to self-reflect. In addition to Michigan State's rigorous program and their engaging online atmosphere, I have become the person I am today because of self-reflection. Throughout the MAET program, I was able to watch myself create, improvise, revise and then reflect. By reflecting, I was able to take my initial thought, compare it to what I just learned and then apply it. Through this process I have not only been able to watch myself grow into a successful Educational Technologist, but also a more informative person as well.

Most of the coursework that I was required to complete could be applied to my work environment. This was very helpful because I was able to apply my knowledge to a real-world, professional setting. The experience that I was able to gain from the MAET program was unlike any other educational experience that I have received before. It is authentic, challenging and innovative. During these courses, I had the pleasure of connecting with many people around the world. Michigan State is very adamant about their group work and is really capable of showing the engagement and interaction that can be made among students online. Through these experiences, I have grown into a capable Educational Technologist with a strong passion to learn more. The coursework required has allowed me to step out of my comfort zone, go beyond my limits and exceed my expectations of learning.

While all courses at Michigan State contributed to my exceptional education, there were a few that really challenged me and allowed me to think outside of the box. One of these courses was Michigan State's CEP-812: Apply Educational Technology to Practice. In CEP-812, I was asked to explore how technology could be used to amend the daily education issues we may find within our curriculum. I was required to take a real-world problem and apply my own solution. This project was called the Wicked Problem Project.

The timing of this course couldn't have matched better with what I was currently doing at my place of employment. As a Technology Coordinator of Brookville Center for Children's Services, one of the biggest issues I was facing at the time was the deployment of 500 iPads. This became my "wicked problem." The solution to my "wicked problem" was to conduct a training, which entailed a 30-minute video tutorial, hands-on practice and a PDF guide of how to use Apple Configurator. Apple Configurator allows you to successfully manage multiple iOS devices all at once. Teachers could use this application to manage the iPads successfully. The training was very effective because it allowed multiple opportunities for learning and understanding. The video showed a clear demonstration on how to use the application and its multiple features. This way, teachers would apply what they learn during the hands-on practice. A video tutorial also allowed me to pause and take time to clarify questions and concerns some people had. The video is also on the schools website where it is easily accessible and can be reviewed by teachers at their own convenience. The PDF file can

be used as a guide during hands-on practice or to assist teachers anytime after the training.

Overall, I learned so much from this project. I was able to gain experience as a leader, an educator and as a professional. As successful as the training was, I even found a way to make it better with instructional design. I ended up make it interactive with online course management system. While I still kept the hands-on practice, this was much better because it allowed staff to complete the training at their own convenience. This course allowed me to take a big step within my education and I only managed to grow more from there.

Another course that contributed to my growth was CEP-817: Learning Technology by Design. CEP-817 focused on all aspects of design from technical function to aesthetics. This course taught me the importance of design and the major role it plays in student learning. One of the major focuses of this course was Scott McCloud's theory of design creation within six steps. While keeping the six steps in mind, I designed a website that focused on Introductory Mobile Application Development. This website was referred to as "The Big Kahuna."

The "Big Kahuna" project was a big idea that you had and that you wanted to share with others via website design. I really enjoyed doing this project. While it was a lot of work, it required you to pay attention to detail and work with others. I never realized how fonts, format and color could play such a huge role in the quality of a website. When designing my own website, everything I did had a reason. The fonts, the

layout, the colors, the images and even activities all had reasons behind them. Reasons being for better functionality and easier use; these seemed to be the favored qualities within website design.

Another great experience that I endured during this course was the ability to work with and receive feedback from many of my classmates. I really enjoyed this because my group happened to be made up of many diverse individuals so it made feedback and collaborating that much better. While creating our websites, we each had to provide suggestions and advice to our peers on how to improve our "Big Kahuna." I found this to be the most helpful thing because when you're designing something, you can only think of so much. It is always beneficial to have a second pair of eyes to look at things; in this case, I had four.

My group members were able to pick-up on many things I missed and suggested things I have never thought of. It was also great to be exploring their sites and providing them with feedback because I was also able to get some ideas. In addition to having my group members critique my site, once it was mostly complete, I was required to have "test users." I think that this something that anyone who designs a website should have. Having real people, outside of the website idea, test the website and make their own suggestions was even better. While my group was very helpful, they provided feedback mostly from a designer's point of view. The other individuals that test drove my website were able to give me feedback from a users point of view. Since, every site is ultimately judged by its users, this was the most helpful.

CEP-817 was a more difficult course but definitely provided me with a lot of insight. I was able to see the design aspect of technology, which I was unable to view as in depth in my other courses. CEP-817 also allowed me to explore my own design and view multiple perspectives that are beneficial for online learning. For me, this course was a turning point in my educational career.

CEP-820: Teaching K-12 Students Online was a course that really allowed me to experience what e-learning was all about. During this course, I had the opportunity to examine multiple learning management systems, review their pros and cons and select one that I wanted to use for my own course design. I developed my own LMS and was able to test-drive it with my professors and peers. CEP-820 allowed me to see the determination and extensive revision that is required to create a successful online learning environment. If I learned anything about online course development during this course, it's that it doesn't happen overnight. It is a process and requires a large amount of preparation, thinking and improvising. Even though I have finally developed a "finished" product, it is nowhere near finished. This is something that I will constantly continue to work on to make it better; that's the best thing about it.

One of the most important things I learned throughout CEP-820 is that selecting the right learning management system requires research. When selecting my LMS, I compared a handful of them inside and out. Aside from actually testing a few online courses, I learned the most about each LMS by comparing them to one another. I used a chart to help get a visual of the pros and cons of each LMS. This helped me pair what I

wanted in an online course, to what features were being offered. This is definitely something I will do when creating online courses in the future.

This course allowed me to learn about new LMS and all their features. I eventually decided to use Canvas as my LMS and created an online course on Mobile Applications.

This course has made me realize that when you're designing an online course, you want to make it as much as the real thing as you can. As I was brainstorming my ideas for an online course, I thought of all the online course I've experienced that were boring, bland and didn't expect much of me. With these thoughts, I focused on an important UDL principle: provide multiple means of representation. I wanted to give my users something that they don't expect while maintaining structure at the same time. I believe that this was something I showcased really well in my online courses. I maintained the same navigation and structure throughout all modules but presented new content in different ways. This is not only important to engage your students but to also accommodate multiple learning styles. CEP-820 really helped me to understand the process of designing an online course and all the work that must go into it.

Another course that really allowed me to grow as a professional is CEP-807: Capstone Educational Technology. In this course I was able to reflect back on all accomplished goals, all new goals created and what I have planned for my future. During this course, I was required to create an online portfolio. Lucky for me, I already had one. While this course was designed to introduce web design to some people, for me it was more than that. I was able to compare my current site (Google Sites) to others

such as Weebly, Wix and much more. This excited me because I have always worked with Google and never wanted to move away from it however, Weebly's web design is just cleaner and more appealing to the eye.

This course also gave me a chance to improve on my current portfolio, not just by selecting a new website creator, but also new features and widgets. I managed to make it more personal and provided more information about my knowledge and expertise as well. My portfolio is something that I share with people on a daily basis. It's a reflection of me and what I do, and it is even on my resume. This is something that demonstrates all that I have learned, my accomplishments and my qualifications. I am really glad I was able to end my Master's program with this course because it has left me with something so important that will help me move forward within my future. As you can see, I have definitely come a long way. Through the MAET program at Michigan State University, I can honestly say that I am prepared to pursue a career in Educational Technology. I've spent the last year analyzing TPACK (Technology, Pedagogy and Content Knowledge), applying what I learn to real-world situations and developing professionally. These courses did not only teach me everything I need to know, but they also taught me the importance of continuing my learning. Unfortunately technology is always changing and so is education. In order for me to be successful in my career, it's very important that I pursue professional development and educate myself on the newest technologies. While my degree is complete, the learning does not stop here. I

will take the knowledge I've learned from the MAET program, but I will never stop learning.