

## **An Evolution of Passions**

When I was in preschool, my teacher told my parents I was going to be the first female president. Confident, outgoing, and a leader - not a follower, I was quite the character at just 4 years old. My parents still find it funny to tell this story at family gatherings.

In elementary school, I wanted to be a lawyer. My dad is a lawyer, and in my elementary opinion, he was always right. Eight-year-old me loved the idea of standing up in front of a group of people, proving my point, and having them think I was smart. Getting a laugh out of them would be a bonus, but a career as a comedian was too far fetched.

My aspirations changed when I got to middle school as I started to think about a career in journalism. I was an anchor for my school's morning news and I loved the rush it gave as I knew I had the eyes and ears of the whole entire student body. They were looking to me for important information and I was prepared to deliver.

It wasn't until high school that I first knew I wanted to become a teacher. I took a class titled T.I.E.S. (Teaching, Interacting, and Encouraging Students) where I was placed as a mentor in a Cognitively Impaired (C.I.) classroom. I reveled in my new found "happy place" where I was always welcomed by smiles and would leave feeling like I did something good that day. Although the students were the main part in my desire to become a special education teacher, I can't forget the camaraderie of the teachers and para-professionals who worked together so seamlessly to not only provide an excellent learning experience for the students, but to have fun while doing it.

Finally in college, I chose to major in special education. The degree required that we student teach in both special education and general education settings. Due to my love for special education, I was honestly dreading my general education placement. Little did I know, teaching first grade would become the job that fulfilled all of my childhood dreams...

I could be myself: confident, outgoing, a leader - not a follower.

I could stand in front of a group of people, prove my point, and have them think I was smart - and even funny.

I could have the eyes and ears of the entire student body, who looked to me for important information.

I could be welcomed by smiles and leave feeling like I did something good that day.

Most importantly, I could have my very own family of students and teaching team. Together we could provide an excellent learning experience and have fun while doing it.

This was my dream job.

After two years in my dream job, I realized that I craved more education that would push me to be the best educator I could be for my students. I decided to pursue a **Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET)** degree from Michigan State University. I chose this program after two years of teaching and seeing first hand where I thought education was going: towards deeper thinking and technology. The MAET program focused on just that. My goal was to gain new knowledge and skills that would allow me to guide my students and colleagues into the world of 21st century learning, full of deep thinking and technology. As I wrap up my year in the MAET program, I can confidently say that I have become a better questioner, learner, and leader. I attribute this to all of the courses I have taken in the program, but a few stand out in particular. These courses have pushed me and will continue to inspire me to always question, learn, and lead as I continue living out my dream job.

## Questioning

Perhaps the most profound change I experienced in the program occurred from a single book I read in the course **CEP 812: Applying Educational Technology to Issues of Practice**. The book was titled **A More Beautiful Question by Warren Berger**. This book pushed me to realize that our students, and our society, need to focus on asking the right questions as opposed to simply finding answers. Asking questions can help us discover new ideas, solve new or old problems, and end up with better answers than we were originally seeking. After reading this book, I was reminded of the beauty of a child's constantly questioning mind. As adults, we can get tired of children's constant questions. This book changed me in the fact that I will forever encourage and praise my students' questions, no matter how small.

In addition to encouraging my students' questioning, this course has also changed the way I approach questioning. Instead of complaining about all the aspects of my job that are hard, I turned them into questions. I participated in a Question Quickfire where I took 5 minutes to write down every question I could come up with surrounding problems of practice in education. It was invigorating to write these down as questions as opposed to complaining out loud to a colleague. In writing it down as a question, it somehow changed my view to be able to seek ways in which to solve the problem.

Ultimately, the course led me to choose one *wicked problem*, or a problem that is seemingly impossible to solve. Being influenced by Berger's book in addition to professional development opportunities at my school and my masters' program as a whole, I was feeling the pressure to make time for so many different, but equally important aspects of the school day. I decided to turn this into my wicked problem: How can a teacher make more time for thinking, questioning, and play while still fitting in all the curriculum? By using Berger's questioning techniques and surveying my colleagues, I found that although this will likely always be a wicked problem teachers face, we can take steps in the right direction by doing something us teachers are masters at: multitasking. Incorporating thinking, questioning, and play into our every day curriculum will allow us to "fit everything in" while also preparing our students for their futures.

## Learning

Another course that helped mold my views on teaching was **CEP 800: Learning in School and Other Settings**. I found it most fitting that I was taking this course when the COVID-19 pandemic started. It was so comforting to be in connection with other educators as well as instructors to help guide us along the way of navigating distance learning. Perhaps because of this, however, it pushed me and my classmates to develop our personal theories of learning on a different level than it would have been the semester prior.

Over the course of the semester, I was exposed to and reminded of several different learning theories. Perhaps more than anything, I learned how to take in information, apply it to what I know or have experienced, and form new ideas from there. In this process, I created my own **Personal Theory of Learning**. In my theory, I explore how and where learning occurs, learning through doing, and lifelong learning as a whole. CEP 800 helped solidify some opinions on learning I already had, as well as push me out of my comfort zone to realize there are different types of learning other than what I have experienced both as a student and a teacher.

In addition to my theory of learning in relation to my students, I was reminded that I, too, am a learner, and always will be. During distance learning, the teachers quickly became the students once again as we had to shift from teaching in-person to online. CEP 800 allowed me to nourish my role as both a teacher and a learner as I was able to fully immerse myself in distance learning in the way that I view myself as a learner.

More than anything, this course kept me grounded in the fundamentals of learning throughout my time of distance teaching at the end of the 2020 school year and beyond. We cannot predict what the future will bring, but I am confident in my abilities because of this course. I have been refreshed of the major components of learning and inspired to bring this fresh perspective to whatever the next school years bring.

## Leading

One class in particular that surprised me was **CEP 815: Technology and Leadership**. When I first started the course, I was overwhelmed by the fact that most of my classmates were business majors. I felt somewhat out of place, but trusted the MAET program since they suggested this course. As mentioned in my history of job aspirations, I have always considered myself a leader, but this course started by asking me to play the role of the technology leader in my district who was responsible for heading a committee and enacting change. This pushed me out of my comfort zone and while I am still not sure I would actually want that role, the assignment led me to realize some aspects of my leadership style and point me in the direction of the leader I want to be.

After learning more about who I am as a leader and aspects of educational technology I am most passionate about, I created a **vision statement** encompassing where I hope to see the field of education in the next 5 years. Thanks to my experience in the MAET program, I felt strongly about encouraging my students to be critical thinkers. My vision focused on this as I pursued how to create critical thinkers in today's classroom, and thus prepare our world's future innovators and problem solvers. My research guided by assignments in CEP 815 allowed me to learn that in order to create critical thinkers, we must focus on teaching inquiry, fostering collaboration, and engaging students in learning.

All in all, this course was an eye opener for me in terms of thinking of myself as a leader beyond my four classroom walls. Every day, I lead 25 little first graders in learning how to read, to share, to use their manners, to apologize, the list goes on. But I have been so focused on my own classroom that I have seldom thought of myself as a leader within my school let alone my district as a whole. This class showed me that I do have important things to say and that I should share it for the betterment of my district.

### **Continuing**

Much like my journey to choose a career in education, my post-baccalaureate experience has been an evolution of passions. I started out thinking I was going back to school to better help me serve the 25 students in my classroom. After deepening my understanding about questioning, learning, and leading, I can now say that I feel confident in my abilities to not only serve my 25 students at a time, but I can contribute to the advancement of my first grade team, my school, my district, and even our nation. I plan to continue my journey as a lifelong learner as well as stay connected with other educators within my Personal Learning Network. Michigan State's MAET program has provided me with the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to be a strong leader in my classroom and the field of education as a whole.