

MAET Summer Year 2, East Lansing: The Long and Winding Road

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***Looking Back***

In discussing my graduate work with my colleagues (most maintain or are seeking graduate degrees outside of educational technology) the most common question I receive is, “what has been the most applicable part to your current work?”<sup>1</sup> I would imagine that for each individual in this program the answer would be different and possibly difficult to narrow one particular point. However, for me, the greatest aspect has been the contemplation of TPACK and how I design and create lessons. The balance of technology, pedagogy, and content was a difficult task for me prior to beginning my program through Michigan State University’s Master of Arts in Educational Technology program. It has transformed my thought process and allowed me to think about lessons in ways I never did before. Since the structure of this program focuses heavily on the pedagogy and technology aspect of TPACK (allowing for our own content to guide our growth in these two other areas), I believe it is essential that I focus my “looking back” portion of this essay on these two areas. Through the past six weeks my introduction to strong pedagogical thought and concentration on developing my technological skills have allowed me to insert my content knowledge to create unique, diverse lessons that will benefit each learner in my class.

The process in which I implement my lessons has developed through considering the ideology of many educational professionals that believe learning is different for each person. In contemplating the different learning process of students throughout this course, and especially during my Dream It project, I continued to return to the first day’s reading from Professor Feynman. Throughout his quest to count in what seemed like every manner possible, I continued to ask myself, so what? Finally, as the story progressed and

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<sup>1</sup> Quote attributed to every one of my colleagues.

his friend was able to count in a way that he could not, and vice versa, it clicked, he is portraying different learning styles in a nice and simple anecdote.<sup>2</sup> This anecdote has stuck with me and forced me to consider this through every reading and activity that followed. In the classroom this means teachers need to discover the learning patterns of their students, but in the setting of our experiences through MAET year two it meant we needed to discover who we all were as learners of technology. Lee Shulman states, "Learning flourishes when we take what we think we know and offer it as community property among fellow learners so that it can be tested, examined, challenged, and improved before we internalize it."<sup>3</sup> For us educators (or learning support staff), acting as learners, this was demonstrated through the Just Shoot Me activity, Technology Survey, and putting us in groups based on our technological skills. From the beginning, we shared our specific knowledge with each other and the instructor in a completely organic way that allowed us to work in an effective manner. Through these articles and activities strong pedagogical methods were given and modeled to show how to discover who our students and we are as learners.

As we started to work in our groups the idea of different learners with different skills became more apparent. A person in our group was an excellent writer, another was good at storyboarding, one could organize our thoughts in a coherent fashion, and another seemed equip to edit and structure the work. However, similar to Watson and Kopniczek's observation of a science teacher's class, "...students, allowed to examine their own

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<sup>2</sup> R.P. Feynman, "It's As Simple as One, Two, Three," in *What Do You Care What Other People Think* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 217-223.

<sup>3</sup> Lee S. Shulman, "What is learning and what does it look like when it doesn't go well," *Change* 31, no. 4 (1999): 2, accessed on July 23, 2013  
[http://www.msuedtechsandbox.com/2010RouenY2/Readings/wk1d1\\_shulman.pdf](http://www.msuedtechsandbox.com/2010RouenY2/Readings/wk1d1_shulman.pdf).

experiences, must confront the inconsistencies in their theories. In the process they find the path toward a deeper understanding...,"<sup>4</sup> we needed to discover that our task had to be altered. An important pedagogical approach in figuring out the learning process is that experimentation needs to take place. However, that experimentation needs to be monitored. Whether that monitoring takes the approach of scheduling, chaining, prompting and fading, or reinforcement and punishment it is important to provide support in this process. For example, in each activity, whether it was Understanding Understanding, the physics video, or the pixlr activity something was provided as a model to help us advance on our own. Though I do not agree with each method we discussed in class, it is important to discover one that works best for you and your level of students and allows them to progress in a fashion towards independent thinking.

In the area of pedagogy the two biggest takeaways I have looking back are that as educators we need to discover what our students already know and then we need to give them structured time to experiment and find deeper understanding. The readings from Feynman, Shulman, Watson, and Kopniczek display that students enter our classrooms with certain preconceived notions and learning styles and without understanding these, we will never be able to help them progress their learning. Through the exposure to educational psychology we can understand the way certain learners develop and choose the best methods of approach based on the type of learners we are exposed to.

Technology will continue to be an important factor in curriculum development going forward and should be placed in balance with pedagogy and content. However, I

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce Watson and Richard Kopniczek, "Teaching for Conceptual Change: Confronting Children's Experience, Phi Delta Kappan, last modified May 1990, [http://www.virtual.ufc.br/cursouca/modulo\\_3/Teaching%20for%20Conceptual%20Change.htm](http://www.virtual.ufc.br/cursouca/modulo_3/Teaching%20for%20Conceptual%20Change.htm), 680-4.

keep coming back to the idea posed by Mishra and Koehler that “creative repurposing is important because most technologies that teachers use typically have not been designed for educational purposes.”<sup>5</sup> If this is the case, the challenge becomes finding the most appropriate ways to adapt this technology to fit our needs. Exercises that we participated in that were a good example of this included the Just Shoot Me activity, the Pixlr activity, the use of PowToon (my group specifically), and any other activity involving video editing technology. These activities consisted of technologies that were not specifically for educational purposes, but were supported by strong pedagogy and content allowing them to work. The work started with TPACK is extremely important in this matter because it can be very easy to allow technology to overtake the classroom. Though I stated that the balance of TPACK has changed the way I think about every lesson, I always try to consider the “T” last (I know, it does not make for as nice of an acronym). The goal of our lesson should not be to integrate some form of technology, but to implement technology if it improves the way our students understand. Larry Cuban’s quote of Judi Harris discusses this topic nicely in his article on instructional reform by stating, “Technocentrists, she says, seek ‘educational uses for particular technologies.’ Instead, ‘educators must focus upon how best to assist students’ learning.” I believe TPACK supports this thought well, but we must always be reticent of the idea that technology is the only way to present things. In my in-depth look at TPACK through this summer program, I have discovered that with the correct pedagogical and content approach, technology can be a useful ally. However, if it is not, then another tool or medium must be used first.

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<sup>5</sup> Punya Mishra and Matthew Koehler, “Too Cool For School? No Way!,” *Learning and Leading with Technology*, May 2009 and accessed on June 28, 2013, <http://eric.ed.gov/PDFS/EJ839143.pdf>.

In addition to my discussion of TPACK and the appropriate use of technology in the program, I would like to consider how the SAMR model has changed the way I have looked at lessons. Prior to my program through MAET I often considered technology as a way to make a lesson more interesting or a project more creative. However, through contemplation of the SAMR model I need to return to my former lessons and see if it has made them more practical. By considering whether technology is substituting, augmenting, modifying, or redefining my lessons I can better use technology in the classroom. At first glance I thought that each time I use technology it should be reaching for the redefinition portion of the model, however as my interaction progressed it simply began to serve as a way of thinking about each type of integration. If a simple substitution or augmentation allows students to learn easier, then it should be considered. Also, technology can modify or redefine an assignment if it leads my students to a greater understanding of the subject material. Through this model and reconsidering the types of lessons that I have created, I hope to find a better balance of appropriate technology use in the class.

By looking back I have discovered that my greatest takeaways are that a teacher's pedagogical and technological choices can shape a student's understanding of a subject. If a teacher considers his students' learning styles and prior learning history then they can build lessons that teach both content knowledge and technological skills to improve understanding.

### ***Looking Forward***

Trying to see five years into the future seems like a harder task now than it did when I was 20 (five years ago). Then I expected to be a middle or high school social studies teacher in Michigan that coached, preferably hockey and soccer, and worked with student

leadership. Fast-forward five years and I am currently doing what I set out to do. However, at the time I would have taken a job in any middle or high school without the consideration of what type of social studies teacher or extracurricular activities I had to do. The next five-year plan does not seem to be as simple to narrow down. However, if I were to construct my own personal learning plan to help me progress in my teaching method and skills I would focus on the continued balance I am trying to find in technology, pedagogy, and content. However, I would also like to put a specific focus on leadership and athletics as I move into a role with more commitment and responsibility. As all implementation of information in a lesson begins with the content you are teaching, I will start here and work my way forward. Regrettable as it is to admit, I am currently just a high school social studies teacher with a degree in history and a endorsement in social studies. I am currently not a member of any association or group that focuses on improving the teaching of social studies instructors. Therefore, my first task will be to join the state and national organizations that represent social studies teachers. The National Council for the Social Studies is an excellent choice because it prints a multitude of publications, provides resources and standards, and holds councils in each state it has members. In addition, staying active in my own state council will afford me extra opportunities to attend local conferences and stay connected to teachers in the area. Exposure to more content material and exhibiting other social studies teachers practice their craft will extend my personal learning network and provide more ample opportunities.

In addition to not being a member of leading social studies memberships, I also need to stay more current on educational and technological magazines to improve my

implementation of these resources in the classroom. Essentially the only experience I have with these types of organizations come through my certification with the state of Michigan and membership with Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning (MACUL) through my CEP 812 coursework. Also, through this course I have become a contributing member of the Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT) database. The use of this database has been beneficial because it considers technological tools that can be implemented in the class, but the pedagogical approach that the contributor used. Therefore, you have the opportunity to judge whether the tool is valuable or not. Similar, the forums that exist on the MACUL website and Facebook page offers the ability to share comments with colleagues and further the discussion of pedagogy and content in the classroom. Through my own admission I understand that these organizations all have connections to the MAET program and I will have to improve my outreach once this program is complete. Through my current coworkers and connections in the program I will have to share discussions about what organizations and publications are helpful and through trial and error select those that best suit me. Fortunately, I have developed a wonderful working relationship with my coworkers in the history department and they have been instrumental in helping review projects and lessons plans and discuss their pedagogical approach.

In the last section of this reflection, I would like to discuss my progression towards a leader in my community and how my current and future education could benefit from certain programs. Certainly in the MAET Year Two Cohort we have discussed the implications of leadership beyond this class and how people in the program seem to develop organically into that role as technology advisor in their school. However, I have



recently been named a dean of a class, taken on a larger role in the student commission, and remain the head assistant coach on the varsity hockey team and head coach of the boys' middle school soccer team. In these leadership roles of student and athletic activities I have found something I am certain I want to continue to do five years from now. In these new roles and with the state of Michigan's continued education requirement to maintain your certificate this could be a good outlet to look into programs that could facilitate better educational leadership or eventually a position in administration or as an athletic director. Specifically, in viewing MSU's Master of Arts in Educational Administration courses in budgeting, planning, the economics of schools, and analyzing educational systems appear to be courses that could help me improve my position as a school leader. In terms of coaching, contacting and becoming involved with programs through the Michigan High School Athletic Association could improve my standing as a coach and help me understand the role of an athletic director. Through their Coaches Advancement Program I could obtain the experience necessary in organizing team activities, budgeting finances, and working with other schools that are essential in running an athletic department. Whether I try to pursue an advancement in school or athletic leadership I will have to continue to rely on the direction of my own school administration and athletic department to provide opportunities and direction on the proper protocol of leadership in a school setting.

### ***Bridging Then and Now***

Five years ago the main focus of my educational training was trying to become an expert in my content area and to learn pedagogical approaches that would allow me to convey this content to my students in a way they would understand. Currently, I am studying educational technology and trying to balance the implementation of strong

technological, pedagogical, and content rich lessons. As my education of being and educator grows in the next five years I have given myself many options and avenues for improvement. I can continue to focus on my growth of content knowledge by joining local organizations and focusing on creating a stronger personal network amongst my colleagues. In the same sense, I can put a greater focus on subscribing to educational journals and organizations that's main purpose is to further teacher's strategies for pedagogic and technological development. Also, I can look to forward my own graduate work by seeking opportunities of leadership through administrative and athletic training. Despite the path I take in the next five years I must remember that there needs to be balance in my approach and whether I am teaching secondary students, participating in classes with graduate students, or working with colleagues, each person has a different learning style and learning history. By acknowledging this learning history and style I can gain a new perspective on an individual's qualities and together we can find a new level of understanding collectively.