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CEP 807 Capstone
Synthesis Essay

MAET's Impact on Becoming a Lifelong Learner

For this specific reflection essay, I chose not to have an image of myself teaching to greet the viewer to this section of the portfolio. Though this certainly will be an essay about my growth as an educator, it also is about the specific impact of the MAET program on my perceptions about education. One of the most influential aspects about MAET from my perspective is the emphasis they place on reflecting and documenting our practice. In this specific essay I will focus on several classes that had a major influence on my work and try to provide specific examples as well. Therefore, in essence, this essay is more about the role of MAET in convincing me to become a lifelong learner, than about the specific practices I have learned and hope to learn that have been mentioned in the previous essays. The classes, instructors, and assessments that have framed this specific program have taught me the importance of design and planning when it comes to all aspects of teaching, not just in the implementation of technology. Specifically, the importance of considering the balance that should exist in our content choices, pedagogical approaches, and use of technology in the classroom.

Naturally, the first course in this essay to be discussed is the first class of the program, CEP 810. In this class, instructor Caroline McCarthy challenged the students to think about their purpose in the program and start to build a professional development plan that continued to grow each week in the program. One of my specific focuses throughout the program is how to introduce and teach my students proper historical research through the use of technology. Throughout my professional growth plan I mentioned this as a specific focus and in the reflection at the end of the assignment I continued to identify this as a major issue that I wanted to explore. Caroline was essential in encouraging me to use this as a motivator and allowed me to identify ways I could succeed in this area by working with classmates and colleagues. For example, in our group assignment based on a special interest (SIG-

Special Interest Group project) the group assignment discussed multiple ways that a classroom could be flipped to benefit our students. In my specific focus area I was able to use primary documents and discuss the importance of their use in a historical discussion. In my practice, this is a necessary first step in introducing students to a way to discuss historical research. By flipping the class, this project gave me more time and resources to have this discussion with my students.

The collaboration and encouragement that existed in CEP 810 allowed me the confidence and skills to build assessments that focused on research and technology. Specifically, the Special Interest Group Project gave me experience in working in a professional community and provided me additional resources to help me fulfill my goals. Since the completion of this class, I have often collaborated with my colleagues to produce assessments that consider technological outcomes that are based on historical research. One example of the skills learned in CEP 810 is a project created by a history colleague and myself to help students understand early river valley Civilizations. The students do individual research on examples of river valley civilizations, the different professions that exist, provide information to their classmates, and then build a model example using MineCraft Edu as a way to display their work in a living biome. Throughout CEP 810 the ability to reflect on what I wanted to accomplish and the opportunity to work with classmates in a professional atmosphere set the stage to accomplish similar work in my school on a daily basis.

If CEP 810 taught me the importance of reflection and collaboration, CEP 812 provided the importance of detail in these areas as well. In this specific course I owe a personal thank you to instructor Alison Lee Keller for pushing me harder than any instructor has previously. Certainly it was frustrating in the moment, but Alison's insistence that each aspect of an assignment be considered taught me the necessity of fixing a problem when it arises and paying attention to the details of the classroom. Most specifically, these skills manifested themselves in a multi-assignment project related to

a problem that we recognized in the classroom. We were supposed to identify this “Wicked Problem” and come up with a solution. This problem was to be addressed in a multimedia approach and tested our skills in assessing a classroom issue and using multiple modes to come up with a solution.

For my personal “Wicked Problem” I considered the amount of time that exists in the classroom to complete quality project-based work, while still considering my program-wide focus on historical research. As I completed this project, I noticed the importance and connection of the skills I learned in CEP 810, as reflecting and discussing the issue with classmates and my instructor helped me improve my understanding of how to solve the problem. As a result, of the multi-stepped assessment, I was able to identify an issue in the classroom, consider multiple options for a solution, implement the assessment, and decide where successes and failures took place. As I stated at the beginning of this portion of the essay, the importance of detail was greatly considered. Due to the excellent feedback provided by Alison I took a great deal away from this class about how to attack an issue and provide feedback for improvement.

In addition, this class continued to tie into the reflection portion of CEP 810 by considering if our personal growth plan had changed significantly from CEP 810 to CEP 812. Since these three introductory courses set the tone for the rest of the program, it was an excellent way for me to consider how much I had changed since the beginning of the program. Due to the skills I acquired new goals and outcomes needed to be addressed. This assignment really marked my first detailed assessment as my future as a lifelong learner.

Though CEP 810 and CEP 812 contained many opportunities for group work, the major aspects of the class considered individual improvement and reflection. In the year 2 summer cohort that took place in East Lansing (this was a hybrid of CEP 800, CEP 815, and CEP 822) the major focus was on creating a learning community and struggling with the questions of the three classes together. Unlike

the other MAET classes, this class contained an intensive two week face-to-face program that brought collaboration to a new level. In addition, one of the classes even focused on the importance of academic research, very specific for my own personal goals. Also, as mentioned in my goal reflection essay, the introduction to TPACK really shifted what I expected to learn from the program and provided an opportunity to complete many assessments with my team (Let's Go to the Mall!) that focused on the balance of content, pedagogy, and technology. Key to the learning process was the constant intervention of the instructors Punya Mishra, Danah Henriksen, and William Cain. The ability to discuss topics related to TPACK in a professional fashion, face-to-face really enhanced the overall experience of the program.

Most specifically, the importance of this class can be identified in the Understanding Understanding project. Through CEP 810 and CEP 812 I learned the importance of reflecting on my practice, however this year 2 cohort pushed me to further think about what students know when they walk into your class and how to work with the different learning styles that exists. As a team, we had to construct an assignment considering different individuals knowledge and try to consider approaches to dealing with these different levels of understanding. To display our findings, we created a video and a website to create a multimedia solution. In addition, as a group (Let's Go to the Mall!), we continued to consider different learning styles and approaches to addressing their needs through the research portion of the class. Together we had to compile resources based on a general issue and each one of us had to learn about a different component within the general issue.

Though I learned many technological approaches to learning and instructional needs in this intensive summer program, it was the importance of working with colleagues that was my greatest takeaway. Teamwork/Group work is a major component of project-based work and is specifically identified in the school I teach. During this hybrid course, I learned multiple methods of group work,

how to implement collaborative research, and how to build a learning network that is still very valuable today.

To continue with the theme of reflection the capstone course (CEP 807) has been an excellent reminder of what has been accomplished and what still needs to be worked on as I move forward in my career. Similar, to the building blocks established in the introductory courses of CEP 810, CEP 811, and CEP 812, the year two summer cohort set the stage for the completion of our entire program. In the independent weeks of the course professors Mishra, Henriksen, and Cain gave us a head start on this assignment by assigning us the framework for what would be the final construction of our portfolios in CEP 807. This served as an exemplary reflection piece on the work that had been accomplished to that point. In addition, it put the burden on collecting the resources necessary to create a well-rounded portfolio a year prior to actually taking the course. Though it does not seem like a huge burden, tracking down all of the resources from multiple computers, flash drives, web sites, and the “cloud” was a time consuming task. Once all of these resources existed in one format, it set the stage for the actual portfolio class to be a huge benefit to thinking about what I learned in the MAET program.

Throughout this essay, and more broadly, my portfolio, I have mentioned the impact considering TPACK has had on my teaching practice. The final assignment for the Educational Technology program is an excellent model of how useful considering content, pedagogy, and technology can be. For me, reflecting on assessments has allowed me to consider what I am able to put into practice in my classroom and the skills I still need to require to become a well-rounded teacher. By experimenting with different platforms and resources throughout the program, it is clear that a web portfolio is the easiest and most efficient way of sharing what has been accomplished since I started the program. In many ways this class has lived up to the very definition of a capstone class. The assessment has challenged us to reflect on our work, make decisions about the artifacts that best display our

accomplishments, and created a running dialogue with classmates in a similar point in their career and instructors that are familiar with the construction of such a monumental project.

Reflection is a difficult process. It makes us consider the places where we have succeeded, but more often than not it makes us consider where there is more work to be done. In this essay, I presented the framework of classes, assessments, and most specifically instructors that have impacted my thinking in the field of Educational Technology. The most interesting aspect of looking back to the beginning of the program was that they told us point blank this would be the culminating assessment. From that point forward I have been planning its creation with the help of my instructors. Though the framework was concretely constructed in the year 2 cohort, the plan was set in motion even prior to starting CEP 810. Now that the program is complete, I've fulfilled (mostly) my obligations for recertification; it is time to consider what the next steps are going forward. However, the confidence I have gained from this program and the tools it provided will certainly help me make the right decision.