

A Technology Journey

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After completing my undergraduate degree in Elementary Education from Michigan State University in 2008, I was immediately thinking about what kind of master's degree to pursue. I put this thought on hold at first because I was told by several teachers and principals that I should hold off on a master's degree until I had a teaching position. As the years went by and I still did not have a permanent teaching position, I thought that I needed to do something productive until the time came. After talking to many teachers and principals I received mixed responses about whether or not I should risk getting a master's degree before having a permanent teaching position. Although some thought it would be best to wait because of the pay difference between hiring a teacher with a bachelor's degree versus a master's degree the majority thought that I should go forward with my plan to obtain a master's degree. This is when I started my search for a program to pursue.

There was no question in my mind where I wanted to obtain my degree, so I began looking into programs at Michigan State University. Thinking back to my internship year, I remembered hearing that Michigan State offered completely online master's degrees and I thought that this would be perfect for me. I could live at home and not have to commute an hour to classes during the week or on Saturdays to earn a degree. It also allowed me to work on my classwork when it was convenient for me. So, in the summer of 2010 I found the Master of Arts in Educational Technology program at Michigan State University. I applied and was accepted into the program in the fall of 2010, but decided to postpone the start of my courses until the spring of 2011 because of my situation at the time. This was when my technology journey truly began.

When looking back at all of the wonderful courses I took to earn my master's degree I realize that they have enhanced my knowledge of using technologies, how to use these technologies in my teaching, how to become a better leader in general and in technology, and to continue to be a life long learner. Although they have all impacted me greatly, I would like to reflect on a few that have had the greatest impact.

Teaching Students Online

In the spring of 2012 I took the course CEP 820, Teaching K-12 Students online, taught by Michelle Schira Hagerman. I have to admit when I first started this course I was terrified. I saw that I had to create a complete online course, on my own and was extremely intimidated. Yes, I had some experience with using technologies in the classroom by now, but not something this extreme. I thought it would be even more challenging for me since I did not teach in a classroom of my own. After taking several deep breaths I took the leap and started the course. Taking it day-by-day and week-by-week really helped me to see that it was not as bad as I thought it was going to be.

Each week was broken up into a certain task to complete for the online course and a notebook entry. By using the notebook on Google docs I was able to express my plan for my course and receive feedback from an instructor about it. This helped me understand what I was doing right and what I needed to work on. As I worked more and more on my course I become comfortable incorporating several different technologies in my course module. Some of these technologies include screencasts, surveys, youtube videos, and online games.

Not only did this course challenge me to create an online course, but it also helped me widen my knowledge of web publishing. I learned about the best ways to design a website to be aesthetically pleasing and be useful to the user. This class was very beneficial to me as an educational technology leader because I feel that I can use what I learned to help others with web publishing.

Psychology of Learning

In the summer of 2012 I took CEP 800, Psychology of Learning in School and Other Settings, taught by Danah Henriksen. This course was one of the last courses I took before my final course in the master's program. It taught me that it is extremely important to first look at how students understand in order to achieve great teaching and learning. Back when I first began my undergraduate degree in elementary education, I knew that all students are different and learn in different ways. This course taught me to use this understanding along with technology to make learning a powerful experience. Technology should not just be used to excite students, although it does, but also to affect them cognitively, emotionally, and behaviorally.

One of the first assignments was to watch a video about student misconceptions. This really stuck with me because in the video they asked college graduates as well as elementary students some basic science questions and they did not have the correct understanding. The video showed us that all students have background knowledge that they bring with them, including misconceptions. It also shows that you cannot assume anything about a student's knowledge they bring. If the misconceptions are not addressed and taught in a memorable way, then students may go back to their misconceptions because it makes sense to them. After watching this video we had to conduct our own podcast interviewing students about a certain topic and then reflect on their understanding.

So, in order to avoid misconceptions, or replace them with the correct understanding, teaching must be done in a memorable way. To teach in a memorable way does not necessarily have to be done using technology, but it is a great option. An important thing to remember when teaching with technology is to first understand what you want your students to know and then find the best technology to achieve that goal. This is something that I strive to keep in mind when teaching with technology and teaching others how to as well.

Educational Research

In the summer of 2012 I also took CEP 822, Approaches to Educational Research, taught by Danah Henriksen. I honestly was not thrilled about this class at first, but as I began work in this course I realized how important and beneficial it was. In this course, I not only learned how to create a research proposal, I also learned how to distinguish the bad research from the good. In the first week of classes we were asked to watch a movie titled, *Nell*, which was about two different people who had two different research techniques. The movie followed the research they did on a young woman who grew up in the woods with her mother, who kept the young woman sheltered from the outside world. It was very interesting to see how their different methods worked and did not work when trying to figure out the young woman. It also taught me to really take notice of how different backgrounds, like the field you work in, influence research techniques. What I learned from this video helped me to become better at weeding out good research from bad research.

This video helped me in writing my very first research proposal. It was our job to come up with an issue in education and create a research question around it. After coming up with background information on the question, we then had to complete a literature review. This is when I really used what I learned about weeding out the good research from the bad because we had to read through other research that had been done about our question and use it to help support our proposal. Once we did the research we had to come up with a plan of intervention and evaluation. Although we did not actually carry it out, we did have to create it so that it would be able to be done in the future. In order to make this happen we had to come up with a plan that was systematic, justified, and appropriate for the research. Lastly, we had to create an executive summary and appendices with all the work we did in the semester.

This course had long tedious tasks at times, but it was an amazing experience and I will be able to use it to help me create research proposals in the future. Since I would like to one day be a technology leader I need to be able to use research done by others and myself to help prove to my superiors why certain technologies are beneficial to education. This is a skill that I would like to develop more, so that one day I can really use my knowledge effectively.

In Summary

Upon entering the Master of Arts in Educational Technology program, I sought out ways to incorporate technology into my teaching in order to improve student achievement. As I come to the end, I realize that I have learned how to do this and much more. I have learned many new technologies to use in my teaching and am excited to discover more. I am also much more confident in my role as a technology leader and cannot wait share my knowledge and ideas with others.