

*"Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire."*  
--William Butler Yeats

I feel like I can take a deep breath. Wow. Completing my Masters degree gives me an overwhelming sense of accomplishment. I feel that I have grown significantly as a teacher and learner and I have been profoundly impacted by the experiences I have had, the work I have completed, and the colleagues I have worked with throughout this journey. This program wasn't about just completing assignments it was about learning about myself as a teacher and learner and how to best incorporate technology in a positive, appropriate and impactful way to my students. It was about the approaches to learning, leadership development, research gains, and hands on experiences that I encountered that developed my skills, confidence and outlook on teaching. This program didn't just fill my "pail" with knowledge it lit more fires in the sense that I now have more ideas, more to share, and more to accomplish in the educational field.

I vividly remember starting my first course, CEP 811, and feeling completely overwhelmed. There was so much technology lingo and high expectations for being computer savvy that I felt like I was drowning. I remember looking at my husband with a panicked expression saying, "What did I get myself into? I can't do this!!" I was insecure about my abilities and was scared to mess up. I had that mentality that using certain technologies was just too hard and that I would never be able to figure it out. I got frustrated so easily when I couldn't figure something out and I wanted to give up. Luckily, my professors, my husband, and friends were very encouraging and knew that I could be successful if I remembered to have patience. (Which is something I have trouble with when it comes to my own learning) So, I tried my best to be patient and even though I had a few meltdowns, I found myself actually enjoying the class!

BUT, at the same time, I was still very weary of my abilities when it came to creating a Stand Alone Instructional Resource. I doubted that I could use Power Point to create an entire instructional resource for students to use independently to learn about a specific concept. Looking back it's hard to imagine being that unsure of my capabilities but at the time this was all new and I viewed it as difficult and frustrating. Through many excruciating late night hours of working on this project, I found myself creating a very stimulating, interactive, and engaging Power Point teaching the relationship between whole numbers, fractions, and decimals. I used a variety of instructional strategies including metaphors, simulation/problem Solving, and scaffolding. The project included videos, sound effects, immediate feedback for students, fraction bar images, and it required students to play an active role within the Power Point. I still remember how proud I was when I put the finishing touches on the project. I kept asking my husband and friends if they wanted to check it out and when they reached certain sections, I would interrupt and say, "Isn't that so cool?!"

This class was just the beginning of my journey but it significantly impacted me for several reasons. First, it challenged me in ways that I hadn't been challenged

while working at my current teaching position. I was “playing it safe” and only using technology at a level I felt comfortable. It was eye opening to realize that I needed to feel uncomfortable. I needed to be pushed to take chances and make mistakes. I was afraid of looking uninformed and didn’t want to be embarrassed in front of students or colleagues. Playing it safe and being comfortable isn’t how one moves forward, grows or learns. Being forced to get out of my comfort zone was what I needed to start moving in the direction I wanted to be. I wanted to be knowledgeable and resourceful with the technologies that were being introduced in the classroom and this class helped me see that it wasn’t just possible it was necessary and imperative for my success as a teacher in this technology rich world are students are growing up in. Second, I learned a lot about myself as a learner. At first, I thought it was absurd that the professor would give a short lecture, tell us to read a few articles, give us a short tutorial and then expect us to create these difficult tasks on are own. I felt like I needed more guidance and more direction. What I really needed was not to have someone hold my hand, I just didn’t know that yet. If the professors would have walked us step by step through every task, I would have never learned to figure things out on my own. I didn’t know that I could learn so well by trial and error and practice, practice, practice. I discovered that I learn very well by having the opportunity to work hands on and in a practical setting. Everything we did was related to our current teaching situation so everything I created was applied directly to my classroom instruction. Learning by doing is definitely my favorite way of learning now and I’m so appreciative that this course helped me learn that about myself. Lastly, this class taught me the importance of patience when dealing with technology. All the technology tools that we have at our fingertips are not useful if we don’t take the time to learn how to use them effectively. I expected technology tools to be as easy as 1,2,3. Turn it on or open it up and I expected magical things to happen without any work. I learned that I need to take the time to “get to know” the technology that I am working with so that I can use it in a way that makes sense and so that I have a good understanding of how it works. I never spent much time just “playing” with Power Point or SMARTBoards partly because I was intimidated and didn’t know where to start. Having the opportunity to *make* time, made a significant impact on my confidence level with learning new technologies.

Another class that stands out in my mind is CEP 815, Technology and Leadership. Since I have wanted to become more of a leader in my educational setting, I knew that advancing my skills in terms of technology would be a step in the right direction. I thoroughly enjoyed all the great discussions on the changes new technologies bring related to what and how students learn as well as how it can alter the task of teaching. Technology is making a significant impact and as a leader it is crucial to be effective in being responsible for managing relationships between technology, teaching and learning.

Part of taking on a leadership role is taking the initiative to be knowledgeable about the happenings in the classroom and community. In discussing the factors that influence student achievement related to technology, there is a lot to take

note of so that informed decisions are being made. The six factors: the child, the home, the school, the curricula, the teacher, and the approaches to teaching all have their opportunities and challenges when it come to using technologies. I found that approaches to teaching could be the most problematic factor related to technology usage. As Hattie stated, “what *some* teachers do, matters...” Teachers that are deliberate and dedicated and want to make a difference, will. Others, could take the technology that is presented to them and teach it in a very haphazardly way. They could approach teaching with technology as a burden, annoyance, and/or painfully difficult and time consuming. Changing your teaching to fit the needs of the children of this generation is going to take time and effort. Learning new technologies and the best ways to make these technologies meaningful in the classroom is a huge task. As Bill Gates states, *"Technology is just a tool. In terms of getting the kids working together & motivating them, the teacher is the most important."* That makes sense, doesn't it? Teachers that first think of pedagogical strategies and develop thought provoking and challenging lessons will be the ones that incorporate technology in a meaningful way.

How do we bridge that gap without causing tension and while maintaining a positive work environment? Being an effective leader takes deliberate and thoughtful action. It's a leader's responsibility to build relationships among the staff and create a learning environment that fosters maximum student engagement in learning. As an effective leader I know that I have to be confident enough to reveal my weaknesses so that I expose some vulnerability, which makes me approachable and genuine. It will help build trust and a collaborative atmosphere. I will also practice tough empathy, meaning I will empathize passionately but realistically. I will respect the individual as well as the task at hand. I will also use my intuition to gauge appropriate timing and course of actions. I know it's crucial to know *how* to be effective and what strengths I bring to the table so that I can best lead others appropriately and successfully. How can I motivate others? How can I encourage others to collaborate, learn and share ideas? A leader sets the tone for the entire school, so if given the opportunity, I will lead with passion and gusto while trying to capitalize on the strengths of my colleagues.

Another way of leading is to lead by example as a classroom teacher. After taking CEP 820, Teaching K12 Students Online, I feel confident in my abilities to not only design hybrid classes and use a variety of technology tools but also to teach and share my ideas with my colleagues. Even though the thought of designing an online class was daunting, I felt so much more confident because of all the courses I had taken leading up to it. I felt so much more equipped to tackle this project then I did when I first started the program. Creating the course was overwhelming and time consuming but also exciting, rewarding, and fun!

I learned so much from this class because I was able to switch my thinking from teaching in the classroom to teaching a class online. There are definitely different criteria to consider and different ways of approaching things when teaching in a

hybrid setting that I hadn't put much thought into until creating my own course. I didn't necessarily change my way of teaching it was more the approach in creating the class in a way that would be successful online. I learned how to organize all of my ideas and present it in a fashion that was easy to navigate and understandable for students. To accomplish that task, it took a lot of thoughtful consideration as to how students learn in an online environment. I also learned how to create assessments that promote further engagement and conversation. Instead of assessments being viewed as "the end" of the learning cycle, it is designed to give students immediate feedback so that they can engage in the process. I included an inquiry-based assessment so that my students could be involved in the learning process. I also effectively incorporated asynchronous teaching into my online course. I incorporated discussion forums, podcasts, screencasts, and online polls as tools to use with my age group. This type of teaching allows students to reflect and gives them time to compose their responses. I had to evaluate the best pedagogical teaching method as well as an effective communication policy for an online environment. I addressed the National Standards for online teaching while thinking about how I would differentiate and meet the needs of all my learners. This course thoroughly addressed so many important factors to a successful online class that I would have otherwise overlooked. I thought the Good Practices that we read about guided me with developing my class:

1. Good Practice Encourages Contacts Between Students and Faculty
2. Good Practice Develops Reciprocity and Cooperation Among Students
3. Good Practice Uses Active Learning Techniques
4. Good Practice Gives Prompt Feedback
5. Good Practice Emphasizes Time on Task
6. Good Practice Communicates High Expectations
7. Good Practice Respects Diverse Talents and Ways of Learning

In the end, I created an online learning environment that promotes active learning and student inquiry. I'm confident that my students would thoroughly enjoy, learn, grow, and write stories that meet and exceed the standards and expectations that I set forth for them. I know that I now possess the understanding of what it takes to make an online class successful and I'm looking forward to creating more online learning opportunities for my students.

In conclusion, I would like to refer to a song I remember listening to as a child on family road trips. The song is about a teacher telling a student exactly how to color a picture. She repeats these lines over and over: "Flowers are red young man. And green leaves are green. There's no need to see flowers any other way then the way they always have been seen." But the little boy speaks up and responds, "There are so many colors in the rainbow. So many colors in the morning sun. So many colors in the flowers. And I see every one." The teacher continues to lecture and discipline the young boy until he sees things *her* way. (Harry Chapin)

This resonated with me as a child, as I already had the inclination to become a teacher and it continues to speak volumes to me now. The song illustrates what **not** to do as a teacher and the perception that we should all march to the same drum instead of thinking for ourselves and encouraging students to have a mind of their own. Throughout everything I have learned and experienced, the most important part of teaching is the impact that I have on my students. I always ask myself:

*Did I lead by example?*

*Did I teach my students to have a love for learning?*

*Did I respect each student's uniqueness and meet his or her individual needs?*

*Did I give them the opportunity to express themselves in their own way?*

*Did I teach them in ways that they learn best?*

*Did I make a positive impact or significant difference in their lives?*

*Did I leave a lasting impression?*

As a teacher, I will never expect students to fit certain molds and conform to one way of thinking and/or learning. My job, as so eloquently stated by Einstein, is "It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge."

And no matter how much advancement we have in technology, it all comes down to the teacher. Did I teach and use my resources in a way that matters? If I can answer yes, then all my teaching and learning is well worth it.

Written by Elizabeth Maccani