

Dream On

At the beginning of each school year, I would ask my new students the following question: what do you want to be when you grow up? I asked this question in this specific way because the way students answered told me a lot about them. I had students tell me they want to be in a specific career (doctor, teacher, athlete, etc.). I had students tell me titles outside of general careers (a mom, a grandpa, a dog, etc.). Then I had students respond with an adjective (happy, nice, a good friend, etc.). Each answer I got told me so much about that student, without them even knowing. These answers told me about their goals and sometimes even how they were going to achieve these goals. Some students already knew they were going to medical school, or they needed to play football at a major university to get drafted to the NFL. Then I could help teach my students those skills needed to reach their dream: both standards-based and not.

This program has taken me two years: six semesters in total. Throughout those two years, I've moved across the country, changed teaching jobs, changed careers entirely, twice, and dealt with all of the anxiety and panic that comes with change. All of this on top of having my confidence shaken -- it was a hard two years. When I started a new course, my instructor would always ask about my program goal as a whole (what did I want to get out of this program) and my course goal (what did I want to get out of this course). Beginning the program in January of 2021, my goal was "I want to learn more about how I can incorporate technology into my classroom and engage my students in digital and media literacy. I want to prepare them for our ever technology-reliant world!". That is why I applied to the MAET (Master's of the Arts in Education Technology) program at Michigan State in general. I wanted to provide my students with as much knowledge as possible to help prepare them for our technology-based world and what is to come in the future.

At this point in my career, I left my teaching job in Colorado and moved back to Michigan where I was seeking employment in [Detroit Public Schools Community District](#). I knew I wasn't ready to leave the classroom yet, but loved the opportunity to imagine myself in a position as a technology coordinator for a school district. One course that had a tremendous impact on who I now am as a learner and educator is CEP 815 (Technology and Leadership). This course gave me the opportunity to see what it would be like to have a position in a school system, without being in a classroom, something I hadn't ever really considered. We practiced writing pitches to stakeholders, making large scale decisions and backing them up with research and evidence, as well as explored what it means to be an effective leader. This course helped give me the confidence to not only advocate for my students, but also for myself.

Although I was still in the teaching world while taking CEP 815, the skills I learned carried over into my new jobs tremendously well. Through this class, I found out what kind of leader I work best with as well as what kind of leader I am in positions of authority. I learned communication skills for those “hard conversations” that we have to have every once in a while, which is helpful professionally as well as personally. I also got the opportunity to develop a professional development session, which really strengthened my presentation skills, communication skills, and confidence with speaking to teachers. It is with those communication skills that I can now speak confidently to influential stakeholders in my current company, and feel equipped to handle managing people who are not in fifth grade...

Then in the fall of 2021, my goal shifted to “I am fascinated by technology and how it impacts our entire world. As I consider different career paths, it excites me to know I could be learning about and using tech in so many different capacities. The opportunities are endless! I want to create new tools, support others in learning about new tools, or just find a different tool to make a process easier or more efficient. That scope is very broad but with my career goals changing, it’s what I can think of right now,” At this point, I didn’t know what I wanted professionally, or where to go from there. All I knew was that I wanted to get out of the school system as a whole and sink my teeth into perhaps the education world that exists outside of the traditional K-12 system.

This was when I was able to take CEP 817 (Learning Technology through Design) and my interest was piqued to opportunities outside of the school system in general. Through this course, I was able to reflect on issues in education, why they happen, and what we can do about them. This course taught me about the design process, how the biggest solutions come from the smallest ideas, and how valuable feedback is. I did a lot of reflecting and research and decided that I wanted to create a solution for the lack of a work/life balance that many teachers face. This issue was one of the major reasons I left the classroom, so I wanted to tackle it. After speaking with former coworkers and friends who are teachers, I learned that this is an issue that all of them face and they were interested in seeing what solutions I could come up with. While I couldn’t, in this capacity, fix the major systemic reasons why many teachers face a lack of a work/life balance, I could try to give them back some time in their day, thus creating my [student centered classroom evaluation tool](#) (report linked [here](#) and in the [showcase page](#)).

Participating in the [design process](#) was incredibly engaging. I can honestly say that I enjoyed each part of the process, even needing to go back and implement feedback given by my colleagues and peers over and over again. I became so invested in this project, not only because it was a required assignment for the course, but because I had so much personal energy invested in it. I was able to take a massive problem,

break it down into more manageable chunks, and create a solution that could actually help classroom teachers. This not only gave me tremendously valuable project management knowledge and skills, but also it gave me the confidence in knowing that regardless of what career path I go down, I can be creative and effective in finding solutions to problems (and a bonus if I happen to help some people along the way).

In the spring of 2022, my final goal became, “I am fascinated by technology and how it impacts our entire world. I want to create new tools, support others in learning about new tools, or just find a different tool to make a process easier or more efficient,” and I think I really have achieved this goal. I realized through my courses that I really loved the design process and finding new and innovative ways to solve problems. Once I defined this most recent goal, changes really started to happen in my thinking, planning, and beliefs in general. Beginning this program, I was all about how to make my classroom the best environment to help my students gain valuable 21st century skills. Now that I am no longer thinking in terms of a classroom, I am able to question, design, and find solutions in a much easier way, being outside of not only the boundaries of a classroom, but also outside of my comfort zone as well.

One last course that had a tremendous impact on me throughout this program was CEP 800 (Psychology of Learning in School and Other Settings). Beginning a course about the psychology of learning, after already earning a bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree in education was such a reflective experience. I loved being able to go back to the beginning, so to speak, and remember how our brains learn and the different theories behind it. I even had a prior belief completely contradicted by this course, which I wish I would have known about before leaving the classroom. In my first draft of my *Personal Learning Theory*, I discussed the idea that there are different learning styles, such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and reading/writing. While teaching, I tried to observe how my students learned best so I could adapt my teaching style to them. While it is best practice to meet the needs of one’s learners, my instructor quickly let me know that this “learner style” belief is actually *not backed by science* and within a week or two, I was revising this part of my essay, because I no longer believed that theory. I thought I knew most things there is to know about learning with my education, however my thinking and prior beliefs were challenged, and now I am a better learner and educator because of it.

I also learned quite a bit about who I am as a learner, which is so important for everyone to know, whether they are a teacher or not. I learned that I am adaptable, reflective, and am always ready for my thinking to be challenged, which happened quite often in this course and in the MAET program in general. I was able to reflect on my career change, on why *my nephew took a while to learn to say my name*, and how best to teach adult

learners in my new job. The last time I remember learning about the psychology of learning was in one of my very first teacher education courses at Michigan State (in 2013...). This course helped fill in those gaps in my foundational knowledge of learning and also allowed me to apply this knowledge to my career now outside of the classroom.

I did achieve my final goal as I now wrap up the MAET program and reflect on all of the work I have done. The three classes I mentioned previously made this achievement possible: CEP 800, CEP 815, and CEP 817. However, that is not to say the rest of the classes I took also made a tremendous impact but it is with these three that helped me not only gain knowledge and skills, but also the confidence to do all of the things I mentioned. Each one of these classes also helped me build a skill set entirely different from one another, which allowed me to grow in a very broad and well rounded way, allowing for adaptability and flexibility with future life changes. These two years definitely taught me that adaptability and flexibility are two incredibly important skills to master in life in general.

I wish I could go back and talk to my former students about our “What do you want to be when you grow up?” conversation because of how much I’ve learned these past two years. I would tell them to “dream on” but not in the way that we are sometimes told if we have a huge goal that someone thinks we won't be able to achieve. I would tell them to “dream on” and keep dreaming because we never know where life will take us or where we will end up so why not dream and change and grow as much as we can? I only ever wanted to be a teacher my entire life, and within the span of two years, now not only is my career entirely different, but my personal and professional goals are as well. The MAET program helped me not only gain incredibly important knowledge and skills, but also realize that I can decide what I want out of my professional life and take it one step at a time to get there.