

Synthesis Essay

Teaching Understanding with Computers

The first class that I took in MAET was CEP 810. It was taught by Carolyn McCarthy and was a great start to a Master's program. The class was paced well, so that we as students could get used to online learning and the demands coming to us for the next few years. She also gave us the opportunity to have online classes once per week where she would introduce us to the following week's teaching and expectations. We were able to ask questions and clarify what was being taught and asked of us. I thought this was the perfect introduction into the MAET program.

In CEP 810, we did a lot of small experiments with different online resources. We looked at wikis, blogs, webpages, and RSS pages. Our major project in this class was creating an RSS page. I didn't see the point of using an RSS page at the start of the semester, because I save all of the pages I want to check each day. However, when I looked at the difference in the amount of time it takes to look through each webpage I want to check (including emails, news pages, facebook, weather, comics, etc.) versus going to my RSS page and looking at the headlines on each of my websites from that one page, I was pleasantly surprised. I reduce the amount of time I have to navigate online significantly each day. This allows me to do my other school work, talk to parents, and relax at night without dealing with the stress of online navigation.

The projects embedded into the CEP810 class were made to be able to teach the students for what was to come soon in the future of the MAET program. Carolyn paced the class and held our hands just enough to let us learn to get by in the program later on by ourselves. The class was nicely set up to let people with either no experience or a lot of experience to feel as though they were all learning. I liked that there were things for us all to learn and do in the class. Carolyn nicely differentiated the class for her students based on their needs. This is something that I hope to do in my classroom and do it as nicely. Basing my data on my elementary students might be a bit different than Carolyn's higher education students, but all teachers need to understand that there are ranges in their classrooms. We, as educators, need to know when to push our students and how to push them. We need to know what pace our students can work on based on their needs. I think that was the best part of my first class in the MAET program.

Electronic Portfolios

I didn't think that I would ever want to make student portfolios in my classroom until CEP 813. It taught me how to easily showcase student work, learning, and to share their everyday experiences. I have started sharing ideas I have with parents and other professionals about my practice. I have felt so frustrated at the lack of EI resources. Now I am someone who is putting those resources out onto the web. I feel that I am making a difference and helping parents and teachers alike to teach students how to control their behavior.

When I started CEP 813, I was against student online portfolios. However, as I started making my class portfolio, it helped me in so many ways. I am able to show parents how far my students have come in my classroom. I am also able to show parents school wide how students are doing. It gave me suggestions on how to add projects and ideas to our school's webpage. I have been able to branch the school's website out enough to be personal enough to parents so that they can see what is coming up in their students' classes and what they have accomplished previously.

CEP 813 also helped me to understand how to reach out to parents in my classroom. I have been able to put suggestions and ideas I have for parents to use at home on my website. I have used it as a portal to connect to parents and give them more current and accurate information than I have ever been able to before. This class was able to help me to create a true web presence that I have never been able to have before.

If I had to choose one project that meant the most to me and my teaching I would have to choose the online portfolio. It means a lot to me to be able to send my students' parents to one centralized location that has the latest school information, tips from me as their teacher, and pictures of their child doing great in the classrooms around school. CEP 813 was able to give me a web presence that helped me feel as a true technology educator. I feel very proud whenever I direct someone to my Google Sites Online Portfolio Webpage.

MAET Summer Cohort

It was suggested to me to take the MAET summer cohort program by someone that I work with. I was told it was a very intense face to face 2 weeks followed by online learning for another 4 weeks. I wanted to get to know some of the students and professors in the program so I decided to join up. This was my best decision. This course was taught by Punya Mishra and it was done very well! We were constantly learning new technology skills to use in our everyday lives and classrooms as well as embedding them into the assignments we were doing in the intensive classroom. This was the first time I truly saw technology perfectly meshed with the classroom learning skills and everyday teaching. We didn't think of putting technology into the projects we were working on because they were already embedded perfectly with technology. This was truly the perfect technology experience.

In the MAET Summer Cohort, we would do daily smaller projects that would need to be done within a few hours. These included the "Ball Drop" project, "Just Shoot Me", and "Tensions" pictures. We would quickly need to do the assignment showing the educational learning that we had figured out, the technology we had been taught, and creativity we were pushing ourselves to use. These truly showed how well we worked under pressure. We then had a few projects that were due at the end of a few days or the end of a week. These were less stressful, but always sat at the back of our minds. This is when we were learning to use our time management skills and delegating skills between the members in our groups. At the end of the class, we had a few major projects. We worked on a few of them with our groups including the "Understanding Understanding" project. We also needed to work alone on some major projects including the "Dream It" project and the "Final Reflection Paper."

As I think of how to create projects for my students in my classroom, I hope to use the MAET summer cohort program as a great example. I want to not only have my students use technology while working on projects, but use technology wisely to push their projects farther and make them even better than what they could have once been.

A Special Thanks

As I am creating the perfect classroom incorporating technology, I look to these three classes as perfect examples of how I can nicely blend technology, “old school” learning ideas, and the benchmarks that my students have to meet each year. I want to make sure that before I ask my students to do anything with technology, I teach them in the extraordinary way that Carolyn McCarthy taught me. I will teach my students how to use different parts of the Internet by “holding their hands” and take them step-by-step on what links are and do, how to scroll through pages, what the differences are between wikis, blogs, regular websites, educational pages, RSS pages, and so on. I will teach my students the basics of the Internet and other technology slowly and then allow them to explore on their own so that they can experience what technology has to offer while seeking information for themselves.

I will allow my students to create a web presence for themselves as I collaborate with their general education teachers and their parents. I believe that all students should publish their work for others to view, read, and experience. The Internet is a great way for students to allow more people to view their published works without having to use money, travel, or viewing face-to-face. My students will create an online portfolio so that they can always view what they have created in school, and at home. They will be able to publish drawings, pictures, stories, poems, field trip photos, and much more. They will be able to talk about how they are feeling and believe their education and lives are going from month to month and year to year. I believe this is an important process for not only elementary students, but for students everywhere at any age. We all need to take ownership of the work we have accomplished, and the things we have learned.

My students will be able to easily learn using technology built into their everyday lesson plans. I will try hard to not add technology for the sake of having technology, but so that it adds to the experience of learning for the students and enhances their education because of it. I will make sure that when my students do projects, I will look at when technology will improve their learning and when we are adding technology for a fun addition. I believe that students should be able to use technology to have fun, but I also want to make sure they are using technology to learn and further their education most of the time. I will work hard to make sure that I add technology appropriately to my teaching and lesson plans and also to the projects my students produce.

I thank the MAET Program to teaching so much for the past two years. I know that I am a better educator because of MSU’s MAET Program and all that I have learned from it. Special thanks to the professors of the program, who I have had the privilege of being taught by, and to the other students in the program who have learned beside me. You have helped me learn and grown as a student, an educator, and a technology user. Thank you.