Synthesis Essay-Renewed Growth
Elizabeth Schoeff

When I started looking at the possibility of going back to school and getting my master's, I remember reflecting and thinking about what did I want to get from going back to school. I knew I had so many different options and I wanted to pick the best one that would help me as a learner and a teacher. I strive to do my best and always put my best foot forward. I wanted to make sure I was picking the right place that would benefit my students the most. I choose to go to Michigan State University and receive my Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET). I wanted to engage myself in learning, be challenged, to discover all that I could to become a better teacher and learner. I bring up the point of being a good learner because I have learned so much about what it takes to be a good educator by knowing how to be a good learner and reminding myself what my students are going through in my classroom by putting myself back in the classroom.

As I prepared myself to go to graduate school I knew I wanted to grow in certain areas. The first area was technology and how to best use it in my classroom. I felt as a new teacher I was being bombarded with the latest coolest technology and was trying to use all of it and make it work for me. Another area I wanted to grow was creating meaningful and engaging activities for my students. I felt in the first year or two teaching you are just swimming and trying to stay above water and now that I had a few years under my belt I wanted to start tailoring my craft to work more efficiently in the classroom. Lastly, I wanted to feel better equipped as a teacher and more confident in what I do.

Throughout my time in the MAET program, I have noticed how much I have grown in these areas. I now think differently about assessments, how to use technology, what kind of experience I want for my students, how to use creativity, and much more. I have also gained confidence in my craft that I did not have before going into this program. I have grown as an educator and a leader. I was able to learn and grow by putting myself back in the shoes of my students and seeing what I can do to help them grow and succeed. This program modeled for me the experience that I want in my classroom. I learned how to be international, creative, and thoughtful in my craft, and three classes during my time here at Michigan State University did that for me.

The first class that had an impact on me was my first semester where I took three classes in the Hybrid Online program. The instructors integrated Teaching for Understanding with Technology (CEP 810), Adapting Innovative Technologies in Education (CEP 811), and Applying Education Technology to Issues of Practice (CEP 812) together into one class. In these three classes, I was able to experience the

benefits of a blended learning environment and see how the learning goals from each course worked together over the course of the semester to produce meaningful projects and learning. During this class, I learned how to let go of everything always being perfect and complete, and to just enjoy the learning process and reflecting on how that went. I learned this throughout the many different quick-fires we had. I was given different parameters (odd tools, new tools, objectives) and was asked to complete them in a short time frame. I was able to see how some students might feel coming in with different affordances and how my overachievers may feel. This helped me realize what kind of environment I want to set up in my classroom and have this type of conversation with my students.

Another impact these classes had on me was the framework around [TPCK](#) (technological pedagogical content knowledge). This became the backbone of many of my ideas and lessons. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of technology and how to use technology in my classroom and this framework did that for me. I was able to see if this technology helped and enhanced my lesson or was I just using the technology for the sake of using it. My goal is to find the sweet spot between technology, content knowledge, and pedagogical practice. This helped me filter out what technologies are good for this project and what does not work. With technology always changing and a new program or app available I need to make sure as a teacher I am being smart about what I am using. These classes helped me look at technology from a new perspective and I now feel confident in how I am using technology with my students.

Another class that helped shape the way I think was Electronic Assessment (CEP 813). I have been trying to use assessments in my classroom wisely and make the most of them. I wanted to make sure I was being intentional with my assessments. In this course, I have looked at how I can use assessments to both help myself and the students. I saw how I can use these assessments to adjust for my students' needs but also how to use assessments to help my students grow. I was able to see how I need to communicate with my students to provide them feedback and help them understand how to use the feedback to help push themselves. In this course, I created a five-question checklist to use when creating or using an assessment to see if it is hitting all the areas it needs to hit as an assessment. This checklist has really helped me look at my assessments and see how I can improve and adjust them. I feel I am better equipped to develop meaningful assessments and purposeful feedback. I have gotten better at how to use assessments to focus on students being able to show me what they have learned and helping them create goals from that.

Using the checklist I created, I was able to create a new assessment for one of the projects my students do and also create a rubric on one of my learning management

systems. I looked at an assessment that wasn't living up to the expectations the checklist presented and created a new one for my students to use. I was able to look at the accessibility of my assessment and make sure it was not creating any barriers for my students.

The last class that had a strong impact on me was Creativity in K12 Computing Education (CEP 833). I was hesitant to take this class originally because I didn't know much about computer science and with teaching 3rd grade I didn't do a bunch with computer science. Taking this class opened my eyes to all the possibilities I have in my classroom to bring computer science into my curriculum but also make it fun and engaging. I was able to see how students can play with a new tool and be able to learn and explore without having to show a complete assignment or task. Giving students the freedom to explore and play without restrictions is just as meaningful if not more than if you were modeling it for them. The course laid out a model of how we could play and explore with a new tool in the form of a quick-fire and then see how others completed their quick-fires. I was able to learn both from my own play and the play of others. This was a huge aha moment for me on how students can learn new things with it being controlled by me. Being able to let go and give control over to the students is huge and has a big impact on them. Once I discovered more about this tool I then applied my knowledge to create a meaningful task/assignment that I could use with my own students.

Another great process I learned from this class is the creativity spiral and how I can assess creativity. Being creative does not always need to be big and bold and revolutionary, it can be purposeful and unique. Being able to see that and give feedback to the student to help them see how they can grow is powerful. That is the great thing about the spiral is that you can always go back and see how you can add more to your creativity or refine your idea. I like that this process can be applied to all ages and all subjects. I know can help my 3rd grades with coding challenges, designing challenges, and more all through the eyes of being creative.

The MAET program has ingrained in me that learning is a constant process that is always happening that can be enhanced and fostered. I know see how technology plays a role in enhancing learning and also limiting learning. This program has instilled in me new confidence but not a confidence of 'I know everything' but a confidence of how to inquiry, how to learn, and how to grow as an educator and learner. I will continue to grow as a lifelong learner and always strive to do the best for myself and my students.