

For a few years now, I have had the feeling that my desire to learn something new was fading. I was content with the skills I had learned along the way in my teaching career, I had hobbies that I was passionate about so why add more, and overall my life felt very fulfilled. The biggest lesson going back to school and pursuing my [Master of Arts in Educational Technology](#) (MAET) degree has taught me is how wrong I was about my love of learning. My love for learning is one of the biggest reasons I wanted to become a teacher and furthermore my curiosity to discover new things is what makes everything in life that much more exciting.

Some of the most important things the MAET program has taught me happened in my very first class but was a constant theme throughout the entire program. Encouraging student choice and giving students a voice, using the correct tool for the task, fostering 21st century skills, grit and that hard work truly pays off, and the philosophy behind the ungrading system have been key takeaways throughout each class and have impacted my life and my career. I had always felt that I listened to my students' wants and needs in class, but during most of the classes I enrolled in I was given the opportunity to develop and encourage student voice and choice through new units or lesson plans even more. A common theme during all of my courses at [Michigan State University](#) (MSU) was considering the world we live in and how our students will interact with that world once they leave the classroom - are we giving them the tools they need to be successful? And when I say tools, I don't always mean traditional technology type tools (think computers, 3D printers, etc) but fitting the tool to the task whatever it may be (even pencil and paper) and perhaps more importantly collaboration, communication, and problem solving skills that will take them far beyond the success of the classroom. These [21st century skills](#) are perhaps the most important tools we can be helping our students to learn and develop. And finally, and most importantly for me, I learned how much grit, determination, and hard work pays off for me personally as I completed this program in a year and half, coming out of teaching during a pandemic, during the planning of my wedding, and finally growing and giving birth to my first child. It means so much more to me that I've furthered my education for my daughter and I can be an example to her of how bettering yourself can be life changing and fulfilling.

One of the classes I mentioned above, CEP 805 Learning Mathematics with Technology, I could not wait to take and it turned out to be better than I could have imagined. My love of mathematics is deep, so being in a class full of my peers who were equally obsessed and my professor, Brittany Dillman who was

perhaps even more obsessed than I, was extremely exciting and inspiring. Each 3 weeks we focused on a different field of mathematics - numbers and operations, geometry, probability, data, and algebra and we were tasked with coming up with either a unit, a professional development, or something else within that field that each week we would develop even further. In week one we would investigate that field deeply and look at our specific content standards within that field and then finally propose our idea to our classmates who would give us some initial feedback. Week two we would focus on how we would teach or present the material best to our students. By collectively coming up with different pedagogies we could then pull from a large list of ideas each week to see what might fit our current topic best. Seeing different ways my fellow math teachers would present the same or different material inspired me to try new things and sparked fresh ideas that I sometimes immediately implemented in my classroom. One specific example was having my students create their own [graphing stories videos](#) that they then posted in [Flip](#) and had to view and graph their classmates' stories. Finally in week three after considering different technology that could enhance our creation, again through some sort of collaborative list making task, we would finalize our creation, get feedback from our professor and peers to improve the creation even further. Through this ungrading system where my 'final work' at the end of week three was never really final I could take the feedback that I received and improve it even further. Each unit's creation was something evolving and growing and I was truly proud of and excited to bring into my classroom for my students to enjoy and engage in. Overall engaging with like minded mathematical educators and my professor who had been in the mathematics classroom was for me the most exciting part of the entire class.

Another class that was truly transformative for me was my CEP 812 course, Applying Educational Technology to Issues of the Practice. In many ways it felt like a continuation of my first course of the program, CEP 810 Teaching for Understanding with Technology for a few reasons, not least of which because I had the same supportive and inspiring professor, Deborah McHorney. During 810 I was introduced and encouraged to play with so many different ways to present the different things I was learning in the class, but 812 is when I really fell into my stride. Our reading, [A More Beautiful Question](#), had me doing just that - questioning everything about how I taught, how I would approach problems facing educators at large and math teachers specifically, how I would present my

'findings' in interesting and unique ways and I had a lot of fun coming up with these along the way. I enjoyed each week diving deeper into my wicked problem of practice which was, and continues to be, making math feel more authentic. I created a sketch note style video that is one of my favorite creations throughout the entire program, and my final project, presenting my wicked problem through a video narration is one of my proudest accomplishments. Overall, A More Beautiful Question and CEP 812 taught me that sometimes our students are the best ones to be asking us the questions, why are we learning this or why are we doing something the way that we are, because they are not necessarily the experts in that area and they have a unique and valuable viewpoint that helps me consider why I am teaching what I'm teaching and how it can be applied to something my students can find value in.

During my last semester, I had the great fortune of being able to participate in the newly revamped Hybrid program in 2022. The three classes that make up the Hybrid experience were broken up into two weeks online, attending campus for two weeks, and finishing up the experience with two more weeks online. To say that this was the best way to wrap up my graduate degree is an understatement. Not only did I get to experience being on MSU's campus, which in part I had wanted to do during my undergrad (instead choosing to stay at a college near home to save money), but we weren't confined to the classroom. Because of the nature of the classes we were taking, Learning in Schools and Other Spaces and Creativity in Teaching and Learning we ventured outside of our classroom walls daily. It was hard to draw a line between where one class began and another ended so to me it all felt like one cohesive unit. During our first two weeks we did some intense research on learning theorists, thought creatively about different ways to present something within our context, and were introduced to our overarching major project, our Unit Renovation Creation (URC). Our wonderful professor, Brittany Dillman understood that as educators we often aren't given the time to overhaul units during normal work hours, so she was giving us that and in the spirit of creativity, unique learning spaces, and basing our plans on well researched theory we were given the freedom to and time to come up with something we were truly passionate about and could use in the upcoming school year. When we arrived on campus we continued our creativity moments, talked a bit more about how to do well thought out research, were given time to work on our URCs, but again, for me the most transformative parts of the course were interacting with my peers and unique to this experience, visiting different

locations and talking about what learning looks like in that space. We visited the Michigan State Capitol, the Broad Art Museum on campus, attended an 'unconference', went to the museum on campus that had science on a sphere as its main exhibit, and different sites around campus including the brand new STEM building. I was so inspired by these different spaces and through these creative exercises that I came up with a unit that in many ways I still can't believe came together as well as it did.

Our initial unit in Algebra 1 is really a review of Pre-Algebra about simplifying expressions and solving equations. It can be a bit bland and students often don't feel engaged or challenged as it is a review. I took on the task of making this my URC. Being an avid board gamer, during one of our creativity tasks I decided to redesign a Magic the Gathering card to 'defeat' a math problem by solving for x - this is where inspiration struck. During one afternoon I came up with a basic outline of how I would gamify the unit and it quickly transformed from Magic to Dungeons and Dragons where a party of four would build up their math solving skills before questing out to defeat different Dragons hiding in Dungeons around town. With the help of my classmates and professor, by the end of the program I had a robust unit that I believed would engage students, allow them to work at their own pace throughout that unit, and feel as if they were working and earning a goal at the end of it. Not only was this experience transformative and again, the best way to wrap up my graduate degree, but this project really is a culmination of all my learning and hard work throughout my entire masters experience at MSU as well.

I am truly grateful for finding, applying, and fast tracking the MAET experience at MSU. It has made my teaching that much more robust, it has enabled me to free myself from making sure my students 'take their notes' and instead had me focus on making sure my students are gaining experiences in my class that has them growing in not only their math education, but also in their 21st century skills. And personally, the program reminded me how much I love to learn and push myself to do hard things. This reminder of my intense curiosity of the world around me couldn't have come at a better time with the birth of my daughter and also it has sparked an excitement in my career to continue to carefully consider each lesson and unit that I am presenting to my students to make sure it is engaging, meaningful, and gives them just enough of a challenge to feel fulfilled at the conclusion of it.