

When I applied to the MAET program, I did so sitting at my desk in Fordson High School. I was nearly finished with my first year of teaching in Dearborn Public Schools, and although I knew I wanted to change districts at some point, I wanted to get a jump start on my graduate degree. While I was ambitious, I was unsure of how I would ultimately fit into education. My first year of teaching was not full of joy as I had hoped. I was overwhelmed, and feelings of self doubt crept into my head each and every morning when I made my commute to work. In the afternoons, I longed to go home, and I wondered if teaching would always feel this way. That summer, I received two pieces of good news: Michigan State University offered me a spot in their Master of Arts in Educational Technology program and Clawson High School offered me a job teaching English Language Arts for the 2015-2016 school year. I happily accepted both and prepared for change.

I learned some immediate lessons in my first few months working at my new district. First, I realized that teaching could be joyful and meaningful as I had always dreamed it could be. I loved my colleagues, my students, and the material I taught. At Dearborn, I was working out of my major, and I missed literature. Clawson offered me the opportunity to mold class curriculum, and I taught Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* that year. I felt privileged to introduce this book to my students, as it is one of my favorites. I brought passion and excitement to work every day, and I stopped wishing to go home in my afternoon classes. I was exhilarated by my profession. The other lesson I learned was that graduate school is realistically not designed to be taken on by teachers who are also transitioning to a job in a new district. It turns out that all of the frustrations of being a first year teacher came back when I switched districts, and I felt a lot of pressure.

That spring, I took a class called CEP 811: Adapting Innovative Technology to Education. The course was fast-paced and demanding. Having discovered my newfound love for teaching at Clawson, I couldn't fathom setting aside my classroom priorities for my graduate work. So I dug in. Every Tuesday after school, I pulled out snacks and settled in. I did not let myself leave the building until 6PM. I did as much as I could, and then I filled in the rest of the week with smaller work sessions to complete remaining assignments. Looking back, this was incredibly exhausting, but this class engaged me in ways that my undergraduate courses never did. They connected to my professional work, and I was actually seeing realistic application to my students. As I learned about technology and its role in my classroom, I turned my attention to lesson planning for my favorite book *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. I designed a lesson in which students followed protagonist Oskar on his journey through New York City's five boroughs. After reading the chapters together, we worked on our Chromebooks and used Google Maps to see exactly what Oskar sees as he travels on his adventure. Using Google Maps Streetview, the book came to life. We stood on the very corners that he did, and we saw the colors and crowds that he described in the text. CEP 811 changed my practice by showing me how technology can open up the doors of the classroom. Students don't have to feel stuck in desks as they listen to lectures anymore--they can go out and experience the world. To ignore technology is to deny students this opportunity, and I am so grateful for this lesson.

After a wonderfully successful year both personally and professionally at Clawson High School, I was ready to go home for the summer, take a couple more MAET classes, and come back for my second year filled with energy and enthusiasm. As a dedicated planner, I mapped out the rest of my classes by semester and was ready to see them through. As a district, Clawson was a bit small for me, and it didn't offer me the room for growth that I knew I ultimately wanted out of a long term employer, but I developed a plan for this as well: I would remain at Clawson for two to four more years while I finished my degree and developed as a teacher. I loved everything else about the school, and I would finally have a year of experience under my belt, so my MAET course load would be much easier to handle. I could picture myself teaching a very similar schedule the next fall, so my planning would be far less than it had been. All of this extra time and energy could go into my studies.

To paraphrase the poet Robert Burns, "The best laid plans of mice and men often go awry." It turns out I am no exception to this rule. At the end of my year at Clawson, I half-heartedly applied for an opening at my alma mater Northville High School. NHS had already rejected me two years in a row, and I was finally ready to give up on my old dream of working in the place that inspired me to teach. I truly had no hopes or expectations when I applied and of course, to my surprise, they offered me the job. It took me all of ten minutes to decide that I was moving districts to be a first year teacher for the third year in a row.

The first few weeks made me wonder if I was cut out for this kind of work. I was incredibly overwhelmed when I received my schedule: English 9, English 10, Honors English 10, and Honors College Writing and Literature. Four classes to prep for the third year in a row had me questioning if I had made the right choice. To try and ease the transition this time, I took the fall semester off of MAET courses and jumped back in for the spring semester. By the time I returned to the program, I was in love with education all over again. My classroom was filled with young men and women who were used to being held to the highest of standards, and I came back with questions for my instructors. I needed more tools to push my students and develop my teaching.

I found the tools I so desperately needed in CEP 820: Teaching Students Online. This course could not have come at a better time; now that I was comfortable with my students and curriculum, the course pushed me to ask myself how I could utilize online resources to maximize productivity in my classroom. I chose to revamp a unit we were working on for Albert Camus's *The Plague*, and I developed an online module through Google Classroom. I reflected on what had gone well or needed work during my class, and then I brought that to my coursework each week. I would look back and realize that the lecture dragged on that day. Then I'd consult my course readings and develop a way for students to watch a YouTube video from John Green's "Crash Course" and take notes that would prepare them for class discussion. Students could submit their notes and questions online, and we could start class by answering those questions before transitioning into discussion leading to deeper understanding of the content. Pairing this class with my spring semester pushed me to answer difficult questions about my teaching: Why are we doing this in class? Is this the most efficient way to deliver information to students? Can I

offer any more scaffolding to them through technology? These questions all deserved answers, and I don't know if I would have been pushed to find them if not for CEP 820. Concurrently, I was talking with my evaluator about these ideas. I told him how excited I was to incorporate technology into my classroom, and he put me in contact with a few members of the math department who were experimenting with flipping the classroom. I was able to observe others and grow as an educator because of the questions that this class raised for me.

It's funny how this program seemed to run on a perfectly parallel track to my career. When I completed my spring semester of MAET courses, I could see two important finish lines: I only had two courses remaining until I completed the program, and I was only a few weeks away from finishing my first year at Northville High School. This time, I could say with absolute certainty that I would not be changing positions mid-summer. I was more mentally and emotionally exhausted than I had ever been in my life, and to my surprise, I was sad to see both of these journeys end. I had come to look forward to seeing my students every day, and to standing alongside them as we fought daily battles to grow as writers and readers, learning from each other's mistakes and triumphs. While I tried my best to give my all to my students, My MAET courses had demanded so much of me that I wasn't sure what would be left at the end. Thankfully, my final capstone course allowed me to reflect on this.

CEP 807 asked me to take every single aspect of my MAET experience and reflect on it. From this course I have reaffirmed what every great teacher must know: it is useless to complete a task and not reflect on it. Asking me to compile my work from the two most chaotic years of my life thus far is like asking me to relive hellish battles and glorious triumphs. This reliving has taught me to find areas of growth and identify areas of potential. Although the initial experience of taking these courses and completing this work was beneficial, the act of reflecting is what brings true meaning. I will carry this lesson into my classroom as well, and ask my students to do what I've done in hopes that they find more meaning in our work together. In putting together this digital portfolio, I have defined myself not just as an educator or student, but as the person who has fought hard week after week to create this still incomplete, still flawed, still growing entity that stands in front of her students and shows them that work does pay off, and that if they can't see how they've grown from an experience, they need to do it again.

Over the course of my two years in the MAET program, I longed for closure. It felt like both my career and coursework asked so much of me for no satisfaction in return. Now, at the conclusion of my master's work, I realize that closure is not what the MAET program has to offer. The most valuable lessons I am taking away from this experience have nothing to do with finality or neat conclusions; rather, I am more aware than ever of my potential for more growth and development. How have I changed throughout the last two years? The answer to this question lies beyond words and can only be felt through the agonizing, euphoric adventure I've had. The more important question is how will I change in the next two? The next five? The next twenty? To think I could answer this question through any way but trying, failing, and reflecting as I throw myself into the next void of unknown would be to show that I've learned nothing.