

My Fairy Tale Ending

By: Amy Warner

In the fall of 2012 I had given up my dream of being a teacher and made peace with the idea that it was not meant to be. Times were tough and teaching jobs were far and few in between. At this point, my career as an educator had been bumpy at best with budget cuts, lay-offs, and a move out of state to keep my dream alive. I made a decision to move forward and started to work on a master's degree in social work as I knew that I still wanted to work directly with people in a human service field.

With a sad heart, I said goodbye to teaching and excitedly started working on a masters of social work degree at Eastern Michigan University. One month into my new found future profession, I received a call to interview for a middle school social studies teaching position. To be honest, I didn't even remember applying for the position and I almost turned the interview down as I did not think that I had it in me to be let down one more time. I decided that I did not want to have any regrets or nights wondering "what if" so I reluctantly accepted the interview. To my complete amazement and surprise, I was offered the position and was absolutely thrilled to go back into the classroom as a full time teacher in October 2012.

My dream had come true and I was doing what I love, teaching a fantastic group of students at a wonderful school with a great group of professionals who had welcomed me with open arms. At the time, going back to school to work on a graduate degree was the farthest thing from my mind as I was still soaking in the reality that I was back in the classroom teaching. I can remember being in my classroom on a cold February day in 2013 when I got a call from the HR department telling me that my teaching certificate was going to expire and needed to be renewed before the start of the 2013/2014 school year. Before this moment, I had not put much thought into the renewal process as I had moved around many times since I graduated from my undergraduate program and had been uncertain about my future as an educator.

I needed to devise a plan to earn nine credit hours in four months or else this fairytale that I was living in was quickly going to come to an end. I spent countless hours researching certification and graduate programs and was starting to feel defeated. One night I stumbled upon the graduate certificate in educational technology program at Michigan State University and it caught my eye. While online, I was able to chat with a representative from the program and before the night was over, I had applied into the program and was set to start that winter. The three courses that I would take would give me the nine credits that I needed to renew my teaching certificate before it expired.

I originally thought that I would take the three classes, get the certificate, and be done with formal education for a while. Once I started the certificate program, I was hooked and before I completed my first course, I knew that I wanted to continue into the full Masters of Arts in Educational Technology program. What I thought was going to be a three month time commitment quickly turned into a life changing experience that has helped to shape me as a professional educator and person. When I started this program a year and a half ago, I never would have imagined that I would be embarking on a lifelong journey that would have such a profound impact on my teaching and future goals.

There are many courses that I took as part of my journey in the MAET program that have had a deep and lasting impact on me. In fact, every course that I have taken as been worthwhile and I have gained new skills and knowledge in each that has and will continue to impact my teaching and career as an educator. The courses that have had the most significant impact on my learning were CEP 810: Teaching for Understanding with Technology, CEP 820: Teaching Students Online, CEP 815: Technology and Leadership, and CEP 807: Capstone Portfolio Course. Each of the four courses named above were integral in my learning, understanding, and future as a teacher and leader in educational technology.

The first course that I took as part of the educational technology certificate program was CEP 810: Teaching for Understanding with Technology. This is the course that sparked my interest and passion in educational technology and really inspired me to want to learn more and continue on into the full MAET program. Throughout this course, I was introduced to many technologies that I currently use in my classroom and teaching such as Twitter, social bookmarking sites, Prezi, blogs, and wiki spaces. I learned about effective teaching strategies that integrate technology into lessons that enhanced my current teaching methods and helped to engage and inspire students. Additionally, I learned about creative uses for technology and was introduced to the TPACK framework for teaching and learning. Since then, the TPACK framework has become a focal point of my teaching and lesson planning.

The course that I was the most excited to take (and rightfully so) was CEP 820: Teaching Students Online. I had spent some time teaching high school courses online and had been very interested in online learning and ways to make online courses engaging while creating opportunities for a deep level of learning and understanding. Throughout this course, I explored many different learning management systems, taking a close look at the different features that each had to offer both instructors and students. I then selected a learning management system to create my own online course module. Before the course was over, I had created a fully functioning course module that I could use in my current position with the students whom I teach. This course inspired me to add a virtual extension into all of the middle school social studies classes that I teach and I plan to expand the virtual portion of my classroom even further in the coming school year.

When I look at my future goals as an educator, assuming a leadership role is something that has become important to me. The course that inspired this shift in my goals and thinking was undoubtedly CEP 815: Technology and Leadership. This course helped me to take a closer look at the qualities and skills that are necessary to be a leader in education and educational technology. I learned about the importance of fostering the relationship between teaching, learning, and technology and how to effectively manage and support relationships between all three. Throughout this course I was inspired to look beyond the use of technology in my own classroom and I started thinking in terms of the bigger picture, meaning the implementation and use of educational technologies in my building, district, and community at large. Upon completion of this course I volunteered to be on a district wide technology committee that will be working on writing a proposal addressing the need for the addition of specific technologies in classrooms district wide that will be submitted to the school board. I plan to remain on this committee for the foreseeable future and intend to seek out additional opportunities to extend my presence as a leader in my building and district.

As I approach the finish line, I am so glad that I have had the opportunity to put it all together and reflect on everything that I have learned and accomplished as a student in the MAET program. I am grateful that CEP 807: Capstone Portfolio Course has given me this unique opportunity to take a step back and look carefully at my learning and growth throughout the program. I have learned a lot about myself as a person, professional, and educator as a result of this course and I often find myself reviewing my portfolio with a sense of pride and accomplishment when I look back on all that I have learned and done. I have grown so much as a result of this program and I am without a doubt a different educator today than I was a year and a half ago when I first started the educational technology certificate program. The very nature of creating an online portfolio allows me to easily share my learning and accomplishments with others and it will be a lasting reminder of how much I have grown as a result of the MAET program. This course has provided me with the unique opportunity to revamp my overall resume and future goals as I aim to emerge from the MAET program as a future leader in educational technology.

My completion of the Masters of Arts in Educational technology program is something that I never dreamed I would have done two short years ago. When I look back on how far I have come, I am overwhelmed with happiness, pride, and sometimes disbelief that I am truly living my dream. The work that I have done, and the learning that has taken place through this program, has provided me with an invaluable experience that has helped to transform me as a professional educator. Most importantly, the MAET program has inspired me not only to dream but to get out there and do, using what I have learned to improve the teaching and learning in my classroom, building, district, and community.

As my journey as a student in the MAET program nears an end, I know that as a professional, it is only the beginning as I strive to become a leader in education. For me, this has truly been a life changing experience that has transformed me as a teacher and leader and solidified my love and passion for education. I consider myself lucky to have had this opportunity and I am confident that the experience that I had and the courses that I completed will have a lasting impact on my professional career as an educator and future leader. This final phase as a graduate student in the MAET program has reminded me that dreams do come true and that my fairytale ending has become a reality that continues to amaze and inspire me each and every day.