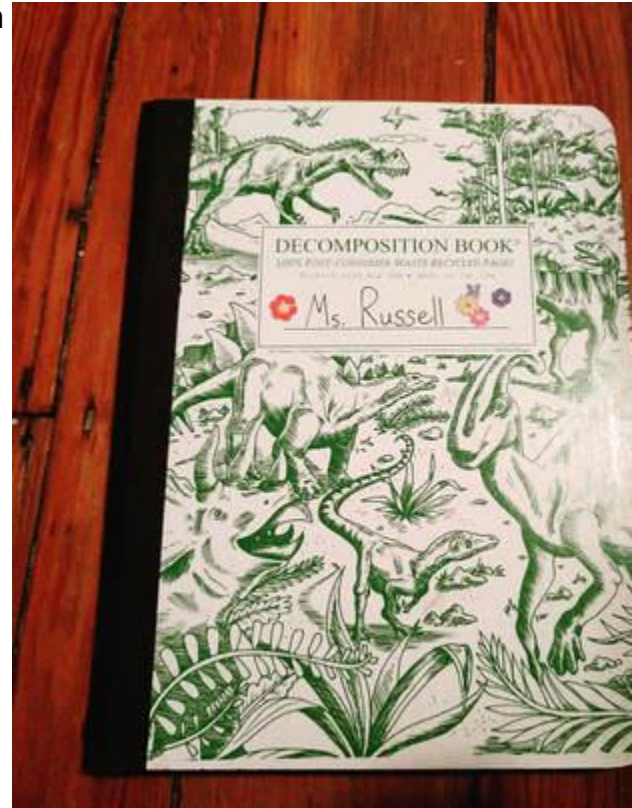


Knowledge with Practice- Becoming a More Mindful Educator with MAET

As an undergraduate, I was enraptured with everything that I was learning about education: [Project-Based Learning](#), [Backwards Design](#), [Differentiation](#), [Inquiry-Based learning](#). However, as cool as all of those things were, it was always a little bit difficult to get a sense of what they actually would look like in daily practice. Leaving undergraduate and getting my own classroom, I built up the experience but found myself longing for a chance and the time to do a structured re-exploration of the methods I had found to be so fascinating. I had transitioned from having knowledge without practice to having practice without reinforcement of the knowledge. Entering the [Master's of Arts in Educational Technology \(MAET\)](#) program, I was excited to finally have both- knowing what I know now as a more seasoned teacher, I would have the opportunity to re-explore some methodologies while learning about some new ones, putting myself in a perfect scenario to have access to both knowledge and practice.



My first year teaching notebook, filled with furious scribbles of me trying to figure out what I was doing and how it matched up with what I had learned as an undergrad

MAET was able to provide me with applicable knowledge within my practice and so much more. In addition to strengthening the skills I was already using in my classroom, I was exposed to a dearth of new frameworks that have direct application in the classroom and beyond, and was able to grow in my ability to be

intentional in my practice, my ability to think like a designer, and my ability to be resilient in the pursuit of my own learning.

Being More Intentional

I was able to start building my intentionality skills at the start of my MAET journey in CEP 810: Teaching for Understanding with Technology. I had considered myself to be a “techie” teacher, but often found myself in situations where things didn’t go right because they were overly complicated and caused me and my students to lose sight of the learning goal. CEP 810 introduced me to the idea of [TPACK](#), or Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge. TPACK is a framework that encourages you to make sure each choice you make in the classroom is using the right tool with the right strategy to teach the right concept. It is a layered approach to reflect upon each lesson in your classroom- does it make sense to explore this concept at this time? Am I [scaffolding](#) this learning in a way that will best help my particular students? Would using technology here help my cause or distract from the learning? Ever since being introduced to TPACK I have found myself slowing down and taking the time to breathe and consider these questions as I make decisions about my own classroom.

I was also able to increase my intentionality thanks to CEP 810 through my re-exploration of the idea of [21st Century Skills](#). It is something that I did cover in undergraduate, but there is a **huge** difference between talking theoretically about what learning could happen in your idealized imaginary classroom and thinking about what is actually attainable within your realized context. While I did cover quite a few 21st century skills in my classroom already, I have grown to become more aware of what skills I am building, how I am building them, and how best to build them in ways that suit all of my learners. For example, I have broadened my internal definition of communication to help students build communication skills in ways that may not traditionally be covered in school, such as the ability to design an effective graphic or create an informational website. I have also grown in my ability to intentionally design and structure critical thinking tasks so that my students can build that skill for their own rather than simply synthesizing what they are given. Over the past few years I have made tasks within my classroom more open and authentic, which has both helped my

students to build stronger 21st Century Skills and has made my classroom more accessible and welcoming to students with a larger variety of abilities.

Thinking Like A Designer

While I have spent plenty of time explaining to others how creative a job teaching is and how much work and thought goes into developing an activity, I had never really thought of myself as a designer- I was just doing my job and trying to accomplish things in a way that works. This mindset started to really shift and solidify for me when I took CEP 816: Teaching and Learning Across the Curriculum. I had already learned about [Universal Design for Learning](#) in a previous class (CEP 811: Adapting Innovative Technologies in Education) and had been applying it to my classes, but I had never given much thought to how the way I display and utilize various media can impact my students' learning. CEP 816 taught me how to utilize my knowledge of Universal Design for Learning and blend it with different graphic design and multimedia strategies in order to not only make my information as accessible as possible for my students, but also design things in a way that literally frees the brain up for more understanding. One of the most transformative ideas to how I think about my practice was that of [cognitive load](#)- by thinking about how to minimize extraneous load caused by how something looks or is organized and by being careful about how material is chunked to manage the germane load, a teacher can create an activity that optimizes the amount of learning that is able to happen without overwhelming students. For example, I have now become much more conscious about making directions clear but concise with multimedia elements to clarify my intention. I have already noticed a world of difference within my classroom since I started designing with cognitive load in mind- my students are able to learn more deeply and spend more time critical thinking compared to less clear versions of the same lessons.

In addition to my work with design and cognitive load, CEP 816 also taught me the depth to which different forms of media can be used to leverage learning. I am now more conscious than ever as to what makes a video a good resource vs a bad resource, and I spent lots of time thinking about each and every piece of media that I include or don't include when planning resources and lessons for my students. Before MAET, I would scan a video to see if it simply contained the information I needed and

would use it regardless of other factors. Now when I find a video for class, I check to make sure there are no distracting sounds and visuals, that information is being provided through different mental channels instead of in the same way, and that showing this video would in fact be a better alternative to whatever else I had in mind.

Leaning Into Resilience

Perhaps the most valuable skill that I have learned from MAET is resilience. While this, again, was present in many of my courses, it clicked with me the most within CEP 809: my independent study. For this course, I traveled all the way across the ocean to Galway, Ireland in order to try and collaborate with multiple educational organizations there to create a novel educational experience. To top it all off, I had four weeks to accomplish my goal. The task in and of itself was daunting- I would have to make contacts, do a needs assessment, organize collaboration meetings, learn some new softwares, and prototype and test a final product that was educationally sound and followed all of the principles that I have learned through MAET. As the project progressed, it became even more difficult than I had anticipated. I was faced with a lack of access to resources that I needed, losing the ability to collaborate with an important contact because he got COVID and needed to quarantine, having to abandon a project idea after a week's worth of work and 4 different softwares learned for it, and a variety of mishaps associated with the 3D printer. Despite all of this, I had confidence in myself and all of the skills that I have learned and was able to push through and end up with a final product that I can be proud of. My work helped me to build the skill of resilience as endurance.

I also learned a lot about resilience as a part of the maker mindset. While I had always preached a growth mindset to my students, I always felt that I didn't have the self confidence to focus on that same growth for myself. I would take setbacks personally and limit myself and my abilities because of those feelings of discomfort around failure. However, this does not make for a good learning mindset, especially in a field where so much of what we do requires constant innovation, reflection, and reinvention. I thought back to all of the lessons I had learned throughout my time with MAET- the power of being willing to fail, the power of asking questions, the power of reflection and iteration.

Moving On

The final thing that I have learned from MAET is the power of people. There have been multiple times during the past three years of pandemic teaching while in graduate school that I felt close to breaking, but every time I was able to reflect upon what I have accomplished in my career and through the MAET program, and that sense of accomplishment and pride from those around me was enough to help me push through. In every collaboration I have participated in through this program, every single person has “Yes and”-ed me and through that openness and enthusiasm helped our end product to become more marvelous than simply the sum of its parts. This feeling of people power is best summed up by something the education director at the Galway Atlantaquaria said to me about her newfound partnership with a local university: “It took you coming all the way across the ocean to connect us, but that connection is going to lead to so many new things”. There really are a lot of remarkable things that can happen when people with shared values and passion get together to make something new, and that ethos is something that I feel truly embodies the educational technology community, especially those within MAET. Even though my time with this program is technically done, this powerful community that I have helped to build and have taken part in will continue to inspire, collaborate, and innovate alongside me.

Once my time with MAET was over, I felt myself feeling sad that my time of overlapping knowledge and practice was over. I know, however, that this is not actually true- I have developed a variety of skills, expertises, and mindsets within the framework of my active practice, and those skills will only continue to grow as I continue to push myself. Learning skills is not a one-and-done exposure to knowledge, it is a beautiful mixture of knowledge, practice, reflection, and collaboration that continues to grow and change as a person does. I am excited to move forward from this experience as a stronger educator who is more willing and able to help others.

