

MAKE it Happen!

Join me for a few moments in this synthesized reflection essay of my journey through the Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) program. During this journey, we will make a few stops along the way to learn and reflect on how this program has impacted me both personally and professionally. Let the journey begin!

Where Did You Go Creativity?

I always considered myself to be a creative person. I haven't always considered myself to be a teacher. I have a God-given talent for drawing which I recognized very early on as a child. I understand that creativity is not only a talent that you're born with, it's something that takes practice. I spent hours upon hours practicing, creating, and learning all that I could about drawing to the point that I knew exactly what I wanted to do when "I grew up". I wanted to be a cartoonist and work for Hanna-Barbera, particularly creating animation art cells for The Flintstones and The Jetsons. I had it all figured out, no need to look any further. Fast forward to present day. I'm not a cartoonist, I don't work on animation art cells for Hanna-Barbera, almost any type of art that I do now involves using a computer, and I'm a teacher! I never seen any of this coming. Surely not what I had planned as a child for myself in adulthood.

In the past before becoming a full-time teacher, I worked for advertising agencies, a marketing company, and a telephone company in many capacities that involved web design, marketing, and graphic arts. I did the creative stuff. I spent many years after graduating from Wayne State University with my Fine Arts in Advertising Design degree working in the "industry" as we say at the community college level. In fact, industry work and experience are highly sought-after qualifications when hiring full-time faculty to teach at a community college. In the field of web programming where I teach, I now work mostly with "code" and programming web pages, debugging errors, web servers, etc. I traded in my colored pencils, watercolors, markers, and paint brushes for a computer. Even though I absolutely enjoy teaching web programming and have a passion for technology, I often would think to myself, "Have I lost my creative spark? Where did the creativity go?" What do computers, programming, technology, and web pages have to do with creativity? I felt myself yearning for that creative passion that I had in my younger years and while working in industry and often wondered if it would ever return.

Creative Confidence

2016 was the year that my creative spark returned, my creative confidence took flight, and a mind shift happened! Why? It's the year that my journey through the Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) program began. Let me pause for a moment and define "creative confidence" because this plays a crucial role in my newfound thinking and in me being where I am today.

Creative Confidence: Having the freedom and courage to fail/take creative risks and the knowledge that all of the ideas you create have value. (OpenIDEO, 2013)

Creative confidence and creativity have been repetitive themes in one way, shape, or form within the courses that I have completed in the MAET program. These pivotal themes have not only changed my way of thinking about and defining creativity but also expanded my creative confidence within the courses that I teach and lead to the creation of the Macomb Makerspace!

Time for a Change

How did the MAET program change me? Let me count the ways. I learned about ways to be **creative with code** (that should be a title of a book) through the use of coding assignments that I give to my students and the technology and resources we use in the web programming courses to supplement learning. I personally stepped out of my comfort zone. I embraced learning new programming languages, working with different operating systems, using new tools and software applications, and researching solutions that assisted in creative problem solving. The fear of failing quickly subsided and I embraced taking risks. For me this was huge!

With my **creative confidence** growing, it was time to pass it on to my students and begin to build theirs. I began encouraging creativity and risk-taking within the web programming courses that I teach through the use of videos that demonstrated various coding and debugging techniques, Flipboard stories related to industry and technology topics, coding examples, and demonstrations aimed at igniting creative thinking and building confidence. I encouraged students to make mistakes (#FailForward), to play and experiment with code, and then share their experience with the class. I chimed in by sharing my mistakes as well – I was amazed just how much students appreciated seeing me taking risks and making errors and learning right alongside them. The courses that I teach have become more interactive than ever as a result of the MAET program. Students are sharing their personal and professional experiences, helping each other, posting online articles related to course topics, and sharing ideas with each other – the participation level within my courses has gone up drastically as a result of my increased interaction.

The way I approached my job has also changed. I noticed that the more I shared with my students, the more they shared with me and their peers. Lead by example is how I like to describe it. The individual classes within the MAET program taught me about purposeful learning, the affordances of technology in teaching and learning, and that not everyone learns the same way and at the same speed. Students appreciate different learning modalities - video instruction, imagery, written instruction, and hands-on activities. They appreciate choice when it comes to learning – I appreciate choice. And when given the creative freedom to chart their personal learning path, really amazing things happen!

Adapting Innovative Technologies to Education

The second course that I completed within the MAET program, single handedly impacted me in ways that I could never have imagined. It was in the **Adapting Innovative Technologies to Education** course that I was first introduced to the Maker Movement, Maker Culture,

Makerspaces, and the notion that we are all "makers and shapers and put-it-togethers" (Dougherty, 2011). I remember thinking to myself, "How did I not know about the Maker Movement?" I teach in the technology area so this is something that I felt I should have known about. I chalked it up to the fact that I teach at a community college and this seemed primarily geared towards the K-12 space. I quickly discovered that was not the case. That aha moment changed the entire trajectory of my experience within the MAET program. I can't put into words the excitement, curiosity, and passion that was ignited within me that day and for the next three years to follow.

How did the **Maker Movement** and all things "**making**" affect my thinking and practice? I first came to the realization that Makerspaces were not at all about the "space" itself, it was about the culture and a mindset that encompasses risk-taking, tinkering, collaborating, experimenting, and building creative confidence. It's about embracing failure in a way that incites curiosity, critical thinking, and creative problem solving. As I learned more about the maker culture, I noticed a shift in my mindset as well as my confidence in stepping out of my comfort zone from a technology-skills-learning standpoint. I began experimenting and developing and honing my research skills, welcomed mistakes and did not view them as failures but rather as opportunities to learn, and explored creativity with technology in a way that I never did before. I was making, tinkering, and learning and having a blast! This new found excitement for the maker culture transformed itself into creating a Makerspace at Macomb Community College. We fully embrace the maker culture in our "space" at the college where we encourage learning by doing, risk-taking, and creativity exactly what I learned to do within the **Adapting Innovative Technologies to Education** course.

Approaches to Educational Research

There is definitely something to be said for data and research, a backbone for making many educated decisions in my opinion. As I mentioned earlier, I think that having a choice is very important, choice makes something more personal and meaningful. I was very excited to be able to dig deeper into **Makerspaces** and the **Maker Culture** by conducting an action research project titled "**A Space for Making**". I am going to be very honest and candid in this next statement but just know that my thinking and practice before the class and then at the end, made a complete 180-degree turn! Out of all the courses in the program, the **Approaches to Educational Research** course was one course that I really was not looking forward to. It didn't have anything to do with the instructors which were phenomenal by the way, and had everything to do with having to do research in a way that I had not done before, at least to this extent and a bit out of my comfort zone.

I embarked on my action research project journey which focused Makerspaces, specifically the obstacles that inhibit people from attending a Community College Makerspace. The research that I conducted for my project included student surveys, observational studies, email interviews, and informal conversations with students, colleagues, administrators at the college, and lab aides. Such much valuable information was gleaned from the responses and data that I

received from that research alone, it was overwhelming but in a very good way. The more I engaged with the "players" in my project, the more they were willing to share with me. It was at this point that I started to really enjoy what I was doing with my project (the 180-degree turnaround). I completed a statistical analysis on the data and information that I received and researched targeted resources using the MSU online library. My completed action research project proved to be so insightful and beneficial that it now serves as a foundation for building upon and enhancing the recently established Makerspace at Macomb Community College.

Creativity in Teaching and Learning

My journey into creativity really took flight in the **Creativity in Teaching and Learning** course. If you remember from the beginning of this essay, I mentioned that I always considered myself to be a creative person. This is where my thinking about creativity pivoted into the belief and understanding that EVERYBODY is creative and creativity takes on many different forms – it's personal to the individual. It's not about being able to draw, paint, sculpt, and being really good at the fine arts, it's way beyond that. It's about being able to think outside the box, using your imagination to find creative solutions to issues (personal and/or worldwide), and transforming ordinary and/or obscure objects into something that is thought provoking, inspirational, memorable, and/or functional.

So how have I put this into practice within the context of teaching and learning? I think you know the answer – the Makerspace! We are continuously working to instill the Maker Culture into our space at the college and we have partnered with the CIE (Center for Innovation and Entrepreneurship) so that any student with an idea that want to develop and take to the next level, has that opportunity available to them. We invite students to visit us and explore their creativity, the only limitations are their imaginations.

The Journey Continues

Even though the MAET program portion of my journey will come to a close, the journey doesn't end here. I will continue to learn, explore, and play! I will continue to put all of what I learned throughout the MAET program into practice and continue to MAKE it happen in all areas of my personal and professional life.

Attributions:

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