

## Moving through a Metamorphosis Jennifer Stirling

Call it a cliché. Call it dramatic. Either way, the Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) program at Michigan State University changed the course of my life. Years ago, when I was finishing my undergraduate degree, I was student teaching in a classroom that was one-for-one with Chromebooks. Every student had their own device and the role of the teacher was more of a guide than a lecturer. At the same time, I was also writing my senior thesis on technology integration in the classroom. I interviewed parents, teachers, students, and administration about their roles and responsibilities in integrating technology effectively in the school. I've never forgotten the experience of teaching with technology and exploring different stakeholders' roles in that integration. After finishing my undergraduate degree and embarking on quite a journey to find my first teaching job, I definitely faced some of the harsh realities of teaching that I still didn't feel prepared for. I quickly felt overwhelmed and exhausted. However, a few years later, I finally felt confident in the classroom and in the curriculum that I had created. Soon, there was an urgency inside of me for more. I still remembered that student teaching experience and the thesis that I had written, and I felt like technology might be something I wanted to invest in. I wanted to learn more and help other teachers to be the best teachers they could be, especially when it came to using technology effectively in the classroom. With that, I enrolled in the MAET program, and through the coursework, I discovered that I was capable of great things. I think I had a lot of personal doubt, but achieving so much in this program, changed my mindset. I identified my strengths and weaknesses and refound a true passion that I hope to make a career. I love working on and with technology and I really want to help other teachers feel as comfortable and confident as I do. The MAET program really lit a spark within me and I am excited to see where it takes me. During this escapade, there were three specific courses in the journey of this program that truly made me realize these feelings of strength and confidence within me. These courses, what I learned, and how they impacted me are explained below:

### CEP 817: Teaching Technology through Design

In the second semester of my program, so the spring of 2020, I took Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Special Education (CEP) 817: "Teaching Technology through Design." This course was the first course I took where my interest in technology aligned with work I was already interested in doing in my classroom, making it all the more special. In this course, I was asked to identify a problem in my practice and work to design a potential solution using technology. To start, I identified my problem as "My 8th-grade students' interest in becoming more culturally aware is hampered by a relative lack of experiences." To take on a problem as big as a lack of experience with diversity was a large undertaking, but I ended up connecting it to my ELA classroom using novels. Through this course-long project, I was able to truly begin to understand where my students come from and what they have experienced. Developing that more extreme level of empathy and understanding of my students, especially through the context of novels, created a stronger classroom community, which I will continue to aspire to every year. I created a novel study unit, that follows the structure of literature circles or book clubs. It uses a variety of characters and stories to show my students what people from

other cultures and experiences deal with in hopes that they will express empathy and want to get involved in the process. This unit plan, along with a lot of support from a fabulous professor, truly showed me what I was capable of. I was capable of working through small steps to create a phenomenal (if I do say so myself) final product. It showed me that failure and iteration were part of the process and I needed to cut my high expectations and be okay with it. It showed me that I could take on a wicked problem and attempt to help and correct it. It showed me how much influence I can have on my students and how I can expose them to a world larger than themselves. This course made me realize how excited I was to continue this journey and it made me feel confident that I was following my purpose.

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#### CEP 813: Electronic Assessment for Teaching and Learning

Following my purpose, however, didn't come without identifying my strengths in planning and curriculum and my weaknesses in creating valuable assessments. This became apparent in CEP 813: "Electronic Assessment for Teaching and Learning" during the summer of 2020. As a teacher, creating quality assessments has always been my downfall and I knew that when enrolling in the course. To start my career, I was using the previous teachers' assessments, which were very much comprehension-based and not aligned to standards or skills. When creating new assessments for my students, I often fell into this trap as well, as it was easy to grade, easy for students to see how they did, but all wrong and I knew it. By creating a checklist of what makes a quality assessment, I was able to examine the assessments I was using and overhaul them, requiring students to demonstrate their understanding, not of the novel we had read, but of the skills they need, like citing evidence, analyzing quotes, and summarizing and sequencing plot. Overhauling these assessments was great practice and now when designing new ones, I go back to the checklist to ensure my assessments will be both accessible but also challenging for my students. During this process, I found that I actually enjoyed creating new assessments, especially ones that involved technology. This course showed me that if there is a challenge, I want to attempt to conquer it. To end the class, I was tasked with creating a game-based assessment using completely unfamiliar software. Man, did I dive right in! I loved learning something new, especially during the summer when I had time to really sit down and play with the software. I used it to design a game that also functioned as an assessment. This course showed me that I really enjoy learning, especially when I self-assess that the area I am learning about is something of a weakness for me. I found that I really challenge myself when I know it is an area to grow in. While learning assessment creation and designing curriculum content is fun for me, I still wasn't quite sure where exactly it would take me. I had faint ideas, but, it wasn't until a global pandemic hit, that I could see my purpose in action.

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#### CEP 815: Technology and Leadership

In the middle of the global COVID-19 pandemic, I started my coursework for CEP 815: "Technology and Leadership." This course challenged me, through a variety of scenarios, to place myself in a technology leadership role. At first, I was hesitant to do so, but my experiences at school began to change my mindset. In my professional context, teachers at my school (including myself) were being asked to teach students who were learning remotely for the first time. One class period, of our five, would now be taught using Google Classroom and Zoom. In no time, I had staff lining up at my door for help and support using technologies they never

thought they would have to use in this capacity. I thought to myself and actually asked some of my closest colleagues, “Why are they asking me for help?” I got answers like: “I’m the youngest” or “They’ve seen me be successful at it before” or “I was recommended by another teacher.” Whatever the case was, I ran with it. I taught professional development for the first time, not because I was the most qualified in the room, but because I had used the software and technology before. Together, our team went through every Zoom setting, every Google Classroom feature, and set up every student on LanSchool. The administration started calling on me for advice and expertise. I’d never felt more alive and yet more exhausted at the same time. I loved steering the ship. I loved being a leader at school and coming home at night and learning how to be a better one. These experiences of learning leadership while becoming a leader in my professional context inspired me to truly begin researching positions outside of teaching, eventually landing on the title of Educational Technology Consultant or Specialist. I like the idea of supporting teachers and students in their use of technology to make all stakeholders successful in the classroom. By feeling confident using technology, students will be more engaged, more motivated, and hopefully more successful. Teachers’ confidence would also increase allowing them to focus more on guiding students and giving powerful feedback. I want to be the person teachers call on for help. I want to be there to support them all and lead our district toward successful technology integration in every classroom. After developing a vision of what effective leadership can and should look like, I can foresee this vision and want to do everything in my power to make it happen.

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The MAET program made me much more confident. I’ve always had high expectations for myself, but this program made me realize that sometimes I need to be okay with failure and iteration. The coursework allowed me the ability to create what I wanted to create. It was the tasks and courses that applied and connected to my professional context that made the most impact. These three courses, and honestly, all of the other ones as well, made me love learning again. Through the courses, I found areas that are strengths and areas that are in need of improvement. I think it really speaks to the program, the professors, and the sense of community, that I wasn’t ashamed to admit these weaknesses and challenged myself to be better. The MAET program sparked a passion that I want to pursue. I’m planning to discuss the creation of a new position for me in my school district with the superintendent next month. With one-for-one Chromebooks headed our way, I am confident that I can use my undergraduate experience, the knowledge I received in the MAET program, and the experiences I have had so far in my professional context, to truly support and inspire teachers to reach greatness. With the global pandemic still in full force, I do not foresee teaching remote learners going away any time soon. Therefore, I know that teachers will need support, students will need guidance, and parents and administrators will also need knowledge of the programs. I want to be that person that they all turn to. It’s a cliché, of course, but the Master of Arts in Educational Technology program truly took me on a new path. It’s been a journey for myself and my mindset and an adventure for my knowledge and understanding. At times the road was bumpy, but I made it through more confident, knowledgeable, and empathetic than before. I learned so much and now feel empowered to start a new path on my journey to helping others and, of course, learning along the way.