The Ride of a Lifetime: Teaching, Learning, Reflecting

During the winter break of 2013, I found myself driving down a local highway without a destination or particular schedule in mind. As I made journey, I tuned into *The Dan Patrick Show* and stumbled upon an interview with Keanu Reeves. Typically this show pays most of their time discussing sports related content, but today Reeves was invited in as part of their entertainment commentary. The interview was light and oftentimes comical, but in the middle, Reeves made a comment in regards to his current and past experiences and to this day, I find myself returning to this quote as a source of pondering. As definition of his personal development, Reeves stated, "we are all just the sum of our experiences."

Now Reeves is not often highlighted for profound commentary, but the simplicity in this insight does carry weight and is truly applicable. Most all teachers can remember the first time they connected with an instructor, decided to enter into education, and truly felt like they had become a teacher. The other half of this conversation represents the times maybe we would have liked to forget, but regardless, they have shaped who we are. One experience that has helped to shape me in my professional career is my experiences in Masters of Arts in Educational Technology program. Before this program I simply was not sure if my tech skills just added flash to teaching or if using technology was an important part to 21st century learning. What I discovered is it is truly important for educators to explore technologies available, as the repurposing of these tools allows them to evolve the practicing of teaching in correspondence with human behavior.

Coming to this conclusion was not an instant revelation, but rather a gradual progression of learning, reflecting and understanding. I first began this pursuit while substitute teaching throughout the Traverse Bay Area Intermediate School District (TBAISD). I had

became comfortable in my classroom presence, but after being removed from the lesson planning and learning process for a year, I craved a kick start. I decided to explore graduate programs to see if any program offerings would draw my interest. As I looked, I found that Michigan State University maintained a reputable ranking in the US News and World Report and I decided to see what they had to offer. One particular program that stood out to me what the Master's of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET). Without being fully sure that I wanted to dive headfirst into graduate education, I did find appeal in the certificate program, which allowed development without a full commitment. Without much hesitation, I signed up for two courses to see If I found a new life path or maybe just a detour.

I embarked on my journey in the fall of 2010 and elected to simultaneously enroll in both CEP 810 (Teaching for Understanding with Technology) and CEP 811 (Adapting Innovative Technologies in Education). Right from the start of my learning in these courses, I experienced curious excitement, as we were asked to utilize new tools that I had heard about, but never made the time to dive into. Yet, the foundations of our searches were grounded in the principle of TPACK (Teaching, Pedagogy, and Content Knowledge). Through this, we were led to understand that simply incorporating technology into our teaching was not enough. We needed to consider how the technology would facilitate the pedagogical approach we would be using to help students better understand the content we were teaching. While this was not a complex concept, it was quite enlightening and began to shape how I would think about applying technology in my teaching.

I used this new perspective in our exploration new tools. A lot of the focus of these courses was on Web 2.0 applications, which I found were designed to facilitate two way conversation between an author and a reader. My whole mindset regarding how to use the

internet was changing, and I became to develop a familiarity with Google Docs, wikis, and Skype in ways that I truly did not ever think were necessary. Furthermore, I had never been part of such rich dialogue about technology's role in education. The joy of this was twofold, as hearing other's idea was exciting, but it was equally pleasant having an audience to listen to my thoughts as well.

I moved through CEP 812 (Applying Educational Technology to Issues of Practice) the following winter and upon entering the spring of 2011, I was committed to finishing the full MAET program. When I received confirmation that I indeed would be accepted into the program, I signed up for a the summer year two (2) hybrid courses, which include CEP 800 (Learning in School and Other Settings, CEP 815 (Technology and Leadership), and CEP 822 (Approaches to Educational Research). To this day, I don't think I have part of a more dynamic learning experience. Due to the predominantly online nature of this program, the face-to-face model simply is not common, but I truly believe the opportunity to interact with my peers was a real treat. Not only was the subject matter interesting, but in addition, the people that were part of my cohort shared my passion, and essentially were part of my learning team. Our coach was Punya Mishra, Ph.D., and his combination of physiological perspective, technical skills, and general excitement for educational technology was contagious and spread through the classroom. Personally, I began to respect him for his devotion to this craft and his general excitement for sharing it to all that would listen.

In addition to the quality of instruction, the course was designed to develop our understanding educational psychology, learn how to use various tools to communicate comprehension, and apply our skills in both a group and individual projects. Although intensive, I enjoyed my two-week schedule consisting of going class, eating dinner, and then diving back into our course material. Largely,

what I took away from this is that what tech enthusiasts are doing isn't ignoring past principles, but rather building on proven concepts to use the most powerful tools available now. It is not is if Piaget, Garder, and Watson ideas are being ignored, but rather applied in ways that best suit the learners of the current times.

After these courses, I took a year to sort through my professional academic life, trying to find balance to be successful at both. After this, I continued in my studies and began developing my class website through the use of the course management software (CMS) Haiku. This was part of CEP 820 (Teaching Students Online) and doing so served as my introduction into developing an online learning experience for students. In my initial course design, I attempted to flip my (Physical Education) PE class and have students work on learning skills and rules outside of class so more time in class could be used for physical activity. In order to do so, I uploaded videos of skill breakdowns and four step explanations of proper movement patterns in each step. Furthermore, each sport introduced was accompanied with a list of rules.

This took a while for students to get used to in PE, as many of them still wanted the class to be about playing games, as opposed to developing skills for lifelong activity. After some time of working through this, my Middle School PE course still did not grow as successfully as I had hoped for, but I think two important results came from the application of this model. One, students were pushed to consider the physical and tactical skills needed in order to fully engage in an activity. Secondly, students learned that physical education can be individualized, as the progression of abilities does not need to be simultaneous, but rather at the pace of the learner. After the skill is refined, then participants can join together in a collective competition. Without the online course module, it would be extremely difficult to provide this type of instruction across a field or court. However, when each student has an iPad, learner-centered teaching can occur in every corner of

gymnasium.

Yet, learning can be even more expansive than expanding the communication between students and teachers. Throughout the world people are publishing media of different formats online and all people need to access these materials is a internet connection. In CEP 816 (Teaching and Learning Across the Curriculum) Rand Spiro, Ph.D., both encouraged us to read and initiate conversation regarding how digital readers consume this information. Before this course, many discussions that I had a chance to engage with focused on the negative influence of digital reading. One of the most commonly brought up points was the lack of focus multiple stimulus invites. However, in this class it was suggested that this may not detract from student learning, but actually enhance. Never before had I realized that if used appropriately, the expansive world that rests at the other end of a keyboard actually allows us to experience reading a way that is more of a discussion than was ever previously possible.

One of best texts that were part of this class was Will Richardson's *Blogs, Wikis, Podcasts, and Other Powerful Web Tools for Classrooms*. For the most part, I have felt the educational texts I have read remain optimistic that the ideas presented will work for you as a teacher. Yet, this text allowed for the counterargument to be present and I found that every time I would question the author, he would bring my question up and then answer it with his research/experiences. I really enjoyed this experience and found it valuable in my future conversations with teachers regarding their use of technology.

Now that it is the summer of 2014, my trip through the MAET program is quickly coming to an end. Coincidentally, as I sit peering out of a coffee shop window, I am typing this essay on a Bluetooth keyboard that is connected to my iPad. I am connected to the shops wi-fi and using Google Docs to compose these ideas.

In the midst of this process, I opened my Kindle app and downloaded a book I previously purchased to double check my references. I was quite sure that my spelling of word was correct, so I doubled checked on the dictionary app to ensure I was indeed accurate and using the word properly. During my break five minutes ago, I opened an email from my superintendent on my iPhone and promptly watched a video on YouTube regarding effective feedback.

When I stopped to think about what I was doing, my sudden realization was almost surreal, as my habits have become a product of my experience through the MAET program. I would not claim to be a tech expert, but I do tend to rely heavily on many different forms of software and hardware to complete my daily tasks. Many naysayers that I encounter would argue that their methods of teaching and learning are more effective than the latest and greatest tech tools. At times these conversations end as both parties decide we will agree to disagree. Yet, even though I honestly don't know if using technological resources ultimately improves a student's education, I don't think it can be ignored that now there are more tools available for learner's than ever before. As we further evolve, this trend will continue, as it is human nature to learn what we know from the past to drive ourselves forward for the future. Without doing our best to at least develop an awareness of technological tools, educators will be leaving out a large part of our culture in their classroom. When talking to reluctant users, many are fearful that technology is being used as a replacement for education. This is not the case. Bloom's taxonomy is still a prevalent part of the education, it just looks and is acted out different than some are used to, and this develops discomfort. Referencing Reeves again, using technology in education is part of a culture, but the practice is still the "sum of past experiences. It was through the MAET program that I was able to learn this about myself and the practice of teaching in the 21st century. This in

mind, I don't know if I have found my destination, but when I do, I definitely have a clearer idea of how to get there.