

Closing Time

by Benjamin Oberdick

As I look back over my last five years of taking classes in the MAED program, I am struck by the variety of classes I have taken, and the impact these classes have had on my understanding of teaching and learning, and in particular their contribution and influence on my work as a teacher and librarian at MSU. I came into the program wanting to be a better teacher when I emerged on the other end, and I think that my coursework has allowed me to accomplish this mission. I also wanted to get a better understanding, and grasp, on using technology effectively, efficiently, and in a pedagogically-appropriate manner, and I think that my focus on technology in my MAED coursework has allowed me to do this.

When I began the MAED program, I was someone who was comfortable and confident in their use of technology for personal use, but I had not used, or done much with, technology in my teaching. Two courses that really helped me to understand the use, benefits and importance of technology in education, were CEP 818 and CEP 817. One of my major takeaways from these technology-focused courses was that it is not sufficient or adequate to just use technology as an add-on to what you are already doing in the classroom, but instead how important it is to really integrate technology into your instruction in an efficient, effective, and pedagogically-appropriate manner. Learning about the framework where you can make this happen (TPACK), has become a foundation of my instructional design principles and is a key ingredient in any lesson, activity, class, or course I teach. I have also been able to share the principles of TPACK with other colleagues and teacher-librarians which has had a big impact on the way they teach and plan their lessons. TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) has helped me to be able to identify the different forms of knowledge required to integrate technology into my instruction/teaching and to get over the hurdle of being able to effectively and efficiently incorporate technology into my teaching while simultaneously making sure it is done in a pedagogically sound manner. I very much wanted to avoid opting for the easy way out where technology is incorporated into a class as simply an add-on to what someone is already doing, but rather as the integral and key part of any activity, lesson or plan that it actually is. By taking these classes, I have been able to more fully understand the importance of three different forms of teacher knowledge (Content Knowledge (CK), Pedagogy Knowledge (PK), & Technology Knowledge (TK)), and to feel confident effectively adding technology into my teaching. TPACK has allowed me to understand and negotiate the relationships between these three components of knowledge.

Before becoming a librarian, I taught third grade for a few years in the Raleigh, North Carolina area and also worked as a Teacher of English as a Foreign Language with the Peace Corps in the Slovak Republic. These teaching experiences fit well with my educational background as an Elementary and Early Childhood Education major during my undergraduate education, which consisted of a lot of coursework in Educational Psychology and others that focused on “how to teach.” Many of these classes were geared toward K-6 students and focused on things like creating lesson plans, writing learning outcomes, maintaining a secure, safe, and productive classroom, dealing with classroom management issues, etc. Having this core knowledge and background in education has been very helpful for me in my career as a librarian since the main focus of my job is teaching information literacy classes for students in a First Year Writing class. Many of the things I learned during my undergraduate education have easily transferred to my current teaching situation, and it has also helped my colleagues who also teach but may not have any background in education (like many higher education faculty) since I can share some of these things with them, but since the focus of my education was on teaching in the K-6 world, I was very excited to be able to take some courses in my MAED program that would focus, and more easily apply, to the students I currently teach. As such, I was very excited to take EAD 866 and CEP 802 during my program.

EAD 866: Teaching in Postsecondary Education was a very important course for me. This class allowed me to really focus on teaching and what I was doing in my new teaching environment of working with college students. I really needed to make that switch in my mind so that I was thinking of who my students were, what kinds of things I would be teaching in my librarian position, and to put my teaching in the context of information literacy instead of thinking of the type of curriculum I taught as a classroom teacher. I really enjoyed, and learned a lot from, the reading, activities, and writing we did for this course. Two of the projects that had the biggest impact on my thought processes and work were the Teaching Philosophy Statement and the Individual Teaching Analysis. Being a student and practitioner of reflection, it was very helpful for me to reflect on my teaching and how and why I do things through different assignments and activities. The Individual Teaching Analysis allowed me to analyze a class that I had recently taught and to critically reflect on how, and why, I did things, and to think about changes I may make in the future, which I have done so since. The teaching philosophy statement was also very impactful because while I had already written a teaching philosophy statement before, and was well-versed in their importance and use to any teacher, I was not able to write one in my new teaching situation, was very important and helpful to me. This assignment allowed me to examine my teaching in relation to information literacy and my current teaching situation where I teach one-shot sessions (meaning that students come to the library for a class one-time and we need to “cover everything” that they will need in order to write their research

papers), thus making it very different from my previous statements on my teaching philosophy. Below is an excerpt from my statement:

...I think students learn best when they are actively engaged. They have been treated as passive vessels to be filled for too long and we must change the game, and our expectations, for students in our classes. By making the classroom a learner-centered environment and changing our expectations of what students will actually do in our classes, we shift the onus for learning onto the students and give them a larger stake in the process. I believe that students learn by doing and by being allowed to have a natural process of discovery. Students have become passive learners because we have forced them to; we've talked at them for their whole lives and just expected them to listen and learn from it, but it hasn't worked well. Students need to be actively engaged in the process of learning in order to learn the problem-solving, critical thinking and information-processing skills they will need to be successful lifelong learners. I use a few different active learning techniques, tools and strategies in my classes like clickers and the Cephalonian Method and I am continually trying new things and looking for new ideas and approaches to take. These tools are not only fun for the students during class, but a valuable learning experience. I believe in continuing my own education as much as possible. I fully embrace the lifelong learning goal and plan to continue engaging in professional development activities until my time as an educator ends. I believe that a teacher is never perfect and is always able to learn and improve in their teaching..

I have had a great "ride" through the MAED program. It has had it's ups and downs over the five years I have been taking classes in the program, but overall I have learned a lot about myself as teacher, how to incorporate and effectively use technology in my instruction, and I know that I have come out the other side as a better teacher. I am passionate about teaching, working with students in our information literacy classes, maintaining an engaged and active classroom where students can work to construct their own knowledge and where they are not treated as empty vessels waiting to be filled by me. I don't know if I will ever continue with a formal educational program in the future, especially now that I will have two graduate degrees, but I do know that I will never stop striving to be a better teacher, and that I will continue learning and improving for the rest of my career and life.