

A Long Look in the Mirror

*“A great accomplishment shouldn't be the end
of the road, just the starting point for
the next leap forward.”
Harvey Mackay*

Throughout life I have found that the most frequent question is the infamous one word conversation sparker (or moment killer). Why? Why this or why that? We have all heard it and have all equally have been as guilty of asking this pesky question. Is it because we are all inquisitive at heart searching for all of the knowledge we can obtain or is simply just a reflex question? Regardless of why we ask it is important to note that asking questions is a crucial aspect of life. That asking questions is OK. Asking questions is something we all partake in since “terrible two’s” and the “Why?” phase.

Why is this important? Why even bring this up? In the fall of 2013 I graduated from Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania with a Bachelor degree in Early Childhood Education. (I bet you could guess my favorite question to ask my professors, resident assistants and coaches!) In the spring of 2014 I accepted my first job teaching 5th grade in Raeford, North Carolina. I’m a city boy. Born and raised. Going to the rural area of Raeford, population of 5,000, was quite the adjustment. Regardless of circumstance, I was eager to get started with my first year of teaching. However, I am not a person of contentment or mundane experiences. I am eager and persistent. I am driven and goal oriented. So why stop there? I chose, in my first year of teaching, to apply to the Master of Art of Educational Technology (MAET) program of Michigan State University. A decision that undoubtedly changed who I am not only as a professional but also as a leader. It was during my time in the MAET program that I learned just how important that infamous question is.

I have seen numerous videos and articles of people that have written notes to their past selves describing the roller coaster of emotions and a list of things not to worry about. Looking back at the previous 3 years I certainly would have some stern conversations with past Glen. In the beginning of the MAET program I was riding the high of beginning my adult life. I shrugged off most hardships and kept mostly to myself. After a month of full time Masters courses and my first teaching job with no resources for curriculum I received a slap in the face I like to call: The Reality Slap. This slap was cognizant of the MAET program. Not a literal slap in the face but more in the eye opening “Hey, pay attention to this” kind of way. Looking back over the past three years it is very clear what this illustrious program has taught me.

1. Ask questions. Ask questions about everything. Ask everyone. Ask them twice. Ask them until you are blue in the face because you can never learn enough.
2. Technology is no substitute. Technology can be an effective and creative tool if used correctly.
3. Learning is not a why question. Learning is not a what question. Learning is a **HOW** question.
4. Step Up. **Be a leader.**

I began the program a skeptic. I was interested in seeing if an online learning environment was something I could be successful in. After long talks with a few go-to mentors I was feeling far from confident about my choice. **Thankfully my mentors and I were proven wrong.** Michigan State’s MAET program showed me the true meaning of a digital learning environment. There are no judges. No jurors. No one looking to smite you at your first mistake. Everyone I came across, instructors and students alike, were nothing but gracious people always willing to help at the drop of a hat. It was that help that taught me one of the most important lessons I learned during the program. Ask when you don’t know the answer. Ask for

help from people that have been there already. Ask and ask again because at some point someone else was in your shoes wandering helplessly for assistance. It was this philosophy that really grabbed my attention and made me the learner I am today. It became clear that asking questions does not show weakness but rather strength. Asking questions and trying to deeply understand the meaning of the answer down to the roots is a skill that not only helped me as a learner but as an educator as well.

After a while, it became clear that I was going to learn some *really* cool technology tools. With all the work I completed I came across a few wonderful and useful tools. However, it was mostly by reading other posts, blogs, or snippets from other classmates that opened the door to new tech tools. In the beginning of the program I had ambitions to use every one from Kazena, Piktochart and PopcornMaker to new Maker Education kits I had been tinkering with. I was confident that I could integrate them into my classroom with no hesitation. (Yet again another stern conversation to have with past me). The MAET program does more than open the doors to tech tools. Over the last three years I have learned the importance of using technology the **RIGHT WAY**. It is one thing to use technology in your classroom and another to use it correctly, efficiently and effectively. Throughout my studies I came across a wide range of acronyms and studies that detailed the right way to use technology in the classroom. We discussed two main models: [TPACK](#) (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) [SAMR](#) (Substitution, Augmentation, Modification, Redefinition) With this knowledge I was able to integrate technology into my classroom in ways that improved instruction.

My journey through the MAET program is full of uncovering things that are right in front of your face. I know this may seem confusing so let me explain. Learning is a concept that I am all too familiar with as an educator. Everyone in the program most likely could tell you the definition of learning and it would sound exactly the same...right? Not quite. Uncovering what learning really means was the heart of the program. I

have always seen learning as, “Ok, what do I need to learn next?” The MAET program aims to challenge the mind in a way that we don’t always see the obvious questions right in front of us. One of my favorite assignments throughout the program was a simple, yet eye opening experience. Over a few weeks in a course called CEP 812 Apply Educ Tech to Practice we were asked to look at the word learning under a microscope. Deep and detailed examination was essential to understanding the assignment. Learning is not a what question. I learned that the more important question is HOW learning takes place. If an educator can figure out how each and every student learns than instruction becomes more clear and concise. The learning about learning did not stop there. CEP 800 Learning in School & Other Settings and CEP 818 Creativity in Teaching & Learning transformed my philosophy of teaching. Knowing the answers to the “How?” has transformed my teaching philosophy in a way that puts a student centered philosophy into effect whereas in the past it was teacher centered. This transformation is not possible without the simple task, “Define Learning.”

In a program revolving around technology I was pleasantly surprised to find that leadership was a huge component of the program. I like to think that I flourish in leadership roles. Throughout highschool and college I was the captain of numerous sports teams. I was the president of my residence hall. After six months of my first year of teaching a member of my team relinquished her role as grade level chair and I stepped into that role happily. When I tell friends, family or colleagues that I am enrolled in Educational Technology courses they hardly ever ask about the leadership entailed. One particular class, Technology and Leadership (CEP815) spoke volumes to how important leadership is. Being a leader often means leading by example. Since this program began I have created three Google Classroom environments from scratch (add four more for other teachers), created an ongoing blog about the educational technology field, created a twitter account to partake in conversations, and accepted a role of technology administrator in my school. I created professional development

sessions, led workshops, and mentored other beginning teachers in using technologies. The MAET program instilled deep confidence in my abilities, attitude, and leadership capabilities.

The MAET program should take pride in the atmosphere it has created. Never have I felt so comfortable with people that I have never, nor will ever, meet. I was able to do miraculous things in what seemed like impossible deadlines. I read numerous novels and countless studies. I was challenged to reflect and react. I was given lifelong advice and inspired by what others were able to create. I was astonished with my own abilities whilst looking in the mirror and thinking, "Wow, I did this." The MAET program experience I will never forget. With the help of many fellow graduate students, inspiring instructors, and excellent teaching assistants I am able to say boldly and confidently that I am a better leader, learner, educator, and person after this program.