

With a Grateful Heart

By Sarah Kramer

Starting my Master of Arts in Education (MAET) program, I was filled with many emotions - mostly excitement. I was excited to dive into graduate level classes, to read impactful educational research, to write fluently about my ideas, develop a fluency in education technology tools, and to go to Ireland for a summer semester. Now that I approach my graduation date, that emotion remains. The excitement, however, has shifted. Instead of a burning desire to start my first class, I am excited at the idea of putting all that I have learned into action. Recently, I took a new position in my company to be an Instructional Leader to colleagues, as well as manage the development and updating of our project-based learning curriculum. My work in my master's program has given me the knowledge and the confidence to step into this role feeling secure, as well as feeling eager to continue to grow.

I participated in the Global Educators' Cohort Program during my undergraduate experience at Michigan State University, which fueled my desire to travel and learn from different cultures and places. Back in 2014, I went to Italy and studied at the American University of Rome for a spring semester. While I did not take formal education courses there, this was arguably the most impactful experience of my undergraduate career. I had to learn to adapt to somewhere new, break down a language barrier, find my way around a new city, make friends as I came with none, and, most importantly, I had to find myself. Returning to Michigan State my junior year, I enrolled in my more formal teaching classes to learn about developing literacy, teaching mathematics, hands-on science, classroom management, and more. Each day in my classroom, I aim to infuse these practical skills I learned in school, apply the knowledge I have gained through experience with fantastic colleagues, and bring other parts of the world inside our four walls.

I have taught for four years post-student teaching: one in Colorado Springs, Colorado, one in Copperas Cove, Texas, and one fully remotely for an online private school - all fourth grade. Over the past four years, my students have taught me a great deal and brought immense joy to my life. Helping my young students become readers so they can be successful in a career, practice mathematics so they can be successful problem solvers, learn social studies from diverse perspectives so they can be critical thinkers, and engage in hands-on science experiences so they can be curious is my absolute passion. It drives me to get up each day. Now, with the new job managing the development of curriculum, I am excited to impact even more lives than only the ones inside my classroom. Thinking about the curriculum I work on, and making it relevant, rigorous, and accessible, being used across the United States, and even throughout the world, is exciting.

After my second year of teaching, I decided to continue my education and pursue my master's degrees with Michigan State University once again. Going to Ireland with the MAET program was a thrilling prospect - I could grow in a professional learning network of educators while also experiencing some of the same exciting challenges and growth opportunities I had during my previous study abroad experience. Sadly, spending a summer learning in Ireland was no longer an option due to the coronavirus pandemic. Although disappointing, it was an opportunity to practice

flexibility (a crucial skill that educators can always improve upon). I also looked at this as a gift of time. I had to push classes from the summer semester in Ireland to be taken throughout the year, I added a certificate in K-12 Computer Science to my master's degree. This trio of courses, more than anything, pushed me out of my comfort zone and made me grow as a learner, educator, and programmer. It was such a valuable experience to return to being a student again and struggling with new content as I can empathize with my students in their learning experience more readily. I have also already had the chance to share some coding lessons and introduce my students to using Scratch throughout a project-based learning unit I implemented, and my students blew me away. Seeing what I learned in my courses be applicable to my work, and seeing my students be so successful was such a joy. Read more about my specific experience in CEP 833, Creativity in K-12 Computing Education, below. I have found other chances to implement lessons I have designed throughout my MAET experience, as well, such as "Curating Adaptations" using Padlet, an "Ultimate Computer Science" lesson plan introducing coding concepts, and a data lesson where students gathered data and analyzed their carbon footprints. I have already been able to see some fruits of my learning in MAET, and I know that it won't stop there. Finding my learning in MAET so relevant to my career has been exciting and reassuring that I made the best choice for me in choosing this path.

Lastly, MAET implemented an ungrading policy early on in my time as a student. Ungrading has forced me to shift my mindset when completing assignments from, "How many points will I earn/lose?" to "How can I show what I've learned, take a risk, and grow as a learner and an educator?" Although sometimes stressful for me as a historically A/4.0 student, this has been an overall very healthy change for me and has fostered my growth in the field of education. While it is not possible for me to overhaul my school's grading policy (yet, maybe one day), I have found ways to offer my students more timely, meaningful feedback like that that I receive through ungrading instead of just a number atop a paper, as well as offering opportunities for iteration and revision as growth rather than remediation.

Earning my master's degree required thirty post-graduate credits. To see all courses that I took during my time in my master's program, visit my annotated transcript page. Below, you can read in more detail about three specific courses that were particularly impactful throughout my MAET program. I am so grateful for the learning opportunities these courses presented, as well as the instructors who guided me through them.

CEP 833: Creativity in K-12 Computing Education

By far my favorite and the most impactful class I took was "Creativity in K-12 Computing Education." Due to the coronavirus pandemic, I was unable to travel abroad to Ireland for a summer semester. I took this gift of time to add a certificate in K-12 Computer Science to my master's degree. The first course in this triad was this CEP 833 course. In the course, I learned about a variety of coding platforms to use with kids (Scratch, Trinket, micro:bit, etc), considered how to integrate coding projects into my core curriculum, and added to my knowledge of coding practices and terminology. More than that, though, I failed. I got stuck. I was frustrated... A lot. Writing papers and lesson plans are things I am used to doing and can do efficiently, but jumping into the Scratch platform to create a student example in seven days? Not so easy for me. This experience and these feelings have made

me a better teacher to be empathetic with my students and allows me to predict some of the misconceptions they may have. Additionally, my instructor was incredible. He artfully allowed me to struggle, yet gave guidance just at the right time to help me along. His feedback was timely and specific, pointing out both glows and grows. Not only did I learn a great deal from his course, I had an impeccable role model to observe a talented teaching craft from. Check out my [profile on Scratch](#) to find a variety of projects I created for CEP 833, as well as projects I have worked on for myself and with my students since then.

CEP 810: Teaching for Understanding with Technology

My first class in my Master of Arts in Education (MAET) program was CEP 810, “Teaching for Understanding with Technology,” and it made a lasting impact on me for a multitude of reasons. It was my first graduate level course (aside from my graduate level student teaching courses, but that feels like a lifetime ago now), and I was excited to rise to the challenge. I regularly blogged about my learning and experiences, I attempted to learn to play the guitar through a networked learning project, and I [burst my “filter bubble”](#) by exploring [Twitter](#) and other educational social media. I love to write, and blogging felt like such a great creative, yet academic outlet, so the course was a good fit for me from the get go. The unit where we were asked to explore accounts with opposing viewpoints from our own was difficult in some ways, but it is something that truly stuck with me. I continue to follow accounts that do not necessarily align with all of my beliefs so that I can have a more well-rounded understanding of diverse perspectives. This is something I have shared and discussed with family and friends, too, and it has definitely helped me to grow and mature as a critical thinker and person. Sadly I have not continued to play guitar, but [learning to play part of an Ed Sheeran song](#) was a fun, challenging, and memorable experience. Lastly, we explored the not-so-exciting-but-very-important topic of [copyright and attribution](#). In my current job managing curriculum development, this knowledge has been crucial every day. I am grateful to CEP 810 for teaching me about policies and procedures related to adhering to acceptable copyright guidelines.

CEP 811: Adapting Innovative Technologies in Education

The course “Adapting Innovative Technologies in Education” (CEP 811) taught me about a variety of topics, particularly including [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) pedagogy. In my current position as an elementary teacher, Instructional Leader, and managing curriculum development projects, UDL is something I consider each day. I have taught my developers the importance of providing multiple means of representation, such as a text explanation and an embedded video. We also look for opportunities to include voice and choice and to meaningfully engage our students. My knowledge of UDL has been helpful in my own work and in mentoring other educators. We also talked a lot about failure, and the importance of failing in learning. This course helped me become more comfortable with sharing an imperfect product and asking for feedback or trying something new and learning that I did it all wrong. It helped me become more “okay” with feeling like I failed, as well as improved how I approached “failure” with my students. This lens has helped me view my teaching as more iterative and feedback driven than evaluative. One task in particular that was a lot of fun, as well as something I learned a great deal from, was exploring [Circuit Stickers from Chibitronics](#). I was able to combine my love for art with my love for science in exploring circuit stickers, and then I finished the exploration by

creating a lesson for my students. I designed an experience for students to learn about constellations and demonstrate their knowledge using Circuit Stickers. I look forward to implementing the lesson if I return to teaching in person one day.

Looking back on my experience in the MAET program, I have become a more critical thinker, a more-well rounded human, and a more informed educator. I am so excited to continue to grow more as a learner, educator, and educational technology leader.