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Someone once told me, most teachers leave the education profession within the first five years of their career. I don't know factual statistics about beginning teachers and I don't know if this person had any truth to what they told me. What I have learned is teaching is hard. It's hard to watch a student body mourn the death of one of their own and have no way to take their pain away. It's hard to watch your coworker go on trial for an inappropriate relationship with one of your students. It's hard to see your friends laid off and not called back because the school can't afford to keep so many on staff. It's hard to stay focused and positive about the profession that gets hit after hit in the media and the government. I got to a point where I was just going through the motions, early in my profession, just surviving day after day. I was a dumping ground for students who had nowhere else to go. I was a video that was just buffering, waiting for the next part to start. This is the story of how enrolling in a Master's program pushed me through the buffering stage and I was able to press play.

I spent five years studying to be an art teacher and I spent thousands of dollars. I had very high student loan payment reminding me on a monthly basis of those two things as well. I didn't want to give up on teaching; I loved working in a school and teaching art to children. In the back of mind I couldn't shake the thought that maybe I should be doing something else. I wasn't unhappy, I was content in the career but I wanted more from my career. Wanting more did not necessarily mean a different position; I just needed to restart, to get out of the buffering.

In the fall of 2012 I enrolled in the Educational Technology certificate program at Michigan State University. A friend of mine was in the program and told me to check it out. I knew I needed to take a few courses for my certification renewal, so after reading over all the information online I decided to give it a shot and signed up for two courses. That first semester I took CEP 810: Teaching Understanding with Technology with Jodi Spicer and Melissa White. The course was like an overview of what educational technology can offer and it opened my eyes to a whole new world of teaching. I saw a glimpse of what the field of educational technology was and what it could mean for my teaching. I was introduced to technology I never saw as a teaching tool and began seeing the need to incorporate the technology our students already use into the classroom. I found that excitement I had when I first started teaching, that enthusiasm and drive to push my students and myself to do better. The start of my MSU career ignited my career as an art educator.

CEP 810 not only introduced me to the technology but taught me the importance of teaching students about their digital footprints, and to be aware of the dangers of the internet. Sadly, students think they are immune to the threats we teach about and have the “it will never happen to me” mindset. In my personal growth plan written for CEP 810 I stated, I wanted to become more comfortable using technology for educational purposes as well as assist my students in becoming better prepared for a digital world. The goal I set for myself by the end of the educational technology program at MSU was to be a confident educational technology resource for my classroom and school. I can proudly say I have met my goal and expectations for myself within the program with the help of my professors and peers.

After that first semester, my outlook on teaching began to change. I was still a dumping ground for students, we have had more heartaches and hardships but I remembered why I decided to become a teacher. I love working with students. I love sharing my love and knowledge of the arts, pushing students to be more creative, and my newly found joy integrating technology into the classroom. The Educational technology program sparked that excitement in my teaching and now that my time in the program is over, I will not stop learning about educational technology practices and lose that spark in my classroom and teaching.

I decided to enroll in the Master's of Educational Technology program at Michigan State. I was positive after the first semester I wanted to continue this educational journey. I also decided to take the entire program online. The courses I took the first semester were very organized and I didn't feel I was missing anything crucial to my educational by taking the courses online. The professors throughout the program require and encourage interaction with our peers and teaching staff in order to get a true educational experience, and because of this I have connected with educators across the nation and the world. During one course I had a video conference with a teacher in South Africa. How amazing is that? My experience as an online learner has modeled the incredible impact educational technology can have in my classroom.

In the fall of 2012 I was enrolled in the course, Learning in Schools and Other Settings (CEP 800) taught by Danah Henriksen. In this course I grew tremendously as an educator. I began implementing meaningful technology based lessons into my teaching on an everyday basis. I had a Smart Board installed in my classroom and was diving into the educational technology realm. I understood the need for effective technology that impacts the quality of

the lesson. Throwing a You Tube video into the mix is not what educational technology is, don't get me wrong You Tube videos can be awesome, but making sure the technology creates a meaningful connection to the learning that's Ed-tech.

Being a part of the MSU Educational Technology program I was able to look at my classroom and my methods and better my classroom for my students. I teach art, we paint, draw and sculpt. There are many aspects of my teaching that will not "go digital" but the learning process for the students have improved because of technology. I am able to publish elementary artwork to the world within the matter of a few minutes, students can connect with working artists through message boards, and together we can visit the Louvre with a virtual tour.

During the summer semester of 2013 I took CEP 820: Teaching Students Online. This course was one of the most practical courses I took during my time at MSU. I actually created an online course using an online educational platform. The lectures and coursework fully prepared me to be an online educator. I feel confident with the completion of the course as well as my experience as an online student I am capable of being a successful online teacher. The teaching staff in the Ed-tech program at MSU has been amazing models of educational technology in action. I have learned from the lectures, communication, videos, and coursework practical, successful teaching practices within educational technology teaching online and in the classroom.

One of the most influential courses I took as a student at Michigan State was CEP 818: Creativity in Teaching and Learning. Creativity is my thing; it's who I am. One of the reasons I became a teacher was to ignite creativity in children. I wanted to be the person that opened

them up to new ideas and creative expression. I was excited to begin CEP 818, I couldn't wait. After the course began I realized that when it came to creativity in teaching and learning I had so much to learn. The course introduced me to the seven cognitive tools that can alter the teaching and learning inside your classroom to promote more creative students. The seven tools are: perceiving, patterning, abstracting, embodied thinking, modeling, playing & synthesizing.

CEP 818 was broken down into sessions like every other online course in the program, each session focused on one of the seven cognitive tools mentioned above. The lectures, readings and coursework intrigued me and required me to deepen my thinking on creativity in the classroom. It gave me new tools to enhance my students learning and tools to enhance my delivery of information. I was able to take lessons that I have taught in the past and revise them to better provide for my students. I was a creative person but CEP 818 made me a creative thinker. Creative thinkers are the people who bring us new technologies, new inventions, new product designs, new theater and music. I cannot think of a better way to educate my students than encouraging them to become creative thinkers.

My entire experience in the Ed-tech program has impacted my life as a creative thinker. I take the information given to me in my courses and find a way to successfully integrate it into my teaching. Teachers have to be creative thinkers; we have to be inventors, designers and innovators. As I mentioned earlier my time at MSU has allowed me to interact with other teacher. We are able to use one another to analyze, create, and reflect on educational practices or tools. Having a support group of creative thinkers to problem solve educational issues is a

huge asset and due to social networking and Web 2.0 tools we will always have access to one another and other creative educational technology teachers across the world.

As a teacher in this technological world we can blog, post, tweet, like, follow, and lead are way to a successful educational environment for our students. We can reach out to one another and continue our learning after we have left MSU. One of the greatest aspects of all this technology is the fact that we have access so much free education. There is always teaching and learning ready to take place. In my classroom and my personal life I am constantly using Google and You Tube to learn how to do new things. My students come to me with new project ideas they found on Pinterest the night before, and many times I try to find a way to work them into the curriculum. Technology has allowed us to create learning environments outside our classroom walls.

I am an educator. I am confident that is who I am. I am very good at what I do and I am always looking to be better. I will continually educate myself to better the education of my students. My experience at Michigan State has equipped me with the tools to be a better learner and a better teacher. I am a lifelong learner. I am a creative thinker. My future as an Ed-tech learner is only beginning. I will continue implementing educational technology practices in my classroom, follow social media platforms, educational blogs, collaborate with the educators in my school, continue professional development with webinars and conferences, and keep up with the latest in education. My time at MSU is ending; it is now time to push play on the next part of my professional journey.