

## Learning the Spartan Way Meagan Provines

I loved my undergraduate time at Michigan State University and specifically my fifth-year student teaching internship teaching high school government and civics. Michigan State University is the only university in Michigan and one of few across the nation to require all teacher candidates to complete a **full academic-year internship** in a K-12 school before receiving their teacher certification. I love that I spent Monday through Thursday student teaching and then on Friday all the Michigan State University interns had the opportunity to gather and discuss our experiences. The classes we attended on Fridays were graduate level courses TE 803 Professional Roles and Teaching Practice II and TE 804 Reflect and Inquiry in Teaching Practice II. Throughout these courses I collaboratively worked with other social studies interns about pedagogical and content related problems. Subsequently, we grew close as a group and I still keep in touch with many of the other Michigan State University students that were in my 5th year internship.

I enjoyed my time at Michigan State University's College of Education so much so that I knew that eventually I would complete my masters at Michigan State University as well. My graduate level courses throughout my 5th year student teaching prepared me for me for my graduate studies. There was no question where I wanted to continue my education because Michigan State University always prides itself on being the **best education school** in the country. Graduate study in the areas of both elementary and secondary education at Michigan State University has ranked No. 1 in the nation for 20 consecutive years, according to the U.S. News & World Report [ranking of education graduate programs](#). Through my continued contact with other MSU internship alums, I was able to get first hand recommendations about the Masters of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) Program. My friends enjoyed the overall technology experience and not simply focusing on one technology tool. As well as, the interconnectedness of technology, pedagogy and content. This background knowledge is essential for understanding why educational technologies are impactful for student engagement and achievement throughout any classroom.

The MAET program has been a great learning experience. Even though I knew friends who had completed the MAET degree, I fully did not understand what I was getting myself into. My video application stated that my main goal was to learn how to implement tablets into my classroom. I have learned much more than tablets throughout the past 18 months of my graduate studies. During the 2014 Spring Semester I was enrolled in CEP 812 Applying Education Technology to Issues of Practice with William Marsland and Michelle Schira Hagerman. This course focused on a range of technologies to address teaching and education-related problems.

Early on in the class we read James Paul Gee's book *The Anti-Education Era*. The book is about how our mind, culture and current education approach fail to make us smarter. Why are people stupid? What limitations prevent us from solving big, complex problems smartly? I specifically

looked at the problem of time and patience in our modern day, instant-gratification world. It is hard for humans to solve big complex problems smartly because many institutions often “freeze” a solution to a problem. The solution was good originally but gets to be less and less good as circumstances (and the problem) change. Once a solution is frozen, it takes lots of work to unfreeze it. People do not take the time to unfreeze problems and prior solutions. Once a solution is frozen, it takes lots of work to unfreeze it.

At Osbourn High School, we have a new principal this year. She is trying to “unfreeze” many of our out-dated systems to create a better long-term working school. In an effort to “unfreeze” some systems, the school is transitioning to Professional Learning Communities (PLC). One of the major components of a PLC is the Collaborative Learning Team (CLT). The CLTs are subject-based for the most part and are charged with looking at data, collaborating to develop curriculum, and remediating when student learning does not occur and team goals are not achieved. The CLT process takes time. In the beginning, teachers at my school were resistant to the CLTs teachers did not want to share their test data in fear of showing the content areas they as teachers are weak in. The individual teachers’ fear of thinking limited the group from solving problems collaboratively and intelligently.

Congruently while reading James Paul Gee, I worked with a group to tackle one of the frozen or wicked problems in education. My group decided to **reimagining** teaching in the 21st century through project-based learning. My group created a Blendspace. This was my first time creating a Blendspace and I instantly saw all the affordances of this multimedia presentation medium. This was a great collaborative learning experience as all of my group members lived in different states and countries. Doing an online masters I was unsure how much I would interact and get to know the other students. I have been pleasantly surprised with the amount of group work and constant peer feedback. I appreciated using Google Drive and Hangout to collaborate with my group members. This is another strategy that I used that I have translated into my own classroom. In June 2014, I had my World Geography students use Google Drive to collaboratively work on a group monument project. I love that several of the new technology tools I used as a graduate student can easily translate into my own classroom for my students.

During the 2014 Summer Semester I was enrolled in CEP 800 Psychology of Learning in School and Other Settings taught by Josh Rosenberg. Throughout the semester, I learned how to use several different new technologies while congruently learning how students learn. I enjoyed this course because I was learning how to use technology with the **student’s learning** in mind. The focus was less on myself and more on the students I would be teaching.

There were several great assignments throughout that semester. I learned several new technology mediums including making a video, digital storytelling and an audio file. The audio file was a project where I had interviewed my students to understand their understanding. As I listened to my student understanding interview, I realized interviewing about culture was difficult because of what culture is, it can be so many different things: where you live, your job, religion, conflicts with others. My student did a great job of giving a general description of culture but had a hard

time describing the specific aspects of culture because there are so many different factors of culture and so many different cultures in the world. Being able to reflect on how students learn allows me to reflect how I am teaching students. I came to the realization that it does not matter how I taught the lesson or how many different ways I differentiated, the only thing that matters is student learning. I think this is where many teachers face obstacles. They are more concerned with their teaching rather than student learning. This is one of the many obstacles faced while analyzing data in the CLT.

I not only learned about my student's understanding but also learned how to create an audio file using Audacity. The assignment was a perfect example for all my learning throughout the MAET program. The assignment was daunting in the beginning because I have never used Audacity previously but when I was finished, I was proud of my final product and excited that I added another technology tool to my **instructional tool box**. As I fill this toolbox, I am finding new ways for my students to demonstrate their learning. I realized that that all the ways that I was assessed on my learning is the same way that I can assess my students' understanding in my content. I look forward to teaching my students how to use Audacity for a unit review project.

I also liked the wide range of assignments throughout CEP 800 Psychology of Learning in School and Other Settings. In addition to the Audio File, I also created my first digital storytelling video regarding the Social Constructivist Theory. The assignments were a unique blend between myself learning content through new technologies as well as how my students learn. I like this blended approach. Many of these assignments were new technologies and they made me uncomfortable; however, I appreciated the push outside of my comfort zone. I feel that my graduate studies has prepared me with a wide variety of technology skills.

Currently, I am enrolled in CEP 815 Technology and Leadership taught by Josh Rosenberg and Leigh Wolf. I am enjoying this course because Osbourn High School just began a 1:1 Initiative. Osbourn High School received money from the Virginia Department of Education to purchase tablets for all incoming freshman and sophomores, approximately 1,1000 students, at the beginning of the 2014-2015 school year. This grant is a part of the E-Backpack 1:1 Initiative. Now, through seven weeks of school, I have had success with the tablets but there still remains several logistical issues: connectivity, troubleshooting, cracked screens, students not bringing the tablets and filtering problems. For me, the main tension was the high expectation and hope the tablets would be the end all be all solution for Osbourn High School and Manassas City Public Schools.

I am appreciative of my educational technology background in order to provide opinions and feedback throughout the E-backpack initiative process. Administrators knew I was pursuing a masters degree in technology and as a result, I was asked for my opinion throughout the E-Backpack initiative and presented to the school board. As a result of strategies and concepts learned in CEP 815 Technology and Leadership, I have been proactive and taken on a **leadership** role throughout this initiative, representing the numerous teachers involved. CEP 815 Technology and Leadership has been a practical learning experience. I appreciate being

able to use my classroom and school problems to learn real ways to support change by becoming a leader at my school through the E-Backpack Initiative. This positive leadership experience allowed me to take other leadership roles at Osbourn High School, I have become a teacher trainer as we have initiated Learning Focused Schools. As well, I am one of the first teachers of a new course: Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID). I have taken the leadership skills I have learned through CEP 815 Technology and Leadership and applied them to become a more active participant in the overall changing culture at Osbourn High School.

Overall, the classes I liked throughout my graduate work were ones that I could **relate** to my own classroom. I liked CEP 812 Applying Educational Technology to Issues of Practice, CEP 800 Learning in School and Other Settings and CEP 815 Technology and Leadership specifically because these classes were relevant to me and had practical application. I did not like classes that I could not relate to and felt like I was simply completing assignments to check boxes.

As my Master of Arts in Educational Technology program is coming to a finish, I do not feel like an expert or a master. Instead, I am just getting started. This program has opened my eyes to many more possibilities. Possibilities in the flipped classroom, possibilities in educational leadership, possibilities in adolescent cognitive development and the role of online learning in that development. But perhaps that was the purpose of this program, to ignite the fire within me for more. I want to know what more I can do in my school to implement and use educational technology. I want to do more research on the role of educational technology on student achievement. In the era of standardized testing, how can educational technology be used to improve and enhance understanding? This program has just scratched the surface of what is to come in my career and I am proud to call myself a **Spartan** graduate for the second time!