Learning Cannot Stop When Classes Do
By Danielle Alexander

As an almost fourth-year teacher, one of the most challenging aspects of teaching thus far has been student motivation. During my first couple years, I could get the majority of students to do their work when it was worth "points". I would give credit for signed syllabi, participation during grammar warmups, and typed rough drafts. I was definitely saddened that not all of my students were motivated by grades, but, as a brand new teacher and someone who always worked hard in school to obtain as many points possible, I did not know what else to do.

Recently, it was brought to my attention that the State of Michigan would not support my decision to fail a student if he or she did, indeed, show evidence of learning. In other words, I could not use students' grades as forms of reward or punishment for "behavioral acts" such as lack of participation, homework, late work, etc. Since I have no choice but to adhere to this policy, I have begun searching for ways in which to motivate students to work purely as preparation for summative assessments or for the simple sake of learning, which is an even much greater battle. Fortunately, I do think that I will have a greater chance of motivating students if I a) Continue teaching the same classes for several years and limit the amount of preps per trimester, b) Implement technology in a meaningful way in order to enhance digital literacy, and c) Begin all curricula in students' "lived lives" (Maxine Greene).

During my first three years of teaching, I have already taught ten different types of classes, some of which taught twice but at different lengths (semesters vs. trimesters, etc.). Although I love learning how to teach a variety of courses, I think I am doing a disservice to both the students and myself, especially since I typically teach three different types of classes at one time. As an English teacher, I am constantly struggling to keep up with the curriculum and grading that finding strategies to improve student motivation, although the most integral part of student learning, is often placed low on my priority list. I am hoping to remain teaching the same classes for the next few years and perhaps reduce the number of types of courses each trimester, so I can build upon prior knowledge, dedicate more time to improving motivation, and grow as a teacher.

Even though I only graduated high school eight short years ago, there is no way I could be an effective teacher if I solely taught the way I was taught. In an article titled "No Longer Luxury: Digital Literacy Can't Wait", Troy Hicks and Kristen Hawley Turner state, "Digital literacy is no longer a

luxury, and we simply cannot wait to build the capacity in our students and colleagues, as well as ourselves". If I had to provide a one-sentence "take-away" from the MAET program, this is it. Through my experience overseas, online, and on the East Lansing campus, I have learned that a true educational technology leader is not one who only implements meaningful technology into their own classroom but rather one who shares this knowledge with all teachers (in and out of the building), so all students will benefit. Digital literacy is a skill that all students will need as they enter higher education, as well as the work force. In order to expand my knowledge in this constantly changing area in the future, I plan to continue pushing myself to attend conferences, reading texts/articles about educational technology, and sharing information with my coworkers, as well as other teachers via social media.

Even with consistent classes/fewer preps and meaningful implementation of technology, I still might not motivate every student, and this is why Maxine Greene's philosophy of beginning curricula in students' "lived lives" is so important. I studied this philosophy during the Red Cedar Writing Project Summer Institute. According to Greene, student motivation and investment will increase if the curriculum is centered on issues of deep concern and interest to them. Not only will I need to learn about my students as individuals, but I will also have to take time to find ways to implement Greene's philosophy while still adhering to my school's curriculum and standards. I look forward to this challenge since I truthfully believe this will motivate my students who seemingly struggle to find value in education.

"Mrs. A, is this points?" is a question that I unfortunately hear often. To me, it reveals that a student's purpose is not necessarily to learn. In the future, however, I want to be able to reply with "No." and an answer that will motivate students to actually want to learn. My years spent in the MAET program have been life-changing, but I know my own learning will not end in August when my classes do.