

## Ready to Confidently Move Out into a New Direction By Danielle Alexander

“There are times when a leader must move out ahead of the flock, go off in a new direction, confident that he is leading his people the right way”. Prior to participating in the [Master’s in Educational Technology \(MAET\)](#) program at Michigan State University, I never considered myself a leader in or out of my career, let alone the type that Nelson Mandela refers to in my opening quote. After growing as an educator and developing a passion for purposeful technology, however, I am beginning to realize my potential as a leader in this field, and even though I now know I am capable of being one, there are necessary steps I will have to continue taking in order to effectively lead others in “a new direction”. In order to be a “confident” leader, I have realized that I need to continue to meaningfully implement technology, teach the same classes for several years and limit the amount of preps per trimester, and begin lessons in students’ “lived lives”. Although my experience in the MAET program as a whole was invaluable, there were three, specific courses that ultimately yielded these conclusions concerning effective digital leadership: [CEP 800](#), [CEP 820](#), and [AL 842](#).

### **CEP 800**

[CEP 800](#), Lrn School & Other Settings, with Emily Bouck and Sean Sweeney was my favorite of the three classes I took in Galway, Ireland, and this was where I learned how to go about meaningfully implementing technology into my lessons. The final assessment of this course was to create a “[DreamIT](#)” ([Dream Instructional Technology](#)) proposal where I was asked to focus on an objective, think about how that objective needed to be taught (using technology) in order to yield learning, and consider what my learners would already be able to contribute. My objective concerned comma usage, particularly in compound and complex sentences, and I used the [TPACK \(Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge\) framework](#) to guide my thinking process and approach to teaching. In using this method, I was forced to see just how vital technology can be if implemented appropriately to my lessons. Prior to learning TPACK, I embarrassingly avoided using technology since I felt it “took away” from content time, but now I realize this was because I was implementing technology just for the simple sake of implementing it. This project truly made me value time spent searching for technologies that are fundamental for whatever my daily learning targets are. Since taking this class, I am constantly applying the TPACK framework to my own lesson planning, as well as all curriculum planning with my Professional Learning Team (PLT). For example, while planning the required Media and

Marketing Unit this past school year with the other ninth grade PLT members in my school, I suggested that we do away with a recommended online poster assignment since I felt that the objective could still be met without spending two days working on computers in the media center; they agreed. If it were not for CEP 800 and learning TPACK, I never would have had the courage to ask my PLT to critically look at the technology component in this unit or in several others since.

### **CEP 820**

[CEP 820](#), Teaching Students Online, with Anne Heintz and Spencer Greenhalgh was my first experience taking an online class, and coincidentally, it taught me how to construct and implement an online class, something that I truly value but struggle to find the time for. Since I like to make my Master's work as applicable as possible to my everyday classroom, I created a required [MAISA Informational Essay Unit](#) using the [flipped-classroom method](#). While taking the course, I was so fascinated with teaching students this way that I attended a flipped classroom workshop provided by [Oakland Schools](#). The workshop only enhanced my curiosity, and, since then, I have created and taught several "flipped" lessons in my own classroom. Although I find significance in the "flipped" format, I already feel so overwhelmed while planning for three or more classes at once, that I struggle to find ways to simply fill the 70-minute class period, let alone spend more time creating work that I would then have to post online for students to complete at home. Within 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.), and when I sit down to lesson plan for each trimester's preps, my kitchen table is covered with the old curriculum, hand-me-down lessons and materials from other department members, the newly required MAISA Units, Common Core State Standards (CCSS), and our district-provided [Classroom Assessment for Study Learning](#) book. Through CEP 820, I learned that if I want to effectively begin "flipping" units or maybe one day even courses and show others how beneficial the "flipped" format is, I will need to know and feel comfortable with my curriculum well enough to do so, which is why 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.

### **AL 842**

[AL 842](#), Writing Workshop for Teachers, also known as the [Red Cedar Writing Project](#) (RCWP) Summer Institute (SI), with Janet Swenson and Dawn Reed was where I studied [Maxine Greene's "lived lives" philosophy](#). I could have the knowledge to meaningfully implement

technology and the time in which to do it, but if I do not teach out of students' "lived lives", motivation will be lost. Student motivation has always been a challenge for me as a teacher since I was one of those students who was easily motivated by grades; I did not want that B+, so I always worked hard to ensure that I had a 90 percent or higher. Although I do have many students (especially my AP English Language and Composition students) who share similar motivations, I still have many students who could not relate. In the RCWP SI, I provided my cohort with a grammar mini-lesson demonstration, specifically focused on compound sentences. I especially chose this topic since the majority of my students do not see the point in learning grammar, especially specific comma rules. For some students, a simple, "It's on the ACT test, and it'll raise your score if you know them." response will suffice, but once again, I still have many students who will refuse to take notes and engage in daily grammar warm-ups. With that said, I ended up extensively studying [Jeff Anderson's \*Mechanically Inclined\*](#) and [Kelly Gallagher's \*Write Like This\*](#), both of which suggest ideas of how to motivate students to learn grammar. For example, instead of having students copy down notes on compound sentences and practice in a drill-like format, I decided to show them the three types of compound sentences in an article concerning advertising, something all of them could relate to in some way. Later in the week, I planned to show them well-known commercials on YouTube advertising familiar products, so that they could write about what they saw using compound sentences. Although strategies such as this would motivate more students than simply mentioning the ACT, still, not all students will see the purpose in reading a variety of sentence types in advertising articles or using them to describe a commercial; situations like these are where Maxine Greene's "lived lives" philosophy best applies. Students who find no value in varying sentence types require a "wideawakeness", and as their teacher, I need to find out what matters most to each student and help them find the audience and purpose that will best suit them and their needs. Janet Swenson provided me with the following scenario in my portfolio feedback, "A student is barely passing, but it appears he is intent on graduating from high school before seeking work in a garage as a mechanic. He is fine with getting C-'s as long as he can pass...Finding out what matters to the student (the state providing scholarships for those entering the field of garage mechanics to get state certified?)...If he hears he has to pass five tests to become state certified, and each one requires \$250 to pass, the proposed focus could be critically important to him because he could monetarily benefit from his success. If you now tell him he will be better received if he has sentence variety in his piece, he is more apt to want to learn how to do this." Through AL 842, I have recognized that motivation like this is truly key to student

achievement, and it must be a priority above all else, including technology, while lesson planning.

Even though I valued each course taken in the MAET program, CEP 800, CEP 820, and AL 842 were the most influential on my journey to becoming a digital leader; luckily, CEP 807, the class in which I am writing this Synthesis Essay for, has provided me the outlet in which to critically reflect on and showcase this journey. As a teacher, writer, and technology leader, there will be countless times in which I will need to take risks but remain confident that I am making the right choice, and MSU's MAET program as a whole undoubtedly prepared me for them.