

## Synthesis: Linking it Together

by Melissa Smith

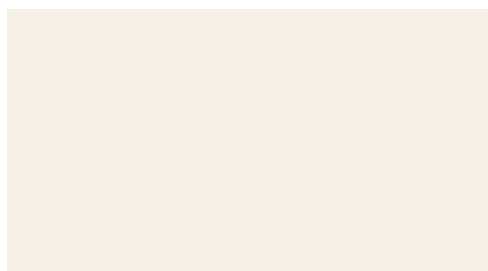
*Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new things.- Steve Jobs*

Learning so much in incremental steps (semesters) through the Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) here at Michigan State University (MSU) allowed me a chance to apply coursework to real life educational scenarios. I feel like this was a crucial piece for me as a graduate student. Learning how this integrates into my teaching as an educator in my Montessori kindergarten classroom and taking what I've learned and incorporating it into action has been of the utmost value to myself and my students.

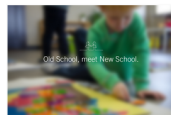
I was excited at how much I was able to weave my Montessori classroom theory in with my MAET coursework. This was evident early into my program, one class I connected with right away was [CEP 800: Learning in School and Other Settings](#). My professor was Melissa White and with her encouraging feedback, she helped me learn and grow with confidence. I went into the MAET program feeling nervous and overwhelmed in the beginning. Melissa was a welcome hopeful and encouraging voice. The software program she had us explore were basic, but as a nervous technology student she

was so patient with me that I took chances and learned so much! Windows Movie Maker, an assignment creating a digital story was one of those such assignments. *Understanding Student Understanding* was the name of the assignment that really put student learning and perspective into place. For this assignment, I had to record myself interviewing a student. The technology tool I used was obviously Windows Movie Maker, a tool I was not familiar with at the time. My podcast turned out well and I took away a new view of technology and it's purpose in the classroom.

Another course that comes to mind as impacting me deeply was [CEP 815: Technology and Leadership](#) with Ben Gleason. It was extremely thought provoking and forced me to think critically in relation to educational leadership styles. This course made a large impact on me as a teacher hoping to move into administration sometime in my career. We studied John Hattie's Six Factors of Influence on Student Achievement; the child, the home, the school, the curriculum, the teacher, and the approaches to teaching. This was a great thought process for any educator to work through, as well as anyone in an administrative position. I learned about the influences technology has on student and how each of Hattie's six factors work hand-in-hand. It was extremely thought provoking to learn about the factors within student achievement in this hierarchy and how it truly affects learning.



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Planning lessons in this course that involve technology, reading data reports, emailing newsletters home, and many more facets of the school/home/staff connection were very eye opening. My Prezi Six Factors creation was about this and I felt motivated to see this pop up on my career front at a professional development day as well as the MAET program. This was a time that I felt like a leader with prior knowledge on the subject in a district wide group. Each assignment I did in [CEP 815: Technology and Leadership](#) was impactful to me in some facet or another.

The comparison between instrumental versus relational understanding is a daily lens to use in education. The introduction to the concepts of missional versus instrumental thinking really makes an

educator think about learning objectives, digging deeper into student understanding and the purpose of instructional time or technology integration. Having a Master of Arts in Educational Technology will play a key role in the development of my own personal leadership skills.

Another course I truly connected with was [CEP 818 Creativity in Teaching and Learning](#) with Dr. Punya Mishra and Jon Good. This is a course that will follow me forever as I enjoyed the philosophical piece immensely. When referring to the TPACK framework, my pedagogical knowledge has improved in relation to not only the readings in Dr. Mishra's class, but in the assignments that applied the philosophy presented. The units within the coursework had relevance to my educational theory and then further made the connection to creative technology projects. Montessori educational theory believes in teaching for a relational understanding. Pencil and paper is the very last step (abstract) when learning. Concrete materials present the concept first. Students create a relational understanding as to the purpose and are able to explain why. The assignments within the MAET program have closely modeled this for me as an adult learner.

Every class was a unique learning experience for me, no matter the title or concept at hand. I feel confident, experienced and resourceful with educational technology, my original goal when I began my MAET coursework here at MSU. My journey as a lifelong learner has been enriched and my educational technology resource base is something I view as the perfect balance of creative and pragmatic in my career. I am truly grateful for this piece of my journey. The learning path for educators is never complete. It is an ever evolving process to be effective in the classroom or in administration.

