

# THERE IS NO END TO EDUCATION: MY SECOND MASTER'S DEGREE- MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY (MAET) MELISSA BROOKS-YIP

*There is no end to education. It is not that you read a book, pass an examination, and finish with education. The whole life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die, is a process of learning. "*

*-Jiddu Krishnamurti*

I believe that one is never “finished” with their education. Knowledge is infinite, and I spend my life gaining as much as I can through life experiences, reading texts of all kinds, and continuing my formal education. After completing my Master of Arts in Curriculum and Teaching (MACT) in 2003 and continuing my career in education, I realized that to stay knowledgeable and in touch about the ever changing world of education, I needed to investigate instruction and practice around literacy, more specifically, how technology influences our reading, writing, speaking, listening, teaching and producing of text.

In my current position as Coordinator of Instruction at Washtenaw Intermediate School District (WISD), I am responsible for supporting literacy instruction across PreK-12th grades. This is an educational leader at the county level and proves to be a rewarding and challenging job, as it is well known that literacy is the heart of every subject area! The [WISD Achievement Initiatives Team](#), of which I am a member, currently has two networks to support secondary literacy instruction based on the Reading Apprenticeship framework and a teacher developed Writing Collaborative. Both are frameworks heavily based on metacognition during reading and writing, building the classroom community and the Gradual Release of Responsibility model, creating student agency. Both focus across all secondary content areas. However, nothing had been organized county wide with a focus on early literacy (PreK-3) with the same principles. With a new position, and a new challenge in front of me, I knew I had to meet the challenge by continuing my education.

*"With words at your disposal, you can see more clearly. Finding the words is another step in learning to see."* - Robin Kimmerer

Having been secondary certified over 14 years ago, and all of my graduate work to date mainly in adolescent literacy, I was missing practical experience and study of early literacy practices. The knowledge gained in [TE 846 with Dr. Patricia Edwards](#) had an immediate impact on my work with teachers and leaders in my newly formed Study of Early Literacy (SOEL) work group beginning in the 2013-2014 school year. With this

practical knowledge of a basic understanding of how children learn to read, and how teachers instruct and assess that, I learned to perform better observations in K-3 classrooms, and have richer conversations with teachers around recent research and practitioner texts on literacy instruction. Previously, I thought of elementary reading assessments as just giving numbers or reading levels, but when looking closely at them, paired with a teacher observing her student as a reader every day, I see how assessment could really impact instruction on a deeper level, and communicate something useful to students and parents.

***“Great schools grow when educators understand that the power of their leadership lies in the strength of their relationships.”*** -

*Donaldson*

In TE 873, Literacy

***Leadership, again, with Dr. Patricia Edwards,*** I learned that a literacy leader cannot lead without creating an atmosphere where collaboration and trust exists and where teachers have a sense of self-efficacy. “A hallmark of leadership is the ability to collaborate with others” (Danielson) could not be a truer statement to me in every role I’ve been in education. This is true whether one is coaching in the classroom, has a leadership position in the building, or leadership across the district or county. In my current position, I still plan my professional development under the belief that teachers should be “expected to be active partners in professional development, not passive recipients” (McKenna and Walpole, 2011). Collaboration with the teachers you lead, instead of being the “all knowing” will allow change of instruction to happen much more smoothly, especially if you are a younger leader or new to the profession/position than the teachers you are leading. I want to position myself as collaborator, rather than authority, and enable teacher colleagues to take some ownership over changes to their practice. If a teacher knows that their experiences and knowledge base is valued and part of improving instruction, and the literacy leader is not placing herself in the position of “all knowing” there is much more room for many minds and lives full of rich experiences in education to influence positive change for improved instruction and student growth.

As a literacy leader, one must work to establish this trust and collaboration with various groups. First, I see that collaboration must exist between the leader and the teachers. This course helped me to think about not only the face-to-face time I have with teacher groups (roughly six hours per group, per month), but how I can supplement that with an online space, which I was able to learn about and create in my CEP courses. I want to work to establish both a face-to-face relationship for our work that continues online.

***“It is only as we develop others that we permanently succeed.”*** - Harvey S. Firestone

As a creator and supporter of teacher networks as professional development, I need to be a model of how one critically evaluates educational research. With the internet being many teachers “go to” on making instructional decisions, the thoughtfulness involved in this process is key. In CEP 822 with Dr. Leigh Graves-Wolf I learned how to critically evaluate educational research in order to make informed decisions about instruction, assessment, curriculum, and teacher professional development. When evaluating research, a critical reader should consider the source of the research- is this author credible? What is his/her background? One also needs to make sure to look at the actual data from the original research and determine the claim the research is making. Often, I’ve seen teachers simply purchase something off of a website like Teachers Pay

Teachers, with no evaluation of the quality or source whatsoever. To foster thoughtful, knowledgeable educators, we must read educational research together, and ask what was measured? What was compared? Who were the students and how many? How much did the treatment help? When reading research, I must always be a model for teachers in that critical reading. We need to stop simply purchasing boxed educational programs where none of these questions are answered for us, but rather read the research ourselves and make thoughtful instructional decisions based upon that. I feel I now have a foundation on which to base my professional development upon.

In [CEP 820 with Dr. Anne Heintz](#), I examined more deeply the possibilities for online learning as an important and effective piece of teacher professional development to supplement my face-to-face time. Teachers are in the classroom with their students for seven hours per day for 180 days per year. With substitute teacher pay costly to districts, and limited time after school to meet face to face, online professional development is a necessary and valuable way to gain pedagogical content knowledge to improve instructional practices.

When online instruction is mixed with face to face, there is a larger advantage to learning than purely online or purely face-to-face. When done well, online learning can give learners control of their interactions with material and peers online and prompt reflection of their learning (Means, et. al, 2009). Online collaboration between staff members or teachers from other areas can result in wide sharing of resources and solving problems around instruction (perhaps through video) to supplement face-to-face instruction (Chickering and Ehrmann, 1996).

Technology can supplement face-to-face professional development for teachers, but it is also necessary for teachers to have professional development on the topic of instructional technology itself. K-12 students are expected to be well versed in digital environments, being able to read and compose digital text, and interact with new technologies. Teachers are expected to lead students in being digitally literate and competent, yet many have a fear of learning new technology. With my combined literacy and technology focus through my MAET studies, I now feel I have the tools I need to teach and motivate teachers to use technology as an instructional tool. I created the [Study of Early Literacy Wikispace](#) as part of CEP 820 for teachers to solidify their understanding of literacy and the elements of early literacy (Modified Cognitive Model) to implement research based, recent best practices (reading, writing, speaking and listening, and producing, while integrating into all subject areas. With this online supplemental space, I also provide teachers with a way to extend their learning and application of practices we learned in our face-to-face time.

***"Education is all a matter of building bridges."*** - Ralph Ellison

CEP 818, Creativity in Teaching and Learning, with Dr. Punya Mishra and Dr. John Good helped me to see my topic of literacy in multiple ways- in ways I never would have examined it on my own. Through traditional methods as well as more modern methods using technology, I began to see that teaching an individual the keys to literacy is a complex task that can be reached with various methods and experiences. One cannot simply hand a child a book, pencil and worksheet and leave it at that. Many experiences should be involved throughout a lifetime if one is to become not only a reader, but someone who lives through reading and writing, can connect to it, visualize, enjoy it, and truly experience the words on the page through all senses.

My work with Drs. Mishra and Good allowed me to connect deeper with my understanding of early literacy- both of how one learns to read and how a teacher instructs this. While many models of teaching show the progression of learning, it does not show *how* a teacher should teach, or the experiences to offer to students to get them through phases of acquiring literacy. In my development of my SOEL group, I work to guide teachers in creating and considering creative thinking tools into their planning for early literacy instruction. My thinking on what literacy means was stretched by allowing me to look at the very basics of how we acquire it, or rather how we apply our cognitive tools of modeling, observing and perceiving, patterning, abstracting, embody and play. Opening my eyes to being creative in these ways with literacy allowed me to approach professional development differently with my teachers. In order to be effective teachers of early literacy, and create a lifelong love of reading, writing, speaking and listening, teachers should consider weaving creative thinking tools into their planning for early literacy instruction. Cognitive tools will bring results in literacy that cannot be seen through teaching methods like lecturing, or sitting in a seat filling out worksheets. The whole literacy learner will be involved if creative tools are applied.

***"Change is the end result of all true learning."*** - Leo Buscaglia

As I complete my MAET, I reflect upon how my professional practice has changed and improved from my experiences and learning with instructors and colleagues in the program. My scope on literacy acquisition and instruction has broadened to include the incorporation of cognitive tools, building relationships with teachers, and guiding them toward critical reading, thinking, and efficacy in their own practice. The understanding and use of technology tools such as Wikspaces to expand my professional development work with teachers has doubled our time learning together. Making educated decisions about how and when to use online tools and making sense of digital literacy for teaching and learning has made all the difference in my professional work in education.

Chickering, Arthur and Stephen C. Ehrmann (1996), "Implementing the Seven Principles: Technology as Lever," *AAHE*

*Bulletin*, October, pp. 3-6.

Means, et. al, (2009), "Evaluation of evidence-based practices in online learning: a meta-analysis of online learning studies".

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