

What's Next? The Beginning of the End

By Dan Winther

A few years ago, I would have been satisfied to learn as much as I have from the Master's in Educational Technology courses. I started out with a vision of myself using some technologies in the classroom to increase both student engagement and achievement. I aimed to incorporate a few of these technologies, tweak them as needed and leave the program with a more comprehensive thinking about what technology in the classroom looked like. However, my departure includes so much more than just a "this is what technology looks like, no do it!" attitude. Instead, I'm leaving with a whole new outlook on where the future leads, as well as the ability to continually adapt to a changing field.

I will try to explain what I meant above with an example: last night, as I sat at my computer checking Twitter, I came across a tweet from a colleague (who I met in the MAET program) that intrigued me. It had to do with using learning management systems in the classroom. I have been working to find a new learning management system, so I was excited to find out more. What began as a simple click to read experiences from other educators ended with me staying up way past my bedtime researching what it meant to have a flipped classroom. This sums up what the MAET program has provided me with as I go on to explore on my own; a sense of curiosity and intrigue with using technology in the classroom. One person's experience lead me to multiple experiences with learning management systems, which in turn lead me to find a learning management system that used a flipped classroom approach, which finally lead to three hours of search engines and videos on flipped classrooms.

Now it's Sunday, and I have already spent countless hours working on preparing a new site that will be my learning management system, as well as prepared some resources for building a pilot of the flipped classroom for the last quarter of school. While I continue to read research about quality flipped classrooms, I sit back and realize that being a life long learner is exactly what I want to be. What might look like the end of my student career is really just the beginning. I have gained a path for continuing my learning, without actually attending classes and working towards another degree. I've also gained a network of professionals with the same interest in technology with which I will be in contact, whether directly or indirectly, for the remainder of my career.

These conversations with colleagues at school and online are the main source for my continuing education in technology. I may not be required to attend class weekly or complete assignments to further my experiences, but I have moved beyond the required and into the realm of discovery. Like the above example, I have my own goals and now have resources to utilize. I have a clear vision of what I would like my classroom to look like, all the while knowing that this vision will change over time. I know that I will find some new technology that excites me. I also know that I have the foundation to build from that will allow me to learn and explore, test and evaluate these technologies.

In addition, I am excited for future careers that this program has prepared me for. Over time, I would like to transition my teaching from leading students in the classroom to leading teachers in using technology in their classrooms. This opportunity will provide countless more resources for my continued education.

These conversations with teachers, as well as their students, will continue to change my own thinking about how technology, learn from all involved, and better my own practice as an educator.

In reality, completing my master's degree does mean the end of formal education for me. I do not see myself pursuing a doctorate at this time, though in 10 years I may consider adding another master's program to further my career. Instead, I am assured that the end of the MAET program does not mean the end of my education. Instead, it means the true beginning of my pursuit of inspiring students and teachers to learn by using technology. I can now set free on my own experiences, bringing with me the knowledge and tools that will allow me to continue to change with the field. I have become a lifelong learner because of the program and the inspiration that it gave me. And I will work to continue growing as an educator, knowing that I am not in this alone.