

The Beginning:

I was about to begin my twentieth year of public education and my thirteenth year as a building administrator and it was clear I needed something. I have prided myself in keeping fresh by taking on different challenges in my career, however at this point I was missing something. What could I do that would make an impact on the job I faced daily, something meaningful, something that could impact change and make education better for me? It was evident that the Educational Leadership classes that I was taking at Eastern Michigan University were redundant and the content I gained in my first masters program was honestly not valuable to my day to day work. During our summer administration retreat it became clear what I needed, what our teachers needed and most importantly what our students needed. Educational Technology! Not just talking it, but actually implementing it into our daily instructional methods. That was the day I contacted Michigan State University and began my journey within the MAET program.

All I could think as I made the drive from Saline to East Lansing was that this is going to be a long ten days! Not to mention that I am 44, just completed twenty years in public education and received my Technology Education Endorsement from MSU. There really is no need to continue on, I can learn on my own and continue to be a good administrator is what I was thinking. Bottom line, I was too old to go back to school and sit in class with all these youngsters. Rather than turn my car around and head back to Saline, I decided to go for it! So, here I go...day one and Punya enters the classroom. I am nervous, I am not sure this is what I really need at this point??? Then what happened next confused me... we were sent out of the classroom to take pictures of ourselves. Oh no, what did I get myself into? I guess it was a technology class and taking pictures was part of technology? It still hadn't hit me

that there was much more to this time we were about to embark on that would overshadow the technology portion of this class. Daniel Willingham's book, "Why Don't Students Like School" was sure to enlighten me on how understanding the mind and how it works can ultimately lead to better teaching in the classroom.

The second day is actually when it began to sink in that these classes were going to have more to do with how the mind works than how much technology we use. We would be reflecting on learned behaviors and how much they have to do with how people react to different situations. The debate as to whether to praise and reinforce positive behavior -vs- negative reinforcement for not performing the right way has continued to be argued, not only by parents of different generations, but by many people in the education world. How do we condition the mind is the question? What really hit home to me was Pavlov's greatest work, the understanding of "Classical" Conditioning of the mind. What really continues to confuse me or makes me wonder what is best for our students is praise for everything they do. We are in a time that uses more positive reinforcements to behaviors that are acceptable or expected. During class it really made me think- is it positive response we want to give them or motivation to continue to push harder to do more or better?

Day 3 was the day it really started to make sense to me about learning. It has been some time that I had to look back on my previous knowledge of learning. What seems to be simple is not always at the forefront of how we teach. Simply put, background knowledge is the key to how we learn. If we as educators really sat back and thought about how we learned material and pulled from our previous knowledge it would make sense. As it relates to our teaching we need to find those connections with our students so that they find interest in what we are teaching. Looking at the cognitive perspective

which was pointed out in our discussion, I really liked the statement that “children are not blank slates, instead learning is a process of transforming understanding that they already have”.

The good news today was that I learned who came up with the theory of two glasses. Meaning that two glasses of different sizes can be equal based on the amount of liquid in them. Sure, I knew this to be true, however I didn't know the name of the man that first discovered it. Today was Jean Piaget's day and his Theory of Cognitive Development, which shows us that there is a progression to learning in our lifetime.

What was clear was that we are all motivated by many different things. In most cases it was doing a good job that motivated us. Seeing a job to completion and being praised for the work we do was also very popular. As I was listening to the group it was clear they really want to be praised for the work they do. That really made me reflect on myself as a leader. As educators, we are not in the business to make money, that's clear. But, being “thanked” and told that we are doing a good job is important and is a key to motivation in our field. Over the years as an administrator I think I have forgotten to focus on the little things, such as providing positive reinforcement for the good things our staff does. This will be important for me to not take for granted as we enter into another school year. I believe it is the intrinsic pieces that self-motivate us as educators. Now as for the students, I'm still trying to figure this out. I do believe for some that extrinsic motivation can help, but I also know this is somewhat confrontational within our building. Some teachers believe that students should just do what they are asked to do and no “rewards” should be given for what is expected. I would argue that in most cases that is true and most students step up and do what is asked and their grades are their motivation. However, I have over time realized with certain students, most with behavior issues, for numerous

reasons do respond with external rewards.

Willingham discusses the importance of background knowledge throughout his book. Actually, I really never thought of my learning or anyone's learning in that fashion. It makes sense that having background knowledge in any specific area only leads us to full understanding. But, as we draw on our background knowledge it is important to also practice what we are learning as students. It's like anything we do, if we do it once we would not have background knowledge to actually become proficient. As this relates to teaching and learning we, as educators, need to focus on how we can provide this for our students so that they are learning our content. So, pulling on background knowledge then practicing what we are learning is key. There is, however, one more valuable element that really can make the difference in all of our learning. Creativity being that last important element. How we develop our lessons can really impact how much we can spark our students interests. Being creative is not an easy task, especially when we have so many learning styles and interests to target. This is where I really see the TPack model come into play. This is where you take learned or unlearned knowledge, mix it with the content information and create a lesson using technology that engages the students. Now, Willingham would argue that all students can learn and it really doesn't matter what their specific learning style is, which would go against Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences and the 8 different types of learners. Gardner's thought process is that each person learns one way better than the other, which is what I have always believed as true. Though, Willingham makes some good arguments for his belief that each intelligence is interconnected. He does hope that differentiation takes place, but doesn't think differentiation is part of cognitive science. Willingham's thoughts are that teachers need to start with what they want their students to know by the end of the lesson. He also

wants the lessons to be changed up so that the students are not limited to specific styles of learning. Finally, he says that not all students are smart, but they are valuable in their own learning. I truly feel he is right and that as I reflect on the word “differentiation” we use it to generally. I think that we all jumped onto Howard Gardner’s theory and said yes that’s got to be the way students learn. When I was in school in the 80’s there wasn’t much thought to learning styles. It was clear to me that my classes were very teacher lead, which bored me. It wasn’t until I had a government teacher who mixed it up in class that I realized learning could be fun. Even though I wasn’t the strongest student in class I was ok with it because I really enjoyed going to class and learning. So it is apparent that we as educators need a lot of “tools” in our “toolbox” when we teach. This takes time and creativity to develop, but in the end the learning that is taking place is more valuable.

Knowledge -vs- Understanding that is the question! This has made me realize that we as educators reel off facts and hammer home content that our students memorize for a short period of time. However, if we begin by knowing what we want our students to understand and the knowledge we want them to actually walk away with then we are better preparing them for the real world. We have to do more of teaching the meaning of the facts so that our students walk away with a full understanding. This goes for anything we do, it doesn’t have to really focus on our students. As I reflect on how I lead, sometimes I provide information to the staff, but really never plan out what information I want them to walk away with. For example, we had implemented a new evaluation tool this past year and looking back it didn’t go very well. I presented what I felt they needed to know, but didn’t actually think about what I wanted them to understand. I actually now realize why there was so much confusion as to how we came up with our evaluation process and how teachers were being

measured...maybe a better plan could have been developed.

I think one of the most important reflections I took away is that we as educators need to continue to improve outside the classroom. Not only building relationships with students and colleagues, but being able to reflect on our own teaching. Willingham really hit on this in chapter 9 when he discussed how we need to continue to practice to get better. Taping your teaching is a great idea, but meeting and talking with colleagues to discuss our teaching is more helpful. Teachers need to know how to teach their content using a mix of pedagogy that is creative and has purpose. Getting feedback from our students is an idea that is done by some and at times hard to swallow, but is helpful insight.

I will end my reflection with a thought about intelligence. It was eye opening as a parent and educator to discuss the topic regarding students and their intelligence level, knowing that I have two daughters who learn very different with different levels of intelligence. As a parent, I don't think I did the right thing to help my daughter be a better student. If along the way I would have praised hard work and effort rather than focus on grades, maybe her confidence would be a lot stronger. However, intelligence can be improved by working hard and hard work pays off. This in turn will lead to success.

I could never imagine the impact and learning that took place during the ten days I spent in class at MSU. As I looked back I had a hard time narrowing down my reflection and how much impact it has had on me this summer. I feel rejuvenated and excited to get back to school and work with our staff and students. The networking and friendships that have been made during these ten days will be everlasting. More importantly very useful as I move further into the 21st century learning environment. Willingham's book, "Why Don't Students Like School" has inspired me to reflect on student learning more passionately. Also, it has motivated me use his book as our feature text in our first middle school

staff book club. With highlights of the book being shared during monthly school improvement meetings. Finally, the implementation of “tech tips” during each staff meeting, in which each department will rotate and be responsible for sharing 3-5 tech tips.

Moving forward:

I look at this in a few different parts. What I can do moving forward personally, what I can do for Saline Middle School and finally what I can do for the district.

Personally, I need to expand my usage of visual learning spaces to promote ideas, offer tips and tricks and encourage collaboration.. With that I also need to expand my knowledge and practice of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Finally, being well versed in research technology integration best practices and emerging technologies to be used in education.

As for Saline Middle School, we have a variety of teachers that embed technology into their classrooms to support instructional concepts, enhance the curriculum and extend the learning experience outside of the classroom walls...but it doesn't seem to be enough. The technology backbone is in place, we have a new network core, enterprise wireless in the building, BYOD access for all staff & students, Google Suite of Products and unlimited access to web tools. I'd like to work on a yearlong tech integration plan that gets to the systemic level at the MS that includes strategies, communication, training, collaboration of all staff members and reconstructing learning spaces. A plan that is paired tightly with good teaching/facilitation, administering authentic assessments, allowing the students to be producers of content instead of just consumers, and tackles important 21st century skills for both staff & students. In the end, it's about vision, culture and excellence.

At the district level, I need to begin to live and model the NETS-A for the administration team. For

the 2013-14 school year, I would like to build a webpage in my ePortfolio that addresses/reflects/showcases my ability to facilitate and lead technology integration at the building level on the following standards:

- Visionary Leadership
- Digital-Age Learning Culture
- Excellence in Professional Practice
- Systemic Improvement
- Digital Citizenship

Basically, be passionate, inspirational and sharing of my tech knowledge...in a non-threatening and more consultative way. My experiences at many levels within the organization make me knowledgeable and seasoned. Basically, pay it forward and help build tech capacity with my administration colleagues.