

A Fusion of Steps

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Introduction

Preparing this essay has led me to reflect on how a presentation I saw at the Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) [International Conference](#) back in 2008 was an early step on a journey whose latest stage is coming to a close with this course. I went to the presentation, *Writing portfolios: Empowering students, teachers, and the curriculum*, (see Howrey & Tanner, 2009) and it was my first introduction to the idea of using portfolios as a mode of summative assessment in language learning. I later used what I remembered from this short session and started incorporating portfolios in writing courses for a couple of years in hopes of getting my students to achieve more. However, the portfolios didn't really seem to make a huge difference, and I didn't know what was missing. When I started working with John Howrey at Nanzan University in 2012, he noted that I should be asking for reflections from the students. So, I began to build reflections into my portfolio assignments, but with varied emphasis. Then recently, I did a reading on alternative types of testing, which included a discussion of writing portfolios from which I gained a deeper intellectual understanding of the importance and benefits of learner reflections as part of portfolios (Coombe, Purmensky, & Davidson, 2012), as part of my Assessment in Foreign Language Teaching (FLT 808) coursework. Shortly after doing that reading, I started looking over the syllabus and website for the Master of Arts in Educational Technology ([MAET](#)) capstone course (CEP 807), and noticed there were assignments for three reflective essays as part of the online portfolio. Finally, through actually engaging in my own reflections on my MAET learning and the curation of my own work, I have experienced portfolio assessment first-hand as a learner and come to really understand why reflections are such a key element. Reflecting on this led me to notice that I have been on a knowledge-journey from that first exposure in 2008, gradually understanding more and more about portfolio assessment.

My MAET studies have been a similar journey. My first exposure to using computer technology as a language teacher dates back to 1999 and the Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) course I took as part of my MA in Applied Linguistics. While I subsequently dabbled in using such things as blogs and class websites, I found myself constrained by my own fledgling technical competencies and the limited technology available to me and my students. In 2011, I decided that the MAET program would be a good avenue for improving my own abilities and knowledge and then I began to study more deeply about educational technology. While the learning path I have ended up taking has had unexpected twists, turns and detours, it has directly and significantly contributed to positive change in both my classroom practices and my leadership abilities.

One major area in which the MAET has led to changes is in my teaching practice. Prior to starting these courses I rarely used digital resources in the classroom. I used a lot of pre-recorded audio and video, and had transitioned from magnetic tape recordings to CDs and DVDs, but was just starting to use an mp3 audio player to store, manage, and play digital audio.

I used a computer for preparing materials, sometimes finding a little information online or using some clipart images, but I generally delivered these materials on printed handouts. I didn't have access to a computer in my classrooms and never took my own computer with me. I had tried using a classroom website one year, and student blogs for book reviews in another class, but had trouble with equipment access and overcoming technical problems. In spite of occasionally attending presentations on things like using Twitter or Facebook in the classroom, I had not incorporated any social networking services (SNS), or really any online resources, into my teaching.

Now, as I finish the MAET program, I rarely step into the classroom without at least one computer and Internet access. I also deliver information and materials to students online, both inside and outside the classroom. The course Adapting Innovative Technologies in Education (CEP 811) was the first to directly influence my in-class use of educational technology. For one thing, I learned how presentation software such as PowerPoint or Keynote could be used to support presenting information in the classroom and also as a resource for learners to refer to outside the classroom. I shifted a lot of my in-class presentation from writing on the whiteboard and printed handouts to displaying slides, either prepared in advance or created in class by typing text and pasting images in, and to giving online access to documents, such as [this one](#) for a writing class. This shift makes text easier for students to read than with my handwriting, saves me the embarrassment of displaying my lack of drawing skills, and allows me to keep a record of what was addressed in class to use or share later. Another shift is to using video and audio that is either on my computer or online instead of using CDs and DVDs in class. This lets me carry fewer items to class and to not fall victim to misplacing or forgetting materials. I am also able to have a wider variety of materials at my fingertips and therefore to be more flexible in class and in delivery to students. I also make courses more interactive and encourage responses from more students while still maintaining a low-pressure environment through the use of things like Google Forms and Kahoot. CEP 811 also introduced me to the [WebQuest](#) model, which has helped me with integrating authentic linguistic resources in a scaffolded, cooperative, project-based way. A WebQuest that I initially created for my own courses and which has since been shared and used by other instructors is this one [introducing Extensive Reading](#). In addition, I now maintain a [personal teacher's website](#) where my students can go to access resources and homework assignments for each course as well as use to contact me.

My MAET courses have also helped deepen my understanding of the theory and principles of teaching, learning, and technology integration, which helps me make better decisions about my teaching practice. In particular, the three courses Learning in School and Other Settings (CEP 800), Applying Educational Technology to Issues of Practice (CEP 812), and Technology and Leadership (CEP 815) involved examining these ideas. In CEP 800, I was exposed to a wider range of ideas about learning, and in more depth, than I had explored prior to that course. CEP 812 addressed some of these ideas and we considered how technology could be applied to improve, and even transform, teaching and learning. For example, I worked with a team to produce this [project and white paper](#) advocating project-based learning. Additionally, in the aforementioned CEP 811, I learned about the [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) principles. The UDL principles have inspired me to pay more attention to making sure the learning activities I present, as well as the formative and summative assessments I use,

accommodate all my students as well as possible. These various ideas were pulled together in an [advocacy letter](#) written for CEP 815, in which I envisioned an ideal environment and model for increasing technology integration.

This leads to the other major area in which the MAET has helped me grow - as a leader. The course that most obviously could be expected to have had an influence on this would be Technology and Leadership (CEP 815). I did read, discuss, and consider a lot of useful management and leadership concepts as part of that course, and most of them were completely new to me. For example, we read the descriptions of seven leadership styles by Rooke and Torbert (2005), which I outlined in a [presentation here](#). We also examined such things as effective time and task management and how to build a shared vision for the future. That said, my growth as a leader was given nurture in most of my MAET classes, not only this one.

My first MAET course was Teaching for Understanding with Technology (CEP 810) and a key element in this course was leveraging SNSs to manage our own learning and professional development. By being required to use Twitter and Facebook, not only did I learn to use them for my own growth, but I also began to develop an online professional presence, and this has contributed to my being known and recognized among my language teaching colleagues through tweets and posts to my own page as well as contributions to online groups.

As I became more involved with JALT leadership roles, the skills I was developing in the courses for the [Educational Technology Certificate](#) (CEP 810, 811, & 812) continued to help. I was regularly asked to use the Google suite of productivity tools in these courses. My familiarity with these tools then helped me be comfortable implementing their use to aid in managing the work of the officers of the JALT Extensive Reading SIG, who are spread throughout Japan. We plan an annual conference and [ER-related events](#) at two other international conferences every year, as well as managing three [publications](#). My growing comfort with technology helped me lead us into using the newsletter editing and mailing list management site [MailChimp](#) to improve our regular communication with members, to starting online publication of a journal, and to working with a developer to implement an online submission and registration system for our annual event. I also became comfortable in working with various other team and event management tools with other groups and events, and I took on a number of leadership roles. One such role is being an officer in the JALT Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) SIG, something that my expanding educational technology skill set helped give me the confidence to do. Another is that I have been elected as Director of Public Relations for JALT, set to begin at the end of 2016.

In addition to having these organizational leadership roles, thanks to the MAET program I have often found myself being the person to introduce others to technological tools or to help them learn to use them. I spent four years as a Language Instructor in the Nanzan English Education Center, starting about the same time as I finished my first MAET class. As I learned and adapted educational technologies to my own teaching, I often shared what I was doing with my colleagues, both in informal conversations and through presenting in internal faculty development (FD) sessions to small groups of language teachers. The early FD presentations I did helped me refine both my ideas and my presentation skills. This in turn helped me gain the confidence to submit to, and ultimately present at, conferences. Since 2013, I have given 18 presentations or workshops on educational technology in language teaching at conferences

including JALT PanSIG (2013, 2015), JALT International Conference (2013, 2014, 2015, 2016), JALT CALL (2013, 2014, 2016), TESOL International Convention (2014, 2015), and conferences in Nagoya, Seoul, Singapore, and Tokyo. I have also published two related articles and have a book chapter in press. All of these activities reflect my newfound role as an educational technology leader.

As I mentioned in my second essay in this series, I don't consider my journey done. Like the journey to deeper understanding of portfolios, I continue to take new steps - even some missteps - that lead me to ever more knowledge and skills. I continue to pursue evolving learning goals, personal and professional. However, the steps I have taken in the Master of Arts in Educational Technology program have helped me blend together and reach some of my significant initial goals. I have improved my formal qualifications and my educational technology skills and knowledge, and have become a resource for peers and students. This has led to better teaching practice and to me improving as a leader. I hope to continue my path with the aim of always improving the quality of education that my students and those of others receive.

References

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