**Reflection on Classroom Assignments**

On the first day of class, we took “mugshot” photos and created a class facebook page. These are two activities that I will use in my classroom, not exactly as they were presented, but incorporate them into my classroom. I would like to take pictures of each of my students and teachers (my paraprofessionals and myself) that are similar to each other and create a “family” classroom environment. In the past, I have used baseball as a theme in my classroom, so perhaps having my students hold baseball props and take pictures to put on our class webpage and wiki would be a good idea in order to make the students feel more as a part of our classroom community.

The class facebook page was also an idea that I really liked. It was a space that was easy to interact with other classmates, ask questions, and leave messages. My district doesn’t allow facebook to be used during school hours, so making a wiki would be a better use for us. This would be a good spot for my students to go to and leave their happy feelings for the day, ask questions about homework, or just to communicate with each other or their teachers.

There are many techniques I would like to use in my classroom that I have learned in the MEAT summer cohort session. I learned a lot of techniques to show “before and after” with my students using cameras. The “tension” pictures were a very good representation for me to show my students how they look before doing an intervention and after. I think this would be a really good technique before and after doing a Brain Gym activity or some other calming activity. It is a really good way for students to be able to see how stressed they are before the activity and how their posture looks, how they stand, how tight their muscles are, and how they look to others. Then compare that picture side-by-side to the after, where the student should look more relaxed, stand looser, and see how much more inviting they look to others around them.

This activity would also be a good idea to use in order to have students show me two different emotions. If the student can choose appropriate props and actions, along with different facial expressions, it will tell me that the student understands where to look at other people to find signs of how they are feeling. It is also a good way to talk to the student about how they are feeling and have them express the different expressions, actions, or feelings that they have already showed they understand during each emotion.

I have been trying to stress risk-taking to my students for the past few years. I think that one great activity that we learned about that teaches risk-taking without the students even knowing it is geocaching. When Petra Fisser first explained the idea of geocaching, my mind went in all different directions thinking of how many ways I could use geocaching in teaching and in my everyday life. I would love to get GPS devices or iPhones for my classroom in order to have my students be able to find real geocaches around our school (go on walking field trips around town), set up my own geocaches for the students to practice taking risks and finding prizes, and also setting up small geocache scavenger hunts where they need to find one answer to a question in order to answer the next. This could be used with math, language arts, science, social studies, or behavior. My mind is racing with ideas for all the different ways geocaching would work in an everyday classroom.

When our groups used wikis in order to teach others in the classroom about specific tools on the Internet that could help them in their everyday educational lives, I was able to find out about one of my favorite applications. I came across Smilebox, which I have seen a peer use in another class and thought that it looked very fun and eye-catching. When I was given the opportunity to research Smilebox, I was pleasantly surprised. I found that Smilebox was easy to use, fun, eye-catching, and easy to share with others. I am in charge of my school’s website, and I like to put many pictures on the website as possible. Smilebox will help me put more pictures on the website and make them more inviting to look at. It’s much easier to put pictures on the website once I’ve made a Smilebox presentation, instead of a Picasa presentation. Smilebox is so easy and has so much to offer that I will have my students use Smilebox, also. I want to do scrapbooks this year with my students, and I can’t think of a better way for them to put pictures together from field trips than to put them on a collage page in Smilebox.

There were many websites that came to my attention during this activity including bubble.us, snagit, pixlr.com, and so many others. These are many applications that I will use in my everyday creating and organizing, and not have the students use them. My students being grades K-4, I don’t think they will have the skills to work with these websites as much as I do. I do believe, however, that they will help me in my teaching, creating the school website, organizing my classroom and lesson plans, and making my overall classroom more appealing.

The thought of praising for effort, not for intelligence is what seems to be an easy idea. However, many educators and parents don’t see the ease of this task. I constantly try to praise my students for attempting work in my classroom, and wean them into their general education classroom without a paraprofessional for help. They often tell me that they think they are dumb and can’t do an assignment, and I reassure them how smart they are, especially when they have completed the task. However, if I start praising them on their effort for taking the risk of failure instead of the smarts to complete the task, I might be able to take my students further. This may be why my students believe they are “dumb,” because there isn’t someone beside them telling them how intelligent they are after every problem completed. When I tell them how important and impressive it is that they have taken a risk and put so much effort forward, I believe I will see the change I need in my students.

Sharing aha! moments in the classroom is something that I often do in professional developments. However, thinking about using it in my classroom and having my students think about what moments have had the biggest impacts on them, will teach me how to teach them better. I know what kind of teachers influenced me (both good and bad), but I should know what kinds influenced my students as well. I need to know what moments have gotten their attention in order to use moments like those more in the future.

Brandon showed us great tips about how to use light exposure in our picture taking. Making sure that the subject is facing the sun, to get the sunlight to light up the person’s face instead of backlighting them, creates a more pleasurable picture. This is a simple technique to make a big impact on picture taking throughout the school year. This will definitely help the website that I am in charge of when I put the pictures on it. Having more eye-catching pictures will make the website look and feel much better than just having pictures thrown together.

The Google reading level is an application that I have never worked with before. This is a great resource that I will be able to use with my students. First of all, my students being younger, it is hard to have them search the Internet to find information because it is often above their reading level. Also, having students with reading disabilities adds to these problems. Having this small application in my teaching toolbox gives my students and me one big jump into how much they can learn, research, and put out into the Internet.

When watching videos with the gorilla going through the background, I learned a lot about how students learn. If we are focused too much on the small parts that are moving throughout the picture, we will miss the “big gorilla” dancing through. We need to make sure that we are focusing on our individual students’ needs as well as our class’s overall needs. I often get too caught up in one or two students (being that my job is to focus on a small amount of students). However, I need to make sure I am showing attention to all of my students and even the students around the school that aren’t “mine.” By doing this, I am helping to prevent problems and working pro-actively instead of re-actively.

When Brandon taught the class about taking camera shots up close compared to far away and zoomed in, the results were amazing. That small difference made a huge impact on how the subject of the picture would look better if we would just step back and take a wider look. I think this is a metaphor for us, as teachers. When we get too close to a problem or a student, it is hard for us to understand the real problem. It is difficult to look at other objects and people that may be affecting our student. However, if we take a step back and look at the larger picture, we are able to then see how everything relates to each other. We are then able to zoom in on different parts of the problem and see how each person or object is playing a part in the overall problem. If we, as educators, take this approach to our teaching, we would be able to listen more to our students and hear more sides of the “story.” We often assume we know what happens and narrow in on our result before we step back and look at everything and everyone that had to do with the issue. Taking a step back and looking at the “wide angle” might be just what we need as educators today.

I believe that there was one thing that had the biggest impact on me in the MAET summer cohort class: knowing that learning is what is most important. The professors, teacher’s assistants, and all of the extra help in the classroom always made sure that we were learning all of the time. There was so much learning packed into ten days of classes, seventy hours of classes, that I don’t think any of the students or teachers fully know how much was taught or learned. The greatest part of it was whenever we (as the students) would get worried about how we would be graded or how the teachers wanted the projects done, the teachers would simply state again that they were trying to give us experiences and teaching us through the projects. They were trying to make sure that we were impacted in ways that we had never experienced before.

Every teacher wants to believe that what the student experiences and learns is most important, not the grade on the test. However, so many times in our society this isn’t the case. I think that in this cohort, the professors and teacher’s assistants have made sure to teach us the most that they possibly can, about what they know. As an educator myself, that was the greatest learning experience for me. I am constantly trying to make sure my students understand and try to get them to not care about their grades, but am I actually practicing what I am preaching? Aren’t I still scared that my pay will decrease if my students perform poorly on a test? It is very refreshing to see teachers on the college level practice what they preach, and make sure that we, as the students, are learning as much as we possibly can without worrying about grades. Because as soon as we stop worrying about the grades, and what the exact specifications of the assigned projects are, is when our best ideas come to life, and when we start creating master pieces. It is when we achieve what we were meant to and get the grade that we were so worried to get in the first place.

**Reflection on Readings**

When reading in MAET summer cohort, I was able to learn a lot of information from a very well selected group of articles. One of the articles that had the biggest impact on me was “It’s As Simple As 1,2,3…” The author talked of doing extra experiments just to figure out how people’s minds work. I was able to connect easily with Feynman due to the way his and my minds work. Both of our minds work like they are working on a puzzle that must be solved. He showed me that I am able to go the extra mile and solve the puzzle to understand why students work the way they do, or why we think the way we do. This author was a great influence and inspiration to me as an educator and technology enforcer.

In “The Theory Behind Disciplined Inquiry,” the author talks about how students can’t learn new information without linking it to something they already know. This makes complete sense, since whenever we, as adults, learn something new, we always think of how we will fit it into our lives, we decide whether it makes sense based on what we already know about the world, or we relate the information to an event or idea that we already know about. This theory easily connects to the article, “The Power of Children’s Thinking.” Just because children have ideas that aren’t easily suggested, doesn’t mean that they are wrong. It simply means that we need to listen to what they have to say in order to understand them. We can dissect their theories in order to learn more about them as learners and children. We should use open-ended questions whenever possible in order to not taint the children’s theories and ideas.

I believe that listening to children’s theories at a young age will lead to intrinsic motivation later in life, instead of the need for extrinsic motivation. This is an idea taught in “Student Motivation to Learn.” Students need to be able to understand the importance of knowledge, instead of needing to have stickers, prizes, or other external objects in order to gain proper motivation from children. This can also be helped by the article, “Caution: Praise Can Be Dangerous.” The article talks of making sure students actually for rewards and praise, instead of giving them easy tasks to get a lot of rewards. This leads students to seek approval for everything they do, instead of earning the pleasure of completing a task and gaining knowledge. I believe this is where a lot of my students need a lot of help and rewards in order to complete simple tasks. They have been given rewards for most of their lives for very small tasks, and they have come to expect to always be rewarded in these ways. If we start giving fewer rewards for greater accomplishments, students will strive to achieve higher expectations and gain intrinsic motivation.

In “Teaching that Sticks,” I learned about using “sticky ideas.” Using ideas that are simple, unexpected, concrete, credible, emotional, and involve a story help students to have ideas “stick” in their minds. I think remembering these six ideas when creating lessons and talking with my students about their emotions will definitely get the lessons across easier and quicker.

**Personal Learning Network**

In my personal learning network, I plan to keep touch with many people. I have made many friends in the summer cohort but a few have the skills and communication that I am in need of. The educators in the MAET summer cohort have a lot of knowledge and quickly help their students out whenever they have the answers. I plan to keep these educators in my learning network to update and communicate about important technology issues in the educational world.

My peers in the MAET summer cohort have become great friends and assets to my learning and teaching. I plan to keep in touch with my group mates through Facebook and texting. We can update each other about ideas in educational technology, along with informing each other how we are integrating technology in our classrooms. We will be able to brainstorm ideas with each other and hopefully come up with innovative and creative ideas of how to incorporate technology in classrooms around the country.

I have many friends and colleagues that I have known for years that are technology savvy, and can help me whenever I have questions having to do with bringing technology into my classroom. My colleagues in my district have been a big help in getting educational technology to my students. I have many people within my district and daily life that I can go to for help with questions about the technology I use every day. Most importantly, I plan to teach my students about educational technology and allow them to explore technology on their own. That way, I can move from being their educator in technology to being a student that they are teaching. I want to learn new ideas from my students, and educational technology is a great way to give my students the opportunity.