# Forward, Forward

At the annual [TED Talk conference](#) in 2017, Elon Musk sat down with TED's head curator Chris Anderson and shared some career advice and his beliefs about the future and being successful. When talking about technology, he said:

> People are mistaken when they think that technology just automatically improves. It does not automatically improve. It only improves if a lot of people work very hard to make it better, and actually it will, I think, by itself degrade, actually. -[Elon Musk, TED2017](#)

He believes that technology does not evolve on it's own. It is only by hard work and forward momentum that progression and evolution happen.

More importantly, if you are not moving forward, you might even start to move backward. So to progress, one must always keep moving forward. I have finally been able to pinpoint the feeling that has been driving me since I decided that I wanted to become a teacher. My core drive as an educator is to move forward. I want to learn, move forward, because I want to be the best. Best to me, however, does not mean perfect. It means progress. Being the best educator means being an educator that is willing to learn new things and innovate in their classroom. My students deserve to have the best me. They deserve a teacher who is willing to learn and grow and adapt and change to bring them the best, and most progressive education possible.

My decision to pursue the Master of Art in Educational Technology (MAET) program was driven by that desire to learn. This program has given me so many new tools, from how to teach literacy in a French classroom, to understanding the meaning of learning, to using missional thinking to let purpose guide my technology integration. It has given me new lenses to look through when searching for solutions to problems.

To better explain the impact that the MAET program has had on my life as an educator, I'm going to detail three specific classes below. However, they weren't just classes and the impact they had wasn't surface level. They changed me enough to say that I am now three things I would never have said I was before.

## I am creative.

Creativity is something that I've always professed I do not possess. Coming up with creative lessons and designing creative things has always been a struggle for me. That perhaps I was just one of those people who wasn't creative. Much of that changed after taking CEP 818, which was all about creativity in teaching and in learning.

We read a novel in this class called Sparks of Creativity and kept a semester-long journal off all the different 'sparks' of creativity that we found within ourselves. Many a night was spent staring at my

computer screen, telling myself that there was NO WAY that the assignment I turned in was what my professors were looking for. I would reflect for a while, make some tweaks to my work, reflect some more, tweak some more, and eventually I would get to a point where I had no more time left and had to turn in whatever I had created, thinking all the while that I would get the news that I had completely misinterpreted the assignment.

However, that news never came. Again and again I was greeted with positive, productive, and even creative feedback about my work. Every new grade was an affirmation, and the inspiration and positivity I felt about my newfound sense of creativity at the end of this course was indescribable.

A perfect example of this thought process and experience as a whole was an assignment titled "Patterning". We were charged with taking something (a topic, an idea, a standard, etc.) in a content area that we taught and find a pattern. We then had to creatively display and describe that pattern. This was the first of many assignments where I spent the majority of the week just brainstorming about what the heck I was supposed to do. Eventually I would randomly (or what I thought was random at the time) pick a topic and go with it, hoping and praying that it was what the professors were looking for. I later realized that this random choice was actually one of my creative sparks! The creative spark for this project led me to choose French sentence structure and then compare it to the patterns that are found in 17th, 18th, and 19th century French gardens. My instructors loved this project, and I received high feedback on the first iteration.

This experience repeated itself with many of the following projects, and by the end of the course, I found myself recognizing when I had a creative 'spark'. Creativity is something I still sometimes struggle to find within myself, but I am now much more comfortable with embracing it as a concept and believing it is something that I am capable of. I learned in CEP 818 that creativity comes in many forms and functions differently for each person who embraces it.

## I am intentional.

Teaching Students Online (CEP 820) required me to become a more intentional educator, and in turn that has lead to me becoming a more intentional person in other aspects of my life as well.

Every choice I made in this course was based on research and analysis, from choosing a CMS (content management system) to choosing the assessments for each lesson. Sometimes I found myself throwing something into my French 1 unit on Google Classroom based on past experience, and I often had to stop myself and think deeper about the purpose and outcome that I am looking for. After that reflection, many times I would have to go back and remove or adjust what I had put in the course.

An example of this intentional experience came after I received peer feedback on my module. In my second lesson, which talked about greetings and formality, I had included an extra lesson segment on something that didn't end up showing up in the assessment. At first I thought that perhaps the assessment should be modified, but after asking myself what I thought was most important for

students to learn in this lesson, I realized that the additional segment was completely unnecessary. I had included it just because it was something I had included in a previous lesson that I had done in my brick and mortar classroom, and so my brain told me that it just **belonged** there. I ended up removing that additional segment and keeping the assessment the way it was, and then I even removed that additional segment from the lesson it came from. It is now something that I throw on to the end of a unit (if we have extra time), and it is not something that gets assessed.

Looking forward, I have started to become a more intentional thinker in many aspects of my life now, from home design to relationships with my friends and family. I often stop and ask myself what the purpose of an item is, if there is a location I have in mind, **why** am I doing what I am doing, or what outcome I intend and if my actions are relevant toward that outcome. Some specific side effects of this new thought process are: a backwards-designed K-4 French curriculum that I implemented for the first time this year, a cleaner and more purposeful house, and a much less cluttered tack room at the barn.

## I am a leader.

These words seem so strange to me, "I am a leader." Strange as they may seem, after taking the Technology & Leadership course (CEP 815) I feel confident in saying that I know what it means to be a leader and I know that I am one in my own way, and can become a greater one with time.

This course was, without a doubt, the hardest one that I took throughout my Master's program. Cramming three classes into 6 weeks? Easy peasy. An entire class on graduate-level research? Cake walk. Ok, they weren't really easy, but compared to CEP 815, it almost seemed like it.

The struggle in this course was derived from the fact that I knew very little about the concepts of management and leadership. After all, I'm a TEACHER, not a manager or a leader! I had never read the Harvard Business Review, had never thought about leadership roles, and had never considered that I could be a leader in my own domain. I knew that I was in charge of my students, and I could manage them, but when it came to bigger pictures issues on a district-level, I was clueless.

The major project for this course was developing a vision statement for my organization from the point of view of a technology leader, which could have meant CIO, Technology Director, Technology Integration Specialist, etc. This was an especially hard task because over the course of the semester, the definition of vision statements changed a few times. At first they were lofty statements meant to inspire, then they came back down to Earth with reasonable and attainable goals, and finally they settled somewhere in between. I had to come up with a vision statement that encompassed three specific goals, each backed with research and a reasonable plan of attainment. I would say that for someone who had never thought of leadership before, writing a vision statement was HARD. I spent hours reflecting on what I wanted my three goals to be, and had to drop a few because I realized that although they were great goals, they were not attainable. Vision statements can be lofty, but they cannot be impossible to achieve. Once I had my goals, I backed them up with

research from the readings and tweaked things here and there based on preliminary feedback. All of this culminated in the semester-long project of a "Blurry Vision Statement".

Now that I have been exposed to the fact that leadership and management exist everywhere, not just in business, I have started to look for areas in my life where I might become a leader. Perhaps one day I might find myself as a technology integration specialist for my school, or maybe even as the technology leader for the whole district. All I know is that if the call ever comes, I will be much more prepared to answer it. I think I could even be pushed to write another vision statement. Maybe don't quote me on that just yet, though!

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Overall, the Master of Arts in Educational Technology program has changed so many aspects of who I am as a person, as well as an educator. Going in, I thought that the program would be mostly focused on technology and learning how to find and use various technologies for educational purposes, but it turned out to be so much more. From intentional use of technology to the skills needed to lead district or even county-wide technology initiatives, I am so thrilled with the program I chose, and am proud to call myself a MAET graduate. The skills I acquired, tools I was introduced to, and friendships I formed have already changed me for the better in all aspects of my life and I am so grateful to be where I am today because of this program.