David McGregor
September 25, 2022

A Wish For Waves

Good teaching is often defined by preparedness, and preparedness is often misidentified as inflexibility. When collaborating with colleagues, I often felt like I was doing something wrong. Where they had planned transitions to the minute, I had large scale concepts split, at most, to three ideas per hour. However, some of my best days came from moments of unpreparedness where I knew what I wanted to teach, but not the best method of delivery, and students' comments directed the conversation in unanticipated ways. Even when we didn't get through the content I intended or the desired concept didn't stick, I always felt these moments of failure came with a breakthrough that often saw students connect to the material and become more open to ideas. I refer to these moments in my classroom as "ridin' the wave," as in, "Whoa, we were really ridin' the wave there." I have no idea why it was these days that always seemed to get the students engaged, but I knew that they had to come about naturally. To try to prepare for these moments of improvisation or bring in current events to stoke the conversation may lead to a solid class, but never these moments of inspiration that were so powerful. I have always felt my teaching is defined by flexibility, and one thing was clear, the more I let my students talk, the more likely we were to have one of these moments to "catch a wave." Over the past year it has become clear that "ridin' the wave" sees us, my students and I, connecting the material to ourselves, the outside world, and our shared experiences.

When looking for a master's program, I wanted to find something that seemed built around this idea of flexibility. I thought about the ever changing nature of technology, and figured the Masters of Education Technology (MAET) at Michigan State University would be suited for my needs. As I applied, I outlined my goals as simply gaining knowledge to leverage every tool available to ensure my students engage with, and enjoy, the content in my classroom. Technology would simply allow me to have more options and tools to allow my students to "ride the wave" and inspire more natural connections in my classroom.

As I near the end of my experience at Michigan State, I now know that this flexibility is empowering. This flexibility honors student's contexts as learners and human beings with lives and experiences that have led them to that day, and that moment in my classroom. What I described as flexibility was me turning over the reins of my classroom to my students and showing them the respect they deserve as curious people. With this freedom, they can see that education isn't a way-one street, but that we learn from each other.

My goals remain the same, though I would like to share this discovery with my colleagues. If we could just slow down, and allow students to teach us how they filter the concepts through their context, we all might have a bit more fun and learn a bit more. But I also know that my original goal is never ending. As technology advances and culture shifts, my students will always have new contexts to filter material and teach me anew. We all just need to have the courage to "ride the wave."