Come and listen to my story

'bout a tech named Mann

Sung to the tunes of the Beverly Hillbillies theme song

By Andy Mann

"Come and listen to my story 'bout a tech named Mann"

A fine educator, who was doing what he could.

And then one day, he was trainin' as he prized,

Then his boss said to him they were going to downsize.

Change, that is…God's plan…just have faith

Well the first thing you know Ol' Mann's out in the air,

Friendfolks said Mann move away from there

Said, Battle Creek is the place you want to be

So he loaded up the minivan and moved his family

Teaching, you see, a new beginning for me.

Well now it's time to recognize to Mann and all his kin

He got his job in Marshall but would it happen again?

He would like to thanks you folks for kindly readin' here,

'Bout my Masters degree and all the work I did without 'no' fear

MSU it is, a fast track, just get it done.

Hard work's okay, y'hear?

The Beverly Hillbillies
Original Theme Song
By Paul Henning

Come 'n listen to my story 'bout a man named Jed
A poor mountaineer, barely kept his family fed
And then one day, he was shootin' at some food
And up through the ground come a bubblin' crude
Oil, that is, black gold, Texas tea

Well, the first thing you know, old Jed's a millionaire
Kin folk said, Jed, move away from there
Said, Californy is the place you oughta be
So they loaded up the truck and they moved to Beverly
Hills, that is, swimmin' pools, movie stars

Well, now it's time to say goodbye to Jed and all his kin
They would like to thank you folks for kindly droppin' in
You're all invited back again to this locality
To have a heapin' helpin' of their hospitality
Hillbilly, that is, set a spell, take your shoes off

Y'all come back now, hear?

http://www.guntheranderson.com/v/data/beverlyh.htm

A Masters Degree is Expected

Two years ago I was working at the Ottawa Area Intermediate School District in Holland, Michigan as an Educational Technology Coordinator. I had been in that position for ten years and received excellent reviews. The organization needed to downsize and my position was eliminated. While I was initially devastated, I realized that for every door which closes, another door opens. I realized this was a golden opportunity and looked forward to whatever was ahead. Throughout the process, the hand of God was evident and I was not afraid. I networked and was fortunate to have more than one job offer including a fantastic opportunity for a newly created position as Educational Technology Consultant for the Calhoun Intermediate School District in Marshall which I accepted – not missing a single day of work.

As I was interviewing for the position in Marshall and exploring similar positions, I realized that though I had a wealth of experience, I lacked the credentials others who were applying for the same positions possessed. It was a wake up call that if I were ever in a position where I was once again looking for job, a Masters degree would be expected.

Expect Delays

I started on a Masters Degree in 1980 from Indiana University in Alternative Education. While the program started me in a new direction and led me to Michigan, I found the program not relevant and lost motivation for completion. Years later I'd start again at Grand Valley State University (GVSU) only to find that the curriculum was not current. I was doing more relevant technology integration in my day-to-day career as a technology teacher and technology

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director for Caledonia Community Schools that what the Masters in Technology Education provided at GVSU. Still I wanted to get going and complete my Masters degree.

The kicker came when I was prepared to start taking the core curriculum at GVSU and registered for the first course, a course similar to MSU's CEP 810, Teaching for Understanding with Computers. Two weeks before the course started GVSU contacted me and saying they were in a crisis. The course instructor was let go and GVSU needed to find an instructor to teach this course. Because of my experience I was asked to teach this entry level graduate course. I taught it and went on to teach an number of other undergraduate and graduate courses for GVSU as adjunct faculty. Though I had no Masters degree, I had experience technology integration experience.

A Teacher Not an Administrator

Following this experience I reviewed my goals to get a Masters in Education from GVSU. I realized the technology in education program would not challenge me or extend my knowledge. So I considered GVSU's well respected Masters in Educational Leadership program. I liked the administrators I met who were in the program. However, when I looked at my goals, I never wanted to be a principal or other administrator. I'm a teacher at heart. I've learned what I am good at doing and what I'm not good at doing. When I served as technology director I supervised a staff. I learned my strengths are not in being a supervisor or an administrator. I excel at teaching. I elected not to pursue any graduate programs at GVSU.

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I learned soon there after that Michigan State University (MSU) offered a Masters in Educational Psychology with a focus on Technology Education. I met a well respected professor named Dr. Norm Bell, who encouraged me to apply to the program. I was accepted but soon lost interest as I found that MSU's program was not the technology integration program I wanted. It focused more on game theory and learning design. The MSU program seemed like it was more for those who wanted to work for a corporation and design self guided computer driven learning modules. The MAET program had not yet been formed. About that time I got married and started a family and stopped my work on my MSU Masters degree.

WMU or MSU
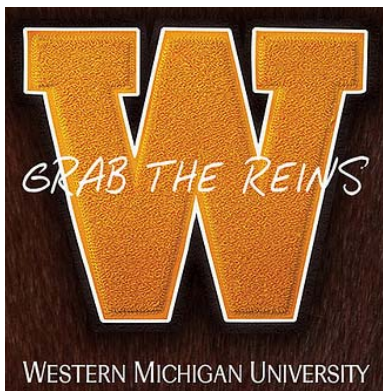
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For what I'm doing and my future, I really wanted to complete the Master degree and was ready to start again. Four young children had come since I last started as well as a new job. However, I had a supportive wife and we decided to make a commitment for the degree as a family. My wife set one stipulation, "if you're going to start the degree this time, you're going to finish it." So before I started again, I

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wanted to be certain whichever Master's degree program I selected was relevant to what I'm currently doing and taught me something new. Michigan State University offered a program called their Masters of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET). Western Michigan University (WMU) offered a similar program with a similar title, a Masters of Arts in Educational Technology.

There were three reasons I selected MSU. First, I've always been a MSU fan ever since I arrived in Michigan. I'm not sure if it was because U of M always seemed like the bigger kid on the block and I liked to cheer for the underdog of if it was because I found U of M fans a bit obnoxious; I just found myself cheering for MSU. Second, a program which fit my schedule was beginning which involved taking the first three courses through a face-to-face weekend style of courses. This fit my schedule. I also knew and liked the instructor, Tammy Maginity. She worked in one of the schools I serve and we trust and respect each other's knowledge and expertise. The final decision came when I found that MSU would reinstate my status from my application into the program from years before with Dr. Bell. This saved me days worth of work in submitting a new application and securing letters of reference. It was coming together and I was meant to be a MSU student.

Getting Started

I brought 25 years of experience of working with teachers to integrate technology into the curriculum, so I wasn't sure what I'd learn in the three course certificate program. I wanted to be a valuable, contributing member in the courses, and didn't want to come across as a "know it all." I went into the course ready to learn. What I discovered was a well organized, course which taught me some new ideas. It was useful to watch the well done video taped lectures which helped to solidify the importance of constructivism as a cornerstone of technology integration. I was most impressed with the structure and design of the course and the way the course utilized Angel. I appreciated the way the instructor for these three courses, Tammy Maginity, modeled effective instructional practices for adult learners. She was flexible and allowed the teachers to customize projects to be more useful to each person's curriculum area.

She understood what portions of the MSU created curriculum were most important and needed in-depth work which could be reviewed in less detail. The three courses also utilized Angel's portfolio in a way that was helpful. The portfolio provided clear project rubrics and deadlines. Projects were also graded in a timely manner so I understood in a the course based on the points earned-to-date. This modeled good online course design which I hope to utilize in online courses I will teach in the future.

Sample screen from Angel's portfolio area showing a project's grading rubric

Online Learning – the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Taking courses through the MAET program where most of the courses would be online would present advantages as well as some disadvantages. To begin with, I don't consider myself a good online learner. I like the face-to-face interaction and with so many different items pulling at my time, a face-to-face course seemed easier to manage my time. At a certain time, on a certain day, I would know I had to be in class. When I'm taking a course

which is taught online, I must be a better manager of my time. I must have

better self discipline. With a busy family and career, my time is not always at my control. I found that most of my course work was completed between 10:00 PM and 1:00 AM. This was when I had time. I learned that the online course format ended up working well for my schedule, allowing me to complete multiple courses in a short amount of time, what I call the "fast track".

The online format did not allow me to have discussions in a way which I found as effective and engaging as discussions I had in a face-to-face courses. For one course we initiated a weekly Skype conference call to touch base on group projects. However, in the Angel course, I found that the discussions were sometimes a challenge. After reading another person's post I often didn't have that much to say in reply. For some of the MAET online courses, the instructors would state that the online discussions were important, but then they did not participate in the online discussion. I doubted if my posts were being read by the instructor when the instructor did not participate in the discussion forums. I began to wonder if the instructor was simply giving a grade to the discussions forums based on the number of posts each student posted and not the quality of their posts.   I recalled reading posts and replies which were clearly off topic and wondered if these were "counted" by an instructor who simply used Angel's summary of total number of posts for each student for a grade; I certainly hope not.

Three Highlights

I would focus on three highlights from the MAET program. First – learning good (and bad) online course design and facilitation. I was able to observe some of the best online instruction and facilitation, as modeled by instructors like Leigh Wolf and Pat Dickson. Leigh was not only an excellent instructor, but she actively participated in the discussion forums and was quick to reply to any questions – often within hours. Pat Dickson modeled how important it is to recognize the needs of the students by adjusting course deadlines when he instituted a "snow delay" to allow busy teachers an opportunity to complete their end-of-school course work. This was only a few of the example of how these two veteran online instructors modeled good course facilitation.

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As I think about the modeling of bad online course design, I recall one instructor who reminded students that they shouldn't email him with questions but post them to a common discussion forum for all to see. Yet when I posted a timely question about an assignment to the common discussion forum, after three days with no reply I finally sent an email to both the instructor and the graduate assistant.

I valued the effective use of the Angel portfolio system in the three certification courses. It provided not only a grading rubric, but an up-to-the-moment assessment of how I was doing in a course. For comparison, in two other required MAET courses, grades were not provided at anytime during the semester, causing me to wonder if I was on task, doing what was expected.
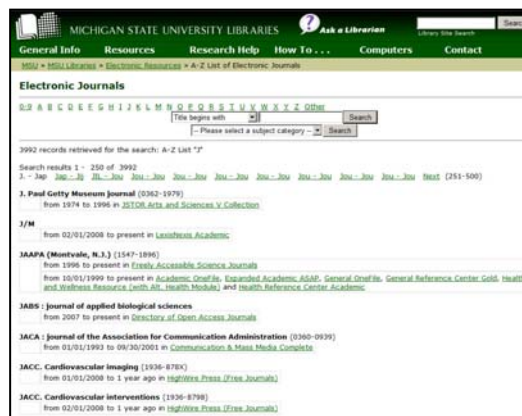
There were other examples of confusing course design. Such as when an instructor would have different dates for assignment due dates. In an online course environment, where deadlines are

critical, conflicting dates would not only be confusing but didn't build trust in the instructor or course expectation.

I had one instructor who created a spreadsheet to calculate final grades but it had an error in the summary formula resulting in an incorrect calculation of a lower grade than I should have earned. When I pointed this out (it also happened for others) the formula was fixed and the grade corrected, but no apologize was offered. These examples of poor course design were just as important for my learning as were the models of good course design. I learned from both.

A second highlight would be what I learned in the CEP 817, Learning Technology through Design. While I was sometimes frustrated by the choice of using an alternative/non Angel discussion board, the course content was excellent. It challenged me to think about design in new ways.

A third highlight was the elective course I took, CEP 822, Approaches to Educational Research. In the area of educational research I was an empty slate ready to be filled. Both this research course and the design course utilized an excellent selection of web based content and examples. I also valued the opportunity in the research course to explore the MSU Library's E-Resources section. Since the course I have used the E-Resources

MSU Library E-Resources – electronic journals search

section to research topics for my ISD career when a journal article would be referenced. I wonder how long I'll be allowed access when I'm no longer a student.

Next Steps

I have one three credit elective course to take to finish my Michigan State University Masters of Arts in Educational Technology degree.   I expect to take this final course in fall semester, 2009. I hope to take something fun which will extend my learning. I plan to attend one of the commencements on campus and celebrate my accomplishment with my family as this degree represents a commitment from the entire family. I look forward to using what I've learned in the MAET program to further my career. I may begin teaching at a graduate level again.

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I plan to continue my learning with a goal to earn a
Ph. D and teach fulltime at a graduate level. I will begin explore Ph. D programs and anticipating applying in 2010. I enjoy teaching educators. A PhD will require time and hard work. However, it will provide me with the credentials to continue my vision to teach at a university level. I have a passion for teaching teachers to better use the exciting, ever changing area of technology integration.