

What Would You Do if You Knew You Couldn't Fail?
Rosin Capstone

Who was the first person to make you fall in love with learning? For me, I remember playing rhyming games with my mom while we waited outside for my sister to finish school for the day. She was always so patient, and I remember squealing with joy when I would finally come up with a rhyming word to keep the game going. Our positive interactions and her enthusiasm were important lessons on how to teach and how to learn. Later on, it was this support and patience that encouraged my love for music and solidified the importance of education and exploration. As I'm sure is the case with many educators, the list of influential teachers that I've had over the years is endless, and one characteristic that is common in each is their ability to challenge me to be the best I can be. The passion for their subject was contagious and their genuine support and encouragement helped me strive for excellence and love learning for its own sake. Teachers can have a dramatic influence on a student's day and life when they least expect it.

At the end of my experience in the master of arts in educational technology (MAET) program at Michigan State University, I've come to realize that the most important part of teaching is learning. Ok, ok- that sounds too simple, but in other words, teaching is being able to continue your own learning to find the best ideas for your teaching. It's about having life experiences, trials and tribulations, and imparting the information that will be most beneficial and concrete for your students. The most influential classes for me during the program were CEP 820, which involved building an online course, and the entire East Lansing Summer Cohort which included CEP 800, 815, and 822 and dealt with technology and leadership. During these courses, I experienced the best of teaching and learning. I learned the importance of exploration and finding what fits best instead of simply using what's there. I was challenged to produce the best work I could, encouraged to explore and create, and intrigued to contemplate

What Would You Do if You Knew You Couldn't Fail?
Rosin Capstone

the future of education and the role technology can play. Most importantly, I was inspired by the work of my professors and colleagues and had a renewed excitement for teaching.

When I entered the program at Michigan State, I didn't know what to expect. As a full time teacher, I knew I wanted to work on a degree that would be meaningful to my teaching immediately. Technology seemed to be an outlet that interested me and was obviously becoming increasingly popular in our society. What's amazing for me is to reflect on technology's role when I was younger and how it's evolved to our current iteration. As a teen, I thought clipart was the greatest invention and used as many pictures, fonts and borders as I could to "enhance" papers. I started to become a facebook fiend after I graduated from college, and the more I use it now, the more I feel fortunate to be an adult in the current technological world. I get caught up in social media and love to keep up with old acquaintances and friends, but I cannot imagine being a teen in this same world. I see my students getting overwhelmed by the whirlwind of social media and also see the pressures that come with this responsibility. Smartphones have become an expectation for students instead of a luxury. Guitar Hero and Rock Band convince students that they are good musicians, because, hey, they can play at the expert level. Students see their self worth in "likes" and "followers." What a wild difference from when I was their age. With this said, I was anxious to start the educational technology program to use these technological advances to my advantage and to be an example of a technological role model who does not ban its use, but instead uses it safely.

I must admit that I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge a program that changed my entire digital footprint on the world. I feel fortunate to have joined the masters program at a time when free, cloud-based web design was becoming a reality and was also free to the public. The work that I have done on weebly has caused me to be a slight fanatic and I share the joys of this

What Would You Do if You Knew You Couldn't Fail?
Rosin Capstone

site with anyone who will listen to me. Once I became comfortable with it, I began to document my work more clearly and share what I was doing with the world. I completed the majority of my work in this masters degree with the help of this site, and it is truly one of the most valuable skills I gained.

Once I began CEP 820, I had already completed a few online courses and must say that I was surprised by the variation between the classes. The expectations, of course, were different, the technology used to interact was different, and even the layout of each class was extremely different. I began to realize that every class has a “personality” and each instructor has the ability to involve the students as much as they desire and force involvement for the greater good of the class. By the time I was tasked with creating my own unit online, I had ideas in my mind of what I liked and disliked in the online classroom. What is shocking to me is the recent outpouring of support for online teaching and schooling in my state, while it seems that the resources to educate teachers in this field is just starting to gain momentum. I can't imagine taking a single class to learn how to teach online. For me, I felt that the entire educational technology masters program helped me gain insight on how to teach an online class. Taking courses online helped me gain a sense of what is possible and beneficial for students. I had the gamut of experiences from professors who never gave feedback to those who checked in every week or every two weeks. I felt the desire to try my best in certain classes while other classes were pushed to the back burner because of the aloofness of the teacher.

Fortunately, my teacher during CEP 820 not only designed this specific course very well, but gave incredible feedback and encouraged the class to strive for their best work. In other words, I experienced the best of learning and teaching. In the end, I felt comfortable enough that I would take my course to an administration as a possible class to put forth to students. One of

What Would You Do if You Knew You Couldn't Fail?
Rosin Capstone

the greatest attributes of the course was the emphasis on exploration. So many times, we give answers to our students, but we don't give them a chance to explore the best way for them to learn the information. For example, some students may be better at writing a report, others may enjoy creating a poster, and still others may enjoy creating a video. In CEP 820, the teacher understood that there is a plethora of possibilities for online learning management systems, so a bulk of the course was spent defining what we were trying to accomplish and finding an appropriate system to match our goals. Unfortunately, I feel that many school districts are stuck in the idea that every teacher should be using the same technology programs. I can understand this somewhat for streamlining and trying to help students and parents with consistency between classes. I do believe, however, that this is stifling to teachers who may decide to simply abandon a program altogether because it is not quite what they need. For instance, I know a school district near me that will not let teachers create their own websites because the district has their own system that they use. Every addition to the site has to go through the technology department. Wouldn't it make sense to link a site to the main page, but let teachers add and subtract what is necessary from their own site? I even appreciate the educational technology department at Michigan State who will veer from Angel to create their own course pages simply because it is more efficient. I have definitely learned to explore and discover what works best instead of using what is simply already there.

The expectation of discovery and exploration in CEP 820 also forced a creativity on my end to really design a class appropriately from the end back to the beginning. I had to envision a final goal and work my way back to a starting point for the class. This included thinking broadly and creatively about how much I wanted the students to interact with me and with other students. How could I be sure that they were completing the work themselves? How could I

What Would You Do if You Knew You Couldn't Fail?
Rosin Capstone

assess the work that was being done? What could I do to get students to feel involved with the work being given? What could I do to make them want to learn? The teacher for CEP 820 really imparted the idea of planning a course educationally and psychologically. As with any other class, including face to face, students want to feel that what they are completing is worthwhile. CEP 820 really challenged me to contemplate how an online course differs from being in the classroom. In my opinion, I was also faced with challenging the status quo in our schools and deciding if this is a route that I would want to support my school to follow. I say this in a state where online schools are being encouraged as an option to traditional schooling. My answer to this situation didn't truly hit me until the next summer, as I'll soon explain.

Because I live in East Lansing, it only made sense that a portion of my masters degree take place on campus with the East Lansing Summer Cohort. I had no idea that my ideas, outlook and approach to teaching would be impacted so fully. I cannot say enough good things about the professor, assistants, and colleagues I had the pleasure of working with throughout the summer. The cohort consisted of two weeks face to face on campus and four weeks online, culminating with one final meeting at the end of this time to share work with our peers.

The two weeks on campus truly encompassed the best of learning and teaching. If I could sum it up into one quote, it would be, "what would you do if you knew you couldn't fail?" What if all teachers could create a learning environment where students wanted to learn simply because it was fun and the expectation was excellence? Granted, I was surrounded by teachers with a passion for learning, but I saw tremendous leadership from our professor, Dr. Punya Mishra. From the moment we walked in the room, the expectation was collaboration, perspective, and learning through experience. How do you make someone love learning? This question was inadvertently posed to us throughout the summer, but the task was using the vast amount of

What Would You Do if You Knew You Couldn't Fail?
Rosin Capstone

information now available through technology to answer it. While each teacher came to the cohort with different subject knowledge and backgrounds, we could all come to the table with creativity as our catalyst. For example, we are at the point in the evolution of technology that there are hundreds of websites aiming to accomplish the same task, such as creating timelines, for example. We were asked to explore and judge these to help the greater good of the group. Did the site accomplish its task? What was missing or something that you wish it contained? What are creative uses for this website? Because the class was only face to face for two weeks, the deadlines were swift and the hours seemed to tick by very quickly. I recently heard the COO of facebook, Sheryl Sandberg, explain that in their offices, there are posters that proclaim "done is better than perfect" and this is how I felt during the face to face course. (i.) The point of the assignments was not to be perfect, but to work in a group and accomplish the task to the best of your ability. From one assignment to the next, the groups learned about themselves and improved. While I was no expert using imovie, I had to learn quickly and with the help from peers, I figured it out. The class became a community, where the goal was sharing ideas and using expertise to our advantage. In the same way, I feel that teachers tend to neglect that some students can be experts. We can learn from them!

In a room full of teachers, one of the most difficult philosophies set forth by Dr. Mishra in the summer was to not assign grades for each assignment. Think about it- we were working to do our best work with the incentive being the end product. Not the grade. An educational anomaly? Yes, but it shouldn't be! This philosophy has been essential to me in music and to most musicians I know. The goal is the concert and putting forth the best product possible. The educational part is the process that leads to that goal.

What Would You Do if You Knew You Couldn't Fail?
Rosin Capstone

The most important lesson I learned during the summer cohort was to look at the world through new lenses. Dr. Mishra is a master of creativity and I was intrigued by his photography, videos, and positive outlook on life and beauty. Instead of this being a personal secret, however, he opened up this key to his world and connected it to our learning. I think that humans are innately intrigued by beauty and how individuals interpret this. I was fascinated by Dr. Mishra's use of apps online to enhance his photography and his use of photoshop to alter his photos which, in turn, taught the class a lesson in educational psychology. We spent time with photography and seeing the Earth and nature as lessons in science, math, music and art. Another example of Dr. Mishra's creativity would be the bag of dum-dum suckers next to his projector every day. He would design a slide utilizing the sucker in such a way that would connect to what had been taught or what was going to be taught. It seems silly until the class started to take over the slides. Students with all backgrounds would add a silly quip, drawing or comment to connect the dum-dums to the class. Did this help us retain information? Yes! Did it help connect everyone to the class? Yes! Will we ever look at a dum-dum the same way? No! Is this all I learned from the class? No, but I would add that creativity such as this led me to see the world in a new way. Why can't students take control of their learning? Who's to say that every student's background can't impact every other student in a positive way? I believe that we take for granted the imagination and creativity that our students already possess, and it's crucial for us to use what they know to help them learn.

To connect with my experiences online, I must add that the summer cohort solidified my belief that there is no substitution for a live classroom. While online courses can be a great addition to a student's educational career, I do not believe it's wise to use this as a complete replacement. The East Lansing Summer Cohort was an educational experience I wouldn't

What Would You Do if You Knew You Couldn't Fail?
Rosin Capstone

change for the world, and I think I shocked some by admitting that my motivation and work was better in this class than in my online classes. There is something intangible about a teacher who is there sitting next to you with patience, encouragement and belief that you can achieve anything you want.

I am fortunate to be at a point in my life where learning and education is a true privilege and not something I would take for granted. My life is an exploration and quest for knowledge and beauty. The MAET program was truly a great life experience that has encouraged me to be the best teacher possible and to challenge myself to learn for my students' sake. The most important part of teaching is learning, to put it simply.

1. <http://www.firstpost.com/living/facebook-coo-sheryl-sandberg-lists-the-perils-of-being-the-woman-boss-656608.html>