The Teacher with Many Hats

MACT Synthesis Paper

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts Degree in Curriculum and Teaching
Department of Teacher Education, Michigan State University

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July 15, 2013

Introduction:

Hats have been around for many centuries—each hat serving a different purpose. Some hats were required by the church to cover a woman's hair while others were meant to protect the wearer from the sun's harsh rays. Whatever the reason, the wearer donned the hat so that it helped the wearer accomplish a goal or task. Although hats are not as fashionable as they once were, everyone still wears many philosophical hats. These hats are the personalities that people take on in different circumstances in order to accomplish different tasks. Margaret Atwood cleverly said, "I myself have 12 hats, and each one represents a different personality. Why just be yourself?" Atwood, who is a novelist, poet, and much more, changes aspects of her personality so that she may excel in whatever she is doing. Similar to Atwood, teachers have several hats that each represent a different facet of daily teaching. In Brian Jones' (2010) article, *The Many Hats of a Teacher*, he lists that teachers must be actors, advocates, authors, bailiffs, beggars, binders, counselors, cheerleaders, coaches, computer experts, detectives, doctors, editors, fans, and much, much more. The more a teacher gains insight and experience, the more hats they learn to wear both professionally and personally.

When I first struck out to become a teacher, I naively thought that teachers only taught the content and helped students to grow as human beings in-between lessons. Now that I have one year of pre-service teaching, three years of teaching, and several MATC classes under my belt, I can confidently say that I was very wrong with that assumption. Every day that I go to work, I know that I will be called upon by my students to be a teacher, a career counselor, a relationship expert, an email guru, a parent, a helping hand, a spring board, a dart board, and the list continues. When I go to work I am unconsciously playing all these roles, sometimes several at a time, so I can positively influence my students and help them to become the people they

were always meant to be. My adventure in the MATC program has helped me to realize that I have acquired three new hats or roles that I did not know I was missing. These hats, the leader hat, the student hat, and the creativity hat, have helped me to become closer to the teacher I was always meant to be.

<u>The Leader Hat:</u>

Since I was very young, I have always gravitated towards the leader position. Whether it was bossing my younger brother around or directing my friends around the soccer field, I was the one that was giving directions, showing someone what I thought was the better way, and sharing my knowledge or opinion. I am not surprised that I decided to be a teacher at a young age and I am grateful for the path that I have followed. Teaching students has given me great reward in helping people to grow and learn.

Contradictorily, I have always been reluctant to share my knowledge and experiences with my colleagues. I always assumed that because of their many years in teaching, they knew much more than I did. What business do I have teaching them how to do something? Shouldn't they be sharing their knowledge with me—the novice and inexperienced? I believed this to be the order of things until this last school year.

Recently, my school held a professional development day where our Curriculum Director asked us to volunteer to teach a breakout session for our district. Since I am on the School Improvement Team, he expected me and several others to lead a session—something that I would have normally turned down. My co-worker and I had completed a lot of the same courses in the MATC program, so we decided to draw our inspiration from the class. As seen in <u>Artifact 5</u>, a Power Point presentation, we decided to teach our colleagues about basic level technology and its uses in the classroom. Thanks to TE 831 and my CEP classes, I found that I was

confident in the pedagogy behind using the technology and my ability to apply it in a school setting. I was encouraged to take a stronger position in my School Improvement Team and among my colleagues because I saw the impact that this presentation had on the participants. It gave me courage and reassurance that I truly was a part of the group (the group being my colleagues, students, and community). My perception of how the passing down of knowledge should occur was overthrown by my own ability to share my expertise in something that my colleagues were struggling in. I have learned that everyone has something to contribute to the group as a whole and to withhold their knowledge is doing an injustice to all the people who are invested in the good of the group.

When I felt that my leader role would benefit more than just my students, I decided that I would use what I have learned in my courses to relate information from the School Improvement Team to the staff. I wanted to give our staff feedback from a survey that they took so they knew what the Team was doing with the data. I used an online application called Popplet, which is shown in artifact 2. Through my courses, I have learned that data is extremely important in driving decisions. Adults are just like younger students, they want to see results from something they did and they want to know that it was meaningful and not contrived.

In James Paul Gee's book, *The Anti-Education Era: Creating Smarter Students through Digital Learning,* he talks about affinity spaces where people come together mentally to serve a common purpose. He writes, "Some people make massive numbers of contributions to the space, others make many less, but every contribution, large or small, has the change to matter, change things, and contribute," (p. 175). In this case, my colleagues and I came together, although some gave more information on the survey than others, to look at our needs as a staff and to see how they were being addressed. Everyone had the chance to contribute to our goals

and how we planned on achieving them. As a leader on the Team, I have come to realize through Gee's book (2012), that, "Education must focus on giving every member of society a valued life and the ability to contribute, to learn how to learn, and to adapt to changing times," (2012, p. 205). I often forget that everyone has to have a say in their learning otherwise it will not be meaningful and they will not be personally invested in it.

Sometimes I forget that personal investment means buy-in in my daily teaching and I am only reminded of my students' personal investment when they whine, "Why do I have to do this," or "When am I ever going to use this in real life?" Phrases like these are immediate eye-openers for me—they are truly humbling and remind me that I have to start over with my students so they have a chance to contribute and feel that their opinion is valued. It is my job as the leader to show them why any kind of knowledge is important. It also makes me critique my curriculum to make sure that I am teaching something that is meaningful and relevant. I know that I will always need improving when it comes to making everyone a contributor to their own education. Luckily, I can count on the students to inspire me to keep working towards my goal of making my curriculum entirely meaningful and relevant.

<u>The Student Hat:</u>

While I may take the leader role from time to time, I also have to be in the student role as well. Educators are constantly learning (putting on the student hat) so that we may be better leaders. I have heard from colleagues that teachers make the worst students and I was surprised by this because I am constantly striving to learn from others and through research. In my Personal Growth Plan, [artifact 6](), I commented that I wanted more knowledge as a student so that I could become a better teacher, "Once this class is over, I will continue to peruse the Internet for resources to share with my students and also resources that will help me grow as a teacher and

French student," (p. 6). This statement was true then and it is still true now. Teaching is not just about doling out knowledge for the students to ingest; it is about loving to learn and always working towards obtaining knowledge that will help the learner grow. Nel Noddings strongly supports research in her article, "What Can Teachers Learn from Research?." Noddings (2009) offers, "I hope that you, as teachers, will rediscover discovery and do something both effective and joyful with it," (p.25). In artifact 8, I discuss how research is one of the key ingredients to becoming a great teacher. I have learned that learning is key to becoming a person who is creative, innovative, able to focus, contribute to society, and able to think critically.

Before my MATC classes, I was would often avoid talking about politics or sensitive topics to those that I knew had opposing viewpoints. The reason for this was a complete lack of education on my part. It is necessary to know the opposite side in order to reaffirm what I believe in. My info-diet was thin and weak because I did not take the time to educate myself. Artifact 7, the post about my information diet, was a rude awakening for me. I forgot to be the student that I set out to be at the beginning of my courses. How could I cheat myself out of my student role? I am slowly digesting more and more information so that I am able to have these educated conversations. Many of my Teacher Education classes and especially CEP 812 have taught me that I have to constantly update my information pool so that I am able to critically view my world—only then will I be able to glean some meaning from it and be able to relate it back to my students.

Furthermore, it is imperative that I continue to research topics that I am professionally and personally interested in. Data is so important in schools—when synthesized, it can lead to great discoveries and changes. When my language department looked at the percentages of how much our students are speaking in the target-language, we were saddened that it was so little.

This data inspired me to suggest a change in our grading policy, as seen in artifact 1. We altered our grading, to encourage our students and ourselves to speak more in the target-language, by researching Standards-Based Grading and the Common Core Curriculum. I am still assessing how my students are doing in my class by looking at their scores, the standards, and other resources. By stepping back into the student role, I am able to explore information in order to change how I lead.

Professionally and personally, I have come to understand the importance of seeking information. Without it, I am not a critically thinking, contributing member of society. I would not have been able to contribute to the improvement of technology use in my school (artifact 5) and I definitely would not make a very good teacher. So many events are occurring in the francophone world and it does not help my students when I am hiding in a bubble of unhealthy information gleamed from Facebook, Pinterest, and my local news station. Stepping back into the student role on a daily basis will keep me grounded in more ways than one.

The Creative Hat:

When I was I elementary, I was convinced that I was going to be an artist when I grew up. Creativity was something that I wanted to work with daily. As I matured, I slowly lost my vision of spreading creativity around the world and I set my creative hat aside. During my pre-service teaching, my creativity was reinvigorated and I wanted to make all my lessons fun, exciting, and new. Then my first year of teaching hit and I was thrown into complete survival mode. Needless to say, the creativity was lost again.

Throughout several of my courses, I was reminded that creativity is essential to learning. As evidenced in artifact 4, I realized that TPACK and SCOT were perfect for helping me infuse creativity into my lessons, meanwhile making me a better teacher. TPACK taught me that I have

to think about more than just the technology. I have to find the sweet spot between technological, content, and pedagogical knowledge. In addition, SCOT taught me that I give the meaning and purpose to the technology, not visa-versa. All the technology in the world cannot make a classroom more creative if the teacher is not genuinely thinking about how the three primary forms of knowledge are working together in the lesson.

Thinking back upon the hat metaphor, students can be very similar to the wide variety of hats. Students come in all shapes and sizes with a variety of needs, wants, experiences, and skills. Although I knew that all students learned differently, my lessons did not always reflect that knowledge. When I learned about Universal Design for Learning, I knew that I could bring more creativity into my classroom by aiming to give access to learning to all my students. In the book, *Teaching every student in the digital age: Universal design for learning*, David H. Rose and Anne Meyer (2002) mention, "To accommodate a broad spectrum of learners, universally designed curricula require a range of options for accessing, using, and engaging with learning materials," (UDL Implementation section, para. 8). Rose and Meyer (2002) find that, "New digital media offer a much more feasible foundation for the UDL framework," (UDL Implementation section, para. 8). Creativity can now be fun and rewarding for all my students. I created a StAIR (artifact 3) to try to reach several different learning types. I wanted to include speaking, sound, writing, matching, critical thinking skills, and more. Although the StAIR is only for one lesson, it did teach me that with technology there is so much more I can do for my diverse set of students.

Creativity is not just drawing pictures or making posters—it goes so much deeper than that. When I create a lesson, I no longer think about what artistic skill do I want them to show

me, I now think about how can I reach all the different learning styles in my class so that my students have many avenues to access learning.

<u>Hats Off to Myself:</u>

There is a quote by the famous French president and general, Charles de Gaulle, "Vous commencez en donnant votre chapeau, puis vous donnez votre manteau, votre chemise, puis votre peau, et enfin votre âme. » Translated it means, "You start out giving your hat, then you give your coat, then your shirt, then your skin, and finally your soul." This quote reminds me so much of what it means to be a teacher. I started off thinking that I would only commit a part of myself to teaching, meanwhile retaining the other part(s) for whatever else is going on in my life. As each year has passed, I have slowly been giving more of myself to teaching. I feel that it is such an integral part of me and I know as more years pass, I will have given everything I have to become the best teacher possible and to fulfill all the roles that the job requires.

All these hats, all these roles are what it means to be a human being. I cannot just be myself when there is so much out there in the world for me to explore and to take part in. Whether I am wearing the teacher hat, the advocate hat, the cheerleader hat, the student hat, or the creative hat, I will need to use all that I have learned from my years in high school, my undergraduate and graduate degrees, my peers, and most importantly from my experiences as a teacher. Continuous education is the only way to live a fulfilling life where I am able to truly give back to my students and myself.

Overall, I am quite proud of how far I have come. My arrogance and naivety in the beginning hindered me from realizing what I was missing both professionally and personally. I would have missed out on the wonderful learning communities all around me. As of today, I have expanded my personal learning community (PLC) to encompass hundreds of people who I

can connect with daily to discuss almost anything. I am actively searching for information to update my lessons and curriculum through research and my PLC. Although I am still struggling with all the roles I must fulfill each day, I am confident that I will get better at wearing all my hats as the years go on.

Works Cited

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