Finding My Yellow Brick Road

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October 18, 2010: My journey had officially begun as I clicked the 'submit' button. The initial butterflies of registering were still present and now I faced the challenge of studying for two months for the GRE exam. I had conquered the first step towards my pursuit of a Master's degree in Education. When I signed up for the exam, almost five years ago now, my goal in pursuing the degree was not to simply add another line to resume or bolster my academic profile, but rather to put theory to practice in understanding the immense realm of higher education. My goals back then were quite broad: to better understand the operational practices of higher education administration to better serve the next generation of future learners. However, while broad, this has been and always will be my "why" for the pursuit of my Masters degree and continued learning.

I'll be the first one to admit that I didn't have a 'yellow brick road' to outline how I would reach these goals; I just knew I had the drive to help these future learners achieve their own academic pursuits. We often get so focused on identifying specific paths for these goals that we don't embrace the change that we encounter on a daily basis in our learning. While my goals were quite expansive, they were also quite unguided. I was comfortable with the "why" in my pursuit of a master's degree, but I had no idea "how" to best achieve these goals.

I chose Michigan State University to pursue my professional goals by embracing the vast learning experiences that the University has to offer and for guidance on how to organize these goals into achievable steps. I knew that each course would help identify a new piece to my learning puzzle, a collection of learning that would shape my future in higher education. I saw myself as a sponge; I wanted to soak up every little drop of information out there. What I didn't realize until a year later, was that while my foundational goals remained, my interests had evolved. Instead of the pursuit of a Masters of Arts in Education (MAED) and focusing on different principles of education administration, I transitioned into the Masters of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) program. In the first year of the MAED program, my interests were geared towards the educational technology and instructional design courses, so I aligned my studies with the MAET degree requirements. I saw the MAET program as a specialized opportunity to focus on the area of higher education that interests me the most: the evolution and integration of educational technologies. My educational pursuits focused on the

integration of educational technologies to help the next generation of learners expand their thinking and to use these available technologies as a method to make higher education more inclusive to all students. I was initially so focused on the big picture and future goals, that I failed to acknowledge the small steps and requirements that allow for these goals to be achieved. The MAET program taught me focus on the "why" as the reason for utilizing educational technologies and to recognize the needs of our population of learners. The MAET program also helped define my broad goals and put my purpose to practice: to help students define their learning experiences in a more reflective manner than a paper transcript. To read more about my future goals as a learner and educational technology practitioner, please click here.

Thanks to a self-assessment of my own interests and reflection on my future learning, my goals no longer rely simply on 'hope' to improve educational outputs for the next generation. Rather, my goals are now action-oriented with a purpose and outline on how to start the shift towards a self-reflective process as representation of student learning.