Making My Way Through Stagnation

I had a string of tough teaching days in the late winter of 2016. The problem wasn't the students. They were engaged and curious and as wonderful as ever. The problem was me. I was teaching three sections of 9th grade English, and by the third time through the lesson, I could hear a certain artificiality in my voice. A drone. A lifelessness. Then I saw it: a vision of me, in the future, a little worse for wear, teaching the same lesson in the exact same way. I think all teachers experience this stagnation. I also don't think this feeling is limited to teachers. Maybe it's a function of getting older. I've been teaching for a decade. And two years ago, during my string of tough teaching days, the thought of teaching for another three decades did not inspire excitement.

What *was* I excited by? I decided to list things I was curious about. My goals included to better understand:

- how people (including myself) learn
- how technology can best support this learning
- how to implement the latest research on the science of learning to assist educators (including myself) in constructing compelling, authentic learning environments and how to best manage and assess those learning environments

Two years later, I will be completing my Master of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET), and I'm more committed than ever to achieving my goals.

Three experiences from the MAET inspired my new path. Collaborating with three classmates, I produced and led a workshop on making models across disciplines for STEAMlab 2017 in East Lansing, Michigan. Our session, and the other sessions I attended, confirmed my interest in maker education and the possibilities it offers students for creative construction of knowledge.

Another influential experience occurred when I learned about cognitive load theory. I applied the theory and additional lessons on new media texts and tools in my redesign of a unit for my sophomore English class. Having applied the ideas from the course to my redesigned unit, I feel even more strongly the desire to question my teaching, push myself to reimagine my curricula based on how my students learn best, and know when and how to use technology to support my students' success.

Finally, when it comes to my own learning, I benefitted from guiding a project through the Stanford Design School's five design modes. I developed a digital portfolio system for students to use to gather artifacts and reflect upon their growth as learners. My completed project resulted in my school's adoption of the system, a consequence that has encouraged me to solve problems with design thinking in other school-based contexts.

It's safe to say I no longer feel stagnate. And though my future remains shrouded, my excitement is flowing again, winding its way forward.