

My Journey of Lifelong Learning

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My belief is that learning is lifelong. This masters degree journey has been an experience in juggling work, home, and classes as well as a great lesson on time management. To finish this degree I chose to forego activities that I, personally, enjoy in order to cover my work obligations and maintain time with my family. I have always stressed the importance of education through my career choice and through my actions. I learned an important lesson by watching my mom complete her degrees one class at a time while working and being a single parent. I avoided this by completing my bachelors degree before marrying and starting a family and a career. My masters degree, however, has been completed by taking classes while working and handling family obligations. Even though the roadblocks have been great and caused many frustrations during this journey, it was important to me that my children saw me as a person who persevered. Hopefully, they also learned some lessons from this.

To be honest, while I know I will continue being curious about learning and learn something new every day, I do want to take a break from formal education. I am not sure whether or not I want to return to the classroom to obtain additional degrees, but I do know I have to complete credits in order to maintain my teaching certificate. I have always said, "Never say never," so I may decide to pursue additional degrees in the future.

I am curious about life and I get bored easily if I'm not learning and trying new things. I know I learn best by jumping in and trying new technology rather than reading about it. If I have additional questions, I ask others or search online for resources that demonstrate what the particular technology offers. I also learn from my students. Their lives have never been without technology and because each student has different interests and exposure to technology, I've found that I can usually find someone who has already tried something I'm looking at. Also, I don't automatically throw an idea away if it doesn't seem to work immediately. Instead, I sit back for awhile and reflect and then decide if and how it can be used to engage students or help make my life as a teacher easier.

Our school district provides opportunities for professional development. The problem is, I tend to be ahead of my peers in my knowledge of technology. Most professional development workshops are basic and boring for me. Instead of the school district spending funds on bringing in outside facilitators, they could utilize the knowledge that a few of us already have. We could provide the workshops and, as an added benefit, customize them to fit the needs of the teachers in our building. The other teachers in my building seek me out whenever they have questions or problems with technology; and sharing my knowledge of technology with my peers has been something I have been doing on a one-to-one basis since I first began teaching. It makes sense to share this knowledge with a larger audience.

I have also thought about teaching at the local community college. They currently have an education program, but I am unaware as to whether or not it includes a course on technology in the classroom. I would be interested in developing such a course if it isn't already available. I would definitely be interested in teaching it.

On the other side of the issue, I need to find ways to learn that are more appropriate for my needs and are more engaging. I'm open to ideas about this, but what I've already considered doing is taking workshops through the intermediate school district and local community college continuing education program. This way I am able to select classes that are more specific to my needs. Webinars are another possibility for gaining specific knowledge and are often free. I can also seek out other professionals from education and business who may provide insight into software and hardware that could be used to solve particular classroom problems or enhance learning.

I don't believe in using technology for the sake of saying I'm using technology. If you're teaching social studies, for instance, you can't spend all of your time teaching students how to use the tools; you have to spend the time on the required curriculum. Whatever is taught should remain the focus; technology should be used to enhance that focus. I once heard it said that technology should be like a pencil sharpener on the wall--there as a tool to use but not the focus of the classroom. But I do believe technology plays an important part in education today. The use of technology in the classroom can make learning more interactive and exciting if used appropriately, which is exactly what today's learner needs.

To meet this goal in my own classroom, I want to create more resources students can use to refresh their memory on the basics of a subject. For example, I want to create standalone resources to teach students about types of government, types of economies and other basic information we continually refer back to throughout the year. Some students retain this information more quickly and for a longer period of time. Others need more reinforcement. If that tool was available, my time is freed up to focus on more active learning instead of re-teaching basic concepts.

I never found a lecture to be the most desirable way for me to learn, and I know students with any learning style benefit when they are able to interact with the content. By creating more SMART Board activities that incorporate videos, games, music, and questions/quizzes using the SMART Response System learning can be more memorable and fun. It takes a lot of time to create these activities and research the most appropriate technology. This will be an ongoing project for me.

With regard to the use of technology for learning in the future, I have a major concern with the concept of K-12 schools where teaching is done exclusively online. My concern stems from my observation of middle school students and their growing dependency on technology to communicate with each other. As this means of communication has increased, their ability to productively work in groups has diminished. I am a strong advocate for having students engage socially in a safe setting. The social interaction that takes place in classroom settings is a skill necessary in order to be a valuable addition to the workplace and in society. It is vitally important to find a balance between the use of technology and face-to-face interaction. All or nothing (at either extreme) is a dangerous path to follow.