

“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”

— W.B. Yeats

PLAYING WITH FIRE

My Quest for Lifelong Learning
by Rebecca Jackson

Karen’s School - The First Match Strike.

It often began with a hunt for vocabulary cards hidden throughout the house. The first to find each card had to present it to Karen, our babysitter turned teacher, who would help us sound out the word and engage us in a small conversation about the meaning. The next day it might be finding objects around the house that could be written with numbers. There was always time for crafts, things like coffee can pencil holders or jigsaw puzzle pins, but many of my earliest memories relate to Karen’s School, my first encounter with formal education.

K-12 – The Necessary Fuel

Notecards were a prominent part of my K-12 education. They had a permanent home in the back pocket of my jeans, as there was always something to be preparing for, studying, or reviewing. I was a dedicated student, performing well in all of my classes, but looking forward to my future education, where I would have the freedom to select courses to learn more specifically toward my interests.

A U of M Bachelor’s Degree – The Brilliant Fire

It was my time at the University of Michigan where I first found my place as a learner. I was still pressured with prerequisites and exams, but found many of these experiences necessary evils in becoming knowledgeable in the diverse world of education. I discovered the ever-changing face of formal schooling and decided to dive right into a role directly involved this change, a high school mathematics teacher - a position that required the continuation of my own learning as well.

MAED – Stoking the Flames

We have arrived to the current location of my quest for lifelong learning. I selected MSU’s MAED program because of its flexible format and course offerings, but could not have envisioned its influence on my thinking about learning.

The online format of the program has opened my eyes to the possibility of online resources and the endless opportunities for the role of information technology in my own education. I saw how I could use video production tools like *GoAnimate* to offer alternate assignments in a mathematics classroom. I discovered research-based strategies like repetition and making connections to improve students’ content area reading. I used *Dartfish Video Analysis* software to analyze a runner’s athletic performance, identifying key frames and inserting appropriate commentary. I “met” Dan Meyer, and former high school mathematics teacher turned researcher/speaker/blogger, whose *Three-Act Problems*, have inspired me rethinking the way questions should be presented in a high school classroom.

In the MAED program, not only did I have access to a wealth of teaching resources, presentation platforms, and scholarly articles, but could collaborate with classmates and instructors across the globe, sharing a never-ending wealth information, all the while sitting at my own desk. When I first began the program the concept of “group-work” with classmates I would never meet seemed daunting, but with the help of Skype, discussion boards, Google Documents, and a variety of resources, it ended up being one of my favorite aspects of each course. I was able to work with professors right from MSU’s campus, and instructors working for the United States Olympic Committee in Salt Lake City, a graduate student focused on educational collaboration worldwide working from Dubai, and current athletic administrators at the university. I contacted experts in a variety of athletic-related fields and created a network of professionals for future reference and education.

My Future – The Eternal Flame

Although my time in the MAED program is nearing an end, my role as a learner is just beginning. I have been introduced to a wealth of information and resources, but have only begun using each to their greatest potential. I must continue to evaluate the steady stream of new content, technology, and research, learning what I can do to improve my own practice and the experience of my students. It is inevitable that my future as a teacher will require a lifetime of learning.

Two key elements, curiosity and determination, have resonated throughout my experiences in education and will be the cornerstones of what is to come. If I remain curious about what others are doing in their classrooms, what the experts are saying, and what my students are interested in I can continue to learn and improve on my own teaching and learning. If I am determined to maintain this standard of continuous improvement, no matter what curricular or evaluation changes are made, I am confident I will also be able to improve on what my students are learning as well.

Education, teaching, and learning have played a prominent role in my life thus far, and will continue to burn brightly in the future.