

## For My Next Act...

There are so many things I want to do now that my graduate program is coming to an end. Many of those things are recreational: books to read, video games to finish, backyard gardens to take care of, bike trips to plan; and many are not.

Many of them are learning something new.

In some cases, I don't know what it is that I'll be learning. When I started the Master of Arts in Education online program, I had to give up reading many of the teacher blogs I had been reading. I needed to reallocate the hours I spent online reading about new techniques, assignments, frustrations and triumphs that occurred in other classrooms to reading articles and textbooks. Now I can go back and catch up on what's happening in those far away classrooms. And maybe, instead of writing papers and completing homework assignments, I can work on my own posts, and contribute to the learning through blogs that other teachers are doing.

Then there are things that I know I will be learning.

During my first year back in school, I decided to change my grading system to a standards-based grading system. (It was something I learned about through several different teacher blogs.) I've been meaning to read the book *Transforming Classroom Grading* by Robert Marzano since I started using the new system, but have had trouble finding the time between work and grad school. I'm looking forward to learning ways to improve the system I have now.

I'm also interested in extending the work I did in CEP 820: Teaching Students Online by building the rest of the hybrid course for my Honors/AP Calculus class. I want to make use of what I learned about online course design, and there's still a lot I can learn about what Moodle (the LMS I used) has to offer. Actually using what I've built (and will build) will show me what works in practice, and how to improve what, in theory, should have worked.

Lucky for me, I work in an environment that is very supportive of continued learning, above and beyond most schools, I think. One of the goals in our mission statement is that we have a deep respect for intellectual values. Within the goal's criteria are commitments to life-long learning and to on-going professional development for faculty and staff. At our faculty meetings, we take turns presenting something new we've learned at a conference or that we've tried in our classrooms. Plus, continued learning is built into our faculty evaluations. Every year we have to set two stretch goals to improve our practice. We work one-on-one with a member of the administration who helps us identify what goals we want and need to set, and then helps us reach them. Last year, I focused on improving my feedback to students, and encouraging students (all girls) to explore and try different STEM fields and experiences. I know my administration will continue to support my learning and trying new things.

As part of my efforts toward my second goal, I came across the Hour of Code campaign. It raised a very good point – most of us don't know how to program in a world filled with computers. I've had many conversations with our technology teacher about the importance of

our students learning to program, and how many opportunities there are for women in the computer science fields. I'm a firm believer in practicing what I preach, and so I will be learning a new programming language. I'm considering Python, because I've heard that it's one of the most accessible languages, but our new robotics courses uses Robot C, so learning C or C++ would be helpful if I'm ever needed to teach a section of the course. Regardless of the language I choose, there is a lot of support online now for learning to program. I feel confident in my ability to evaluate the resources available, because of the practice I had during the MAED program.

My formal education is coming to a close, for now, but it doesn't mean that the learning stops. Rather, it means that I've gained new ways of thinking and new tools to help me continue learning on my own. The best part is, there's a lot out there still to learn!

-Katrina Hamilton