

The Road Does Not End Here

My Future As A Learner

By: Leslie Gerth

As I come to the end of my Master's program, it is only natural to wonder what lies ahead. Since earning my Bachelor's degree and beginning my teaching career, I have been focused not only on being the best teacher I can be, but also on furthering my education and getting those all-important "continuing education" credits in order to earn my Professional Teaching Certificate and maintain my certification. Now that this process is complete, I must think about a new focus. However, as I think about it, the focus isn't really new. I am, always have been, and will continue to be, a learner. My formal schooling may be coming to a close, but I will continue to grow and learn in so many areas.

My teaching has changed and grown so much over the past four years. I used to think that integrating technology in the classroom was just about using a piece of equipment like a computer, a data projector, or a document camera. However, I now know that it is not enough to merely use some piece of technology and call that integrating technology. I now consciously think about the TPACK model and use technology in order to make my teaching better and create deeper learning in my students. I strive to find just the right mix of technology, pedagogy and content knowledge for each lesson, situation, and subject area when planning my lessons, both long and short term. TPACK will continue to be a way of life for me and with that comes the constant quest for new methods, technologies, and ideas.

The field of technology is both exciting and daunting at the same time. It is constantly changing, so it is impossible to be up to date at all times. This makes it very exciting and never dull! But it also makes the job of keeping on top of the latest tools and methods very difficult. Thanks to the MAET program, I have a network of resources to make this job easier. I have classmates that I still keep in contact with, an active Facebook group, and numerous web resources that I can consult for answers to any question or issue that might arise. These people and resources will be an important part of my continual learning now and in the future.

Outside of my MAET circle, I have many other ways that I continue to learn and grow. I have an active professional learning network, or PLN, in many social media sites such as Pinterest, Facebook, Twitter, and various blogs. I use these tools as a way to share ideas and collaborate with other teachers both locally and from around the country and the world. Some may argue that Pinterest and Facebook are more entertainment-based social media sites than professional, but I would wholeheartedly disagree. My colleagues and I use Facebook more than we use email now. It is so convenient to start a group message when we are planning a unit to teach as a grade level. We share ideas, resources, websites, and brainstorm in this way almost daily. We do much the same thing with Pinterest. It is an extremely convenient way to share ideas and I find myself wondering how we ever managed without these resources! I also have several people in my building and school district that I consult with and work with regularly. Sometimes there is no

substitute for being able to go talk to someone in person to ask an opinion or problem solve.

In order to keep up to date on the latest news and trends in technology, I rely on technology associations such as MACUL and ISTE. These organizations provide an abundance of resources as well as the latest information in the field. As a busy teacher, my time is often limited, but I make an effort to stay up to date by reading newsletters and publications when I can. I attended the MACUL conference once and look forward to attending again in the near future.

My journey in educational technology and my learning are not ending. Perhaps my time in graduate classes is over, but there is no doubt in my mind that I will continue to collaborate with some of the people that I have met during the past few years in the many classes I've taken. I will rely on my PLN for assistance and encouragement when needed. I will continue to look for ways to reach my students the best way I can using all of the resources that are available to me. This is a challenge, to be sure, but it is a challenge that I will take on with excitement and a tireless commitment.