When Doles Learning Stop?

When telling people I will be completing my master's degree in December, the question always comes up… So are you going to go for your doctorate? My quick response is no way! What is interesting is that I have enjoyed the classes required for the completion of my master's program, have learned some great things about technology, and have incorporated these ideas into my classroom. Then why is my response to more school a very enthusiastic NO? It is not that I feel my learning is complete or dislike learning; it is the fact that I want a break from formal learning and deadlines.

This must be exactly how a lot of our students feel in the classroom. Think about it, how many hours of schooling does a person complete by the time they graduate with a bachelor's degree? Classes are set up in the same format; homework is assigned for each night, and tests are required. We continue this day in and day out; Kindergarten through senior year of high school and most likely through a 4-year degree. I can understand why we feel tired of schooling in this format, but that does not mean we are done learning.

What sticks in my mind from my study for this master's program is the idea of how schooling and education is changing. What will education look like in 5 years, 10 years, 15 years? How can I use my experience earning an online degree help in my preparation to teach during this changing educational environment? I could not have even considered completing a master's degree if it had not been solely online and online where I was not required to be in a virtual class a certain time each day. I needed the type of schooling where I was able to manage my own time and fit it into my own schedule if I wanted to continue my education. The most noticeable result; I did not dread doing my work. I could fit it in where I had time and was not missing out on other opportunities in life. How do I apply this feeling and learning into my classroom? Are middle school students and even high school students disciplined enough to manage their time? Is this a life skill that we should be trying to teach? All of these questions and more will push my continued learning.

Professional development is offered a few times throughout the year at my school. Different speakers have been brought in recently to talk about inquiry based learning and 21st century learning skills. However I am beginning to wonder what jobs we are actually training these students for? Technology is changing so rapidly, my master's degree will be earned completely online where my bachelor's degree was in classrooms. High school students are taking online math classes to get ahead I did not have the option of taking online classes when I was in high school. The funny thing is; I'm not that old, I only graduated from high school 11 years ago. By the time my middle school students' graduate from a 4-year university (in another 8 years) what types of jobs will be available and how much will technology and learning advance? To begin understanding how to teach this way, my learning needs to continue in this format.

Not only is this the type of learning I want to continue being a part of it is the type of learning that I want to be able to begin applying within my classroom. How will that be formatted? How will students react to this? How can we apply this to what students will be required to do in the future? Searching for different podcasts, webinars, and talks to listen to would start this type of learning off. For example NCTM (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics) has offered webinars that teachers at a school can stream and watch together.

To be a member of this and keep updated on what is offered as it applies to our school and the future of teaching mathematics can help continue my own and my departments learning. Twitter is another way to stay up to date on certain topics and discussions. Following educational leaders on Twitter could offer links to articles and blogs that may be discussing not only how to incorporate technology into the classroom, but possibly trends in how schooling will be advancing. Following these allows me to get links to the articles and pursue those in my down time either at night or on the weekends.

My experience as a learning will never be complete. Throughout this program I have learned about how I learn and work with new technology. I am somehow managing to create a webpage as a professional portfolio which I had not envisioned myself doing. I would like to apply some of this learning with continued development within my own classroom. Over the next year or so I would like to begin putting together a class website or blog where mathematical topics can be discussed, students may be able to work with each other on projects, and allow students the opportunity to experience a portion of an online classroom environment. I had not felt adequately prepared before to put this together. I still do not feel adequately prepared but in all my studies as a learner it is not all about feeling prepared, it is about taking ownership of something you enjoy and stepping out and being creative. It may not work the first time, it may not work the second time, and it may not even work the third time, but that is what learning is; trying something new and adapting it to new findings, technologies and experiences. With this in mind I look forward to being a continual learner. As more questions arise, more learning must continue!