

**“Always Walk through Life as if You Have Something New to Learn and You Will”**

This quote by educator and author Vernon Howard describes my philosophy about learning. Learning truly is a lifelong experience. Whether it comes from formal schooling or life experiences, learning happens all around us. Ever since I can remember, I have enjoyed school and learning about new things. Therefore, it seems natural to me that I will use the many facets of my life now and in the future as learning opportunities. As a teacher, it is what I do with those learning opportunities afterward that is important.

Since I started teaching, I have been infected with what I call the “teacher mind-set”. What I mean is that whenever I see something that interests me or learn something new, I’m always thinking about how I can bring it back to the classroom. Sometimes the experiences inspire fun lessons. This is especially true of my traveling experiences, where I always find places and exhibits that fascinate me. One recent example came when I traveled with my eighth graders to Washington, D.C. We ate lunch at the Old Post Office, which is a beautiful stone building lined with American flags across its façade. It wouldn’t be complete, however, without a statue of Benjamin Franklin, our first postmaster, out front. I had one of my students snap a photo of me in front of the building, and I plan to use it to introduce our National Letter Writing Day activities next year, which purposely falls on Ben Franklin’s birthday. This way, I can integrate a little history into the letter writing process.

Another way I plan to continue learning is by collaborating with other teachers in order to integrate multiple subjects into my teaching. I get very excited when I am able to integrate subjects because I have an opportunity to show students how everything in our world is connected to something else, and that learning is not merely a segmented, subject by subject process. For example, I collaborated with the literature teacher (who was also my mentor

teacher this year) when our eighth graders worked on a WWI unit. They read WWI literature in her class, and I took them through the research report process once they decided on a WWI topic. I also brought in a section from their history textbook to teach a lesson on note taking. As a result, not only did I learn about how to teach research report writing from my mentor, but I also learned more about WWI from my students while reading their reports. I also enjoy collaborating with the science teacher. She and I have similar teaching philosophies but are still able to learn from each other. This year we collaborated when our students worked on a public speaking unit for me and a science fair project for her. Students presented their projects to the class and received grades in both English and science. She and I look forward to future collaborations and hope we can get the other teachers on board as well.

Learning from the experts is another way I enjoy gaining knowledge about teaching. I often find that I am armed with a wealth of new strategies and resources after attending a professional development session or a conference. Just this past May, I traveled to Chicago for the International Reading Association Conference, where I discovered a new vocabulary program that I will implement next year. I also heard many ideas from presenters and was able to incorporate some of them into my classroom, even at the tail end of the school year. Learning from the experts also comes in the form of my Kappa Delta Pi membership. KDP is an international honor society for teachers. Reading their magazine entitled *The Record* keeps me up to date with the latest research, best practices, and issues facing the world of education.

Lastly, in our fast-paced, information-inundated world, I know that technology will continue to be an important teaching and learning tool for me. My experiences with technology have greatly increased since beginning the MAED online program. Learning online is an increasing trend, and all of my courses provided opportunities for building online learning

communities with classmates, as well as gaining expertise in using free Internet technologies and creating and using forums such as wikis. Having increased my knowledge of using these technologies has given me more confidence to explore others on my own and to introduce some of them to my students. Technology also serves me well as a lesson planning tool. Although I have used many of the curriculum books in my classroom for planning, more often than not, I will search for a strategy or creative lesson online. The Internet allows me to search for exactly what I need very quickly, which has helped me numerous times when I needed to teach a specific skill. In the end, technology has changed the image I have of myself as a learner, as I know that I will continue using its endless resources to increase my own knowledge.

Being a lifelong learner will make my life experiences more rewarding and enjoyable, and I hope to bring many of those experiences into my classroom. Therefore, I have made a commitment to myself to take advantage of the learning opportunities that face me now and in the future.