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Future as a Learner Essay

When I first learned of the online Masters in the Art of Education (MAED) program through Michigan State University, I was floored at the possibility of earning my advanced degree, while being able to use some of my graduate credits from my student-teaching internship year. The best part of the program was that I could still be a Spartan, while working from home on my courses. I had never dreamed that I would be taking all of my classes via the Internet, or that I would be able to earn my credits with such ease. Through all of my learning experiences in the MAED program, I have both learned something new and set goals for my future as a learner.

When I immediately began taking courses online in June 2011, I was struck by how different learning in an online environment was. It took me some time to adjust the way that I took in and processed information. It was during my first course that I realized that the tasks that must be completed, whether asynchronously or not, followed a certain timeline. I needed to get myself organized in the way that a professor in a face-to-face environment might have things organized. I was so used to learning from an actual person in that face-to-face classroom environment that I couldn't navigate my own learning independently. Now that I am at the end of my program, I cannot imagine the program being run any differently. I actually have come to love the independence and learning from various types of media, without that face-to-face communication. Several classes have incorporated ways to feel like the professor is physically there, whether it is a video, a chat room for office hours, or a quick response time to emails. While I still feel that I may learn better with a teacher in the same room as me, these online courses have opened the door to my thinking that perhaps I would not mind taking more online classes in the future.

I originally chose to focus on literacy in my masters program, thinking that I wanted to become a better reading and writing teacher. Unbelievably so, I still feel like I have so much to learn in these areas. When I began the MAED program, the 21 credits I had to earn in order to graduate a year and a half later seemed like plenty of credits for me to gain all the experience I could want in the areas of reading and writing. However, I felt disappointed as I signed up for my last course, the capstone course, and I still felt that I had so much to learn! In looking through the courses offered, I thought about how I would take so many more of them if I had the time and the funds to fuel that particular adventure. I see myself extending my learning from my masters focus in literacy to attending professional developments in the topics that interest me, so that I can further my expertise in the fields of teaching reading and writing. I would love to learn more about the writing units that the Common Core State Standards expect teachers to design and deliver to their students, and also gain more insight into the complex world of guided reading and literature circles, all a part of a balanced literacy program.

I have always had a love-hate relationship with technology. I love technology for its handiness in communicating with others through email, text, Facebook, and so on. It makes living far apart from a friend or family member seem not so bad. I love learning new things on websites like www.pinterest.com, especially those ideas that I can use in my classroom teaching practices. However, the hate part of the relationship I have with technology comes in with more complicated matters, such as when my computer freezes up, when I can't upload a document where it needs to go, or when things just don't work the way they're "supposed" to.

I see my future as a technology learner in a much more positive light, though. The upper elementary teachers at the school I teach at received a grant for buying iPads for use in our classrooms, and I am looking forward to learning how to make the most of them in my classroom. Last year, my school obtained a laptop cart that upper elementary classroom teachers are able to bring into the classroom for more accessible technology. I recently learned how to create a "Prezi," which is another tool for designing digital presentations besides PowerPoint. For myself, I think the key to having a positive relationship with technology is to take "baby steps," much like how my classes in the MAED program have set forth the material they convey.

To sum up, my experience in earning my masters degree feels fantastic. I have grown as a learner, from being a strictly classroom-only learner, to a more seasoned, digital-age learner. I have gone from relying on a teacher to verbally and visually give me information, to getting information from the websites my teachers have put out there for me to learn from. I have gained more experience with online learning tools, such as Schoology and Weebly, among others. I have taken in the value of various media representations for learning, such as web tutorials, and hope to use them with my fourth graders when I become more confident in my own skills in using them. My future as a learner looks bright and clear. Although there is so much more for me to learn about in terms of becoming a "Master" educator, I feel lucky to have soaked up as much knowledge as I have in the MAED program. I know that I will continue to learn, continue to grow as an educator, and continue to keep up with the current technologies that my students are already gaining experience with.