

# Cultivating the Cycle of Lifelong Learning

*an essay by Stephanie Green*

## **The Process of Lifelong Learning**

In envisioning my future as a lifelong learner, I am reminded of a quotation by Vernon Howard: *"Always walk through life as if you have something new to learn and you will."* Throughout my work in the MAET program, I have discovered many new strategies for incorporating technology into the classroom, my ultimate goal, but have surprised myself with the abundance of knowledge that I have learned along the way. Ascertaining where I've been leads me to discern where I'm going. I will reflect upon my learning experiences in this program, how I plan to learn in the future, how my own exploration of how I learn applies to my journey as a lifelong learner, and further discuss how I can evaluate my learning process as well as the tools I can use along this enduring path. It is a cyclical process that will continue as I grow both as an educator in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and as a student keeping pace with the ever changing tools and technologies available.

## **Self-Awareness: Learning Experiences**

During the course of my experience in the MAET program, I feel that I have come to understand the methods and strategies of efficiently and imaginatively implementing technology in the educational setting. Most of my classes led me to examine, analyze, explore, and construct new knowledge about various technologies to not only investigate applications in the classroom, but also discover how the technologies would fit into my own lifestyle. By asking questions, struggling through explorations and making my own assertions about what I was learning, I came to understand the process we all go through as we learn. I learned how to communicate ideas and analyze systems by reflecting on numerous technology ideas and incorporating those ideas to construct new meaning. In using these cognitive constructs to guide me to understanding technology in the relational sense; I have learned to see the uses of technology and its interconnections between society, my classroom and myself.

## **Self-Management: Planning for Learning**

Just as technology evolves and continues to change, as an educator, I believe in the need to move forward and transform as well. In addition to completing my master's degree, I realize it is necessary to continue to be proactive in technology professional development by attending State and National Conferences that implement technology in the classroom. The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics and the National Science Teachers Association, both of which I am a member, have annual conferences in Michigan that promote engaging teaching with technology seminars. Outside of attending professional sessions, I will maintain subscriptions to educational blogs that enable both the sharing of what I am doing in the classroom as well as learning what others are practicing with current technologies. I have already set up RSS feeds in a previous course that allows me to update, read, and respond to some of my favorite blogs. By gaining insights through these experiences, I can also collaborate with my colleagues in order to keep up with the ever changing technologies used for education and to reach my future goals. With these guidelines, I am confident that I can adhere to my commitment to employ my continual learning plan.

## **Meta Learning: Understanding How I Learn**

While most of us are not considered "natural-born learners", I believe as a society, it is crucial to develop the process of learning as we embark on the technological twists of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. My goal in the classroom is to provide a learning environment that is both exciting and rewarding for my students. I understand that people learn

things differently and I do my best to address student needs. I consider myself a lifelong learner and approach teaching by getting to know the way my students learn. One way that I can achieve that is by sharing some of the ways that I gain knowledge. Individually and with others, I learn best through a verbal discourse. I feel that I have truly learned something when I am able to communicate it well to others. This also goes hand in hand with learning by doing. I feel that once I have verbalized an idea or concept, I then have to utilize that understanding by performing the given task. Through collaboration with others and visualizations on my own, I make the connections that help to create my understanding of a concept. Once I have this instrumental understanding, I strive for the reasoning behind the solutions and the procedures for finding a particular answer. I take this problem solving procedure and share my findings with others to gain insights, make corrections, or ask new questions in order to grapple with the concepts I am learning. In this way, I develop the necessary skills that allow me to go back and forth between procedural and relational understanding and view learning as a series of interrelated steps that help me to understand the world around me.

### **Self-Monitoring: Evaluating Learning**

Once again, in looking back in the ways I have learned in this program, I am reminded of the techniques I have utilized to continue to acquire the essential knowledge to study new technologies that I will face in the future. The first is to use the most up-to-date version of the software I wish to use. In using Google Sites with my own students, I have seen the lasting significances of automatically updating previous versions of Google to create the best designs, elements, and formatting to produce multimedia projects that represent desired objectives. I also use the play or explore method when working with technologies in order to discover their relevance to my educational needs. Another good evaluative technique is to use the built in “help” or online tutorials that gear procedures for working with the program in concise steps to assist in self-directed learning. Lastly, when looking at new methods or technology tools, it is essential to use time-management. Often, learning something new takes time, reflection, inquiry, and more time! When continuing to evaluate how I learn, along with the process of learning itself, I can develop the lasting tools I need to carry on the learning cycle.

### **The Process of Lifelong Learning:**

We live in an ever-changing technological world where computers and online learning are becoming front runners in educational policy. Since computers first entered the classroom, an ongoing debate of whether or not technology belongs in the educational process has ensued. Some educators believe that it is imperative to engage students in technological skills, while others contend that technology is best left out of the classroom. When I look at the future of education, I see a vibrant, technology rich environment, with students well-prepared for whatever lies ahead of them. It is my belief that technology plays a vital role in educating 21st Century students who are equipped with the skills necessary to compete in an increasingly technical world. By understanding this sentiment, I also understand my own obligation to forge my future as a lifelong learner.