

Oh the Places I'll Go
Gina Ventimiglia's Future as a Life-Long Learner

As my Master of Arts in Education Program is quickly coming to a close, I cannot help but think about what is to come for me as a professional. Michigan State University has taken a leading role in shaping who I am as an educator through my bachelor and master degrees. It was through this university that my passion for educating young minds was truly realized and that passion was turned into an exciting reality. As I leave this university formally for now, I wonder what will shape my next steps as an educator. With many avenues, paths, and promising opportunities in my future, there are a few hopes and dreams that I have for myself as my journey as an educator continues.

One of the first goals I have for myself is continued formal education. I have found through my formal education that I thrive from the opportunities that this structured environment brings. In my experiences, my formal education has allowed me to learn and reflect on educational ideas and pedagogies that have created huge growth for me as an educator. Therefore, I believe that in order to continue to grow professionally, formal schooling will be a path I take. After teaching second grade for three years, I realize that my true passion lies within lower elementary students. I love their innocence, eagerness to learn, and overall spirits that they bring to each and every day. This is why I think obtaining my early childhood degree will be a path that I explore after my master's degree program. I know now after having some teaching experience that I would like to stay in the lower elementary grades. I think I could really benefit from an early childhood degree, helping me better the education of my young students. Because my heart will forever be with Michigan State University, I have already begun looking at their program options. I look forward to continuing my formal education, striving to become the best educator for my students.

Another goal I have for myself to continue in my journey as a life-long learner is the development of my literacy instruction within my second grade classroom. My master's degree concentration area was literacy education and after completing several courses on reading and writing, I feel that changes and growth in my literacy program within my classroom are necessary. I had an in depth look at the components of quality reading instruction and what I found was that some were areas of strengths for me such as decoding and word recognition while other areas such as comprehension were more challenging. Since this summer I will have

completed my master's degree program, my goal is to focus some time on making improvements to my literacy curriculum. I will do this by using some of the professional texts used throughout this degree program such as: *Literacy for the 21st Century* by Gail Tompkins, *Assessment for Reading Instruction* by Michael McKenna and Katherine Stahl, and *Comprehension and Collaboration* by Stephanie Harvey and Harvey Daniels. I would like to go back through these texts alongside my curriculum plans and the common core standards and try thinking about my approach to literacy instruction and assessment, trying to make it balanced and research based. I would also like to work with some of my colleagues that have been using approaches different from mine and with more experience teaching literacy to lower elementary students and try to take some of their experiences and knowledge and integrate it into my classroom in a way that works for me. I think the tools that I can gain from digging deep into these experienced professionals and professional texts can help me feel more confident in my literacy instruction and produce even greater success for my students.

Going through this journey of obtaining my master's degree online has allowed me to think more about the opportunities that technology can bring to students and teachers. Therefore, a third goal I have for myself in the future is seizing more professional developments about technology integration in the elementary classroom. I have been thinking about this quite a bit over the course of this program and am actually attending the MACUL (Michigan Association for Computer Users in Learning) conference in March 2013. This is a three day conference devoted to sharing ideas and innovations with educators about how to integrate technology into the classroom, further engaging students, and creating opportunities that go further than the classroom walls. I am hoping to take away many ideas that I can reflect on during the summer months that will create even more of a technological classroom environment for my students.

With wanting to seek out more opportunities to learn about technology, I also know that I have quite a bit to offer in terms of being a leader in technology. I therefore feel that it is also my responsibility to share what I do know about technology and the impact it can have in an educator's life and their student's lives. I would like to take on the role of being a leader for my school and district when it comes to parent teacher communication. I now feel very knowledgeable about how to create a professional website and have explored with a few different website builders. I think having a classroom website would be a huge benefit to all

classroom teachers and the ways they are able to get information out to families. It also allows our schools to continue “going green”, embracing the more paperless world that we live in. I feel that my skills with technology have greatly improved throughout this online masters experience and therefore I feel that sharing my skills will not only help other educators but will also help me continue to explore and integrate technology within my classroom and my life.

After completing my master’s degree online, I have a changed image about online learning. I was no doubt weary at first about not having the physical interactions with my peers and professors. However, after being a part of this online program I realized that I have built an online professional learning community that has allowed me to share and reflect on ideas and strategies with other educators. I feel like I have grown more from this online forum because I was able to “meet” people from farther ranging experiences and backgrounds than had I been in a traditional classroom setting. I have really enjoyed reading about what others strengths and challenges were at a pace where I could really digest the information and provide more thoughtful responses and discussions. Therefore, I know that in the future I would like to continue seeking out online professional learning communities. Some ways I might do this is by following professional blogs or wikis that belong to other educators. I have even thought about setting up a twitter account so I could follow some highly experienced and wide ranging educators. The key for me as I more forward in my learning and development is continuing to seek out opportunities to talk with other teachers about the various aspects of education.

As a master’s student for the past year and a half, I have found that I have been able to relate to my own students on a different level. I too go home and have to decide if I am going to do my homework or watch my favorite television show. I too go home from a long day of school and give out a long sigh because I don’t want to “work ahead” or do something “extra” in my own classes because I’d rather enjoy the beautiful day outside. I have related to my students and have gained a closer understanding of some of the feelings they go through as students who are told to practice their math facts and read that extra ten minutes each night. It is because of this feeling and connection that I have felt during my master’s program that guides me in knowing that my learning is never finished. There will always be something that I can improve on as an educator, just as I tell my students they can always strive to do more and do it better. I will never stop learning because there is simply always something to be learned. My passion of teaching young

minds began long ago and it will continue through my own education and knowledge for a long time.