

I Finished My Masters Before My Dad!

By: Mary Wever

In the Spring of 2010, I called my dad to let him know that I was applying to the Masters in Arts in Educational Technology program at MSU. While he was probably excited for me, I think I also put some pressure on him because he had been working on his Masters degree for many years at that point. He said, "That's great Mar, I'm sure you'll do a great job. When's your anticipated graduation date?" Teaching full time while having 2 small kids, I replied, "Well, I think it will take me a few years because I'm only taking courses in the summer." Though he didn't say anything back, I think I heard him sweat with a sigh of relief that his daughter was not going to finish something before he did. My dad is a PE teacher and athletic director, he played a lot of sports throughout his life, and he takes great pride in his education. With this, it would be putting it lightly to say that he's a little competitive, even with his own daughter.

So, I started my program in 2010 with the dream of learning about cutting edge technologies that would motivate my students to learn. I stated in my entrance letter that I wanted to "learn about various hardware, software, and Internet tools to assist and encourage the children in my classroom to learn in different ways." While working on my degree has definitely influenced me to do this, it has also done so much more. Rather than relying on the technology to motivate my students, instead I try to intrinsically motivate children while using technology as a tool for teaching and learning. What I mean by this is I don't entirely rely on the technology to encourage my students. They live in a world that is immersed with tools. Sometimes these tools can be motivating, but other times they are taken for granted. When I am teaching now, I try to engage my students with relevant lessons while offering a choice of various tools to accomplish a task. That way I am balancing the technology, pedagogy, and content knowledge (TPACK) so their educational journey is well rounded and relevant.

Another goal of mine was that I wanted to be a technology leader in my district or county. I can say that I have definitely fulfilled this goal, but I would like to expand my definition someday. I am still on our district's technology committee, I do tech trainings on various software and tools, and I am the "go-to" person in our building when teachers are looking for ideas or need something fixed. One thing that has changed that I did not anticipate is that we have hired new teachers who have a passion for integrating technology into their lessons too. Now my interests do not stick out like a sore thumb. Instead, I have a cohort of colleagues who like to encourage each other to try new things to engage students. I look forward to working with these teachers and others who want to teach 21st Century learners.

When I decided at the last minute to finish my degree in May 2013, I called my dad to let him know how my plans had been pushed ahead. He congratulated me on my decision and accomplishments and told me he was excited to sit through my three hour graduation ceremony. You see, things have changed since 2010. My dad retired earlier than he had originally planned, so he also resigned the idea of ever finishing his Masters degree. Though I'm sure he is disappointed that he wasn't able to fulfill one of his lifetime goals, he did say that he was proud of me for sticking with mine. So yes, I did finish my Masters degree before my dad, but the less competitive goals I accomplished are definitely more rewarding!