

## **“Stuck” in School?**

*Confessions of a lifelong learner by Sarah Frazer*

Growing up, I never wanted to be a teacher. In fact, when adults would inevitably tell me how patient I was around younger kids, or how well I explained things, or how my outgoing personality made me the perfect fit for the educational world, I would kindly thank them and explain why I unequivocally refused to make teaching my career choice. First on my list of reasons was that my mom was a teacher, and I saw how hard she worked and how little she seemed to be rewarded. Second, a high school teacher had introduced me to the world of genetics and I fell quickly in love with the subject. And finally, in my youthful mind, there was something horrifying about never *ever* leaving school. Even on the day I graduated high school, I was determined to become a scientist and leave behind the ever-nagging thoughts of the education field.

Fast-forward several very eye-opening years of college later, and I finally recognized in myself what everyone else had been seeing in me for twenty-some years: I loved working with kids more than I enjoyed science, or pretty much any other topic or discipline I could imagine. It took one summer working as a camp counselor instead of a menial job working in a lab as some graduate student’s assistant for me to realize this, and after some real soul searching, I changed my program of study and even switched colleges within the University of Michigan. It required a huge adjustment to the schema I had built of where my life was going, especially when I fully comprehended I was committing myself to a lifetime of education, something I had promised myself to be liberated from the day I graduated. I made another promise to myself then, that I would dedicate myself to providing my own students with authentic work that was relevant to their lives, that was interesting and – dare I say it? – fun, that incorporated purposeful technology, and that taught them to be successful in an ever-changing world.

When I see myself now as a life-long learner, it is a far cry from what I believed back as a high school graduate about being “stuck” in a classroom for the rest of my life. Yes, I still despise busy work and goodness knows I could live without getting up early every day, but I understand now why my mom became a teacher and why she continued in the profession even when it seemed like she was not getting the recognition she deserved. Each day I have the privilege of working with and shaping the lives of an amazing group of middle school students at Charyl Stockwell Preparatory Academy (CSPA). They have taught me just as much if not more than I have taught them, and I have become a more patient and optimistic person because of it. Their thirst for knowledge has encouraged me to delve into content I never thought I would be teaching, or even interested in for that matter. Because CSPA is a charter school with a mission focused on teaching to the whole child, we do a lot of team teaching. This led to me, with a secondary biology and chemistry certification, teaching math on a regular basis. Five years later, I have realized my passion for working with students of all abilities in mathematics, and I now teach high school Integrated math to my highest achieving middle schoolers. I love seeing them grow

in their skills, providing them with opportunities to connect math to the real world (which is surprisingly easy, despite what they think), interjecting humor into what is usually viewed as a “boring” subject, and ultimately boosting the confidence of kids who think they are just “bad at math.” I have sought out mathematics trainings for my school, chose Science and Mathematics Learning as one of my concentrations for my master’s program at Michigan State University, and am even attending a math professional development seminar this summer on behalf of my school.

Above all else, my experience in teaching and in my graduate program has instilled in me a passion for ensuring that my students receive a quality education that gives them the background they need to pursue a life that makes them happy. It is more than learning the math or science content that will do this, but a strong foundation in technology and digital citizenship, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity that will pave the way for them to do so. This means that I will always find ways to better myself as an educator, whether through online courses, colleagues, or research of my own. I will never see myself as “stuck” in school as a lifelong learner, and I certainly hope my students will feel the same way when they look back on their educational experiences as the happy, successful, well-rounded adults I am confident they will become.