

Searching for Learning

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This is a bit of a difficult topic to begin writing about, as I can see myself doing such a variety of things in the future. Somedays, I want to continue to develop "Goal #3" and be the best teacher that I can possibly be. Other days, I know that I want to return to school (#1) full time and continue my education.

It was not very difficult for me to determine which 3 goals to write about. While I may not know exactly what I will be doing in a few years, it is something that I think about quite often. The experiences that I've had through my master's program, undergraduate courses, as well as life experiences, lead me to be constantly reflecting and thinking about my future plans as a learner and educator.

Goal #1

Return to school full time. I plan to teach for a few more years so that I do have that experience under my belt and can utilize that knowledge in the future (on top of the fact that I love teaching). But, eventually I do hope to return to school full time and earn a PhD in the area of Urban Education or Education Policy. While there are many great programs out there, the one that I have always had my eye on is UCLA's "Urban Schooling" program. One reason this program stands out to me is because of the many research centers that are offered such as the "Civil Rights Project." I hope that through a program like this I can continue to develop my understanding for social justice and education and find a way to make it my life's work.

Goal #2

Continue to learn about social justice and education and how to tie the two together in my classroom and life. There have been some very influential classes that I've taken throughout my master's that helped me realize that this (and special education) is my true passion. I took a few courses in particular (Engaging Diverse Students and Families, Issues in Urban Education: Racial Achievement Gap, and Issues & Strategies in Multicultural Education) that really inspired me to learn more and work more towards social justice and equity in schools. To continue my learning in this area, I will be attending a conference called "Free Minds Free People" in Oakland, CA in the summer of 2015. Here, I hope to meet fellow educators and leaders who are already doing this work and I can bring some of those techniques back home. I also plan to continue to read, including literature by Paulo Friere, Jonathan Kozol, Diane Ravitch, bell hooks and so on because of their influence in the area of advocating for public education and social justice. A few teachers have agreed to be a part of an informal "book study," and I'm looking forward to the opportunity to have discussions with fellow educators.

Goal #3

Better serve my students and families who have students with disabilities. I am still relatively new to the Kansas City area and therefore am still learning about the resources available to help support the community, but from what I'm finding there's not a lot.

What my students' parents have told me is that there is a huge area need is for respite care, whether families need an hour break or a parent just need to go to the grocery store. By researching and connecting with youth organizations, mental health organizations, and the foster care system, I am hoping to help provide services for families for low to no cost or to help families access these services. I will also read the book "My Baby Rides the Short Bus" which is a collection of stories from parents of students with disabilities.

Inside my classroom, my goal is to create a more positive and healthy environment by learning how to work with students (specifically special education students) who have experienced trauma. Recently I attended a lecture by Gerald Cox, a licensed clinical psychologist and he discussed the way teachers can support students who have experienced trauma. This has motivated me to learn more about brain development, therapy, and being a trauma-informed teacher and I truly believe this will change my teaching. I plan to reach out to two different child psychologists that I know so that they can help me implement strategies and techniques for self-regulation into my classroom as well as read various literature, such as "The Whole-Brain Child" and books by Dr. Bruce Perry. I am also on a committee of teachers who will be writing a social-emotional curriculum for our preschool and I plan to incorporate this newly learned knowledge into our curriculum, as we are all working with students who have experienced trauma.