

Learning to Learn

With a naturally curious mind and an appetite for 'knowing' ... from the very beginning of my educational life, I found myself engaged in the classroom. I recall being in class in the second grade and relishing in the fact that my teacher, Mrs. Webb, would read to us scholarly journals every day after recess. The articles were never long, but they taught me something new every day, like theories of why we dream or the backgrounds of holiday traditions. I had no idea that my desire to understand would accelerate my learning, but it did just that. The makeup of the Earth, the anatomy of the human body, the geography of the world, the interworking of a business, the elements in nature, the functions of the brain, the structure of equations, the complexity of literature, the culture of other countries – it all appealed to me and the more entrenched I became in the content, the more my hunger grew. Hence, I found myself chasing the challenge of learning; much like a game, with every test, every quiz, and every paper a measure of performance.

In sport and school, my competitive nature showed itself early on. Charging up and down and back and forth the field of soccer, I took to instruction like a top to spin. Even at the age of four, it made such sense to me – do this, then that and the result will be (or could be) thus! All I needed to do was focus and practice to be ready to pit my skills against another player and when I did, it was exhilarating. The battle in the classroom was somewhat different. The discipline was much the same, concentrate and study, but the challenge was even greater because my opponent was me.

I found myself to be a fearsome rival ... always suspecting I could do better. I remember my third grade teacher placing us in circles in accordance with our ability to read. To my dismay, I assessed that I was not in the advanced reading group and though I didn't particularly care for reading, I felt a deep and abiding desire to upgrade my status. So, I practiced my reading each and every night, challenging myself beyond the easy words on the back of the cereal box onto more sophisticated material, like labels and ingredients ... anything in fine print. I was deeply gratified by my teacher's obvious pleasure over my progress as I took in her praise and my rightful place in the advanced reading group. Still today, when I read for my own pleasure, I quietly chide myself for reading the salacious best seller rather than one of the classics. Clearly my accomplishment in reading brought me a great deal of satisfaction, as well as a good deal of expectation.

The pressure to excel caused me more than a little angst, but I had set the bar high and I was determined to scale it time and time again. While I was fueled by interest, I lived for the grade. My parents could not understand why I had a complete melt down because of one lousy minus sign on my final report card. What they failed to see, what kept me from a perfect 6th grade record, burned bright in my mind and I kept it in my sights all of the next year... determined to keep any such blemish off of my 7th grade record. I succeeded. That challenge being met, I was calmed down a bit and allowed myself to enjoy good, if not perfect, grades to finish out middle school.

In being exposed to a greater variety of subjects in high school, I was thrilled to have more choices besides the traditional math, history, English and science. I felt like a little kid on a brand new playground, a whole new world to explore and more importantly ... conquer! I remember sitting in psychology my sophomore year and thinking "where has this class been all my life?" I would dread the moment the bell signaled the end of class because I was never quite ready for the discussion or lecture to be over. Whether we were talking about behavior modification, the complexity of dreaming, or abnormal psych, I was enthralled. Then along came Chemistry. To hear about elements, atoms and reactions for the first time was a news flash. I found it almost embarrassing how much I enjoyed balancing equations and learning about the different dynamics of reactions and molecules. I remember the blank stares I got from my friends when I expressed that chemistry might be my favorite subject.

While getting the grade was important in high school I definitely felt myself diversifying somewhat as my courses helped me to discover some of personal talents that were not yet known to me. During my debate classes I learned I had a natural knack for memorization. To my surprise, I could recite multiple pages word for word strictly from memory and making it look like I was simply speaking off the cusp. With the realization of this new found skill I looked forward to giving speeches in front of my classmates and when required to speak in front of judges for debate competitions I was undaunted. As result, I emerged with a whole different level of confidence.

My experiences and the education to which I have been exposed, as well as my innate tendencies, have molded me into the student I am today, and the person I will forever be. As a freshman at Michigan State University, I understand that higher education will advance my learning; however, it is the internal factors, my natural inclinations that will ultimately dictate my life choices. As such, I am compelled to cultivate myself as a whole... explore my talents, passions and interests in hope of discovering purpose. Already, I've noted a distinct preference toward the human sciences, as I find myself drawn toward the studies of anatomy, psychology, and chemistry. While I'm unsure how far I will pursue this field of study, I'm certain that employing the methods of learning that have served me so well in the past will continue to grow my mind and broaden my perspective. Therefore, I will fully engage in each and every subject matter and apply myself to the utmost in the pursuit of excellence. I will not be overly concerned about what I'm going to do or be when I "grow up" because I am confident that my learning path will lead me to my destiny. In the meantime, I will remain focused on the here and now and trust that I'm traveling the road that I should be.