

# Sara Galbreath

## To Infinity & Beyond: Future as a Learner



*Toy Story* came out in 1995 when I was twelve years old. It was a favorite movie of mine for quite some time. Watching this clip now seems almost surreal. For me, it captures the drive and emotion of believing in yourself, even when no one else does. This clip also mirrors my graduate career in many ways, as well as how I see my life continuing after graduation. At Michigan State University (MSU), I found myself venturing into the unknown territory of online learning. Although strange, it was thrilling to do something I had never done before. Of course, learning in and

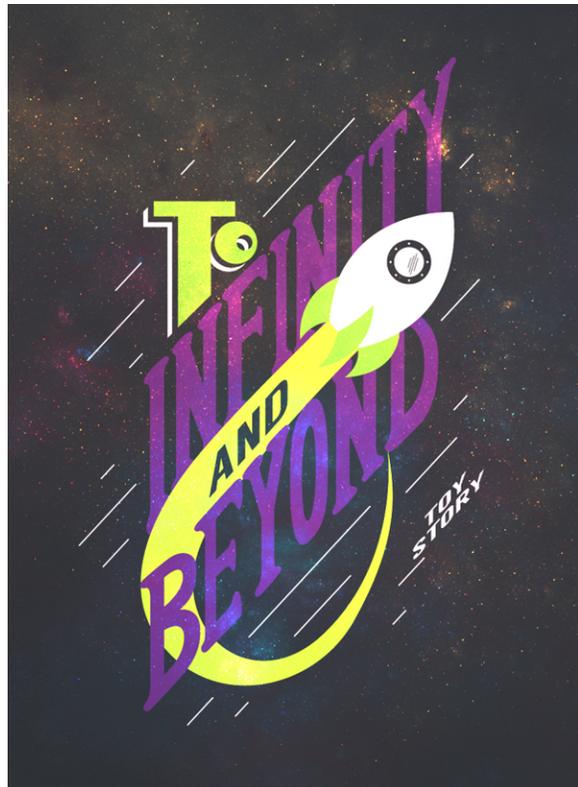
of itself has always been a personal joy of mine. The terrain of online learning, however, was new and unfamiliar. I found my desire for continued learning and my personal interest in technology to be perfectly matched by the Master's of Arts in Educational Technology (MAET) program at MSU. This graduate program brought together aspects of learning, technology, psychology, and leadership. I sought out the indigenous inhabitants through my online learning as I made connections with my classmates and professors to better understand the novelty I was experiencing. I also found a group of colleagues at my school who were eager to share ideas and help each other with all things related to technology and learning.

There were also those who had their doubts about my decision to pursue a graduate degree. There were some who said I wouldn't finish my degree. There were those who said that I had poor timing by starting graduate school while I was a brand new teacher. Some said "What is the point of pursuing a graduate degree when your school corporation will not increase your salary because of yearly teacher evaluations and contracts?" Some were confused by my choice to pursue educational technology instead of a concentration that is more common or needed like special education. Some said that I should start a family instead of pursuing a graduate degree. They said CAN'T but I said CAN. And I did. I proved those naysayers wrong by pursuing my dreams of a graduate degree despite personal obstacles and negativity from those around me. I reached deep within and found a way to not only complete my Master's degree, but to excel in all my courses and end the program with a perfect 4.0. With this achievement comes a sense of accomplishment and extreme personal pride. I have fulfilled something I have wanted to do since I was a child, yet I have only managed to scratch the surface of the **infinity** that is all knowledge and learning.

My time at MSU also pushed me to think about my learning in a broader context **beyond** my own personal learning. What will I do with this education and this degree? What was the point of all this time, effort, hard work, and all those sleepless nights? I heard this saying from a pastor years ago that stuck with me all these years and I think it fits well when considering how to use the knowledge I have gained at MSU. He said we need to stop trying to be a bucket, but instead need to try to be more like a hose. To connect these ideas to knowledge and education, we need to consider how a bucket and a hose would deal with learning. Buckets are great at holding things. They get filled up, but there is a limit. A person who is a bucket loves to learn new things to fill up their bucket. They learn and learn and their bucket fills up over time, eventually spilling over as it reaches capacity. In one large effort, the bucket's contents can be used to put out a fire or cool someone on a hot day. Now the bucket is empty and needs filling again to be effective and useful. As long as you look at life like you're trying to fill a bucket, you will never be satisfied. In contrast, a hose is not a container but more of a conduit of transportation. It

never gets filled up or reaches its capacity because it is always siphoning its contents to something or somewhere else. There is a continuous flow through a hose and it can be used over time and in many different kinds of situations. We need to let the knowledge flow through us like a hose instead of just filling up our minds like a bucket. The knowledge needs to be shared with those around us and for their benefit as well. We cannot be selfish and become knowledge hoarders. With the end of my first graduate experience in sight, it is time to consider how the knowledge I have gained will benefit others at my school, my corporation, and my community.

I do not want to be a bucket that holds onto my knowledge for my benefit alone. Instead I want to be a hose, a conduit of knowledge and information that can help those around me. I have many ideas and plans for the upcoming school year. Since I will be finished with my graduate program, this school year will be the first that I can wholly dedicate my time and effort to teaching. My plan is to collaborate more with the grade level teachers in my building so I can more fully support my English language learners in their regular education classroom. It is my desire to collaborate with teachers to organize lessons and curriculum, specifically sorting by skill, English proficiency level, standard, and grade level. I would also like to connect this work with a yearlong calendar to help maximize instructional time. In addition, the MAET program has shown me that I am not doing enough with technology in my classroom and in my building. I am on the technology committee at my school, and I can sadly say that we did not do anything at all last year! Now that I will have more time, I can focus on how to support the other teachers in the building with technology. The plan is to reboot and expand my monthly Tech Tuesday professional development workshops for teachers. I would like to create a wiki or some other online and shared space for teachers to contribute ideas or ask for help. I am also working on a way for teachers to rate and review apps or programs. This information will be useful for new teachers or ones who are unsure what apps to try or use with their students. Providing a space for teachers to collaborate and share ideas about technology will take our upcoming 1:1 initiative with iPads to the next level. Along the same lines, I have had the idea for a Tech Club for 4th and 5th graders in my building for the past year, but have not had the chance to implement it yet. This year it will become a reality. The plan is for these students to become the experts with technology in our building from



iPads, apps, laptops, and a host of other online tools. I have a few cool group projects lined up also including a welcome video for our school, a test encouragement video, app creation, student written blog with updates about our group, as well as connecting with other student tech groups around the country and world.

Beyond this school year, I have many ideas about how to continue my quest of lifelong learning. It is a comforting feeling for me to know that my learning and education will be a forever kind of thing. I am glad that there is no end in sight. I will never be at that place where I know everything. That is the best kind of role model a teacher can be for students, someone who never stops learning. Specifically, I know my formal education is not over. In a few years, I will begin my journey toward my Doctorate in Educational Psychology and Educational Technology (EPET) from MSU. Whatever the future holds for me, I want to always hold onto the idea that knowledge is powerful when shared. I do not want to keep what I have learned to myself, but desire to share, collaborate and connect with others. I have much to share, but I am eager to learn from others as well. Learning to infinity and beyond!