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Introduction

This portfolio is to show that I am ready to graduate from MC². I will do this by presenting three learning opportunities I experienced while at MC². They will reflect the learning and growth that I have experienced during high school. The first one is about a couple classes I had at MC², Advertising and Entrepreneurship. The second is about my Graduation Research Project on photo essays, and the third learning opportunity is about the volunteer ministry work I do.

I first heard about MC² from a friend who was planning to attend there the autumn it started. I was weeding a garden, and as the sun blistered my neck and I planted delphiniums he wove a tale of a small student body and personalized education. To me it sounded like hope. I remembered the school again, a couple months later, when I was hiding in a classroom during lunch, one week into my sophomore year at Keene High. It meant leaving everything I knew, but as the bell rang and I felt a flutter of panic send me into fight or flight mode, I knew it probably wouldn't be worse. As I meandered the halls looking for my math class, late, and watched some kid get slammed into his locker, I wondered if there was any school where I could let my guard down. The "No Harassment Policy" was nothing but a piece of paper, I knew from experience. Mostly, I knew I needed a change.

I had a mental image of what the school would be like. It ended up not being like that. But it was still a change, I was able to eventually let my guard down, and it wasn't worse, it was better. I kept finding reasons to stay. A class I liked, here or at the college, an idea I wanted to explore, the determination that I could get through high school and maybe even like it.

Needing to feel comfortable in a learning situation is actually a Type One learning style indicator in the 4MAT learning style model that we use at MC². My learning type is Type Four, then Type One as a close second. Some Type One indicators that I also identify strongly with have to do with connecting to myself, others, and the world around me. I also tend to take new information in by sensing and feeling it, and I tend to have an insightful imagination.

Type four is the type that I score the highest in. Some indicators of Type Four that I relate to are that I take in new information by sensing and feeling, I work best when I am on my own creating new things and ideas, and I want to do things that resonate with me.

My two greatest interests are art and writing, and I tend to switch between the two learning types when I do them. When I do art, I am more of a Type Four, asking *if* I do this, change this, what will happen, will it work? When I write I ask the Type One question of *why* do people say, do think, or feel what they do?

At MC² we are assessed on something called “Habits.”

MC² Habits: Self Direction, Ownership of lifelong learning and responsible Community member.

Habits of Mind: Problem Solving, Decision Making, Critical and Creative Thinking, Communication, Organization, Leadership, Management, effective use of Information, and Technology.

Habits of Being: Quality Work, ethical Character, Curiosity and Wonder, and Collaboration

Through an essay writing class I took at Keene State College I began to see how the habits could feed into each other. My professor encouraged us to use our strengths to grow in our weaknesses. Her method was instead of giving me worksheets on grammar and mechanics, which was my relative weakness; I should keep doing what I was best at, writing about my life. Through doing what I was best at, we would work on the mechanics and grammar with that. I began to apply the same to the habits. The habits I feel that I tend to do naturally are Curiosity and Wonder, Quality Work, Creative Thinking and Character. I tend to struggle with concrete things like Organization, Management, Information and Critical thinking. I started to see opportunities to use my strengths to work on my weak areas.

I am including these learning opportunities because they helped me meet graduation requirements and helped prep me for future paths. They are each a piece of my past, present, and future. I learned something significant about myself from each one, something that will affect me for the rest of my life and somehow affect the choices I make in life. This portfolio should show the learning and growth I have experienced at MC², my understanding of the habits and my learning style, and my plans for the future.

Conclusion

Growing up, I was a perfectionist. I had little self-confidence as well, and relied on outside factors to define me. In school, this meant grades. I would wait with bated breath for report card time. I would rip out that sheet of cool, white paper, and anxiously scan the column of letters, not even bothering to look at the classes next to them. These letters told me if I was a success or a failure. But somehow, it was never enough. That B+ should have been an A-, the A- should have been an A, and that A should have been an A+. And when I finally did make high honors, I felt nothing but exhausted.

It was selfish too, if you really think about it. Grades are about promoting the pecking order. I wasn't worthwhile unless I was better than someone else. I was rewarded not just for working hard, but for being "better" than everyone else, just because I forfeited sleep to reproduce a model of an African mask.

When I came to this school, I retained that internal drive to succeed, but I was still missing the point. I had high enough personal standards so that when I did something, I tried to do my very best, but I was frustrated because I wasn't sure what the intrinsic rewards were for doing so. And how was I supposed to feel good about myself, if I couldn't see how I was better than everyone else?

It all finally came together for me when I took these classes about advertising and entrepreneurship. After that I tried to plan projects in the classes I was in that would have ramifications and possible applications outside of the classroom. I also started having more independent blocks which allowed me solitude and quiet reflection to plan independent projects that allowed me to pursue my own interests.

When I was deciding on my Graduation Research Project, I tried to put together a project that would offer me the same fun and satisfaction. I also know that making money would be the same as getting a high grade. It's an outside factor that doesn't appeal to me as much as the internal factors, which is why my ministry work is more important to me than a high paying job.

When it comes to learning, it's not about failure or success, it's not about being "below average", or "above average", it's not about being better than everyone else. It's about discovering new things, about finding things to be passionate about; it's about pushing yourself into unexplored territories. And learning is not supposed to be about making yourself better than someone else. I finally understand why our projects are supposed to have a community angle to them.

I don't remember much of what I learned in middle and high school. There were so many facts presented to me it was overwhelming. And it didn't matter if I really learned them; I only had to remember them long enough to take a test about it. I was depressed by the transitory nature of everything I did. All those papers I wrote were recycled, that African mask has long been rotting in a dumpster.

But ask me about the world of advertising? Prepare yourself for a long dissertation on the insidious nature of promotion and the real agenda behind MTV. Or I can say what it's like to put on a photo show, or what photography really means to me. And if I'm asked what my spiritual beliefs are, I'd be able to show them from the Bible. I need information to be personally relevant, and something I'm passionate about, it can't be facts for the sake of head knowledge, it has to reach my heart.

I can see different ways that my learning relates to the MC² Mission Statement. What I wrote in this portfolio so far is my own mission statement, especially the last one when I recognized the importance of other people in my life. As long as I always hold fast to what I believe in a way that is honest, and use it effectively, everything will turn out okay.

I tend to go to extremes, but over the past few years, I've learned to balance myself out. I've also become in tune to what I need to stay healthy, and I've become a much happier, healthier person. For example, I know that ideally I need to eat every few hours, and to drink plenty of water. Every day I do something spiritual. I need a certain amount of alone time, and sometimes I need people. I need time in nature, and I need time in the city. Sometimes I need to bake something; sometimes I need a good book. I need to schedule time to be active and ideally with other people, or else I won't do it. I take vitamins every day and I've started eating healthier and getting more sleep. When I'm feeling off, I look at what I could be possibly missing and then try different things to see if I feel better, instead of wallowing in despair like I used to.

I believe I am ready for what awaits me after graduation. I'll be looking for a new job, interning at Signal Tree, and auxiliary pioneering. I know from the internships that I've had that environment plays a huge part on whether or not I like my job. Just like school, I have to feel comfortable in a work environment for me to do my best. So I'm going to be looking for a job that I like and I feel comfortable in.

I plan on auxiliary pioneering as much as possible in the next year. As I mentioned, I'm interested in entering the foreign language field and I will continue to investigate that. When the year is up, I plan on either going back to school for a couple

years or I will start regular pioneering. If I go back to school, I am thinking of something that could use my talents in art or writing. I have found two year programs in Graphic Design at Mount Wachusett Community College in Gardner, MA.

I believe that I am ready for whatever happens after high school. I have the knowledge and skills to succeed in whatever I set out to do, as demonstrated in these learning opportunities. No matter what I do, I know myself well enough, and continue to learn about myself, and have the Habits of Mind and Being to make the right decisions.