

That Was Then, This is Now

By Barb Huston, 2020-21 Region 4 Teacher of the Year

Hello, my name is Barb Huston and I am a third-grade teacher at Arrowood Elementary for the Saginaw Township Community Schools. I am currently in my 25th year of teaching. I have taught PreK through 5th grade in two districts and in nine different classrooms. I left the classroom for a couple of years to serve as an interventionist working with at-risk kids. I missed the classroom desperately and have been teaching third grade ever since. It was such an honor being named Michigan's 2020-21 Region 4 Teacher of the Year.

Some Things Change

"They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself." - Andy Warhol. When this Teacher-of-the Year journey began for me over a year ago, I began reflecting on my career in order to write essays. There were lots of essays--there was a lot of reflection. Each prompt challenged me to look into myself and reflect on the choices and growth I have made and the changes that have occurred over my twenty-five years as a teacher.

From the Chalkboard to Google Classroom

I used to think I would be posting my assignments on the chalkboard for my students to see with a permanent cloud of dust following me like Pigpen from Charlie Brown. Now I know how to greet my students with a cartoon Bitmoji, sans dust, as they access their assignments within a virtual classroom.

I used to think the Vis-a-vis marker was a game changer. It allowed me to write on transparency sheets and display them on the overhead projector. Now I know I won't have Vis-a-vis tattooed fingers and spend time cleaning the transparency sheets at the end of the day because my Promethean Board Stylist is much cleaner.

I used to think I would hand write my lesson plans in spiral bound books forever and store them in filing cabinets for future reference. Now I know how to type them and store them digitally in "The Cloud."

I used to think I would have carpal-tunnel from the death grip on my pen as I wrote through four layers of carbon paper to record grades on my report cards. Now I know how to store my grades in a digital gradebook and press print at the end of the marking period.

From Planning to Polished

I used to think at the end of the year that I needed to throw the baby out with the bathwater and chase the new shiny thing in order to start planning for the new school year. Now I know that I can spend my summers reflecting on only those things that need to be tweaked due to new initiatives or things that I want to try.

I used to think I needed to collect and grade every assignment. Now I know how to give feedback without the red pen, that student observations are filled with valuable information, and a quick formative assessment is often all I need to drive my instruction.

I used to think I would never have a social life and that the teaching profession was one of service and solitude. Now I know how to better manage my time and understand that the best planning occurs during team meetings when we can bounce ideas off and share with one another.

I used to think if I asked for help my administrator would think I was incompetent. Now I know that asking for help is not a sign of weakness or a lack of confidence but rather one of reflection and courage. It is important to use all the resources available.

And Some Things Stay the Same

I used to think I was building relationships and making a difference in my students' lives. Now I know I do! When we start our day with "Family Square" I know I am connecting with my students. When I confer with a child during the reading workshop, I know I am making a difference in that reading life. When I have lunch with a child to check in, I know that I've created a memory that will outlast the 180 days that I have with that student. Nothing is better than getting an email from a parent with picture attachments because the child has insisted that I would want to see them. And it's hard to beat running into a past student and hearing something that I said or a lesson that I taught will never be forgotten.

I used to have new teacher excitement. Now I have veteran teacher passion. I love being a teacher and I can't imagine doing anything else. I look forward to setting up the classroom each year in anticipation of the learners that will fill it. I am heading toward the end of my career but still have fire in my belly and passion in my heart for this amazing "ever-changing" profession.