

Esteemed graduates of Madison Country Day School, today marks the start of your journey toward new beginnings. You are special people who deserve the very best...oops wait one second here. I forgot to do something.

*Update status...yes.*

*What's on your mind? Giving...graduation...speech...check.*

*Attachments? Yes*

*Attaching Graduation speech1.doc*

*Share?...check.*

*Updating... updating... updating...complete.*

What we are doing here, gathering to celebrate and reflect upon your education, is good. What I just did was virtual, unreal, and ultimately self-serving (and a little cheesy). It was also much safer than standing before you all and actually 'doing' the speech- as the origins of the word 'authenticity' indicates.

The word comes from Late Latin *authenticus* meaning coming from the author, and from Greek *authentikos*, meaning one who acts independently, a doer.

Authenticity.

Independent action.

This, right now, speaking to you, watching your reactions and looking into your faces is much more difficult than posting a speech online and sitting back to see if it was persuasive or approved based on how many 'likes' it gets. Why? With human interaction, with authentic experience, there is always the fear that things may not work out. But that is what it means to be a real human: not only to take risks for success or failure, but actually to fail. An online, virtual life allows one to avoid such mistakes or problems. As the recent New York Times editorial from author Jonathan Franzen pointed out, it's all so much vanity. Don't like a comment someone made which disagrees with you? Delete the comment. Or delete them. Write down something wrong in a status update? Erase it. Or later add on a 'lol', or 'jk.' Did someone post an unflattering picture of you face-down in a sundae with chocolate sauce all over your face? Remove the tag.

This idea of authentic and real versus the virtual and unreal connects to your educational experience at Madison Country Day School. Yes, at other schools they may also teach

you the same ideas and skills you learned here: force equals mass times acceleration, that Hamlet was mad at his dad, the quadratic formula, the problems with the League of Nations, or that the B flat scale has two flats in it. But though they may know these facts, there is a certain rote, formulaic quality possible in this education, or as a colleague of mine put it, an “algorithmic” way of learning: you punch some numbers on a calculator, click a button, and the answer is 42. It gives only the virtual sense of learning. Memorize 3 flaws and 3 strengths of the League of Nations, and you can pass the IB exam, but it’s not the same as deciding for yourself what role nations, including one’s own, should play in world politics. and it’s certainly not the same as putting forth your view in a class discussion in which some very smart, engaged people are likely to disagree with and challenge your view. But, passing a test is not the same as being prepared to go into the world and vote in the 2012 presidential election based upon your preference for each candidate’s view of the US role in the Middle East and Asia.

When people ask me what makes MCDS different I bring up the discussion and interaction at our school. Of learning through the sharing of ideas. Of a place where it is safe to make mistakes and be a human being-getting down to the sometimes messy process of real learning and understanding not only through the memorization of facts, but through discussion of ideas with others. Socrates said, “I don’t care what people said about me, I do care about my mistakes.” When your point of view is challenged in an English seminar class, you can’t delete your comments, your fellow classmates, or your teachers. You can’t remove the tag from a test if you thought it was not your best work. Real learning occurs when you have to face it when you made an error, not facebook it. (Remember the Dreadnaught Battleships?)

As graduation speeches are meant to give advice this is my advice to the class of 2011, a click of the mouse does not make someone your friend, or make you their friend, just as a click on a calculator giving the correct answer to a problem does not mean you have mastered mathematics. As your time at MCDS gave you an authentic education, I encourage to live an authentic life, without the need of others to ‘like’ it. A life of independent action. I am very proud of you all, and I wish for you real happiness.