

The Treacherous Path

Michelle R. Fairley

My original goal statement was written when I applied for this masters program in September 2010. After reflecting on what I wrote, I find that my thoughts and goals have evolved but remain unchanged. Because of additional education, and particularly due to my experiences, I've been able to fine-tune my path. Unknown to me at the time, that path would become treacherous.

Beyond the fact that I've lived and dealt with a learning disability, I faced some unforeseen and unexpected challenges. I began this masters degree while working full-time as a middle-school teacher and having three young children and all that entails. Then I was involved in a high-speed auto accident that resulted in multiple injuries. These included neck and back problems, ulnar nerve surgery followed by a life-threatening infection, mild traumatic brain injury, and PTSD. All of these had a profound effect on my ability to teach and to complete school assignments. The brain injury caused short-term memory, word finding, and processing challenges. I had to find ways to compensate for all of these issues. This meant adjusting my teaching by sitting more often, reviewing the material before teaching it (even though I have taught the subjects for years), and finding ways to quickly dissect a student's question in order to understand it.. For my masters class assignments, I had to re-read materials multiple times, find alternative ways to complete the coursework, and find assistance with computer keyboarding.

Because I am empathetic and adapt easily to multiple learning modalities, I tend to be assigned many students with special needs. My recent experiences have heightened my awareness of the need to think outside the box when teaching these students. In addition, the resources I found to help myself will certainly benefit my students as well.

I still believe incorporating technology in the classroom is an important aspect of learning and that technology is the means to reach most learners. Technology allows teachers to more easily adapt assignments to the individual learner. Basic introductory information or the need for repetition by some students can be addressed by the development of simple, interactive standalone computer activities.

For students having specific learning challenges, technology can be used to help them share what they know. Paper and pencil does not work for every student. Due to having autism, one of my recent students, for example, struggled to organize his thoughts well enough to write them down. I suggested using technology to address this problem. Specifically, the program Audacity was used to record his free-flowing dialog, which could then be graded as is or be used as a basis for him to develop something written.

Our district continues to implement new technology and I have had a SMART Board, document camera, and a SMART Response System in my classroom for some time. I previously rated myself as highly computer literate. I certainly am able to "play around" with programs and equipment and figure them out; but, it wasn't until this masters program that I realized that I still had a lot to learn. There is so much out there that I don't know about; and,

since technology is ever changing, there will be even more to experience as time moves on. I plan to continue to look for and try new things in order to utilize technology to the fullest for the benefit of both my students and myself.

I have been able to utilize the knowledge I have gained about technology to excite some of my peers and encourage them to use it in their classrooms. I have shared most of this by demonstrating software to individuals when they have shared a problem they are trying to address.. As I reflect on my future goals, I plan to address other ideas I have to further demonstrate the importance of using technology to enhance learning.