SWOT Analysis: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats

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Through my three completed semesters as a Specialist's candidate at the University of West Georgia, I have expanded on and added to my repertoire of technological experiences. I entered UWG with an idea of what "Instructional Technology" entailed and was pleasantly surprised to find out that it included much more than different programs or technologies to use in the classroom. I have learned that effective instructional design includes so many components other than the technology. Besides courses focused on specific technologies, I have gained so much knowledge regarding the ways in which technology should be approached and the ways that technology is changing the face of education nationwide. Each semester, my goals are simple: to become better in my own classroom at utilizing technology to help enhance the learning experience for the students.

Strengths

As a teacher, I bring many strengths and positive attributes with me into the classroom. One of my greatest strengths as a teacher is my constant desire to improve in all areas of my profession. I look to grow as an instructor and as a technology advocate by learning new strategies and new ways to help my students grow as advocates, learners, and individuals. Many times in education, teachers are fearful of anything new, desiring instead to rely on their "old faithful" methods of teaching. When trying to educate these teachers on the new technologies and approaches out there, advocates are often met with comments such as, "What I have works fine." or "I have

taught for 20 years, and the way that I do it is just fine for me." Since I am always seeking to improve myself and my teaching, it is a never ending source of frustration to encounter teachers who are satisfied with the status quo and their old standby teaching methods. More often than not, I think that it is a fear that drives this mentality. However, as an advocate of technology, I strive to embrace the technology and ways in which I can work with these in my classroom.

In addition to my embracing the new technologies, I also hope to inspire my colleagues to be adventurous in their own endeavors. While we do face those teachers who are resistant to change, there are so many teachers just like me who are hoping to find new ways to reach and instruct their students. An additional strength of mine is my ability and desire to encourage and excite my colleagues about the multitude of technological possibilities. As a specialist's candidate, I have had an opportunity and exposure to many of these technologies or teaching strategies that many other teachers have not had available to them. I am able to draw on my own experiences with creating "How-to" presentations and in teaching to help model for my peers the ways in which they can utilize different programs or different aspects of technology.

Weaknesses

In addition to recognizing one's own strengths, it is equally important to recognize weaknesses. I have always felt strong with my own abilities when it comes to technology. However, interestingly enough, I have faced one of my largest technological frustrations this semester. Besides being enrolled in this class, I am also taking MEDT 7467 – Web Design. As the basis for our coursework, we are required to utilize the virtual lab. I have experienced a high level of frustration and disappointment with not

being able to access the virtual lab properly and regularly. As I expressed to my

professor, as a student who often feels quite technologically savvy, it is doubly

frustrating and humbling to have hit the proverbial brick wall when it comes to a basic

technology. I have found that I quickly become frustrated when the components do not

respond or operate as I feel that they should.

Opportunities

I have been blessed within my school in terms of technology. My school had the

opportunity to receive two Promethean boards. After writing a proposal to my

administration, I was granted one of the boards. I quickly began playing around with the

capabilities of the board and the accompanying ActivBoard software. Within a few

years, each math and science classroom within the school was fitted with a Promethean

board. I have used my Promethean board on an almost daily basis for the last four

years. In addition to being able to use interactive websites with my entire class, I rely on

and utilize PowerPoint as a strategy for teaching my math classes. I call on the skills

learned during MEDT 7468: Introduction to Multimedia to create interactive, interesting,

and engaging multimedia presentations. In addition, I look forward to the opportunity to

share my knowledge and created strategies with my fellow math teachers.

Threats

There are numerous things that threaten the use of technology in the classroom:

time, money, limited resources and support, and fear and uncertainty about the

products to name a few. However, I have learned to ignore the factors that I have no

control over and work with those that I do. It is easy to rely on these drawbacks and

threats as excuses for why not to try and succeed in terms of technology usage. It is

important to remember that, while I cannot control the amount of money or resources that I am given to work with when it comes to technology, I can take advantage of the things that I am given and the multitude of free resources and ideas available on the internet. Additionally, if we as teachers rely on each other, we can share ideas on how to make the best of and utilize all of the technology that we do have.

In this time of economic troubles, furlough days, and loss of teachers, money is certainly not being spent directly on technology for the classroom. To be quite frank, I'd rather have another teacher than another computer lab. However, I think that as a technology advocate, we can help our school to find the resources that are available. For example, my school recently received a $5,000 grant from Windstream to use on school technology. With a little bit of work to create a video and fill out some papers, we submitted our entry. While we were not the grand prize winner of $50,000, we were selected as a finalist, and through online voting, we were selected as a top-10 winner of $5,000 to spend on technology as seen fit by our media specialist. I relay this story not to brag on my school (although I am excited) but to reiterate that there are funds and resources available if we only seek them out.

Additionally, another threat to the utilization of technology in the classroom is time and feeling as though there is not enough time to investigate the technologies on my own in order to implement them into the classroom. Between being a coach, mother, wife, student, teacher, friend, and leader, my spare time is extremely limited. I struggle with finding time to delve into the resources needed to create quality lessons, and at times, I tend to rely on the old standby lessons that I already have planned. We, as teachers, are pulled in so many different directions and are required to give so much of

our spare time that it becomes very difficult to give the time needed to creating

wonderful technologically rich resources for the students to use. One thing that I have

learned while at UWG is that these resources are out there and easy to use.

Personal Technology Goals and Plan

As stated previously, my goals each year are simple. I strive to improve myself,

both as an educator and a learner. Being a learner and an educator really go hand-in-

hand. Teachers are constantly working to improve and reinvent themselves. They

attend workshops, spend their own money on resources, books, or trainings, and do

whatever they can to help their students be successful. Teachers, as a whole, are

altruistic people; they give of themselves constantly as a way of helping others – the

students. I want to be a teacher that my colleagues look up to and respect. I strive to be

a teacher who develops bonds with my students that make them want to be successful

– for themselves.

In terms of technology, my goals are to continue to learn as much about

technology and the ways in which I can use the available resources in my classroom.

Additionally, I would like to help inspire my colleagues and teach them how to utilize the

programs that I already know how to use. There are many programs out there with free

trial periods or that are free resources that can be used as an alternative assessment or

a differentiated assignment. If teachers know how to use these tools, they can pass this

knowledge on to their students. I have already created interactive PowerPoint

presentations helping to train my faculty on utilizing our Detention Google Document.

After receiving positive feedback regarding this resource, I plan to create more

multimedia trainings in the future. I love my school, administration, and faculty. I do

believe that I am lucky enough to teach with colleagues who also want to see students

succeed and our school grow and develop as a leader in the community. By introducing

my fellow teachers to the technologies that I have become familiar with or the

interesting components of PowerPoint, I can do my part to help propel my school to

greatness.

I joke with my students that, each year, my goal is to become more and more like

Ron Clark. While I am not likely to ever walk across the desks in my classroom or

create a school with a $1,000,000 donation from Oprah, I can work to inspire and create

new ways of educating my students. They love the ways in which I utilize the

Promethean board to enhance the lessons and the funny little sayings, songs, and

noises that we make to go with the lessons, but I always have room for growth. I seek to

continue as a learner, a trainer, and a technology advocate in the future.