Final Reflection

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I began the Ed.S program at the University of West Georgia during the summer semester of 2008. At the time I had just completed my first year as a technology facilitator in our academy’s Primary School (K-3). My reasons for returning to higher education were to learn more about how to do my job, make sure that what I was already doing was being done correctly, and increase my job security with the higher degree. I received much more than I thought possible. I was given the opportunity to move to the technology position in our Lower School in August of 2009; I now work with fourth through sixth grade students and their teachers.

My strengths coming into the program have only slightly changed from my original SWOT analysis. My strengths were my teaching background and my attitude. They are still strengths that effect my daily situation and will always influence the choices that I make.

I feel that my teaching background of preschool computer teacher, second and third grade classroom teacher, social studies teacher in upper elementary, and now almost three years as an instructional technology facilitator help me to have the classroom understanding needed for my job. When I was at the Primary school, my early childhood background was useful when working with the students. At the Lower School now, my upper elementary experience gives me credibility with the teachers for knowing what their daily constraints and situations. The experiences at the Primary School, both positive and negative, allowed me to reflect and combine them with the knowledge learned at UWG to avoid pitfalls at my new school. When I began the new position, my credibility of past upper elementary teacher and technology facilitator allowed me to be viewed by the classroom teachers as an asset and not a threat.

A positive attitude makes a difference. I still firmly believe that what I am doing is going to make a difference in the lives of students. I have always had a positive attitude in my employment, but I have had an attitude shift in my own personal thinking. Originally, I wanted everyone to be onboard with my thinking and use of technology. Through my experiences, my positive attitude got bruised. I was using a more top down approach and was disappointed when everyone wasn’t participating. I know now that it needs to be a bottom up approach and my attitude needs to be focused on small successes. Having a positive attitude will be an example and influence on the teachers and students in my school.

My weaknesses are also similar to my original SWOT. I am a teacher, not a techie and frustration sometimes causes me to falter from my positive attitude. I have worked on these weaknesses over the past two years and will continue to do so in the future.

Troubleshooting is a constant for technology teachers at the building level. One of my biggest weaknesses is the knowledge of computer “language”. I have learned how to troubleshoot many issues, but the error messages are still out of my league. Changing schools this past year meant going from all new technology to a building with inconsistent components. The equipment was purchased over time, so the models are all different. I have learned many different setups this year. We had trust issues, so I learned about adding machines back to the domain. Even though troubleshooting is still an issue for me, I will continue to try to overcome it and keep adding to my skills.

Frustration was a huge issue when I began technology, but now I have a different opinion of frustration. In the beginning, I expected everything to be perfect if I prepared ahead of time. I always anticipated issues and prepared for them; however, something always occurred that I didn’t anticipate. Once I shifted my thinking from despair of something going wrong to expectation of a problem to solve, my frustration disappeared. I don’t stress about technical issues anymore; I get excited when I solve the issue. I have learned to utilize my IT help desk department often.

The opportunities for me have changed since my first reflection. The schools are very different in technology resources. Our access is not blocked by filtration like most schools. My teachers are slowly moving in the right direction, but part of that is because I was able to recognize mistakes that I made in the implementation of a new technology program (at the Primary School), learn from those mistakes, and not repeat them.

With our current economy, resource development in any school is difficult. I have requested a large list of technologies for my school to try to make it comparable to the resources at the Primary School. My first reflection revealed a school with three stationary labs, a mobile lab, Smart Boards, four student computers per classroom, and access to most Internet resources (by login level). In my new school, I do have two labs, Smart Boards in every room, and most classrooms have two student computers. Our three sets of Senteos (Student Response System) are constantly checked out. We also have an additional 100 students at this school. My focus with my resources is to make the best use of what we have and keep looking for opportunities to obtain the desired resources.

The opportunity for access is still the same as before. Our students and teachers log into the computers with their own personal log in. Each user has leveled access. Faculty can access You Tube, but the students cannot. We collaborate with blogs, wikis, Google docs, and other various web 2.0 tools. Glogster was blocked at the beginning of the school year, but it was unblocked when I asked for it. Our sixth graders have Gmail through a portal on our server. We can monitor it.

Moving to a new school gave me the opportunity to continue the program I began for the teachers and students at the Primary School. I am teaching fourth and fifth graders that originated in my Primary School program. I am reaping the rewards. I now know that mandating programs is not the best way to shift a teacher’s pedagogy about technology, even when the mandate comes from the administration. Grass roots is my current philosophy. I am working with teachers individually and differentiating their projects based on their experience and their student’s abilities.

Time was and is still the biggest threat for me. There isn’t enough in the day to accomplish everything that needs to be done. Being in a new school has involved learning many new things for me this year; therefore, less time to do others. Staff development has not been accomplished to my satisfaction. Teachers have the opportunity to sign up for my time, the lab only, or both. My lab stays booked and my time, as well. I try to block off time periods for troubleshooting and planning, but approximately three days a week, I am booked all seven periods. If is frustrating for teachers who want to do projects, but they can’t get the lab or me when they need them.

This statement was from my original SWOT: “I have two goals that will aid in guiding my future as an instructional technology facilitator. My ultimate target is to progress teachers to the place where they are self sufficient at automatically implementing technology into their personal use, instruction, and activities of their classroom. In saying that, the real goal would be to make myself obsolete; however, with new innovations constantly emerging, there will always be a place for me. My second goal is to continue to learn about technology. I feel this is important for the duration of my career.” These goals are still important to me; however, I would like to add another. I would like to progress students to a place where they are self sufficient at implementing technology into their personal use, learning, and activities in their learning. The teachers can model, but the impact should be on the students.

In my original SWOT, I planned to become more knowledgeable about LoTi. I became LoTi mentor certified this year. I hope to implement more staff development opportunities for my faculty next year. I plan to attend the national technology conference in Denver this summer and continue to attend GaEtc every year. Professional organizations and learning networks will help me to continue with my pursuit of lifelong learning.

The Ed.S program at UWG has impacted my life personally, as well as the aforementioned professional effects. My confidence has risen, and I believe I can accomplish anything I choose. I believe the biggest impact though has been on my family. I have set an example for my children. They have witnessed me pursuing this degree. They have watched me juggle work, school, their sporting events, my personal events, and life’s daily challenges. It has been a sacrifice for us all, but their accolades have been worth the enormous effort.