

Personal Statement and Reflection

*"Don't worry about what the world needs.
Ask what makes you come alive and do that.
Because what the world needs are people who have come alive."
– Howard Thurman*

I'm a creator and designer. I love finding creative ways of making technology and people work together. That's what I am best at. Sometimes it takes us years to find out what we are fitted to do and it is certainly an evolutionary process. But once you know, your focus becomes clearer. The trick is to find an opportunity to do what you are best at with a chance to also grow. Without growth, you become quickly antiquated and lose the ability to stay fresh, alive and contribute to our world.

My background is in web design and Information Technologies. This past year I lost my position as part of a reorganization along with hundreds of .com people. The company I worked for decided to outsource their web/graphic design needs, eliminating a number of positions to be used elsewhere. But, I do believe things happen for a reason. The hard part is to be patient, observant and let the next road reveal itself.

I looked at a number of different career options and conducted informational interviews, talking to professionals in the different fields of technology and education. I wanted to take my skills into something that would be of value. Perhaps it was my age; perhaps it was just the right time. I enrolled in two graduate classes, *Instructional Design of Educational Technology* with Florence Sullivan at Teachers College/Columbia and a local course examining the Educational process in today's society. The combination of the two decided my direction.

The assignment in the class centering on the educational system in this country was very simple. Visit three classrooms at various schools. For one classroom I chose third grade Art. Every child I observed that day was absorbed in what they were doing. The excitement in that classroom was dynamic. The next classroom I visited had a different effect. It was a special support class in a middle school. I observed one sixth grader waste two hours of his precious time. He couldn't possibly have learned one thing. My last visit was at the community college. The subject was undergraduate history. Half the students were either sleeping, barely sitting in the chair or Instant Messaging their friends.

What exactly was I seeing? Just bad days to visit? Maybe, but I wasn't so sure. Where did those excited third graders go? Where were John Dewey's children that I read about in Florence Sullivan's class? I heard every excuse after that why schools are failing in our county. The conclusion I came to is that these are reasons. There are no excuses. As we explored different educational theories in creating exciting learning environments for students in my class at Columbia, my road was making itself known. I wanted the chance to design and create active learning opportunities for students to excel using what I knew, technology.

One administrator remarked to me, "We can't reach every student, we are going to lose some". Perhaps, but I also think a good teacher is like a shepherd, keeping the flock in front of him or her. The ones that wander off or lag should be gathered up but none should be left behind. We need to take a look at today's environment, today's learner, and use every tool and method available to teach students to be explorers and remain excited about learning.

The teaching process is changing. Even the youngest student is technology savvy. Their communities are virtual, no longer bound by location. Adult learners expect the educational process to accommodate anywhere, anytime assessability and convenience. But it takes time, effort, and commitment to move education into today's world. Even the most dedicated and enthusiastic faculty members struggle with technology having little time in their busy schedule to develop the skills necessary to enhance their courses. The development of technology-enhanced learning is not yet recognized as a scholarly activity. Some are reluctant to put the effort into developing their courses for multiple learning places such as the www, ITV, face-to-face and hybrid environments.

Yet, many faculty members recognize their role is changing from a dispenser of information to a facilitator of learning. They are eager to participate and welcome help in using the tools and resources necessary for them to reach students. Through my work at Teacher's College, independent study, experience in the field and digital design skills, I hope to support this change, helping educators combine today's best practices and learning theories with tomorrow's technology to develop effective learning environments.

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