

Goal Statement

Throughout several years of working with general and special education students, I have recognized the importance of technology within the classroom in not only enhancing overall educational quality, but in how the technology provides a crucial means for student access to curriculum, communication, and various forms of educational material. By combining a PhD in Education with a concentration in Instructional Design Learning Technologies and a specialization in assistive technology, with the knowledge of special education obtained through work experience and my Masters degree, I plan to assess students of varying disabilities, as well as the technology, for appropriate assistive technology pairings. In assessing students and the technology, I plan to provide appropriate student to technology matches to help students with disabilities interact within their educational and personal environments to the full extent possible.

My interest in research of technology in education and more specifically, assistive technology began while working as an instructional aide for a nonverbal student with cerebral palsy prior to teaching. This student, although nonverbal and with limited gross and fine motor movement, was able to utilize various forms of technology to access the curriculum and for communication. Working with the student his kindergarten year prior to devices being implemented, I quickly utilized basic computer software, such as Microsoft PowerPoint and Word, in conjunction with switches to modify the students access to the curriculum. Due to my adaptation of programs for the student during his kindergarten year, in his first grade year, I worked closely with the Assistive Technology Professional in finding appropriate devices. I also played an integral role in assessing device usability for the student. Also, forming a personal relationship with the student and his family outside of the school setting allowed exposure to

other forms of technology used at home to aid in communication and movement. I was able to realize that technology did not only have to be an expensive device, but that anything from a slant board to an intricate eye gaze computer system could help the student access many areas of his life. In the two years of working with the student, I was able to appreciate the importance of assistive technology and developed an intense understanding, through my own adaptation and modification of devices, creation of interactive applications, and working with the professional, of planning for and assessing students for appropriate technology.

Currently, my interest of assistive technology continues through three years as a lead teacher for students with autism, traumatic brain injuries, learning and emotional disabilities. I have seen students with difficulty writing flourish with appropriate computer software, improvements in speech with students with autism with the use of communication applications, and students with motor issues access materials with simple modifications to books. I have learned that assistive technology is not only beneficial for students with communication or physical disabilities, but that it also helps students with cognitive, literacy, and learning difficulties. New technological developments and ingenuity with simple devices permit students to bridge the gap between disability and access, which enables students to meet various education, communication, and functional needs. I hope to research various forms of assistive technology to encourage continued accessibility to various mediums, which facilitates overall independence.

I believe that research is crucial to the continued development of new technologies and how new and existing technologies could be used to help people with disabilities. In obtaining a PhD in Education, I plan to research usability of existing devices targeted toward individuals

with disabilities and also research how existing technology for the general population could be used to aid in function as well as access. I would like to apply this continued research into various settings, educational and clinical, to help students and adults with various disabilities to obtain greater independence. I plan to aim for individuals with disabilities to find success in completing tasks to the best of their ability with the support of technology, which leads to the empowerment of the individuals with the various learning, cognitive, physical, and communication needs. This empowerment will help these individuals discover independence and control within their lives in various settings.

I chose George Mason University to continue my graduate studies because of the university's strong education program and the innovation and research base within the PhD in Education program. In completing my Master's degree at George Mason, I was impressed by the depth of knowledge of the professors and the quality of my education. My Master's degree has prepared me to be a competent educator with a strong base in special education theory and its practical application that is able to adapt various materials for students with diverse learning needs. In researching doctoral programs to apply to, I was initially impressed by the innovative nature of the PhD program, with its strong base in research and link between technology and education. I believe that the University, and this specific program, are an ideal match for my overall career goals.

As technological developments advance, the possibilities for individuals with disabilities to access technology continue to increase. By receiving a PhD with a concentration in Instructional Design Learning Technologies, I hope to bridge the gap between technologies readily available or created for those without disabilities and those that could benefit the most

from the technology. I also plan, through constant research within the field, to guarantee that individuals with disabilities are paired with appropriate technological devices, and that these devices are use correctly for the overall goal of the device to ensure the greatest positive impact possible on the individual.