

Running Head: PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Professional Growth in Technology

Rocky Harvey

Walden University

### Professional Growth in Technology

Approximately 11 years ago, I became involved in Northside ISD (NISD) training in technology. Deployment of teacher workstations to every classroom was accompanied by several hours of mandatory and recommended training. At first one is inclined to ponder whether striking a wrong key will somehow fry the keyboard or destroy installed software. Slowly, the initial phobia subsided. Word documents and data spreadsheets and routine troubleshooting gave way to thoughts of how much a computer can be used for in terms of education. Somewhere far beyond the NISD campus doors future-thinking techno-gurus had already conceived of cyberspace and merging files and inserting color and animation into presentations. The more comfortable I became in manipulating data and *playing* with the computer, the more I realized that the instrument beneath my finger tips was a tool with unlimited applications for student learning.

I participated in the 66 hours of technology familiarization training – twice. I talked with computer teachers frequently and delved into the *what* and *how* of programs that was causing problems for me and my techno-neophyte colleagues. The more I learned – the less I knew. Technology is changing faster than I can learn its practical application. Seeing the invitation to be part of the PAVE 4 program, in spring 2005, I jumped at the opportunity. I attended the informational meetings and filed the required applications. Then I learned I had not been selected in *the lottery*. I was extremely disappointed but resolved myself to learn as much technology through self-study and practice as I possibly could. Last minute drops opened the door to the PAVE program, and I did not hesitate to enroll.

Early on, I thought there would be more hands-on application training. After a half-dozen preparatory courses in new Microsoft XP software, the course took on the tone of theoretical

research and regurgitation. Behind the theory and future thinking aspect of the program, however lays a *Discovery Channel* begging to be used.

In order for educators to fully appreciate the technological tools provided them they need to backup from the here and now and put past and current changes into future perspective. It took contemporary society hundreds of years to map the world and now our students are exploring a thing termed cyberspace. No one really grasps the full implication of the possibilities and opportunities available through technological advancements. But even the most casual observer notices the rapid changes taking place around us; and realizes that, for the most part, youth are mastering the conceptual designs better than adults. Several instructors in PAVE video talks echoed the idea that many of the jobs we want our students to be prepared for in the future have not even been thought of yet. Somehow we need to shape their thinking and learning so they can cope in a world not yet conceived.

Computers are no longer anomalies or new-fangled contraptions, they have become the centerpiece for information gathering and sharing. From early electronic keyboards with direct linkage to a printer, computers now exchange complex data on a global scale in real time. What this does for forward thinking teachers is busts down the walls and opens the entire world to exploration. Costly field trips and loss of time riding buses and standing in line can be replaced by virtual trips – anywhere. The neat thing about that is data can be stored and the *trip* resumed as homework or a later class day. Safety and security becomes more an issue of acceptable use and inappropriate application than watching both ways before crossing the street and keeping one's hands inside the windows while the bus is in motion.

PAVE is heavily laden with theory and demands labor intensive weekly papers. The program is not for the undisciplined, disorganized procrastinator. Timelines for reading, video

review, quizzes, surveys, applications, personal reflections, and cohort discussion responses require frequent, consistent use of the computer. As much as some participants would like more application courses, the program as a whole is an application course. It requires considerable preparation and continuous technological growth in order to successfully navigate the virtual coastlines of cyberspace. From simple laptop setup to periodic updates made on personal Web pages; from over-used PowerPoint presentations to imbedded video and narrative voice-over productions, PAVE compels the most timid educator to look beyond his or her present limitations and consider relevant applications for classroom technology as a tool of engagement and enthrallment for long-term student learning.

During the program, I often lost sight of the forward implications of the whole course. Theory does not excite me. Getting into practical application and exploring new possibilities lights a fire in me and gets my mind working towards thinking how technology can be better employed now for getting students to where they will need to be tomorrow. The neat and curious things of *Buck Rogers*, *Star Trek*, and *Star Wars* that intrigued and amused us in the Twentieth Century have become either real or possible. Someone once said, "*If it can be conceived – it can be done.*" Technology is making this more realistic with each new rendition. Cumbersome equipment once required for simple mathematical algorithms has been replaced with tiny silicon circuitry in children's wristwatches. More technological power can be realized in the average home computer than was available on *Apollo* flights to the moon. Yet the average teacher does not look beyond e-mail and *Gradebook*, and shies away from scheduling a lab for student familiarization with new literacy training.

PAVE has made me a discriminate practitioner of technology. Everything we find on the Internet is neither *gospel* nor *kosher*, and it is up to the cyberspace explorer to decide what is

useable and what is not. Considerable PAVE time was spent exploring Web sites and determining what is useful and what is not, what is reliable and what is questionable, and realizing the difference. I find myself considering how more and more classroom activities can be accomplished through computer application. One *what if* thought leads to another and generally leads to seeking out a colleague to bounce ideas off. I have become quite comfortable in seeking out answers for things I can not readily resolve on my own. The campus Computer Instructional Technologist (CIT) is a frequent target for ideas how to accomplish a given task. Fellow PAVE participants provide e-mail access to both differing and supportive viewpoints. And the Internet is a boundless resource for research and discovery. Any techno-phobia I enjoyed a dozen years ago has died a quiet, technologically-induced death allowing an epiphanic awareness that technology is changing the world we live in – the way we operate, the way we communicate, and the way we view our understanding of everything we hope to know. As educators, we need to use classroom computer resources more – and seek out new and innovative methods for enhancing both student learning and instructional best practices through technology.