To Infinity and Beyond: My Future as a Learner

By Daniel Levitt

Buzz Lightyear said it best, but what exactly does that mean? To me, the future is vague. I'm not entirely certain what will happen. I'd like to say that, in the future, I will grow into the best teacher librarian in Omaha Public Schools. I certainly strive to become the best. I certainly want to become respected and liked within my field of expertise. But how will I get there? How will I know when or even if I reach this destination?

What I do know is that I love what I do in my school's library. I get to explore books, explore technology with my students, and engage my students in a wide variety of topics of both curricular and student interests alike. I really enjoy sitting down with new books or titles that have been nominated for an award, such as Nebraska's Golden Sower Award, and promote the titles to the kids, even daring to believe that those titles I endear the most will become ones they cherish as well. Likewise, I enjoy listening to the kids when they perform a "trick" on a computer (aka learn a useful tool that will help with their everyday technological interactions) and get it for the first time.

Back when I decided that I wanted to dive more thoroughly into the field of technology within education, I didn't know exactly what I'd do with it when I finished. I only knew that what I currently had was nice, but not enough. My District offers me a wide array of technology in different guises, from SMARTBoards and MacBook laptops, to electronic resources like Angel, Learn360, CultureGrams, and PebbleGo. They're nice and all that, but I wondered if I could use them more effectively. So, I went into the program hoping to learn how to extend my knowledgebase and "continue on from there."

My first passion in the program evolved around the MAET's utilization of Google Apps. I have always been passionate about making my learning activities relevant to my students and more "real

world" in nature. I greatly value group projects and feel that, though individual projects often lead to great discovery, group projects give the same opportunities to more varied and diverse learners. However, my influence over my students academically never left the Library. My students rarely had time outside of class to work on their Library projects.

I also thought about the stereotype surrounding libraries and schools with regards to group activities: noise levels. Group projects can be noisy. Libraries are supposed to be quiet. I thought about how collaboration could be utilized more efficiently without having to disrupt too many of the older traditions of education (and hence not make waves) and the MAET program assisted me in finding that direction, though one can argue it may have done so indirectly. I think my students can socialize and work in groups using Google Apps such as Google Docs and Google Hangouts and still utilize the same norms and expectations of the more traditional of my school's teachers' mentalities. In other words, it's the best of both worlds.

It's also goes without saying that the future holds change. Educational Technology, or any form of technology, is not a static resource. It's changing seemingly every day. If I'm to continue to grow as an educator, to be the best I can be, I'm going to have to continue to pursue new methods and applications of both librarianship and of Educational Technology. Open Educational Resources are going to open doors to me and my students, especially with the tightening of budgets, and I must be on top of it if I'm going to be able to utilize them and "sell" my superiors on them.

I also will have opportunities to help shape the District's future technological interests. For example, Angel is no longer around and my District is looking into replacing it. There are currently three options being evaluated: Blackboard, Schoology, or Canvas. I can participate in evaluating these three platforms and my input becomes more weighted based upon the concepts I've learned in my time in the MAET program. So, in essence, I get to help make a mark on the entire District and hopefully bring

about a means to continue to provide an effective learning environment through an easier to use platform of online learning than Angel was.

So, professionally, I have direction. I will continue to push for a greater means for students and teachers to collaborate easier and within the comfort zones of both the "old hat" and the "new guard" in education.   Though the path towards this goal is still vague, I know that no matter where I end up, technology will definitely be a strong presence in whatever I do.