

Anna Evmenova  
PhD Applicant to PhD Program  
George Mason University

February 2003

### **Goal Statement**

My interest in education originates simply in the family tradition. All of my family members are teachers in different areas. I remember always being fascinated by all those challenging and successful stories my relatives used to share. I do not see myself doing anything else but teaching. I'm originally from Russia. I came to East Carolina University in 2001 right after graduating from Saratov State University with the Master Degree in English and German Languages as Second Languages. Last year, I graduated from East Carolina University with a Master Degree in Learning Disabilities and an Assistive Technology Certificate.

After arriving in America the field of special education became very interesting to me but my attitude toward teaching students with disabilities was more cynical than passionate. I came from a country where special education has the name "defectology" and teaching students with disabilities appears to be unreasonable and useless. I was able to maintain my cynical attitude for about two months after which I completely fell in love with this profession and the impact it can have on the lives of children with disabilities. I find special education to be the most challenging and rewarding part of education.

Within the field of special education I have found that I'm most interested in assistive technology for students with mild disabilities and have chosen this as my area of focus. For me, the interest in assistive technology started with one quote I read in an article for one of my papers: "I know what to say but I can't get the words out. I start to write but then it gets all mixed up and I just can't get it down," said a fifth-grade girl with learning disabilities. Reading these words I couldn't stop thinking about how many more children were having the same problem with writing, reading, and speaking in school and in everyday life. Coming from a country that doesn't have the resources to research and implement technology for students with disabilities, it seems to be a shame not to use technologies that are so available. Technologies can and do help and enhance the learning of students with disabilities.

Being so passionate about assistive technology I couldn't wait to learn more and do something useful in this area. That was why I decided to design the CD-Rom "Assistive Technology for Students with Learning Disabilities" and make two versions of it: in English and in Russian. When I first started working on it I thought that the main goal was to make it in Russian, for Russian teachers. But as my work progressed I found out that the area of assistive technology in special education for students with mild and/or learning disabilities is not well known to American teachers. Historically, assistive technology devices and services have been associated with individuals who have physical and moderate or severe needs. The area of assistive technology for students with learning disabilities has not received a lot of attention. My CD-Rom happened to be a big success among many teachers on the university and regular-school level. Teachers are

using it in their schools to educate their colleagues about possibilities in the field of assistive technology.

During my last year at East Carolina University, I worked in the Assistive Technology lab. This job was extremely stimulating and proved to me that this is the area that will fit with my interests the best. I enjoyed the balance between educating students, teachers, and parents about available assistive technology devices and learning something new every day about emerging technologies.

Since graduating from ECU I have been teaching as an Inclusion Teacher and have seen the opportunities and challenges in providing AT resources to students and building an AT system in a school. This has reinforced my desire to pursue additional studies in this area. My goal is to explore technologies available, to research the best of them, and to bring that knowledge to many teachers who can improve lives of the students with disabilities forever with that knowledge.

One of the very intriguing qualities about assistive technology is the speed with which it is changing. There are new technologies on the market every day now. One day you may know everything but the next day your knowledge isn't worth a penny because it is too old. You have to be in a constant learning and researching process. For me it is very refreshing and exciting. I believe any job in any area of education, but for me especially in the area of assistive technology for students with disabilities, requires a lot of passion and commitment and I can't wait to engage in coursework and research that could be used for designing more effective instruction for students with learning disabilities at different ages with the help of technologies.

My goal in pursuing this study program is to enter into a career in higher education where I will have duties as a teacher of prospective and current teachers, a researcher (both independent and collaborative), and an assistive technology consultant for students, teachers, and parents of students with disabilities. I have encountered many excellent role models within my university who fulfill these roles and know that I would enjoy the type of balanced and varied career this type of position would offer. I decided to apply to George Mason University for several reasons. First of all it is one of the few universities that focuses on assistive technology from the point of view of education for students with disabilities rather than rehabilitation. Such emphasis on education is what I'm looking for in a program. In researching George Mason University, the work of Dr. Behrmann particularly satisfied my interest. I was exposed to much of Dr. Behrmann's work on assistive technology for students with mild disabilities while doing a lot of research for my Master Degree and AT Certificate. It is my dream to conduct research with internationally known faculty of the School of Education at George Mason University.

I would be very excited to join the PhD in Education program at George Mason University. I feel I am well prepared to enter this program, and my strong motivation and career goals are a good match for what George Mason has to offer.