"And you are...?"

"A rock band arriving at our first big show!"

"And you need to..."

"Grab that dangling lighting cable to swing to the stage over the heads of fanatical fans that will rip our clothes off for souvenirs!" one member of the group continued.

"And we need to carry our microphones over too!" another chimed in.

Success! This group of teenagers at a rustic summer camp had transformed a hanging rope and a tire into a stage upon which they could demonstrate their ability to work together. They were more meaningfully engaged than previous challenge course groups since it was their imaginations that gave birth to the world in which they'd achieve our goals. Instead of providing the background story myself, I pretended to forget part of the challenge introduction, they stepped up and filled in the blanks; I had shifted my role to that of guide rather than instructor. I proved to myself that we could switch the group's focus from teacher- to student-centered learning! Now to convey this to my staff...

Every setting provides different educational possibilities. Teaching sixth-graders multimedia programming and digital video editing showed me how to apply and relate the students' existing knowledge to the current problem to build meaning. Here, the task of constructing a video game provided a framework within which I could convey complex ideas such as event-driven systems. While tutoring deaf students at the American School for the Deaf, they are more receptive when I can relate seemingly abstract mathematic principles to the teenagers' lives. While it's not always easy, I crave that type of challenge because it expands my thinking and their understanding simultaneously.

As a programmer during the Dot Com era, I lived in a world where information lived and breathed. All the projects I explored were virgin territory. We played with XML and XSL before there were books on the topics; we got to build our own application servers when commercial ones were too expensive. As a Technical Lead, I performed much of the research and proof of concept work. I was encouraged to thrash out ideas with my coworkers, test my ideas by building prototypes and then, best of all, when all the pieces fit, I got to show my team how and why it worked so they could complete the full implementation.

When the Dot Com bubble burst I realized how much I truly loved the learning and the free flow of information and ideas. I missed the conferences and technology books that had disappeared from budgets. The challenges were less ambitious, and there was less encouragement, indeed, less tolerance for collaboration. Code review meetings, where we sit with our peers and scrutinize each line our work to identify each other's mistakes, inefficiencies or new approaches, disappeared and

the work became solitary and unrewarding. This world feared the cost of learning and it was killing me.

After leaving this career, I found a deep satisfaction as Challenge Course Director; coordinating and implementing team-building and confidence-enhancing programs using physical challenges. Working with my staff was the most rewarding of my efforts. The campers came to the course expecting to work together and learn about themselves in the process; my team had no such expectations. Each member had her own agenda. I filled my days brainstorming ideas to help them develop individually and as a team.

This summer, I'm traveling to Barcelona to teach English as a foreign language and to gain an understanding of the issues facing those who live and work in foreign cultures. I anticipate this experience will provide me with an appreciation of lesson planning and classroom teaching, which will help me develop my role as an instructor in preparation for classes at Syracuse University.

Having worked professionally as a programmer for six years, I have the skills and confidence to continue in this profession while I attend graduate school part time. However, I would like to gain practical as well as academic experience in my field of study. To this end, I hope to have the opportunity to participate in assistantships or a fellowship within the department. I believe this is the best way to involve myself in and get to know the faculty and learn about their research.

My experiences have been invaluable instructors, leaving me with unique perspectives and a strong technical background. As a result, I'm drawn to the potential of merging computers with educational settings. It's possible today to build dynamic tools to help students feel ownership over their education; tools intelligent enough to guide the teachers in tailoring their lessons to the students' needs. However, this requires comprehension of the learning process. I hope to work with the faculty of the Instructional Design, Development and Evaluation program at Syracuse and other professionals in the industry to formulate and evaluate new ways to use emerging techniques and media to excite creativity and make education more engaging. I look forward to continually learning and helping others to do the same -- I know I'll enjoy my profession.