

Personal Statement

Reflection on my development

For each of my five years experience in education, I have worked with low-income, at risk student populations in schools that were always short on technology. The classrooms I've taught in barely had overhead projectors and a pull down screen, let alone SMARTBoards or a tablet for each student. And yet I always found a way to get technology into my classroom. I borrowed my school's only projector from the auditorium so I could enhance student engagement through multimedia presentations. I brought in my own laptop to use for lessons. I found myself as the only teacher in the school booking computer lab time and making meaningful use of that time. I saw the impact that technology had on my students and I wanted to get it into my classroom however I could.

My career in education has been, well, bumpy. I was in the middle of my teacher training when the current recession hit and remember distinctly being told by my cooperating teacher that the market would be rough since "nobody can retire now." I started off as a paraprofessional and was able to get a job in CPS as a dual language teacher because of my background studying Spanish. That lasted all of 9 months before the CPS layoffs had me, the newest hire, kicked out the door. I then found myself at an unstable charter school with 90% staff turnaround. I finally landed at a private high school for urban children in Waukegan, IL. I work in a 106 year old building and it shows. I now know, however, that this is the path I was destined to take. My current school, though short on resources, has allowed me to utilize laptops from a cart into my daily lesson planning and I knew that I wanted to be involved with helping educators get the same great results I saw from using technology to successfully engage my students. So, I decided to join TS Cohort 3.0.

When I first began my journey towards becoming an instructional technology professional, I knew admittedly little about what I'll call the "backbone" of IT in education. Sure, as an educator I would frequently incorporate technology such as Learning Management Systems or Google Apps into my practice, but my knowledge of the field stopped at my classroom door. I knew virtually nothing about designing a Professional Development on technology or how you would setup a network in a school. That all has changed.

Through my coursework for TS Cohort 3.0, I now feel that I am capable of stepping into a technology specialist role and affecting positive change from day one. I am certain of this, for though I am still a regular, classroom instructor, I've begun helping out at my school when it comes to educating other educators. For example, I've led a brief PD session about switching email to Google Apps. Learning about instructional design has caused me to really focus on where my intended audience is at and meet them there. It has also helped me to think about keeping my ultimate goal in mind (Brown & Green, 2006). While these are things I most likely would have considered to some extent, instructional design has helped me to explicitly think about how students learn and what I can best do to help them.

The program has helped me not just with my instruction of my peers, but also as a classroom teacher. I think that a key component to being a successful technology integration specialist is really understanding what it is like to be a classroom teacher trying to use technology. For example, I've created screencasts to show my students how to set up accounts. When I realized how successful this was, it prompted me to consider my study of learning environments. Technology has really started changing the definition from the brick and mortar classroom to anywhere students can get information (Warger & Dobbin, 2009). As a result, I've started using screencasts of lectures to "flip" my classroom. Students can access learning materials anywhere they are. I also try to link to as many outside sources as well and I encourage other educators to do the same thing. For example, a finance class might have a direct link to a stock market floor (Warger & Dobbin, 2009).

While I learned about learning theory while I was being prepared to become a classroom teacher, I feel that my graduate studies on the subject have caused me to reexamine my practices and learning goals through a more explicit, learning theory lens. I had already started to embrace ideas like Problem Based Learning and real world situations, but after further study, I think I've become a full convert of constructivism (Reiser & Dempsey, 2012). In my U.S. Government classroom this year, I've been using Problem Based Learning units and feel that I've had great success in student engagement. While I had heard of the PBL approach in the past, I had never really spend much time looking into it. My coursework allowed me to visit in depth and now I am reaping the benefits of that research through a successful classroom experience.

As I've continue to learn about instructional technology tools, I've begun to find more and more tools

and strategies that make full implementation possible. In addition to the tools I've picked up in my coursework, I've found that through attending instructional technology events, such as the Learn IT conference or the Illinois Computing Educators Conference, I am able to learn about the latest tools for my classroom and how best to utilize them. These are things I can immediately take back with me to my school and start utilizing with my own students.

Overall, this is indicative of the impact my program of study has had on me. It is something I can immediately take back to my school and use to help students gain the 21st century learning skills that are necessary for future success. I look forward to a bright and productive career in which I am able to take the skills and tools I've learned here and teach them to students and fellow educators alike.

Professional Development

As I mentioned earlier, I've been lucky enough to gradually move into a position at my school where I am able to help plan and lead professional development opportunities. My school is in the process of rolling out Chromebooks to all of our students, and as such training for Google Apps For Education and other Web 2.0 tools is going to be critical to ensuring teachers are making the most out of the computers in their classrooms. I know that I am at a place where I can effectively plan and carry out these professional developments because of the coursework I've completed during my studies at NIU.

It's difficult to pinpoint just one or two classes that demonstrate how I've grown in the Area of Mastery of Professional Development. I say this because I believe that all of our coursework has prepared me to teach others how to successfully integrate technology. The 1:1 Computing Model for ETT 592 is a prime example of how I am able to design a program for implementation and identify what the professional development needs of the various stakeholder groups will be. Looking at it from the perspective of my own continued growth and development, the Professional Development Organization assignment for ETT 501 shows my ability to seek out and select an organization that can help lead to my own growth. For that assignment, I chose the Northern Illinois Computer Educators (NICE). Shortly after completing the assignment, I actually went to their conference and found I was immediately able to use what I had learned

in my own classroom.

Analytical and Integrative Thinking

The program has provided opportunities for Analytical and Integrative Thinking throughout our course of study. I chose to provide artifacts from an early course and one completed in the second half of the program. The first artifact is from ETT 510, my group's Literature Review. This was definitely a learning experience for me, as I was never required to complete any such assignment in my previous Master of Education program. I was lucky enough to have a group member who had extensive experience writing literature reviews, and she was able to guide us all through the process. I was always glad to have her on my team, but especially for this assignment! This review was an opportunity to investigate a topic, review the literature, and communicate in writing a synthesis of our findings. Both scholarly print and online journals were searched for this literature review. This assignment was beneficial for me, as we were asked to synthesize information rather than simply complete a project or make something. This sort of reflective thought is very important for a technology integration specialist, especially for later when I might be asked to make long term decisions.

The second artifact I selected was from ETT 553. In a group of 3, I was asked to examine a case study that deals with professional or ethical practice issues and develop a solution for the case, including information about the case, the ethics issues indicated, and the conclusion that the team developed. Like the many other case studies in this course, this one provided us with a very real situation similar to what we can expect to face in our real world practice. I really appreciated these case studies and the thinking that they involved. There were never "right answers," which is a lesson I think is very important to keep in mind as we move on as professionals. Hard decisions must be made and the long term consequences won't always be clear.

Instructional Design

While my teacher preparation program covered instructional design, I must confess that we never as far in depth as I did during my studies for ETT 510. My previous studies were more on the immediate classroom practices and applications. For this reason, I found all of the discussions and studies of theory fascinating. I chose to use the Design Document my group and I created for ETT 510. The Design Document is a professional development plan design document to teach digital literacy to teachers and students at a fictitious middle school to support the transition between middle school and high school. This design document demonstrates my ability to conduct a needs assessment analyzing a problem/situation and to apply a coherent design model to create a course designed to instruct professional educators.

My second artifact was much more in my comfort zone, seeing as how I have been teaching for five years. The Instructional Unit Plan for ETT 535 was very similar to unit plans I've created in the past, but with a big twist. This unit was designed for a distance education program. Because of the distance learning environment, I had to take into consideration all of the elements involved in designing instruction for a distance learning setting. I included this artifact because it is an example of my ability to analyze a problem/situation, recommend reasonable strategies, and apply a coherent design model appropriate for a specific learning setting.

Media/Technology Development

Some of my favorite coursework came in the Area of Mastery of Media/Technology Development. I really enjoyed creating concrete pieces of media that could have an immediate affect on learning. ETT 511 obviously dealt with this subject matter in great depth. I had a difficult time narrowing down my artifacts for this course, as they obviously all were appropriate. I decided to go with the Web Design assignment because I felt it encompassed a number of the media design principles we learned. For this assignment, I created an instructor's website with multiple pages incorporating specific design choices to encourage ease of use and provide a pleasing aesthetic experience. This website is an example of my ability to select and create media that is appropriate for an online learning environment and provides easy access to course

materials for students.

While another artifact from ETT 511 would have been an obvious choice, I decided to branch out to other courses to demonstrate my ability to use media and technology appropriately. I chose an artifact from ETT 571, a Prezi presentation incorporating engaging visuals and multimedia to accompany a presentation on a Staff Development Plan. My group and I had to do a presentation in front of our instructors and our peers and we wanted to make sure it was visually engaging and that wouldn't be falling into the "death by powerpoint" trap that so many presentations fall into. This presentation demonstrates my understanding of how to select appropriate media to support learning objectives. This artifact positively affected my students' learning environment by providing an engaging visual presentation to accompany the verbal presentation.

Management and Implementation

One of the aspects of my studies that has been most beneficial to me is the real world scenarios we've been given and asked to work with. I've selected two such assignments to demonstrate my mastery of Management and Implementation. The first artifact is the Local Area Network Planning presentation for ETT 573. This was a presentation including a logical network diagram and an "as-built" diagram of the facility, complete with the physical layout, electrical supply, and a physical network diagram. This presentation is an example of my ability to manage resources and projects. It provided me with the opportunity to demonstrate my knowledge of topology and logical network diagrams and taught me how to create an "as-built" diagram for a school.

The second artifact is from ETT 592. As part of the course's final project, my group and I were given a specific budget and told that we needed to create a 1:1 Computing Model that could be rolled out to a real-life school. After examining a number of other school's plans, we created a plan to analyze, design, develop and implement a 1:1 environment for a secondary school. This plan demonstrates my ability to manage resources, projects, and individuals. This plan provided me with an authentic learning experience, allowing me to create a plan that could immediately be implemented in an actual school. These real world scenarios are very helpful, as I hope to find myself in a position professionally to be making these exact

types of decisions.

Evaluation

Evaluation was another area I thought I would have down, given my experience as a classroom teacher. While there were a lot of similarities, such as clearly planning out objectives and tying the evaluation to these objectives, what I came to realize was how different it is when you are no longer evaluating classroom content and are instead evaluating entire programs and the learning of adults. For my first artifact, I chose the Evaluation Project from ETR 531. This project is a proposal for the evaluation of a program designed to teach digital literacy to teachers and students, including a program description, program goals and outcomes, evaluation design, and an evaluation management plan. In particular, our program would teach staff members how to utilize Google Apps For Education. This evaluation plan demonstrates my ability to use appropriate assessment and evaluation techniques and apply them to an authentic learning scenario. This project enabled me to demonstrate my learning of the proper ways to approach and implement evaluation of a program in the real world.

The second artifact comes from ETT 570. I chose to use the Technology Plan I created with a partner to demonstrate my mastery of evaluation. The Technology Plan is a plan for a fictitious school, including mission statement, a Technology needs assessment, Goals and objectives, Hardware/software plan and budget, Personnel position descriptions, Acceptable use policy, Professional development plan, and an Evaluation plan. I felt the evaluation piece we did really demonstrated my ability to use appropriate assessment and evaluation techniques and apply them to an authentic learning scenario. This plan introduced me and familiarized me with issues surrounding the design of a school, district, library, or other organization's technology plan.

Final Reflection

TS Cohort 3.0 has given me numerous opportunities to grow and demonstrate my learning over the

past year and a half. I've had the chance to work with an amazing group of people, all of whom brought some level of IT expertise to our group. Having the opportunity to work and learn from them has been invaluable. The real world problem solving and program development we've done has prepared me to go out into the field and begin contributing from day one. As I complete my Instructional Technology studies at NIU, I can already see the positive changes that it is having on my instruction. I've learned of tools and strategies that are immediately applicable to my job as an educator and that will serve me well as I continue to help others integrate best technological practices into their classrooms. I believe that technology levels the playing field for students of all origins, and I am proud that soon my studies will help to to spread and introduce that belief in any number of fields.

References

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