

Learning Technologies Master's Degree Program Reflection

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Author Note

Course Reflection LTEC 5580

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I have learned a great deal in my three years as a Learning Technologies (LTEC) master's degree student both within and outside of the curriculum of the program. My life is considerably different from when I started the program. I came in this program as a high school biology teacher, focused on the educational side of this master's. I leave this program as a software developer who understands education. Moreover, with the COVID-19 global pandemic, learning technologies play a far better role in today's world than it did in summer 2017. In this course reflection, I will describe my journey in the program, my thoughts on online education in general, and then reflect on what I have learned about myself in this program.

Journey through the LTEC program

My original reason for doing this master's degree program was to get out of the classroom. I knew I liked technology, and I didn't want to go into administration, so learning technologies seemed to be the best choice for me. Unlike many of my peers in this program, I did not come into this program with a set plan. I planned on graduating in summer 2019, hopefully finding a new career.

My first set of classes was from summer 2017 to spring 2018. I took the most writing-intensive courses of the masters with both LTEC 5030 and 5300. I spent a lot of time at the UNT writing center. To me, writing three pages was dread-inducing. After banging my head on hundreds of discussion board posts, and papers, this fear seems to have been quieted. I feel an enormous amount of pride in the papers I have written.

I decided to quit teaching around April 2018. The reasons were complicated. I can thank this program for encouraging me to apply for a technology instructional coach position in my school district. While I didn't get the job, the application process primed me with the idea of

leaving teaching early. Moreover, the stress of grad school might have pushed me over the edge of my final semester of my teaching career.

After a bombardment of YouTube Ads telling me to join a “Coding Bootcamp,” I signed for a program called Coding Dojo in downtown Dallas. Coding Dojo was radically different from this LTEC program. It was a 15 week, 70 hours a week, and all in person. My cohort started with around fifteen people shrunk to about eight when I graduated. I got a job quickly after the program. It was nice to be an in-person student again. It was interesting applying what I learned in cognitive psychology to my Bootcamp experience.

I eased myself back onto the LTEC program in spring 2020, taking web authoring. However, Maymester and a particularly tough summer course drove let me considering quitting the program. After talking to several friends and the new head of the program, Dr. Warren, I was convinced to stay in the program. One of the things I did differently was to take the classes I wanted to take rather than taking a strict career track. I also took the first half of fall 2019 off. My planned graduation day was pushed back to summer 2020.

Spring 2020 proved to be just as tough as any semester I have taken in this school. While I could have taken advanced web authoring, I decided to take a graphics course, LTEC 5260, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I found in my LTEC 5510 course that converting old teaching material into an online course is not easy. The biggest challenge of the semester, however, was COVID-19. For most of this program, I have done my work in a bunch of Starbucks and libraries. I never liked doing work at home, and now, I was stuck at home doing work and grad school in the same place. My work suffered for a while. However, getting laid off freed up a lot of time. I am not sure how much the quality of my work improved, but the extra time to do grad school was appreciated.

Now I am in my last semester. I am only taking one class. I recently got hired for a job that starts at the beginning of August. It is still in software development and not directly LTEC. However, it seems to be an appropriate way to start a new chapter of my life.

Thoughts on Online Education

I had a lot of doubts about this program when I entered it. I had only taken one online class before I started this program in spring 2010 at UT Dallas. The teacher certification course was ironically Educational Technology. While I got an A in the course, I didn't take the subject particularly seriously, and I really can't remember what I learned from it.

This degree, something I describe to friends as "online courses about online courses," certainly has changed some of my views of the subject. As feared, I don't particularly feel close to the people in my courses. I still talk to many of the people in the 15-week coding Bootcamp. However, there are very few people, professors, or students that I remember from this course, much less stay in touch with. As the adage goes, "it's not what you know. It's who you know".

However, this program has shown me some of the advantages of distance education. With the rapid changes in technology, we will have to retrain a large portion of our population, and online learning, when used correctly, is as effective as in person instruction. Online learning makes high-quality education within the grasp of non-traditional students. When properly moderated, online discussions allow for more introverted students to voice their opinion far more effectively than traditional classrooms.

What I Have Learned About Myself

There are somethings that this master's degree confirmed. Writing is not a strength of mine. Staying organized is a constant challenge for me. However, I do enjoy making things. I enjoyed creating graphics, making videos, and websites for this program.

I don't think I learned anything revolutionary about myself. I learned to manage time better. I know I will value my free time more than I did before I did the program. The lack of new friends I made in this program has made me appreciate my current friends.

I also have been reminded of how fast technology changes. My high school got projectors in my senior year. I thought I was sophisticated, making fancy PowerPoints when I taught. I only used Google Classroom the last year of my teaching career. In this master's program, I learned that I have just seen the tip of the iceberg. The discussion board system, Packback, seems to be a promising way to spice up online discussions. And while I plan on doing something education-related as a software developer eventually, I fear I will be far behind when I finally get a job related to education.

The paper I wrote for 5030 about Technology and STEM education is already outdated, less than three years after I wrote it. It stands to reason that the most important lesson that I have learned in this program is to continue to learn and improve myself.

Conclusion

If there is a theme to my LTEC experience, it is best summarized by a quote that I recorded myself reading for one of my classes.

I wanted a perfect ending. Now I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle, and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next. Delicious Ambiguity. - Gilda Radner

My LTEC experience had a lot of twists and turns that I could not have anticipated. I am certainly not doing something I had planned to do. However, I learned a lot and am better for it. I am interested to see what the next turn in my life brings.