

It's just the beginning...

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April 2014

In the Fall of 2012 I enrolled in the Master of Arts in Educational Technology program at Michigan State University. I was excited to see all the different options I had to choose from for the completion of my degree as there were only four mandatory courses required among the College of Education. I am not the typical student to enroll in this program as the majority of the students are kindergarten through 12th grade educators, but I found many courses I wanted to take and had a difficult time narrowing them down. Being that when I started the program I was a Learning Technology Assistant on the Training & Education department for Amway North America, I struggled with adapting the mandatory courses to fit my situation as they were designed for teachers and required a lot of lesson creation. I found this difficult due to having no experience teaching, no audience to try stuff out on nor a topic I felt comfortable enough teaching about. Although this was frustrating and I struggled, it helped me understand the process it takes to build content, identify and incorporate resources and the exhausting life of our educators, as they became my audience at my next job. As I can easily say that all of the courses I took helped me grow into the professional I am today, a certain few classes were the most influential.

One of the important courses to my growth was CEP822 - Approaches to Educational Research with instructor David E. Wong. At first I thought that this class might be the death of me. I was really bummed out to discover that there was in fact math in this degree. Me and math are the greatest of pals. I struggled with the first couple of assignments as it required me to use math I had not used in four or more years. Once we got to the big project, I found my true enjoyment in the class. In this course we were asked to find sixteen resources that would provide me with data that could help answer the question "How does one's personality type affect their learning and how can classrooms best accommodate learning styles?" The topic I chose was inspired by my recent discovery and acceptance of my own personality style. I am an introvert and I am proud! I remember my classes being designed for extroverted personalities and that playing a large role in my struggle with education. I am passionate about spreading the awareness to teachers, students, extroverts and especially other introverts. I want to change how classroom environments are designed. Classrooms should be built in such a way that it challenges and yet supports each student's learning and social style.

This course made me push myself to levels I had never before. I learned so much in my research, it was fueling my passion for the topic. My findings helped me better understand not only the psyche of learners in the different environments we participate and learn in, extroverts and the environmental or educational struggles they deal with and myself, an introvert. When I pursue my doctorate, this is a topic I hope to further explore and write my thesis on. A goal of mine is to have my thesis published.

Another class that greatly influenced me was CEP818 - Creativity in Teaching & Learning with Punya Mishra. Prior to this class I thought I was fairly creative. That statement is/was not necessarily wrong but proved to be slightly irrelevant. I very quickly learned that creativity is like a muscle. If you do not use it, train it or challenge it, it becomes weak. This course pushed my creativity to limits I had never dreamed of. Punya broke down the creative process into, maybe not steps that were second nature, but steps that had been taken for granted. It felt like I was learning to tie my shoes all over again, but on a much higher level of thinking and the use of 7 cognitive tools; Perceiving, Patterning, Abstracting, Embodied Thinking, Modeling, Playing and Synthesizing.

I was greatly impacted by the thought required for the assignments in this course. We deeply explored each cognitive tool. Although coming up with ways to visualize concepts I had never thought of visually was very difficult I was easily able to relate this course to my position as an Instructional Designer. In fact I was apply to apply these steps and tools to my own process and give better attention and provide more detail to nearly all my work. I do not have a classroom or really even students. However I have an audience that I create for. Some may say that this makes teaching even harder. I obviously cannot compare because I have not taught in the classroom. However I have many factors to think about when I develop learning. I have no control over what type of environment my audience will be consuming the learning in. My audience is also a wide arrange of ages, education levels and tech savvy-ness. These cognitive tools have helped me better understand and add meaning to the elements I incorporate into their training courses. If it does not have a purpose, then it should not be in there. Also, by learning these tools, I have gained insight to how our brains work and how we learn. It is not completely necessary to perform these steps in the order in which they were presented and each tool holds their own weight individually. Some of the tools may be required for other pieces to work correctly, but not all of them. If I can incorporate a few of these tools in how I organize and present information my audience may be able to better understand the subject and further explore its components on their own. Hopefully I can guide them along a slightly simpler but yet effective way of using these tools for themselves.

Lastly I would like to recognize the impact that CEP817 - Learning Technology through Design with yet again Punya Mishra played in my growth throughout the completion of my degree. As an Instructional Designer this course is spot on for me. Although I am still completing the course as I write this, I have already learned so much, and I can tell by the final project I can't stop working on. This course almost feels like my capstone because I am using every trick, tool and resources I have gathered from the start of the program. I feel incredibly lucky that my professor and TA were open to and in support of what topic I wanted to do my Big Kahuna project on. As I have stated several times before I am not a traditional teacher in a k-12 classroom. For the first time ever I felt like this was not an element that was going to hold me back.

Somehow I convinced Punya and Jon Good that my Big Kahuna project, a website designed to educate a specific audience, should be about...BEER! I am so excited to announce that I am creating Beer School! Anyone interested in learning more about craft beer can come to my site and participate in 5 lessons designed to get them up to speed in the booming world of craft beer. The course participation focuses on good and bad design and all the fundamentals one must consider when designing. It is in this project that I am able to apply all of that dreadful lesson planning I had to complete earlier in the program, research, creativity, Web 2.0 tools and multimedia. I will be incorporating social media and I have also created a blog. These are all elements from my past that I am able to seamlessly and excitedly piece together to create a really cool and thoughtfully designed website. I feel so fortunate to have been assigned this project. It is not often that you get a project you can't wait to get home to work on or share with your family and friends. I know that this site will continue to evolve and more likely grow. My knowledge and experience with beer only continues to grow, therefore so does my desire to share.

One of the most important elements of the site is a feature that was not required. I finally got around to creating that blog I have meaning to start for several years. My Fiance and I have a list of all the Michigan breweries and are visiting them one by one. We love to try new beers and have new experiences.

I am a bit anxious about our final paper due for this class. We have been asked to creatively and authentically write a paper about design. How design influences us, our work and how we teach and learn. My relationship with design is a bit rocky at times. Design is not always my friend, and I struggle everyday to understand it. While creating an outline for this paper I realized that I am in an awkward romance with design. Is this an odd topic to write a paper about? Yes probably, but throughout the journey of my grad degree I have learned to embrace the quirky.

As I hold the role of an Instructional Designer, design plays a big part of my day. For a long time I thought design and art were synonymous. With design being my profession, this caused a great deal of pressure and anxiety to create masterpiece's everyday. This class has taught me that art can be in design but they are two different things. Design is the function and the feel. How fonts, styles, colors, sizes, graphics, navigation and content are organized for consumption. This realization has helped me tremendously in my career. Sure there is still pressure to create or design amazing things, but it's no longer just about inventing something never seen before. Design has a greater purpose than aesthetics.

Completing my degree online has been a mixed experience for me. As an introvert it was ideal. I work best by myself, in a quiet environment and slightly self paced as I like time to develop my thoughts. Also not having to drive from Grand Rapids to Lansing was great. I could work at 2 am or when I was sick and when I was traveling for work. However completing my degree online did not get rid of group work. In fact I think the amount of group work increased. I prefer to be in control of the grades and work I am paying an arm and a leg for. No offense to my

past teammates but the majority of us have a full time job and a family and obligations. Finding time to collaborate on top of all that and be partially responsible for someone elses grade is frustrating and sometimes felt impossible. Another negative is the general perception of online degrees. People do not really understand that not all online programs deserve the wrap that some others have earned. A positive point I made to those who seemed skeptical was that my degree is Educational Technology, if we can't do it online, there is no point.

My capstone course has allowed me to reflect on all the hard work I have done and everything I have learned while in my classes. I realized when I completed my goal statement reflection how much I have truly grown in the past two years. Not just as a professional but as a person. I have become well rounded and wiser. I have more discipline and am more confident in myself and my skills. Lastly I have discovered the importance of continuing my education as a Lifelong Learner.