

## **LDT Masters Program - Reflective Statement By Dirk Copland**

The end is nigh, as I encouragingly try to wrap up what I hope will be my final semester in the Learning Design and Technology Master of Education program, I look back on what I have accomplished with a huge sense of pride. In what started as merely an enquiry into the field of learning design, has resulted in a passion to succeed within the field as I exit these final days with a different perspective on what my future holds. Along this exciting and educational quest, I encountered various faculty members who offered great insight into learning theories, delivery methods as well as the use of new and emerging technologies to support educational content in a variety of settings. I was also fortunate to meet and work alongside some fascinating individuals from a plethora of backgrounds creating fantastic reflective and educational works which I often look back on with self-admiration. Prior to the enrollment in my first LDT class I would have considered my knowledge of learning as rough, or perhaps raw with little to a basic understanding of what factors go into learning. However, as I approach the conclusion of this journey my perspective has changed dramatically, with particular appreciation of informal learning environments due to my professional capacity which traditionally I would have considered as a non-educational role. However, with this new understanding I can confirm my own role as an educator, whether it be via my managerial position overseeing my audio-visual crew, or as stated by Lave, J. (1991) an old-timer within my online community as a leading contributor of digital content.

My first exploration into the Learning Design and Technology realm within Penn State University happened in the fall 2020 semester as I enrolled as a non-degree student for LDT 467. With the world around us culminating in chaos with the effect of COVID 19 I decided to capitalize on this sudden amount of spare time to explore Learning Design and felt this course could provide a gentle insight into the domain with limited commitment. Expecting to struggle in my first graduate school class I entered the semester with the main aim of survival, however my fears and concerns of graduate school were quickly removed as I felt a sense of belonging especially with requirements requested with my opening class. My relationship with technology helped me settle in the class. However, I needed to find the educational element that I could connect for longer game plan if I was to consider becoming more than a non-degree student. Returning to LDT 467, my understanding and appreciation for all things technology helped me tremendously in this class as I already understood website building, social media tools and content creation. Throughout the class we were tasked in blogging our thoughts in relation to Web 2.0 tools, navigating the digital divide, social media tools and our own learning philosophy. The use of blogs and social media tools as educational platforms was a focal point that was new to me, however this class provided the insight into the perspective uses of these tools to create or sustain digital or online communities of practice (Darren Cambridge & Vicki Suter 2005). The first artifact which I want to highlight in my Learning Design and Technology journey is the final project of LDT 467. We were tasked in creating a video which showcased our learning philosophy, I approached this task by emphasizing the knowledge that I gained within this semester which included highlighting learning theories and delivery methods.

As the semesters progressed so did my involvement within the LDT program, in the following semester I decided to fully embrace myself regarding the program by participating in two classes concurrently. One of the classes was LDT 566 Computers as Learning Tools which culminated in a final project which required consistent collaboration throughout the semester. I was grouped together with Danielle Gibbs and Manny Diaz which provided two different perspectives on learning and instructional design which resulted in a creative masterpiece such as the final project video for this class. With a preexisting passion for content creation, I took the creative lead for this project allowing my group members more time to focus on

educational resources needed to support our video. With the global reaction to the COVID 19 pandemic I was able to immerse myself into this class ensuring I tackled the script, storyboard and the various edits required for this video. Collaboration between the group members was fluid despite navigating different time zones. The corona virus reaction in fact strengthened the bond between team members as we were all responding and reacting to the virus and its implications together. The worldwide consumption of all this video conferencing made the acceptance of digital meetings between the group a normal procedure, as we noticed the acceptance in workplaces, educational facilities and even in our homes of video communication platforms such as Teams, Zoom and Skype. There were even numerous occasions where I had back-to-back zooms for the LDT program switching focus from one class to another. The ability to share, critique and edit our group work in this (and other) program(s) made the learning and creation process enjoyable, which eradicated the fears I was expecting when thrust into a group environment. Meanwhile to be mixed with cohorts of different professional and educational backgrounds allowed the team to explore our strengths while being enlightened to our weaknesses or areas of the field we had limited knowledge. Meanwhile, both Danielle and Manny were at different stages of their own Learning Design journey, and could offer insight into “what was to come” and perhaps “things to avoid”. In summary, I left this class with some great memories of collaboration which I will hold in high regard when delegating similar scenarios in my professional and educational journeys. Within the dialogue and structure of the video and the class we covered a number of topics including the use of video games, learning communities, just-in-time learning and the use of social media. The use of new technology and 21<sup>st</sup> century delivery methods was covered extensively in this class, showcasing what educational institutions can look forward to while embracing these digital and interactive offerings. Meanwhile Manca, S., & Ranieri, M. (2016) discussed in detail the reluctance of traditional educators to alter their learning styles, which in turn will slow down the adoption process of these exciting (yet precarious) technological and sociocultural platforms.

My third submission in which I want to reflect on was my final project for the LDT 550 class (Design Studio), a class I had looked forward to participating in since reviewing the class offerings within the program. This class gave me the reason and need to explore design elements such as web site creation, photography, graphic design and even enhanced my video production skills. This class was created and offered differently to the others which I had previously completed, with a more customized layout for each student to experience. I opted to explore adobe photoshop, adobe illustrator and video production. The reasons why I selected each element differed, for example I had always wanted to explore Adobe Photoshop but never had the time or reason to do so, this class forced my hand so that I had to dedicate time and resources to learning the mere basics of the platform. My thoughts on Adobe Illustrator had similar vibes, however I felt more prepared for the experience as the options within the platform felt more natural to me when compared to the detailed options within Photoshop. Finally I opted for video production, something which I felt comfortable with, however I wanted to explore different video editors such as Camtasia and Adobe Premier. I opted to produce a video which reflected a personal interest such as my affiliation with Fantasy Football Premier League, aiming the instruction at newcomers with the aim to assist their transition into old-timers within the hobby. With my preexisting knowledge on the subject matter, I wanted to produce the video to offer a more engaging and interactive experience for the learners. Using the video editing software Camtasia I was able to add interactive hotspots within the timeline which allow the learner to skip forward, load additional resources or jump to another video to strengthen their knowledge and improve their retention. I explored interactive video during several classes in my LDT journey, as I researched different methods to improve the engagement, interactivity and viewer retention

when deploying instructional video content. I feel my research and exploration of interactive video as well as my interest in virtual reality as major takeaways from my own learning experience over the last few semesters. The option to explore traditional video creation was the easy option, however as stated by Hokanson, B., Miller, C., and Hooper, S. (2008) "the goal of design is not to produce consistent designs, particularly those that replicate previous work. The goal must be to produce better designers and hence, designs as yet unconceived", I hope my experiences and accomplishments throughout the LDT program help me in my long term quest into becoming a learning designer, one that I and others can consider as a "better designer" than I originally hoped for.

In summary I will reflect on my time within the LDT program as a key turning point in my own professional and educational journey, as I can now look forward to new career goals and a refined point of view regarding the new and emerging technologies that can support learning in traditional educational settings as well as digital communities both within professional and informal learning environments. For me the conclusion of this program is merely the start of a new chapter in my professional life as I hope to use the knowledge, skills, and insightful experiences I have encountered over the past couple of years to alter my current career roadmap. As for my next destination, I look forward to seeing what opportunities become available as I consider the next stop on what has already been a fantastic and awe-inspiring journey.

## References

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