

Self-Evaluation and Reflection Paper Foundations of Educational Technology

Reflection

Upon reflection of the current summer semester, I must admit that I am surprised and pleased by what I have learned and accomplished. This and the other class that I am taking this summer are my first online courses and they are also my first graduate courses since receiving my B.S. degree and teaching certificate in April 2000. Ironically, I signed up for these courses and began the process of applying for the Master's in Educational Technology program because I am a teacher who loves computers and I figured that this degree would be all about computer technology. Originally, I reasoned that getting this degree would not only open up administrative opportunities to me in the future, but would also allow me to leave the field of education sometime down the road if I ever got tired, bored, frustrated, or financially destitute. Basically, I assumed that this degree was the Master's degree equivalent of what I would learn from ITT Technical Institute, allowing me to make big money setting up networks or programming for big companies if I ever decided to leave teaching. However, after even the first week, I knew that my preconceptions were entirely off base. Although I cannot completely define the field of Educational Technology as of yet, at least I have a much more clear idea of what it is all about. Fortunately, this was one of the first courses that I decided to take because I don't know how successful I would have been in any other class with such an off-base assumption of the field I was studying.

In order for me to examine how I have progressed during my time in this course, I thought it would be a good idea for me to revisit my comments that I have made on the discussion board and to review the assignments that I have created. By doing so, I realized that my greatest revelatory moments came during the first and second week of class as is evident by my comments in the "What Is Educational Technology" forum. From the reading assignments in the book and the "Letter's Home" article, I learned that Educational Technology encompasses so much more than just computers. Rather, it is a field that studies the many techniques of delivering educational instruction, focusing particularly on methods that involve the various forms of modern media and devices. Of course, this currently includes computers as a major part, since they have become so widely used in schools today and since there are so many new innovations in software and hardware development, multimedia, and the Internet, but Educational Technology is an ever changing field. In the past, before computers became a major influence in society, the Educational Technology field focused on the modern innovations of the time such as film projectors, slides, audio recordings, and various other devices that are still available, but that are no longer the primary focus of the field since better technologies are now available at a reasonable cost. In the future, our current incarnation of computers will likely be relegated to the same fate in place of such things as Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence, voice-recognizing devices, 3-D visualization, hyper-speed Internet connections, and a plethora of other emerging technology currently being developed.

Following these tremendous paradigm shifts I experienced during the first couple of weeks, I have to admit that the remaining material of the course was not as drastically new to me. However, once I had experienced this change of thinking, the additional activities and material

served to reinforce and apply my new learning. Of all of the assignments we had to complete, I believe that the Technology Integration Plan and the Software Evaluation Paper taught me the most. I admit that I didn't enjoy writing the Technology Integration Plan. It was difficult, time consuming, and a little confusing, but that only means that I was in the zone of proximal development. As a result, I was able to more fully internalize the application of the ADDIE model, which is a necessary skill for me if I hope to be a technology coordinator someday.

On the other hand, I thoroughly enjoyed writing the Software Evaluation Paper, though it, too, was time consuming and difficult. Because I work with educational software on a daily basis, this assignment felt like something that was relevant to me in my current situation. I feel that the district spent too much money on one of the software products that we use in my program. With the knowledge that I have gained from this assignment, I will be able to thoroughly evaluate any future products before the money is spent. I also found great value in the remainder of the assignments, though many of them, such as the spreadsheet and Powerpoint projects, were already familiar to me. Still, I feel that the skills taught by those assignments are essential for any teacher to know, especially one pursuing a degree in Educational Technology.

In conclusion, I can only be pleased with what I have accomplished during this semester. In the present, the skills that I have learned will help me to be a more productive teacher. Since my program and classroom is computer based, I can objectively look at the activities and lessons for my students and evaluate their relevance and effectiveness. I can also use the ADDIE model to approach technology integration in my classroom in a structured and consistent manner. Furthermore, in my future career, the knowledge I have gained will also prove to be invaluable. If I do someday become a district technology specialist, I will hopefully be able to instill in my administrators the fact that Educational Technology reaches far beyond computers, thus encouraging them to use me as more than just a "techie" repair and maintenance guy. Since I am already knowledgeable about computers, I want to help teachers overcome their fear of technology and embrace new ideas and methodology. I believe that technology, when used appropriately, can be a valuable tool for education.

Looking Forward

As I have mentioned in the last discussion forum, one of the reasons why Educational Technology is so hard to define is because it is an ever changing field. Educational Technology is not the same now as it has been or as it will be. Although we have discussed and explored some of the emerging technologies, I doubt that anyone can predict what kinds of technological innovations the future will bring. It seems that people are always trying to guess what the future may be like, but they are almost invariably wrong for the most part. One of my favorite examples is the old Star Trek series. For instance, in what is portrayed as the distant future, I remember seeing an episode where they were recording data from the computer onto a tape that looked like a fat cassette. I had to laugh, because I realized that as creative as the Star Trek writers were, even they could not imagine things like disks, CD-ROMs, or DVDs, inventions that would be commonly found in households only 30 years in the future. Being that I am just about to begin my second year teaching, I likely have about 30 years of my career ahead of me, and just like the Star Trek writers, I have probably only have a faint idea of what kinds of technologies will be invented during my years in education. Honestly, I cannot even begin to imagine, and if I could, I would be making much more money than I currently do, if not as an inventor, then as a science-fiction writer. Therefore, the only thing I can do is to prepare. Educational Technology

will change just as drastically and suddenly as any other field in technology, although likely a few years behind due to the high cost involved with being on the cutting edge. Still, the only way to keep up is to continue to be educated. If I do not, then I will be as outdated as the information that I have previously learned.

I am grateful for what I have learned in this course because it has made me aware of several professional development resources that I previously did not know about. To keep myself current, I am going to periodically catch up on information from professional journals and Educational Technology web sites. Additionally, I will continue to take courses up to and beyond my Master's degree as well as attend district training meetings and technology related conferences. However, perhaps most importantly, I am going to keep doing what I do best, that is to use technology on a daily basis. Nearly everything that I have learned about computers I have learned not from a college class, but I have taught myself. When I have a problem for which I need to find a solution, I frequently see if some aspect of technology has the answer. If it does, then I learn what I need to know to apply the solution to the problem. For me, immersion is the best solution and the best way for me to continue to learn more about technology a little bit every day, one day at a time.

Course Feedback

For the most part, I feel that this course is exactly what any "Foundations" course should be: an introductory overview of a given subject. The content of the class was appropriate, valid, interesting, and relevant. In particular, I liked that the class was structured into more broad units which could be taken one week at a time rather than being divided into smaller units and completing two or three each week. The larger units allow more flexibility in scheduling, which is one of the core purposes for online education. As I mentioned before, I also feel that the assignments matched the overall objectives of the class.

I do have one suggestions that would have made the class better for me. It involves the spacing of the assignments. At least to me, it seemed like the first and last parts of the class were relatively easy, but in the middle I was frantically scrambling to keep up with the assignments. I believe this would be a little better if the two major projects of the class, the Technology Integration Plan and the Software Evaluation, were due more than a week apart with something lighter in between. Also, it seems to me that the Technology Integration Plan would have been better placed if it came a little later in the course, perhaps after the Software Evaluation, because I would have liked to have had more knowledge behind me before I attempted such a difficult project. Overall, though, I did enjoy the class and I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it to someone else.