

Master of Education Course Reflections

Fall 2013	Research Methods (5002G)
<p>Course Reflection:</p> <p>Prior to beginning the Master of Education program, and this class in particular, I have to admit that I was quite nervous. Although my previous educational experience was in the field of science, I entered the program with very little knowledge and understanding of research methods. In the beginning of the course I struggled to understand the content of the papers, let alone determine the research paradigm, method and validity and reliability of the study.</p> <p>However, as the weeks progressed I found that my initial uncertainty was dissipating and I was slowly gaining confidence in my ability to read and analyze research. While I recognize that I still have a lot to learn in the area of research methods, this course provided a solid foundation to move forward in the Master's program. I have developed a deeper appreciation of the value of research in guiding decisions. This is important to me as an educator as I have started to reflect back on my teaching practices and question whether they are based on sound theory and research.</p> <p>Through collaboration and completion of the literature review and portfolio proposal I developed an awareness of myself as a learner. For instance, I had never enjoyed creating concept maps as I tend to be linear in my thinking and found concept maps to be too "chaotic". While I struggled to initially create one for my literature review, the process proved to be extremely beneficial. It caused me to go beyond the surface and look for meaningful connections. This is a method I have utilized in my other courses in order to apply and synthesize my understanding of course content. In addition, I learned that reflection plays a critical role in my learning. Through instructor and peer feedback I have continually assessed and redefined my understandings and learning goals.</p>	

Fall 2013	Learning Tools (5104G)
<p>Course Reflection:</p> <p>This course played a key role in my learning throughout the Master's program. It provided me with an opportunity to apply learning theory to my use of digital technology in education. In trying to determine what makes an effective WBLT, I was able to reflect on what WBLTs assist in my learning. This course made me cognizant of the design features used in online learning environments and how they can support or impede learning. One thing I realized after completing this course was that I needed to continue to identify my personal definition of learning. I now look beyond the superficial appeal of using digital technology in the classroom and critically ask myself how using a particular technology will enhance my learning or that of my students.</p>	

Fall 2013	Social and Cultural Context in Education (5005G)
<p>Course Reflection:</p> <p>This course had a substantial impact on how I view myself and others. Prior to enrolling in this course I had taken for granted the privileges (ex. race, socioeconomic status, religion) I had been afforded over the years and how these privileges influenced my beliefs and life experiences. For example, the fact that I was born to two educated parents, created an early academic advantage for me. I entered the education system with a developed vocabulary, the ability to read and exposure to a variety of cultural experiences. These early experiences helped to scaffold new learning in school. From a</p>	

constructivist point of view, recognizing the background knowledge and experiences of the individual learner is essential, as new learning builds off of prior learning and experiences. In order to engage students and meet their individual learning needs it is important to understand their life experiences and multiple identities (ex. gender, race, socioeconomic status).

Winter 2014

Principles of Learning (5001G)

Course Reflection:

With the rapid evolution in digital technology I often found myself asking how I could use the new tools and devices available to engage and motivate my students. Through my participation in the Principles of Learning course I began to modify this question and rather than focus on the tools, focus on learning and how I as a teacher can facilitate learning. Based on the learning theories studied throughout the course, I found that my personal definition of learning most closely aligned with Constructivism. However, critical analysis of my teaching practices demonstrated that my actions do not always align with my beliefs about learning. This is not an uncommon finding amongst educators. Multiple studies have shown that teachers lack the knowledge required to create collaborative, inquiry based classrooms, causing them to continue to rely heavily on teacher driven instruction and to teach as they were taught. Recognition of this misalignment was a critical step to enhancing my instructional practices within my own classroom. Following the Principles of Learning course I identified 2 areas that I wanted to focus on to be a more effective teacher in the digital age:

1. Authentic assessment of learning - While I would often differentiate the learning content and process, when it came to assessment I would rely on a one size fits all model. In addition the assessment did not align with the type of learning the students were used to. While they would collaborate during class, assessment was completely independent. During class they would be encouraged to use a variety of tools, but culminating assignments often directed students towards a single tool or format.
2. Student-centred learning - I must be willing to share the classroom with my students. I have to teach them, but I also have to trust them. I need to place less emphasis on time constraints and covering the curriculum and step out of my comfort zone to try new strategies and tools. I need to ensure that my risks are well thought out and realize that in the worst case scenario the lesson doesn't go as planned and I learn from my experiences and adapt for the future.

Winter 2014

Special Topics in Curriculum: Emerging Technologies for Literacy Development across the Curriculum (5399G)

Course Reflection:

The Special Topics in Curriculum course provided me with an opportunity to investigate how learning can be enhanced using meaningful technology. This course marked the halfway point in the Master's program and required me to apply my learning from all previous courses. Initially, I struggled to connect academic research, learning theory, curriculum expectations and digital technology in a seamless manner. Through instructor and peer feedback I was able to focus my attention to a specific area of interest – reading comprehension of adolescent, struggling readers in science. As I developed an intervention plan to support students I continually asked myself the following questions:

- What is it I want the student to learn?
- What strategies will be most effective in supporting learning?
- How will I know learning has occurred?
- How can digital technology support learning?

These four questions have since become an instrumental part when planning within my own Grade 7 and 8 classroom.

Spring 2014

Authentic Assessment (5305G)

Course Reflection:

Throughout the Authentic Assessment course, I was encouraged to research, analyze, and apply my understanding of assessment to my own learning and professional practice. Herrington and Herrington (2006) provide a description of nine critical elements that should be used to design and evaluate authentic learning environments. I have grouped these elements into 4 categories that I believe are critical components in authentic assessment. Authentic forms of assessment need to be:

1. Relevant and contextualized
2. Collaborative
3. Reflective
4. Seamlessly integrated

While I am more confident in my ability to use assessment for, as and of learning, the following questions continue to guide my interest in assessment:

- 1) How might educators ensure that assessment tools accurately assess learning tasks?
- 2) Is there a need for current policies in education to change with regards to assessment?
- 3) If decisions are based on performance assessments, will educators teach to the assessment, thus sacrificing the validity of authentic assessment?
- 4) How can educators and students be supported in the transition from traditional forms of norm-referenced assessments to authentic, criteria referenced assessments?

Fall 2014

Foundations of Leadership (5201G)

Course Reflection:

Prior to enrolling in this course, I viewed leadership through a unidirectional and narrow lens. When asked during week one to reflect on our personal definition of leadership, I realized that my understanding of leadership had been based on a set of specific traits that I believed good leaders should exemplify. Through a review of the literature, I realized that the study of leadership is a complex and dynamic process. It was through investigating leadership theories that I began to acknowledge myself as a leader. This realization marked a critical step in my leadership journey as I critically examined how I exemplify the leadership traits, behaviours and interactions discussed in class to lead and influence others. At the end of the course I created the following as my personal philosophy of leadership:

1. Leadership requires risk-taking. Effective leaders are not satisfied with maintaining the status quo.
2. Effective leaders do not give up on themselves or others. When a problem arises they search for creative solutions. Leadership requires a growth mindset.
3. Leadership is not about leaders or followers, but rather relationships between people.
4. Great leaders recognize that they have a responsibility to help others achieve.

5. Effective leaders lead by example. They possess strong moral values and are dedicated to doing the right thing. It is through actions rather than words that leaders earn the respect and trust of those they lead.

****This reflection has been taken from my Foundations of Leadership portfolio which can be viewed at www.foundationsofleadership.weebly.com**

Fall 2014

Self-Directed Studies: Digital Portfolios as a Teaching, Learning and Assessment Tool in K-12 Education (5501G)

Course Reflection:

This course proved to be a very rewarding experience as I was able to pursue a topic of great interest, while taking full responsibility for my learning. I researched in depth the learning benefits of digital portfolios in K-12 classrooms. This interest stemmed from a case study I completed in the Authentic Assessment course where I investigated the high abandonment rate of portfolios in elementary and secondary classrooms. What I learned was that growth portfolios can serve as an authentic learning and assessment tool if they are developed with a clear purpose and by the learner. I completed this course during the same term that I was creating my own learning portfolio in the Foundations of Leadership course. This proved to be a beneficial experience as I was able to connect the literature to what I was experiencing as a learner. In turn, the challenges that I was facing allowed me to better address the needs and challenges my own Grade 7 and 8 students were experiencing creating their own digital portfolios. It was the work completed during this course that directed me towards completing the Portfolio capstone option for the Master of Education program.

Winter 2015

Technology and the Curriculum (5303G)

Course Reflection:

The technology and curriculum course was a fantastic course to conclude the Master's program. I was continually challenged to justify my pedagogical, technological and curriculum choices in the classroom. The TPACK and SAMR framework are two models that guide my beliefs about the effective use of digital technology in the classroom. I used to let the "bells and whistles" of technology be a measure of its effectiveness in the classroom. What I have come to understand is that meaningful use of technology allows learners to create something that would not be possible without the technology. Effective use of technology should also allow learners to experience subject content in a relevant and collaborative manner.