

Changes

A Developmental Synthesis Essay

“Have you ever watched a storm approaching on a hot summer’s day? It’s especially spectacular in the mountains. At first there’s nothing to see, but you feel a sort of weariness that tells you something is in the air.” – E.H. Gombrich

The author this quote was borrowed from was illustrating an oncoming change. Essentially, the aim of this essay is to deliver a message about change. It’s about the changes I’ve gone through over the last three years. It’s about philosophy. It’s about scholarly pursuits. It’s about technology. It’s most importantly about the evolution one makes from remaining only a teacher, to fully developing as an educator.

When I began graduate school, my intentions were to survive until, the end and walk away with a certified professional documentation of my completed studies. Many of the courses I would encounter would go on to discuss the differences between how we as educators are posed with the challenges of motivating our students. **Extrinsic** motivation is quite common among most learners. The desire to acquire new skills to satisfy an occupational acquirement, gain access to a new educational program, reach the qualifications for a new promotion and the financial gains accompanied with the new position. What I would draw from and reflect upon most during my studies was the concept of **intrinsic** motivation. This is the desire in learners to apply themselves for reasons unto themselves; learning for the sake of learning, the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom for the sake of being wise. I discovered I had a strong desire to study and reflect in higher education, and that I was very much inspired to invoke this desire in the learners I would go on to encounter. I foresee this as my greatest asset moving forward, my own desire to learn and the strength I find in wisdom.

There are three branches I draw from mostly when I reflect on my intrinsic motivation:

- The Grand Philosophy of Education
- The Aesthetic Nature of Visual Education
- The Pressing Need for Educational Technology

The first branch is inspired by a succession of three courses I encountered during my studies at Michigan State University. They are, in order of when I encountered them: Concepts of Educational Inquiry, Concepts of a Learning Society, and Education in the Digital Age. They are similar in that they were created by Dr. Steven Weiland. They are designed in a self-paced hypermedia format which he devised. These courses encompass a wide range of concepts, but where they meet together is in the philosophy of education and the ongoing societal pursuit of knowledge. Beginning with Concepts of Educational Inquiry I was introduced to the history of education and its progressive emergence in the United States of America through the great John Dewey. Concepts of a Learning Society essentially highlights how learned societies must pursue wisdom throughout their lifetimes in history and how on an individual level, learners must continue to learn throughout their lifetimes. Finally, Education in the Digital Age views the previously mentioned concepts through the lens of emerging technology. It focusses not only

on technology itself in its interconnected global format the internet has ushered us into, (willingly or otherwise), but it also looks at the mind and how we perceive and utilize emerging technologies.

The combination of these three courses shaped a great deal of my own philosophy as an educator and I imagine I will draw on them for more inspiration in the years to come.

“All new tools require some practice before we can become experts in the use of them.”

– William Powers

This next quote comes from the author of *Hamlet’s Blackberry*. As much as these aforementioned courses focus on the importance of technology in learning, they draw a great deal of material from ages past. The quote in reference is at the beginning of a chapter in the book covering the great Benjamin Franklin of all historical figures. Most wouldn’t necessarily focus on Colonial America as a literary source of emerging technologies in the 21st Century, but here, in this novel, we encounter a great deal of how past emerging technologies have shaped how we behave as learners today. I’ve come to realize through my studies that we are, in a sense, in a continuum as learners and educators. Our pursuits blend, change, and develop in space and time, and the understanding of how technology will effect education moving forward can be viewed through the lens of history as much as it can be approached through the newest gadget on the market today.

While we are discussing “branches,” let’s have a look at what a branch is, exactly. When in the history of language did it become necessary to discern between the difference upon a tree from its full form to what holds its many leaves? Why is it that we develop so many various ways of describing things in our world? These are the questions I find myself asking often. On the one hand its always been a personal interest of mine; aesthetics. On the other hand, I realize quite often that language is not as plain to understand as monolingual individuals might fail to realize. I am an ESL teacher by trade (English as a Second Language). Some of the questions I’ve posed about branches and the trees we find them on are in a way, what studying language and the education behind language learning represent. One thing I’ve realized over the years is the difficulty in learning a new language, both from my students, and internally as I’ve pursued some of the languages I’ve encountered through my travels in Southeast Asia.

Interestingly enough, I find the course that most identifies with my aesthetic conceptualization in my field wasn’t a course so much encumbered in educational concepts in their academic format, but a course that synthesized the utilization of children’s literature and how the movie adaptations can be appropriately utilized in the classroom. Children’s Literature in Film was a short summer course I took very early on in my time at Michigan State to satisfy an early elective requirement. It sounded, not to diminish, but “fun.”

There were indeed a great many technical approaches to watching and analyzing film and various camera angles. These concepts were refreshing, because they were all new to me, having only briefly encountered cinematography in my bachelor’s program years ago. I would say what really moved me and inspired me was the concept of selecting the appropriate material and how delivering a film to a classroom was not as simple as “rolling out the projector.” There is a nuance to introducing films to a group of young learners, and when done correctly, it can server as an inspiring visual aide and a much-needed catalyst for retaining valuable comprehensions. This course aided me, shaped me, and prepared me for teaching groups of young learners I had yet to realize I would be encountered in the future.

I live and work in environments that are very much in need of the additional utilization of emerging technologies in education. The third branch I will discuss was inspired by the course Teaching School Subject Matter with Technology. It's almost serendipitous how and when I was taking this course. I had, by my own design, placed this course as late as possible in my Master of Arts in Education program. The main reason was that I am well aware of the fast pace of technology in our brave new world. I desired to literally be as current as possible regarding the study of technology at the end of my graduate studies. What a shocking time to be doing almost anything during the summer of 2020 with the Covid-19 global pandemic in full swing. Online learning, an almost stigmatized concept decades prior, had emerged as the must-have only resort in times when social distancing had become explicitly necessary. I know I witnessed it myself here in Southeast Asia, but by all accounts, even educational institutions in the west were finding it quite demanding and at times insurmountable to deliver quality education in an online format. It is my analysis that a great deal of useful and appropriate education can be delivered over the internet. The missing link and cause for consternation in most institutions was simply a lack of experience at the time. Things were thrust upon educators in such a way that they needed to adapt to survive. I considered myself quite fortunate to be currently enrolled in a tech course during these unfortunate times.

I encountered, for the first time the *Technological Pedagogical and Content Knowledge* model, or TPACK as it's referred to. This brilliant concept illustrates the need for educators to blend a series of most needed skillsets. One must be able to utilize their expertise, or content expertise, as being an expert at something is quite useful. But this is certainly not enough to only be a singular expert at something in the field of education. Just as important is the need for an educator to adapt their pedagogical skills. They must be able to, in essence, show how to do the things they are accomplished at. The all-important transfer of knowledge. Finally, it is absolutely necessary that we as educators are able to take our expertise, be able to demonstrate and spread that knowledge, and be able to do so within the realm of emerging technologies. As mentioned earlier, it is in this day and age that we must reach our students and learners in places that are increasing outside of a formal classroom setting.

As a second language educator, and in the midst of a pandemic, I found myself without a traditional classroom. I was tasked with delivering a tech specified lesson, and I created one of my most remembered lesson plans from my entire Master of Arts in Education experience. I used a simple language learning program found on a simple phone app, and delivered it through an informally choreographed setting, to an entire village that is only connected to the outside world via a simple government provided internet connection situated at the home of one of the village elders. This was both an amazing experience intellectually and technologically speaking, but it was also an investment in my own understanding culturally and spiritually.

There are a lot of reasons people go through changes. Some are voluntary life altering journeys individuals embark upon for improvement. They can be sourced from extrinsic motivations with lofty goals of advancement. They can equally, and perhaps even further, be sourced from one's own intrinsic value they attach to the pursuit. Sometimes changes are forced upon people. The world has a way of pushing individuals in ways quite like water and air currents move light objects.

There are a lot of ways to view philosophies, aesthetics, and ever emerging technologies. One way to view these three concepts I will admit is through a lens of sheer terror. It's intimidating to learn new things and set new goals. It's a challenge to face the unknown and look to the future. Over the course of

the last three years I have combined my prior corporate business expertise with the cultural knowledge I've picked up over a decade living abroad. I've since synthesized my prior knowledge with the vast wealth of new knowledge I have acquired over the course of my Master of Arts in Education (MAED) at Michigan State University. The world changes and so do I along with it. My goals setting forward are to bring wisdom and knowledge to new English learners and hopefully deliver the concepts of philosophy, aesthetics, and technology learning that have inspired me thus far.