

Reflection and Projection

by Stephanie Lee

The online learning platform of Michigan State University's Master of Arts in Education program forced me to tackle my personal resistance to new technologies in order to explore digital education and establish digital literacy to an adequate extent. During my time as a student, the program transitioned online platforms from ANGEL to D2L. It was interesting to navigate a different platform for the same program. The self-paced courses were fantastic. The autonomous flexibility fulfilled exactly what I envisioned for an online master's program. The feedback from the instructors of the self-paced courses was very useful and personalized. Perhaps it was an attribute of the instructors themselves; however, I reckon that the time-structured courses caused instructors to be crunched for deadlines for student feedback as the assignments were all turned in at the same time. The level of thoughtful student responses and feedback was significantly higher in self-paced courses.

Worth mentioning, a few aspects of the MAED were disconcerting; namely, the low level of peer feedback in course forums. Unprofessional language was used in an unhelpful fashion which failed to aid my success in the program. Never did I feel that my commentaries helped others nor did others' commentaries help me. Nevertheless, these disappointments did not outweigh the satisfaction I received from the program as a whole. It was great to have found an accredited online master's program which limited class sizes and incorporated social, political, and economic studies of education. What I liked about this education program most was that there were clear options for studying non-curriculum based topics of education. I am not a teacher and do not have access to local schools or volunteer programs so this program was very suitable for my situation.

Moreover, the CEP 813 Electronic Portfolios course and the final ED 870 Capstone course required me to face my website fears and put together websites using the cloud web designing programs of Weebly and Wix. The ability to design and make a website is an extremely useful skill which extends beyond the scope of the program for myself personally and professionally for perhaps a small-sized business venture in the future. Below, I reflect on three courses in the program that left significant impacts on my learning.

EAD 864 Adult Career Development was my first course and absolute favorite. Upon current reflection, I would actually like to retake the course to gain a deeper insight into the ideas presented. What the course introduced in relation to adult life changed my entire perspective and definition of the colloquial term "career path" and introduced the multifaceted concept of stages rather than a fixed trajectory based on time. In addition to these new academic ideas, the course reinforced my interest in personal narrative writing and publications through reading assignments by both academics and non-academics.

This framework provided structure to the gradation of changes adults experience later in life and opened the discussion of what I refer to as the, "After the 'where I grew up'

discussion.” As an undergraduate, I studied Ethnic Studies which focused a large amount on history, sociology, economics, socio-economics, politics, and political histories. There were extensive readings and discussions on the foundations and processes of immigration to the United States and its related assimilation patterns and problems. Essentially, there was a great deal of “how we got here” and much less about where we can go or what we can do as individuals unrestricted by a bulls-eye toward professional degrees. The units of EAD 864 explored how parts of people’s personal histories are embedded in us, yet it is the choices we make that ultimately pave our routes through and across career stages. Our personal histories are not predictors; rather, they are foundational plots awaiting directional decisions. We are, therefore, connected to our search for meaningful work more than we may consciously realize. Taking a broader viewpoint, adult career development is intriguing even further as work is a unanimous experience unbounded by geographic borders or cultures. What the work is and how a career is established or selected is infinitely variable. There is a wonderfully arbitrary aspect of adult career development that I have learned deserves both reflection and celebration.

TE 838 Children’s Literature in Film extended my understanding of the concept of interpretation. As someone sincerely pursuing a lifelong learning endeavor in foreign languages, the term, “interpretation,” takes on several levels of importance for me. One may immediately associate “translation” with language; however, a more in depth investigation of language requires interpretation of meaning and thus a translation of words. In this course, I did not expect to uncover and identify so many intricate connections between children’s literature, film, and language.

The challenge was to first “read” film and to identify film literacy as its own genre. The unit entitled, “Fidelity to the Original,” required us to analyze how comparisons between the original text and film interpretations affect our understanding of a story. The driving factors for such interpretations were also investigated in order for us to reason why certain, and often evident, changes were included. More than the other courses in the MAED program, this course took a frank look at the commercialism of books and turned a critical eye on the aggressive marketing and merchandising campaigns that literature, or publishing houses rather, has brought to the retail industry. How we consume literature is now much wider in scope. TE 838 included the American cultural appropriation of *The Wizard of Oz* and its resulting craze for collector’s memorabilia. Thereafter, the more current explosion of Harry Potter was scrutinized even deeper as its film adaptations, toys, products of every sort, and amusement park are all recent additions to young American literature and film.

Since this course, I find browsing and shopping for books for my daughter quite a daunting task as my enthusiastic new mother feelings for the cute and precious are continuously trounced by my frustratingly analytical evaluations of marketable literature. Nowadays, the three major factors I consider are language, story, and illustrations/images. For books in all languages, I recall TE 838’s Caldecott Award lesson in picture book layout and design and ask myself what images are being shown and how the text is presented. For English books, I am much more critical because I look at the story moral and the cultural lessons being taught. Internationally, though, there is a

plethora of non-English books with “commercial characters” such as Hello Kitty. I am left contemplating if the book is simply for language practice or if reading can ever be just language practice. Therefore, the conundrum I face is whether to have a shelf overflowing with an array of books or no books at all. Consequently, I have settled on various translations of identical picture books. But I wonder, are these interpretations? Which text is the original? Does being an original make it the superior publication? Can an interpretation be better? In which cases is the interpretation better? How does the translation and related interpretation of meaning result in a new story with the same illustrations? This is now my every day. Thank you, TE 838.

EAD 882 Education in the Digital Age confronted the sudden generation of digital autodidacts. From our own couches, office chairs, or kitchen stools, we need not step foot in a library or bookstore or chat with an expert to believe we have taught ourselves something. With new digital technologies come varying educational gains and losses. Of all of the readings, Siva Vaidhyanathan’s thoughts stood out most prominently to me as he expresses sincere wariness for our Google-search mentalities. He says we only search for what we intend to find which limits us in greater capacities than we know and that Google’s expansion into books and other resource databases should be regulated very closely. How Vaidhyanathan articulates his skepticism for Google as a private technology company serving in the public sphere is extremely thought-provoking. There were other interesting viewpoints presented such as William Powers’ historical accounts of new technologies and his personal inquiries regarding being “plugged in” and connected 24 hours a day for professional and personal purposes in *Hamlet’s BlackBerry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age*.

One area that this course covered which was of particular interest to me was the economic aspect of technology in education. School administrators are faced with weighty decisions on policies such as iPads for all or justifying the expansion of a library or hiring a new librarian. Samples of similar decisions were demonstrated in the PBS Frontline special entitled, *Digital Nation*. Assigned readings included fascinating critiques on Apple’s aggressive “educational marketing,” targeted toward school administrators and educational leadership. There is no consensus. Opinions are divided over traditional teaching and learning methods and the financial investment of expensive and rapidly changing products.

Despite the economic impact of digital technology on education in schools, there is an ever-growing *DIY U* mentality, a term cleverly coined by Anya Kamenetz. With the abundance, or overabundance, of educational resources available on the Internet, we have the option to be self-taught experts, virtuosos, masters, or connoisseurs in nearly any field. The readings associated to modern day autodidacts piqued my interest in what scholars had to say about writing. In the digital age, there is little respect for the patient, thoughtful process of writing and editing well-crafted ideas. Writing is suddenly immediate. It is one instantaneous posting after another and we are left unable to identify, whom exactly is a writer and whether or not writing makes us writers. The inclusion of an investigation into academic bloggers was an interesting twist to this course and challenged my cynicism for blogs in general. A few years ago, I applied for a writer’s

position for a print publication. The company asked for previous publications, writing samples, or a website or blog. I initially questioned if publications and a blog were equal in strength and did not understand the magnitude nor the speed of the shift in media forms from print to digital and the related shift from formal processes of publication recognition to informal processes of garnering a following. The course units and topics of EAD 882 helped to explain this new digital transition and had, in fact, encouraged me to increase my participation in digital tools and technologies. Truthfully, the Internet overwhelms me so it was enlightening to explore the multilayered ideas and thoughts about new digital technologies in an organized fashion in order to prepare myself for learning and teaching going forward.