

Joshua Schultz
Final Reflection

When I began this program, I wasn't sure if Educational Technology would be the right fit for me. I struggled to see where I belonged within the field. However, after completing EDLT 6601, I'm confident that I made the right decision to pursue my master's degree in Educational Technology. Ultimately, I envision myself working alongside subject matter experts to develop training programs, whether in education or the business sector. I'm also drawn to distance learning environments and hope to explore those opportunities further—possibly through internships within this program. That's one of the reasons this program appealed to me so strongly: it offers the flexibility to grow within education or pivot to a different industry entirely.

One of my favorite parts of the course was hearing the “voices from the field.” Listening to professionals from such diverse backgrounds share their paths into instructional design was both inspiring and reassuring. Despite their differences, all successful instructional designers seemed to share common traits: strong communication skills, organizational ability, and a foundational understanding of how people learn. Their stories gave me hope and motivation for my own future in this field.

Although I've only been teaching for four years, my understanding of how people learn has significantly evolved. “Teacher school” taught me various strategies and management techniques, but stepping into a real classroom felt like drinking from a fire hose. I quickly realized that knowledge alone wasn't enough to replicate the smooth operation of a seasoned teacher's classroom. Revisiting those foundational strategies through the lens of learning theory has been both refreshing and eye-opening.

In the early days of my teaching, my approach was heavily teacher-centered. I relied on traditional methods like worksheets, multiple-choice tests, and occasional written responses. Over time, I questioned how much students were actually retaining and applying. That reflection led me to adopt more student-centered teaching strategies. I began incorporating multiple content delivery methods—videos, hands-on materials, and digital resources—and emphasized clear expectations and rubrics. These changes encouraged students to take ownership of their learning, leading to increased engagement and deeper understanding.

To me, meaningful learning is transformative. It's the kind of knowledge that changes how a person sees and interacts with the world. As an instructional designer, fostering meaningful learning means being open to failure, asking questions, and continually evaluating your designs. While I understand the distinction between formative and summative assessments, I still want to deepen my understanding of how to evaluate the design process itself—separate from how learners are assessed. This is an area I hope to explore further in future courses and experiences.

The instructional strategy I use most often is project-based, team-oriented learning. This approach fosters collaboration, encourages critical thinking, and improves knowledge retention. Rubrics serve as a framework, but learners are empowered to ask questions, conduct research, and present their findings. This method allows students to draw on their prior knowledge and experiences, which enriches the learning process. For example, in science lessons, I often begin with open-ended questions like “What do you know about the sun?” I'm consistently amazed by the ideas students bring and how those initial thoughts evolve as they learn more.

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My definition of meaningful learning has greatly influenced how I design instruction—prioritizing a student-centered, teacher-facilitated model. I enjoy giving students opportunities to collaborate, but I also recognize that no single approach fits all learners. It's important to have a deep understanding of the content and to differentiate how and when it's delivered based on the learners' needs. Providing options—such as readings, videos, or slide decks—has helped engage more students meaningfully. Personally, I prefer reading, but there were many times during this course when I listened to audio versions of the material during my commute. Accessibility like that makes education more effective and relevant.

Overall, my views on instructional design haven't drastically changed, but they've become more refined. I was relieved to learn that instructional design involves careful planning to determine whether instruction is even necessary before jumping to technological solutions. It's not about throwing tech at every problem—it's about taking a thoughtful, intentional approach. With a few years of teaching experience under my belt, I now view curriculum with a more critical eye. I'm always asking, "Is this the best way to teach this? Could it be done better?" I'm excited to continue growing, learning new tools and techniques, and exploring how instructional design can support both my work as a teacher and opportunities beyond the classroom.