

Personal Learning Reflection & Professional Competency Model

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Introduction

In this paper I will outline my current learning experiences thus far and attempt to draw a causal relationship between my development and my professional goals. With this relationship established, I will dive into articulating the exact nature of my ideal job. With a review of research into the requirements of those positions and the general trends of the industry, I will then assess my current strengths and weaknesses accordingly. Finally, I will arrive at a kind of roadmap that is informed by my findings and reflections.

My Reflections

When I consider the culture in which I was raised, my pursuit of education is not at all surprising. My early education in public school was consistent, positive, highly structured and supervised.

Education was an unspoken, expected necessity in both my nuclear and extended family. My mother's parents were Sicilian immigrants, and while they rose to financial comfort, they spent early adulthood as dark-skinned minorities with very little income. As a result, grades were fiercely important to my mother's upbringing—and simply put, a successful education was the most effective way to achieve status.

My father's father was the first in his family to graduate high school and went on to utilize his naval education to attend university's like Notre Dame, Dartmouth, Cornell and finally the Citadel. What I remember most of my grandfather was his unfailing curiosity and enthusiasm for education. In his house, you were always your most captivating when discussing your schooling, or sharing an innovation you had discovered in class. This feature was passed

clearly onto my father—and just like that I grew up in an environment where school was not only positive, but fascinating.

This setting motivated my desire to learn, though somewhat unconsciously. Consciously, I had a clear and stated desire to be as much like Hermione Granger of the Harry Potter series as humanly possible. I already had her hair! I can distinctly remember wanting to always have my hand raised and be able to quote verbatim my research, just as she always did.

Both of these factors very clearly motivated the attention I gave to my schooling as a child—and if I am honest, they still manifest when I consider the circumstances in which I am most likely to succeed in my studies as an adult. While I am drawn to projects that grow my personal interests (more on this in a moment), the actual hard work is often motivated by external factors. Truth be told, I sometimes wonder what my learning outcomes would have been if grades were not a clear and visible motivator. While I very often consider this need for validation a flaw, I have found a way weaponize against my lazier tendencies. It sounds a bit aggressive but it's through this self awareness that I've built structure and accountability in my studies. It's also the same reason I don't thrive in 100% self-driven course work.

As I got older, my thirst for knowledge began to translate into a keen hunger to understand the world around me. My teenage years were political ones. The Occupy Wall street movement was in full swing and objections to the US's role on the global stage were loud and clear. Slowly I began to emerge from a conservative, Catholic upbringing to a Liberal, and spiritually open adulthood. I took an International Relations class my senior year of high school and there was thrust, somewhat uncomfortably, into a fully global perspective. I began to clash with my parents, and undoubtably for some time was an insufferable young liberal, only just

learning the ways of conveying and backing up her opinions. Later, I moved to Chicago to study theatre. I spent six years there. It was an incredibly formative time for me. I lived in one of the most diverse cities in the world and worked in one of the most forward thinking industries. Representation of different race and gender identities became the foremost topic of conversation in rehearsal halls. The ability to keep up in those conversations was an imperative marker of professional and social status. For the first time, an unflinching and self-driven education of race and gender dynamics was crucial to my success. The quest for meaning in those years has stuck with me. To this day I view most content through the lens of a political or socioeconomic perspective.

Why consider this? Because while I have outlined for myself *how* I learn, I think consideration of my values informs *what* I learn. I have found undoubtedly, that my learning is most sustainable when it rotates around topics I can meaningfully connect to an impact within the world around me. This is no small recognition. It allows me to realize that professionally, I will be most fulfilled (and therefore successful) when I am doing work that has a clear positive impact. If I want to thrive, I need to seek out opportunities that align clearly with my values.

My values lead to a strong belief in the necessity of using ones strengths to aid in the happiness and safety of others. My strengths lie in communication, in understanding multiple perspectives, and in guiding others to do the same. These values— alongside my familial immigrant history and a strong spiritually grounded belief in the importance of service— have lead me to create a clear picture of what a fulfilling professional life looks like.

My Professional Landscape and Goals

I have identified ESL education as the umbrella industry that will be most fulfilling to me. Specifically, I am particularly interested in aiding the resettlement of refugee communities in the United States.

My top three goals are as follows:

1. Become a thought leader in:
 - Education accessibility,
 - ESL education that does not result in the erasure of native culture, and
 - programming that adapts to the trauma of the refugee experience.
2. Hold a position that allows me to lead a team of diverse talent in the creation of impactful educational programming.
3. Be a pioneer in the field of remote learning with an emphasis on fostering community and belonging.

While I expect and look forward to time in a classroom working directly with students, my big picture dream is to work with larger humanitarian organizations like Save the Children or International Rescue Committee to build sustainable, outcome driven curriculum for adults learning English and seeking asylum in the United States. In researching organizations such as these, I've learned a great deal more about what skills are required to hold such positions.

For my purposes in this paper, I have identified three positions I aspire to hold. I will list them below and include their descriptions. In the last section of the Professional Competencies model you will find direct quotations from the requirements sections of the postings.

1. Education Program Designer, World Learning

The job description was posted as follows:

S/he will be leading the design process to develop high quality, context-responsive, education programs and proposals. This position will play a leadership role in World Learning's Education portfolio, leading: research efforts to document models in key education development fields, connect internal and external stakeholders for information exchange, developing partnerships, and designing education programs to achieve impact. This role will also take the lead in proposal development, concept design, and research on programs across the Education Unit portfolio, including but not limited to programs in: early grade reading, youth leadership and workforce development, education management and capacity development, STEM education, ICT in education, higher education management and university partnerships, and education in emergencies (including efforts to support education and opportunities for refugees). S/he will design these programs in accordance with World Learning's commitment to social inclusion and equality. In addition to leading program design, s/he will support knowledge management efforts to gather evidence on best practices and lessons learned to improve future programming. (Devex International Development, 2016).

The qualifications for this job include a master's degree in education (or a relevant field). They also seek five years experience designing "international education or global development programs," as well as previous work with donor bodies and foundational funding. In other words, experience being a decision maker in a non-profit environment. Otherwise, I am pleased to see that the qualifications are largely soft skills. They do indicate a preference for someone with a firm grasp of a second language and a network within the humanitarian sector (2016).

2. Education Lead, Save the Children

The essential duties are listed on the site as follows:

- Commitment to Child Rights, gender-equality and Save the Children's values
- Bachelor's degree in Education, International Development or related field
- Minimum five years' experience with progressively increasing responsibility for designing, managing, and implementing complex education programming in developing countries involving multiple stakeholders and implementing partners
- At least three years of experience providing technical leadership on large-scale USAID funded projects and designing and implementing education programming, preferably in West Africa
- Demonstrated hands-on experience in building Ministry of Education capacity to provide safe education opportunities in formal and non-formal school settings.
- Ability to collaborate and liaise with senior MoE officials, other USAID implementing partners, other relevant education sector programs, and senior members of the donor community
- Proven track record managing a project team composed of technical experts from multi-cultural backgrounds and fostering team work
- Strengths in inspiring and enabling other through training, and capacity building to realize objectives
- Ability to gain support from staff across teams and to build the capacity of others;
- Sound strategic thinking and planning skills, including ability to think creatively and innovate and to set priorities, manageable work plans and evaluate progress;

- Excellent interpersonal skills and demonstrated ability to lead and work effectively in team situations
- Excellent oral and written communication skills in English.
- Knowledge of oral and written French.
- Ability and willingness to be very flexible and accommodating in difficult and sometimes dangerous working circumstances (Save the Children, 2020).

This position has looser qualifications and focuses on a shared value base and history of work promoting women's education and equality in the context of a "fragile state." For my purposes, I note that my resume does not have a clear history of advocacy and volunteer work. I will definitely need to improve upon that (2020).

3. Instructional Designer, International Rescue Committee

Finally, this position for the IRC outlines the following responsibilities:

- Review...materials including resource guides and training guides to suggest the transformation of each topic.
- Utilize ADDIE to design develop and publish the course content and learning activities for online and virtual modalities with continuous evaluation/improvement cycles for the course content.
- Adapt instructional materials created from face-to-face programming to E-Learning.
- Apply tested instructional design theories, practice and methods.
- Create exercises and activities that enhance and assess the learning process.
- Create visualized storyboard for training-based video.

- Design and develop course content included but not limited to measurable learning objectives, scenarios, simulations, audio scripts (International Rescue Committee, 2021).

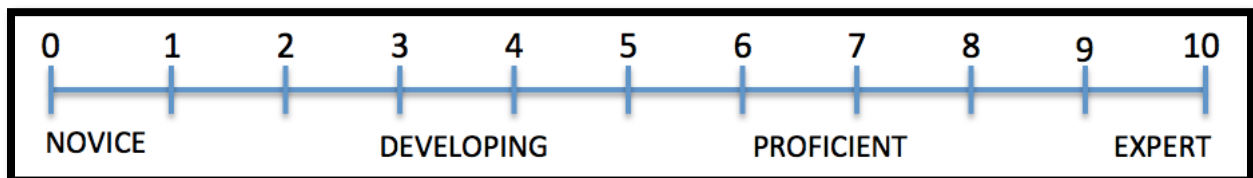
For this position, the IRC requires a university degree in instructional design, five years of experience working in e-learning with an LMS, and most interestingly to me “knowledge and familiarity using image, graphics and video authoring tools.” I already have some experience in this, but it is worth noting that is an area I should really be brushing up on (2021).

General Industry Trends

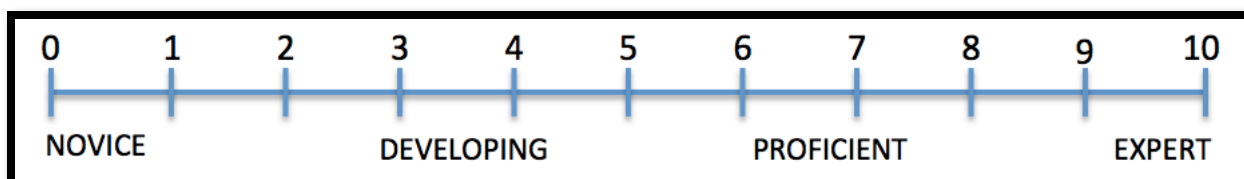
After identifying these three dream jobs, I also completed some research into the industry itself. Because it is a cross section of industries (mainly, ESL and Instructional Design) I chose to focus on ID, as it is newer to me.

A 2018 study titled “Competencies for instructional designers: A view from employers: Competencies for ID” sampled a large cross-section of hiring managers to eventually confirm that the competencies outlined in my three dream jobs are consistent with industry standards. Their research indicates that the top requested skills involved inter-team collaboration, knowledge of LMS’s and other educational authoring software, and proven experience in similar, if not identical capacities. Interestingly, those same hiring managers did often indicate that a Master’s degree may qualify to them as equivalent experience (Klien & Kelly, 2018, pp.236-237).

My Professional Competency Model and Current Level of Expertise



MEd COMPETENCIES	Rating
<i>A Systems Thinker</i>	
Perceives self as an educator participating within a larger system of education	7
Demonstrates strategic awareness	3
Looks for patterns and makes connections	8
Sees how parts relate to the whole, including the implications of systems and organizational change	8
<i>A Communicator</i>	
Proficient as a writer and as a presenter	8
Capacity to work within groups to listen well, speak well, and co-author	9
Able to collaborate and communicate in a range of modalities (face-to-face and online)	7
Facile with technology, keeps current with emerging technologies and social media	8
<i>A Creative Problem Solver</i>	
Situational awareness and leadership in identifying and defining challenges	8
Thinks creatively to generate ideas and be open to alternatives	8
Develops and implements plans for addressing problems and effecting change	8
Is resilient in less-than-optimal circumstances	6
<i>Culturally Responsive</i>	
Perceives the professional self as functioning within a global context of education	9
Aware of the dynamics of race, class, gender, and the other cultural factors within community dynamics and intercultural communication	9
Interest in, and capacity to perceive, multiple perspectives	9
Self-aware of cultural perspective and privilege	9
Capacity to serve as an agent for social justice	9



eLid COMPETENCIES	Rating
Professional Expertise	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute to the design of learning experiences that are rigorous, grounded in evidence-based pedagogical theory, and informed by the science of learning. 	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gather and assess evidence of effectiveness for the purpose of improved learning. 	4
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create engaging environments that involve learners in the construction of knowledge through images, words, videos, and animations. 	3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Serve as a consultant on learning design and connected learning. 	1
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Manage the development of projects related to learning design. 	1
Contextualize Cognizance	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct environmental scans to identify needs and resources, analyze gaps and strengths, and discover partners and opportunities. 	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrate responsiveness to organizational culture, including the capacity to negotiate with others and manage change. 	2
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the expertise and perspectives of participants in the design process (e.g., discipline specialists, educators, learning scientists, media designers, and technologists), in order to forge respectful and constructive working relationships. 	2
Leadership and Vision	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seek out and analyze the pedagogical potential of new models, strategies and tools. 	5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respond innovatively to societal and institutional changes that impact the field of education. 	6
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anticipate and help shape the future of education, particularly next generation learning in mobile and online environments. 	6

ADDITIONAL COMPETENCIES for Refugee specific, ESL Educational Designers	
• Experience designing and/or managing international education or global development programs	0
• Proven track record managing a project team composed of technical experts from multi-cultural backgrounds and fostering team work	3
• Minimum of one (1) year experience working with students required; public school, SEI environments, or ELL experience preferred.	7
• Cross-cultural understanding and strong communication skills, both written and verbal.	9
• Knowledge and familiarity using image, graphics and video authoring tools like adobe Photoshop, illustrator, after effect.	3
• Has minimum five years of experience in using e-learning tools and Learning Management System	5
• Demonstrated experience in the provision of training, curriculum development and implementation	1
• Experience delivering classes in non-traditional contexts and familiarity with new educational methods and technologies (e-learning platforms)	2
• Proficiency in a second language	1

Reflections and Conclusions

The above reflections have clearly outlined for me what a candidacy for my dream job today would look like. While it is not productive to observe that they would all go poorly due to lack of experience, it is worth noting I will need to build a resume in learning design before being competitive for positions with significant creative input. In the meantime, I must work to obtain significant, up-to-date knowledge of content authoring and LMS technologies. I must demonstrate experience through a carefully curated portfolio, and that portfolio must indicate a clear grasp of multiple, diverse technologies. I should begin learning a second language (for me,

Spanish or Arabic) and most importantly, I need to work hard to somehow fit volunteer history into my schedule. So far, this has not been an area that I have had any time for (needing an income as I do...) but if I am going to apply for humanitarian positions, my research has clearly indicated that employers will want to see deep volunteering roots.

In reviewing my current ranking of M.Ed competencies, I observe that soft-skill areas such as communication, cultural responsiveness, and creative problem solving are already well developed, and poised to continue growing through exposure to new content and experience. The more specific skills required of an Instructional Designer are still largely lacking and will require a bit more of a manual focus. I note not only that I need hard experience developing engaging content, but also in measuring it's efficacy. I also note that the process of assessing and diagnosing an existing learning environment is a valuable skill that will need to be included in any kind of comprehensive portfolio.

Overall, I am very pleased to find that my chosen area of study will prepare me for my dream job. While I have some years before I accomplish those positions, I am now more at ease having created an attainable, clear roadmap.

References

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