

Chris Wills
ITEC 57427 – Technology and Learning
Professional Learning Plan

The field of instructional technology is one in which, as Isaac Asimov paraphrased the Greek philosopher Heraclitus, “the only thing constant is change.” Technological innovations occur so rapidly that the importance of continuing professional development for those in the field cannot be overstated. As a consumer of instructional technology tools and a producer of technology-based instructional materials, I must continually refine my skills; keeping up to date with existing applications’ new feature sets and functionality while also being aware of “the next best thing” will help ensure the ongoing relevance of my instructional activities and research.

For over a decade, I’ve worked as a software business analyst and project manager. In these roles, I have been charged with identifying new technologies to solve business problems, and I have served as the conduit between the business and technical sides of the implementation process; as a result, I am extremely comfortable with exploring new technology-based solutions. At the same time, I’ve been responsible for supporting the applications and solutions I implement, so I have developed deep skills with analyzing the quantitative and qualitative data available in my work, and databases, spreadsheets, rule/logic engines, and SQL queries are familiar tools which I use on a daily basis. My ability to successfully juggle a full load of project responsibilities requires me to use these tools efficiently and effectively, and my past successes validate these skills.

I consider myself very knowledgeable in terms of what types of instructional technology tools are available, and am confident in my research capabilities to identify new options should there not be a clear-cut best choice to use in a particular situation. I am able to quickly understand how a particular technology functions and identify the best situations in which to use it, and I have been able to transfer this skill to the educational environment as well. I struggle, though, with selecting a single technology to use for a given instructional application; I’ve encountered so many different “flavors” of similar tool types that narrowing the field to a single choice takes me a long time. I tend to overthink in hopes of making the use of technology as transparent as possible.

As Egbert (2009) notes, “a thoughtful, reflective approach to [professional development] will help teachers get the most out of each experience” (p. 256). The line between true reflection and indecisiveness is a blurry one, at least for me, so setting time-bound goals for myself is an important step in properly planning for the amount of time required to understand the intricacies of the subject I’m studying without venturing into the land of “analysis paralysis.” I’ve learned over the years that while I benefit from being able to learn through “playing around” with technology, I am more likely to develop a deeper understanding of new technologies and concepts if I give myself a deadline by which I must select a single solution and become proficient with its use.

My long-term goals fall into three main categories: producing my own online course materials for my current corporate learning environment, cultivating my own research and academic writing skills, and staying abreast of new technologies. From these larger themes, I have developed short-term goals with appropriate key success factors as validation criteria. Three such goals are listed below in order of priority.

- **Develop advanced competency in producing online course materials using Adobe Captivate, as evidenced by passing the [Adobe Certified Expert examination](#), by 8/1/2011.** In my work environment, I do not have access to CMS functionality; when I brought up the subject of installing Moodle with my server administrators, it was relegated to the bottom of the list of technical priorities. I am often tasked with creating training programs for new software implementations, and it would be beneficial to maintain the same “look and feel” of training by developing it with a true e-learning application rather than in animated PowerPoint presentations and simple text-based quick reference guides. To learn the application to a level sufficient to pass the certification exam, I have identified training manuals and will use them to teach myself the application. While I will pace myself through the manuals so as to complete them by early July and provide myself time to complete practice exams, the sole measure of whether or not I attain this goal is passing the certification exam.
- **By 12/31/2011, further develop my simple list of “technologies to explore” into an annotated list, suitable for sharing with peers or other students or for publication in a resource that typically includes such types of content.** As mentioned above, not having a concrete deadline on a project often causes inertia for me. In one of my recent class postings, I noted that I’ve been building a list of technologies that I’ve learned of and want to try out “someday.” The problem with this approach is that “someday” has not yet arrived. I have only done brief exploration into many of these tools, not even to the point where I can fully explain the “how” and “why” of the best uses for them. By putting a finite end date on this effort, I will force myself to review and evaluate many of the tools on my list. I anticipate pacing myself with an average rate of evaluating one new tool each week until 11/30, which would result in 20-25 fully annotated entries, and can check my progress by using simple math to measure if I’m ahead of schedule or behind schedule; I’ll certainly try to work ahead, but with other goals in play, I could see this one slipping in priority. Completing at least 20 entries, including final editing, constitutes success for this effort.
- **By 3/31/2012, complete a final draft of a paper to be submitted for publication regarding the application of educational change models to the Project Management Institute’s “change management” module of the project management process to make the people-related aspects of change occur more smoothly.** I have long questioned why the Project Management Body of Knowledge only addresses change management in terms of requirements management, without ever considering organizational change management. There are numerous technological tools we have identified throughout the semester that could be of significant benefit in helping organizational change go more smoothly if only their importance was publicized outside the typical educational environment. I plan to have a literature search complete by 9/1/2011, read and review the articles I’ve found by 12/1/2011, and spend the remainder of the time doing the actual writing. As a stretch goal, I’d like to be able to submit the article by the end of this year; to do so, I will need to accelerate those deadlines, but I think it’s certainly doable. I will need to be disciplined in working on this project every week instead of trying to rush to meet my deadlines, and since this is a personal attribute for which I can always use more practice, this will be a good opportunity for such practice.

Regardless of whether I stay in my current position or transition to a new role, perhaps in a new organization, I need to keep my instructional technology skills and knowledge sharp. As I begin to explore new opportunities outside my current organization, I anticipate that it will mean more to prospective employers if I can demonstrate specific steps I have taken to continue my personal and professional development. During my three years in the ITEC programs, I have demonstrated that I love to try to make connections between instructional technology and my current information technology responsibilities. I am just now starting to see some acceptance and understanding of my instructional technology and learning theory knowledge from my colleagues, and I need to keep that momentum going; achieving these three goals will help me to further “prove” the applicability of instructional technology theory to my organization’s everyday training needs and validate the need for thoughtful, good design of our training efforts.

References

Egbert, J. (2009). *Supporting learning with technology: Essentials of classroom practice*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.