

Reflective Conclusion

Introduction

The possible reasons why I took this Master Degree would make interesting reading. Was it the fact that the course was going to be paid for by my Institution and therefore would be a free qualification, compared to many of my peers, in other institutions, who would have to pay 5,000 euro, or more. Was it something deep in my psyche, created up by my father, who stated, "I wouldn't amount to much", after failing my 11+ examination. Alternatively, was it a subject that I had become fascinated with a few years earlier, after conducting a piece of independent research and reporting? I personally believe it was a mixture of all three in varying proportions.

The course itself was a pleasant surprise. After being involved in Computing and Information Technology since 1980 I did not think I would be seeing anything new. How wrong I was! The majority of the course offered newly emerging technologies and teaching / learning strategies that I had not seen before. I enjoyed the experience of using them and putting them into practice for my students. Some examples: included mind maps, Second Life, wikis, bloggers, WebQuest, online quizzes, action research, social constructivism and a lot more.

Initially, I thought the course was going to be mostly online, with a few tutorial sessions. I have previously taken two other Master Degrees, where this was the case and was slightly anxious when I discovered it was going to be a blended course. I was not concerned with the teaching aspects of the blended course, but with the practicalities of turning up at my classroom in Dublin, every Tuesday afternoon, when I lived in Roscommon and worked in Athlone. Initially, I had a class from 10.00 to 12.00 every Tuesday and leaving at 12.00, motoring down to St James hospital car park, taking a taxi to Upper Mount Street, took approximately 2 hours and ten minutes each way and cost around 60 Euro, for petrol, parking and taxi fees. If I left from home, (half term) the journey time increased to 3 hours each way.

One by one, some of these variables changed. During the first year, my expenses were paid by the Institute. My class was changed to 9.00am and finished at 11.00am. A new motorway opened from Athlone to Dublin resulting in a faster and shorter journey and even the recession helped, as many people lost jobs in Dublin, which meant less traffic and faster taxi journeys.

Factors that offset these circumstances were increasing petrol costs, the pension levy and tax increases. Between 2008 to present, my wife and I have seen a dramatic reduction in our monthly cashflow and this resulted in me having to make choices as to which classes / meetings I should attend.

Ist Year Modules

Overall, I enjoyed taking all the first year modules and could see the logic of taking them. I had heard rumours of discontent from the previous year's intake and when I came to meet them, I could appreciate their concerns. These mainly seem to be on making early choices before they have had a chance to understand the course and that some modules seemed out of sequence with modules found later on in the course. There also seemed to be an inflexible lecturer who was demanding that a programme (literary reviews) was completed before the final topic had been chosen. However, all these points seemed to have been addressed by the time I joined the course. In addition, later on in the first year, we elected a representative to put forward any concerns that we had and these seemed to be addressed quickly. For example, assessments had to be handed-in in person at Upper Mount Street; this would have meant a round trip of 6 hours for me. This was changed so that you could send it by email attachment.

The Theory-Design-Practice was a mixture

WORK IN PROGRESS

Design problems

Supporting communities

Project

Students resisted change

Poor questionnaires

Tutor - proof reader

I already have two Master Degrees and if I pass this Master I would have three (MA, MSc and MEd). I do not have any ambitions to proceed with a PhD. First, I think it would involve a lot of hard work and time. Second, I also have other ambitions that I would like to try, such as, writing. I would also like to create and manage a themed “fun farm” in Ireland, or live abroad in France. Either plan is likely to take place around my retirement age. However, I still think a VLE with a blended approach is still worthwhile compared to alternative schemes, so it is something that I will continue to create within the courses I teach. I also intend to experiment to find the artefacts that give the most positive results in this teaching / learning environment.

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