Personal Learning Reflection & Professional Competency Model

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As a Learning Technologist, I have become increasingly curious about how people learn. I'm interested in understanding how to structure and present learning content in ways that are efficient, easy to absorb, interactive, and responsive to the needs of my audience. Throughout my career, I have built the functionality of many online learning experiences, yet my experience with transforming content into true learning has been limited. I enrolled in the Learning Experience Design and Technology program at NU to learn the theory behind the practices my former colleagues used to create the instructional content I helped bring to life. This reflection highlights how my learning style, career experiences, and growing interests have influenced my understanding of what matters most in instructional design.

This paper is divided into five sections. In Section 2, I will explore my personal experiences with learning and the habits I have developed over time, as well as how those habits have evolved. Section 3 will focus on my career goals and the current landscape of my profession. In Section 4, I will present my personalized competency model and self-assessment. Finally, Section 5 will include my reflection on this process and the steps I plan to take to continue growing as a learning experience designer. To begin, I will discuss my early experiences with learning and how my approach has developed since I first entered school.

Section 2: My Reflections

My earliest learning memories were all hands-on and creative. I remember writing and illustrating a storybook, building a Rube Goldberg machine out of household items, making paper mâché statues, and playing Math Blaster 2000 on an Apple IIe. Those experiences stayed with me because they were tactile, exploratory, and fun. In contrast, I found classroom learning much more difficult. I struggled to memorize multiplication tables and always felt pressure to

retain information through repetition. Flashcards helped, but I quickly learned that I thrived on doing, not rote memorization.

In secondary school, the pressure to perform grew. My struggles with memorization continued, and I often felt anxious and "othered" in traditional learning environments. STEM courses that emphasized repetition and recall left me overwhelmed, and I rarely reached out for help. Despite these challenges, I found refuge in classes that valued creativity and empathy. My Religion and Art teacher, Sister Barbara, encouraged experimentation and deeper questioning. She celebrated every student's work and modeled compassion in her teaching. Her classroom was a safe space where I excelled and felt seen. That experience made me realize how much empathy and inclusion shape a learner's sense of belonging.

College marked a turning point in how I approached learning. My program taught the theory behind great media, but when it came to technology, we were expected to figure things out on our own. This open-ended structure reignited a curiosity I had not felt since childhood. I felt engaged through creative projects, collaboration, and self-guided exploration. I became more confident in my ability to teach myself new skills and share that knowledge with others. Over time, learning shifted from something that was done to me to something I actively created and shaped.

Throughout my professional career, I have continued to learn through experimentation and iteration. Early on, I realized that in the professional world, the first response to a question is often, "Did you look it up?" That lesson in self-reliance gave me confidence to synthesize new concepts and apply them in practice. As I moved into more senior roles, I became the person who shared that knowledge with colleagues, creating collaborative spaces for learning. This shift

from passive learning to active discovery helped me see learning as an ongoing, creative process rather than a fixed outcome.

Starting graduate school has brought my learning journey full circle. I now understand that my early frustrations were not failures but signs that my learning style required flexibility, curiosity, and connection. Exploring my own metacognition has shown me that I learn best when given time to explore, reflect, and apply new information. Feeling "othered" as a student taught me the importance of equity and inclusion, and those values now guide my professional practice. Today, I design learning experiences that emphasize accessibility, empathy, and curiosity, the same qualities that once helped me re-engage with learning myself. These insights have also clarified how my personal experiences connect to my professional goals, which I explore in the next section.

Section 3: My Professional Landscape and Goals

The online learning industry has always felt like a natural fit for me. I enjoy the visual storytelling at the heart of online learning and the creative use of multimedia that brings each experience to life. I also value working with cross-functional teams, from subject matter experts to developers, to build something meaningful. My experience with accessibility and equity has deeply influenced my work ethic, and it is something I want to continue carrying into my next role.

To better understand the types of roles I want to pursue, I examined three positions across domains I am most familiar with: corporate, higher education, and accessibility-focused design. These include a Senior Learning and Development Specialist role at The LEGO Group (The LEGO Group, 2025), an Educational Technologist III position at Boston University (Boston University, 2025), and a Learning Experience Designer for Accessibility role at The University

of Michigan (University of Michigan, 2025). I selected these because they align with my professional interests and represent attainable opportunities that would allow me to expand my skills and grow within the field of learning experience design.

The Senior Learning and Development Specialist role at The LEGO Group focuses on professional development and corporate learning, fostering LEGO's culture of play. The company seeks candidates passionate about creativity, inclusion, and the LEGO values of imagination, fun, quality, and learning, all qualities I connect with strongly. The position centers on designing blended learning programs that strengthen leadership, collaboration, and creative problem-solving. Key skills that stand out as growth areas for me include adult learning theory, blended learning methodologies, and data-driven evaluation. This role reflects how organizations now invest in iterative, measurable corporate learning rather than simple compliance training.

The Educational Technologist III role at Boston University is innovation-centered, requiring alignment with the fast-changing educational technology landscape. It involves researching, testing, and implementing new tools for classroom use, as well as developing training materials to help instructors adopt them effectively. Ideal candidate qualifications include a research and innovation mindset, experience with RFPs, and familiarity with generative AI platforms. This position resonates with my commitment to continuous learning and my belief that experimentation is essential to growth. It also reflects how higher education is embracing agile development and openness to new ideas.

The Learning Designer for Accessibility position at The University of Michigan involves collaborating across teams to embed Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles into course development. It blends my interest in technology with my commitment to accessibility and inclusion. The role serves as a departmental resource for developing pedagogical and

technological solutions that make content accessible. Desired skills include familiarity with WCAG standards, accessibility auditing, assistive technology literacy, and empathy-based problem solving. Its existence highlights how central accessibility has become in higher education and how institutions now integrate UDL early in design.

In contrast to previous roles I have held where testing and results analysis were out of scope, these positions reflect a shift in how the industry operates. Each emphasizes collaboration, creativity, and data-driven iteration, requiring professionals to act as both designers and strategists. This reinforces that accessibility and inclusion must be addressed early in the design process, and that the expertise of a learning designer with strong UDL knowledge is indispensable. Building proficiency in accessibility, inclusion, and UDL concepts will be central to my continued professional growth.

Recent analyses confirm that learning experience design continues to evolve toward inclusivity, agility, and ethical AI use. To explore the field's direction, I examined reports from Imran et al. (2024), The Learning Guild (2025), and the International Disability Alliance (2021). The Learning Guild predicts continued growth in AI-assisted personalization, encouraging designers to balance innovation with inclusivity. Imran et al. (2024) identify a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches, increasing student independence and responsibility. The International Disability Alliance (2021) reinforces that "UDL is particularly important when planning for inclusive education systems that are forward-looking and concerned with responding to the needs of the 21st century. Flexibility, capacity to adapt to change, engagement, innovation, and teamwork cannot be taught in the traditional classroom" (p. 26).

Together, these findings suggest that the future of learning experience design will rely on adaptability and inclusive strategy. As I progress in my career, my goal is to integrate creativity,

innovation, and Universal Design for Learning principles to create experiences that are both forward-thinking and accessible to all learners.

There are two professional goals that reflect my desire to move beyond traditional and uninspired online training toward innovative, evidence-based, and inclusive learning experiences for all.

1. **Work within an innovation-driven, collaborative organization**

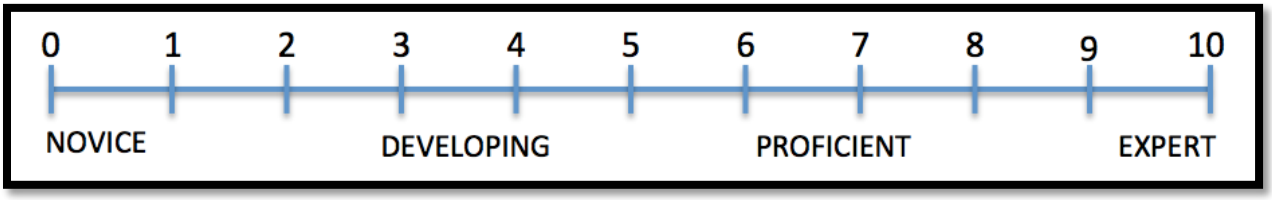
   Join a learning or creative technology lab (such as LEGO Education Lab, Boston University's Center for Academic Innovation, or Michigan's Accessibility Team) that values iteration, testing, and research-backed design to improve real-world outcomes.

2. **Develop advanced expertise in accessibility, learning analytics, and UX evaluation**

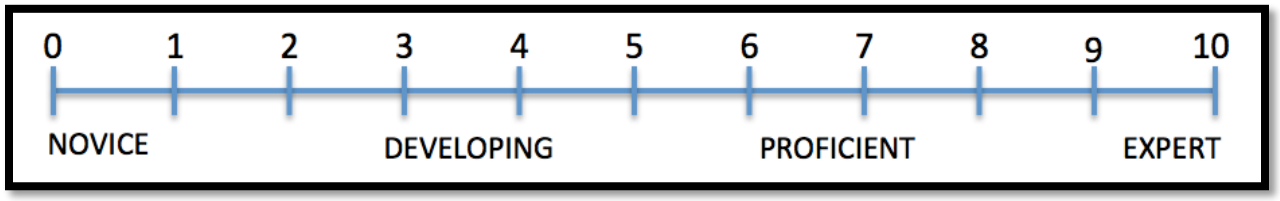
   Use data, learner feedback, and accessibility frameworks (e.g., WCAG and UDL) to measure engagement, equity, and impact.

These goals address the gaps I have recognized in my previous roles and represent important areas of growth not only for me but also for any organization committed to creating effective and inclusive learning experiences.

Michael Torocsik Professional Competency Model



General Professional COMPETENCIES	Rating
A Systems Thinker	
Perceives self as an educator participating within a larger system of education	5
Demonstrates strategic awareness	6
Looks for patterns and makes connections	7
Sees how parts relate to the whole, including the implications of systems and organizational change	8
A Communicator	
Proficient as a writer and as a presenter	5
Capacity to work within groups to listen well, speak well, and co-author	7
Able to collaborate and communicate in a range of modalities (face-to-face and online)	8
Facile with technology, keeps current with emerging technologies and social media	8
A Creative Problem Solver	
Situational awareness and leadership in identifying and defining challenges	7
Thinks creatively to generate ideas and be open to alternatives	7
Develops and implements plans for addressing problems and effecting change	7
Is resilient in less-than-optimal circumstances	7
Culturally Responsive	
Perceives the professional self as functioning within a global context of education	6
Aware of the dynamics of race, class, gender, and the other cultural factors within community dynamics and intercultural communication	7
Interest in, and capacity to perceive, multiple perspectives	7
Self-aware of cultural perspective and privilege	6
Capacity to serve as an agent for social justice	7



Program PLOs*/Professional COMPETENCIES (include those from your own program)	**Rating**
Apply learning design models, theories, practices, and technologies, based on the analysis of context, content, and learner needs, to develop engaging learning environments. *(Learning Experience Design*)	3
Demonstrate constructive working relationships and collaborations in a range of professional contexts while responding to the nuances of organizational culture, diversity of learners, project demands, and allocated resources. *(Collaboration)*	7
Design or **r**edesign learning experiences to create dynamic technology-enhanced and engaging environments by seeking out the learning design potential of new technologies. *(Learning Design Technologies)*	7
Demonstrate the ability to effectively collect, analyze, and present ideas in multiple mediums and to diverse audiences. *(Communication)*	6
Create learning designs that promote social justice, inclusion, and the building of intercultural and global networks, while demonstrating the capacity to perceive multiple perspectives. *(Cultural Responsiveness)*	6
Respond innovatively to the learning design opportunities and challenges in diverse contexts of industry sectors and modalities, while creatively drawing upon the latest research in learning design. *(Creative Problem Solving & Systems Thinking)*	5
ADDITIONAL COMPETENCIES from your own research	
Develop advanced expertise in addressing issues related to accessibility compliance and applying federal policies (e.g., ADA, WCAG 2.0, Section 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act) in an academic setting	4
Ability to employ testing methodologies using tools such as NVDA or JAWs	2
Develop deep understanding of equitable and inclusive design practices and Universal Design for Learning principles	2
Develop expertise with Generative AI platforms and a familiarity around AI functions for teaching, learning, and personalization	3

Section 5: Reflections and Conclusion

I believe my competency ratings accurately reflect my professional experience. I rated my general professional competencies as mostly proficient, with room for improvement. The area *Perceives self as an educator participating within a larger system of education fell* on the lower end of proficient. Although I do not have extensive experience working within the larger education system, I have worked in the corporate world for over 20 years and have had the opportunity to develop proficiency in many of the other areas during that time.

As a communicator, I believe I am mostly proficient, though my writing and presentation skills are still developing. My career in learning experience design has primarily involved receiving content written and edited by others, so I would currently rate myself as developing in this area because I still have much to learn about writing for education. Over time, I have developed creative problem-solving skills in each of my roles. I rated myself as proficient across all four items in this category because I have had extensive experience doing more with fewer resources. I have also had the privilege of working for a culturally responsive organization and consider myself to be both culturally literate and trauma-informed.

I have some work ahead of me to become fully proficient in the LDX program's competencies. While I feel comfortable using technology to design engaging learning environments, my experience applying learning models, theories, and practices is not yet as strong. I also have much to learn about how to collect, analyze, and respond to data on learner needs. Additionally, I need to continue developing my ability to creatively draw upon the latest research in learning design to inform my decisions when creating new learning experiences.

In addition to identifying areas for improvement based on the LDX program outcomes, I have also recognized several blind spots related to accessibility and Universal Design for

Learning through my analysis of the roles I am interested in pursuing. I need to continue developing my skills in auditing learning experiences for accessibility and addressing issues related to compliance with federal policies (e.g., ADA, WCAG 2.0, and Sections 504 and 508 of the Rehabilitation Act) in an academic setting. This will require further study of accessibility standards and the tools used to evaluate compliance. Finally, I want to explore how generative AI can support the creation of accessible content more efficiently and effectively.

Creating my personalized competency model was a valuable exercise that helped me think about where to focus my efforts to meet both industry needs and the needs of the learners I want to reach. Taking a step back to view my career aspirations alongside my current skill set gave me clear, actionable goals and tangible steps to work toward. This process helped me identify gaps in my understanding of the work I hope to pursue, and I look forward to revisiting and refining the model in the future.

This reflection has helped me recognize that learning experience design is as much about planning and experimentation as it is about creativity and technology. I've learned that successful design requires thoughtful solutions and the flexibility to adapt as learners' needs evolve. As I continue developing in this field, I plan to integrate creativity, evidence-based insights, and accessibility principles to create learning experiences that are engaging and inclusive. Ultimately, this process has clarified my path forward toward my professional goals. With the competency improvements I've identified, I will be well positioned to pursue a role that blends creativity, strategy, and equity.

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I acknowledge the use of Generative AI tools (Microsoft Copilot) for brainstorming ideas, looking for sources, and suggesting edits to improve the clarity and flow of this work. However, the final content is my own original writing, and I have verified all research and information against credible sources.