
An International Student's Learning Journey: from red to green

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From red to green

A reoccurring image in my study in New Zealand is the traffic light icon I first met in the Jade development environment. It turns red when the things go wrong and turns back to green after everything is reorganized. My learning has been sometimes painful with lots of 'reds' which I turned to 'greens' through hard work and with help from others.

In the beginning...

In (red) China I studied three-year diploma in computing and English language at Jiangsu Institute of Information and Trade Technology. My motivation to come and study in (green) New Zealand was because there was a pathway to a degree which gave me advanced entry because of my study in China. I wanted to study in an English language and in a western teaching system. When I first came to study in New Zealand I studied programming courses at the same level I had studied in China but there were very different. The difference was the strong emphasis on doing. For example, we studied Software Engineering in China by learning facts out of a book. Now I had to design and write a series of linked programs. At first I was stuck. My teacher told me we can "either eat our own dog food or drink our tasted home brew". I

progressed through being brave enough to experiment with code.

A capstone project

My capstone project followed a student assessment from creation to marking and beyond. The goals established at the beginning of the project were to provide more assessments for an introductory level programming class and to provide students with quicker feedback on their progress and to ease the marking workload on the course teachers. My personal goals were to increase my programming experience and develop a portfolio of work, to creatively problem solve and to try to use the knowledge about how to develop software I had learned in theory classes.

I began by modifying existing tests: transferring the assignment sheets and model answers into a standard format. My first impression was that the tests were difficult but I progressed when I saw the patterns behind them. I next produced new tests based on different problem domains. At the end of this task, I had a deeper understanding of all the patterns involved.

Having gained enough experience from the previous two tasks, I designed and produced an application which marked the practice tests. There were many stops and starts as I learned a lot about unit test frameworks and software design.

After that, I worked as a peer support tutor providing help for students' practicing for the programming tests. My students' faces turned red when they were frustrated and cleared up again when I was able to help them. I observed many coding errors and was able to change the marking application to take these into

account. I have also worked as a teaching assistant in lab classes, which gave me the chance to know more about the expectations from both teachers and students.

Several times throughout my final project my industry supervisor and I did a XP sprint to develop a time logging application to record time spent on phases during the Personal Software Process. The screen turns green when recording time and red when the work is paused. In the Unit Tests I developed the screen is green when all goes perfectly and warns with a red background if there is a test fails. The final 'green light' of my project which made me proud of my work was seeing students being assessed with my assessments and helping mark their work.

References and Citations

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