**The Journey Starts**

Last year I chose to take a break from teaching and to return to University. The way that I had been teaching had not changed for years yet the world was changing. New possibilities were emerging with more available access to the Internet and increasingly mobile ways of learning. I was not taking advantage of these opportunities. Perhaps more importantly, I had not begun to consider the changes that technology would have on learning environments in the future.

The learning environment that I delved into at the start of the year was not like my experiences in University courses that I had in the past. The classroom was not contained in four walls but was a virtual community of learners. One of the most important advantages of converting the classroom into a community of inquiry is that the members of the community look for and correct each others methods and procedures ([Lipman, 2008](#_ENREF_6)). In reflection on my own teaching practice I know that a more positive learning environment occurs when we (myself and the students) can reach a point where criticism (personal and peer evaluation) is seen as part of the learning and not seen as an 'attack' ([Taylor, 2011, March 9](#_ENREF_11)).

**The Case for Blended Learning**

As an adult student, the online learning option suits me the best. In regards to teaching secondary students I regard the blended learning environment as the most suitable. As I mentioned in the Module 1 reflection, the trend towards blended elearning systems will increase. It may even become so ubiquitous that we will eventually drop the word blended and just call it learning ([Graham, 2006, p. 67](#_ENREF_5)). Rajasingham ([2011](#_ENREF_9)) believes that communication and information technologies provide a connection between the learner, teacher and knowledge. He sees this connection as both synchronous and asynchronous allowing learning to not be confined to the four walls of the classroom. My experience in teaching secondary students is that their lives are busy preventing them from always being present during class time. Blended learning allows them to remain connected to a learning community. Sean Cassidy ([2011, March 24](#_ENREF_3)) promotes blended learning yet acknowledges that from his experience “face-to-face interaction is invaluable for helping students manage their programme, answer questions, and increase engagement in the course.”

**Pedagogy with Technology**

Technology simply added on to a learning task does not guarantee an improved and enriching learning experience. A pedagogical change is required in development of the learning community that integrates social media in ways that pave the way for participation, community connections, social interaction and global networking ([McLoughlin & Lee, 2010, p. 10](#_ENREF_7)). I was challenged to consider pedagogy in a Second Life learning environment as well. I had no idea that such a learning environment was possible and found Joanna Gibson’s ([2011, May 29](#_ENREF_4)) online discussion insightful. The authors of Presence Pedagogy ([Bronack et al., 2008](#_ENREF_2)), in reference to Second Life, describe that virtual learning and teaching needs to be grounded in social constructivist theory. It is understood that the concepts of presence, building a true community of practice and constructing an online environment will foster collaboration for reflective learning.

**Digital Citizenship**

Part way through this course I was given the opportunity, for the first time, to participate in an online collaborative group to develop an online learning resource. One of the global educational challenges today is to define and nurture what it means to be an active citizen and community member in the digital age ([Anderson, Brown, & Murray, 2008](#_ENREF_1)). Through our research we found that Bailey and Ribble ([2007](#_ENREF_10)) defined nine elements that outline the norms and responsible behaviour with regards to technology use in our global community. These nine elements emphasize the need to respect, educate, and protect oneself and others. When I return to the classroom I will endeavor to provide students with the skills and understanding of being a global citizenship. I believe that through blended learning environments, teachers can effectively scaffold digital citizenship. The *elearning4globalcitizenship* ([Taylor, Wood, & Gray, 2011](#_ENREF_13)) wiki that our group produced is a collection of useful resources that teachers can use and refer to in scaffolding digital literacy, communication and etiquette in learning environments for primary, middle and secondary school aged students.

**The Importance of Culture**

Our world is becoming more global, even our face-to-face classrooms are becoming more multi-cultural. In my experience of teaching in diverse cultural settings, I have found that students learn to respect the diversity that exists among people. The virtual world provides amazing opportunities for people from differing cultures to collaborate, share expertise and knowledge, and learn from each other ([Taylor, 2011, September 17](#_ENREF_12)). In reading Wellburn and Claeys’ ([2004](#_ENREF_14)) article on the globalized world I was introduced to the word ‘glocalization’ which refers to incorporating learning materials from both the local community and the vast collection of online sources. In my teaching in multi-cultural settings, I have always tried to get students to apply their knowledge and understanding of their home culture to the topics studied and to share this with other learners. When I return to teaching, the challenge will be to ensure that I continue to do this and develop new ways to incorporate local and global aspects of knowledge to learners in blended and online learning environments.

**The Biggest Learning Curve**

I have learned a great deal through the course *Foundations of eLearning* and have highlighted a few of the main points previously. However, the biggest learning curve was not *what* I learned but *how* I learned it. Becoming part of a virtual learning community was foreign, unfamiliar and uncomfortable. Upon reflection I have realized that I have learned so much in this course by 'doing' and 'participating' and' reflecting' through collaboration and sharing with others. What I hope to bring to secondary students when I return to teaching (or switch roles and move into training) is to find ways for students to gain experience and skills in becoming part of a learning community. This is where I believe that blended learning environments are the best option for students particularly at secondary level. As students become effective online participants in learning communities they will be prepared to involve themselves in these virtual groups connected to university and job situations.

**Where To From Here**

As participants in this course reflected on the future of elearning, I considered my pathway in the future when I return to teaching. I agree with Bridget ([Percy, 2011, October 4](#_ENREF_8)) that “ it is not the technology that is the answer, it is the driver behind the technology that we should be investing in.” Less than nine months ago I had no experience with collaborative online learning environments. Unfortunately, there are many teachers teaching today that feel threatened by the advances in technology and do not have time to consider how to effectively incorporate elearning into their classroom environments. I am looking forward to encouraging and scaffolding learning amongst not just students but my peers in the teaching profession as well. I am grateful for the learning community of this course as it has prompted me to analyse current research, discuss issues proactively, and apply new knowledge to my teaching practice.

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