Kamille Samborski

December 8, 2012

Unit 6: Inquiry in the Age of the Internet

Final Writing Assignment

I can still remember the day that my father announced that we would be welcoming something new into our home. It was not a little brother this time, but rather- the Internet. It was 1998. After several moments of odd crunching noises, I knew a connection had been established when I heard the familiar America Online voice say, "Welcome." The Internet, in cliché terms, opened up a whole new world to me.

During my middle school and high school years, I spent hours every day exploring websites, playing online games, blogging my adolescent feelings on LiveJournal, passing on chain letters through email, and instant messaging with friends that appeared on my "buddy list." I also enjoyed going into group chats and meeting new people. Although I never met any of these people in person, I did develop a relationship with them, and kept in contact with some of them for even years. After a certain point, I even developed in some sense an addiction to being online; I felt restless and out of touch with the world if I was not able to "sign on" before I went to sleep at night and I longed to always feel "connected."

Just a couple of weeks before I left home for my freshman year at Michigan State University, I received an email inviting me to join something called, "Facebook." Wondering what "Facebook" was, I called my older sister who had already been in college for two years, she explained what it was and told me to join because "it was the new thing" and "everyone is doing it now." During the first weeks of college, I met many new people, and the common exchange of conversation would be something along the lines of, "Find me on Facebook." Throughout college, checking Facebook became a regular daily task, looking at the latest event invitations, photos, and status updates. Facebook allowed me to keep in touch with friends, reconnect with old friends, and communicate with new college friends. Also throughout college, I became familiar with using the online Angel system to complete coursework and access resources. I gained more experience with using the Internet to research.

After completing my Bachelors degree and a year of student teaching, it was time to look for my first teaching job. Where did I start? The Internet. I filled out numerous online applications. I remember feeling frustrated that I was spending so much time filling out tedious online applications, and because there was no face-to-face interaction and confirmation, I wondered if anyone was even receiving and viewing my online applications. I accepted my first teaching job in a brand new charter school right outside of Detroit. Because it was a brand new school, we welcomed students on the first day of school without Internet and without computers. The teachers were in a panic, wondering, "How can we teach without computers and Internet?!"

We had to resort to using actual books as resources, taking attendance on paper, and communicating by actually talking as opposed to email. This was something that was simply unheard of in a school these days and later in the year, once we had computers and Internet, we talked about how challenging those first few weeks were for that reason.

In the spring of 2012, I decided I would apply to graduate school. Pursuing a Masters degree was always a goal of mine. Where did I start? Again, the Internet. I researched programs and schools using the Internet and filled out online applications. I was required to collect letters of recommendation from past professors, and because I had been out of college and out of touch with past professors for two years at this point, I was worried about how I was going to get those required letters. Email made this simple. I received my first letter of acceptance in my email, and although this was thrilling, it was not as thrilling as the first time I received a hard copy letter of acceptance from MSU in my home mailbox. In the summer, I began my online program. I have interacted with other graduate students that were as far away as Japan through online posts, emails, and chats, completing projects and having rich discussions based around education, but never actually seeing their faces. I will complete my entire Masters degree online, on the computer.

It was not clear to me until now, after reflecting on the stages of my life, just how much of a role that technology has played in my life. I truly do not believe that my life would be what it is today if it was not for the Internet. Technology and the Internet have allowed me to accomplish and experience things I do not think I otherwise would have been able to do.

This unit has encouraged me to reflect on what technology means in an educational career. In the past couple of years, I have attended several job interviews for teaching positions. In every interview, I am asked the question, "How do you use technology in your classroom?" The reality now is that technology is not just something that we integrate into our classrooms and teaching, rather it is in many ways the basis of our instruction and assessment.

From planning, to implementing, to assessing, technology plays a significant role. I access content standards online to help me plan what I will teach. I use assessment data and computer programs to analyze assessment data to help me plan, group my students appropriately, and identify what skills they need to be taught. I track and document student growth and progress on the computer using several of programs. Students use technology to represent their learning. Students have access to online versions of their textbooks that they can use at home. When surveying parents, they agreed that the best mode of communication about what is happening in our classroom would be via website, and for the first time I now regularly maintain a classroom website. When thinking about a typical school day, I can say that I use technology to some extent throughout most of the day. In the morning, my students come in and they are required to read a PowerPoint message displayed on our SMARTBoard. As students complete morning work, I submit attendance and lunch count through our online system. During instruction of content areas, I rely on the SMARTBoard to communicate information and provide

visual support. Lately, I have been using the newly developed Pinterest to acquire many great teaching and classroom management ideas. The teacher across the hall often jokes that, "To be a good teacher these days you just have to know how to steal the best ideas" because so many great resources are available and accessible at our finger tips, just a few clicks away. Just as technology has played such a large role in shaping my life and who I am today, I can also say that without technology, I do not think I would be the educator I am today.

Part of this unit's readings that particularly resonated with me was found in the "Digital Nation II: Read All About It" section. Last year while holiday shopping, I was standing in line, waiting to check out, having a telephone conversation on my iPhone 4S. I finished my conversation and tucked my phone away. Earlier that day, I planned out an afternoon of shopping on a PostIt, like I always do. While thinking about my next stop, I took the PostIt out of my pocket and referenced the piece of paper. Immediately, I received a reaction from the gentleman behind me in line. He began to laugh. I turned around, and he proceeded to say, "You are so funny. You have the world's most powerful piece of technology in your pocket and you are still using PostIts?! You need to get with it!" I quickly realized just how technology-dependent our society is today and how high the expectations are for using technology in every possible facet of our lives. Psychologist Sherry Turkle studied technology and how the use of it can impact people; she explains the idea of many people being "tethered" to their mobile devices in an "always-on/always-on-you" culture. I agree that this is what our culture and society has become; we are expected to always have our phones with us, always available, no excuses. I will never forget a story that one of my teachers once shared with me, about a time when she was walking around a college campus, and she noticed that almost everyone was on their cell phones while walking between classes. She remembers feeling sickened when she overheard a young man telling his mother what he had eaten for lunch, complete with the details of soft-serve ice cream with rainbow sprinkles. She was outraged and confused, explaining that young people in our society will never be able to grow up if they feel the need to communicate such unimportant information with their parents all of the time, and that cell phone are inhibiting the independence that is meant to be developed when children go away to college. She refused to buy her son a cell phone for this reason. I wonder how much of her point is true and to what extent. Again, this story reinforces that our youth and society is so "tethered" to their mobile devices, as Turkle explains, and, "alerts us to the problems in gaining autonomy and being alone, among other things."

During this unit, I also made a connection to Motoko Rich's article titled, *"Literacy Debate: Online, R U Really Reading?"* Just this past week, my niece turned four years old. When I turned four, the birthday gifts I received included dolls, dress-up clothes, and books. My niece received a LeapFrog learning tablet, designed to be like an iPad for young children, complete with a camera feature and "apps." The salesman at the toy store explained that this was something that children as young as two years old begin to use to start learning reading, letters, numbers, and technology. The reality is, most children these days have their first "reading"

experiences in technology, by using devices similar to this LeapPad. Rich explains the concerns with this, that, "Some traditionalists warn that digital reading is the intellectual equivalent of empty calories," and "Zigzagging through a cornucopia of words, pictures, video and sounds, they say, distracts more than strengthens readers." Although the technology devices are fun and especially engaging for young learners, I am reminded of the importance of providing children with real books and genuine experiences with books when teaching and learning reading.

Throughout this course we have been learning through different lenses, different types of inquiry. At the beginning of the course, we defined inquiry, for the purpose of this course, as, "the ways that people search for knowledge of teaching and learning, organization and leadership in schools, local and national policies and their consequences, and more." To complete this final paper, I practiced autobiographical inquiry, which can also be explained as, "a process of learning featuring the curiosity and initiative of the student who formulates and seeks answers to important questions as a way of building his or her knowledge of the world and experience." I was the student, reflecting on and sharing about my own life, seeking to answer questions about how technology has impacted my life and career. Like all other forms of inquiry we worked with, I was constructing my own meaning, seeking for information, and drawing conclusions, but this time about myself and my own life as opposed to about others and their lives, outside experiences, stories, theories, and ideas. This form of inquiry allowed me to make the content of this unit more relevant and connected with my life compared to the other units and forms of inquiry.

Overall this course has given me many rich and extensive opportunities to practice inquiry, construct meaning, and learn about and reflect on education and my life as a teacher. As an educator, I believe that I am committed to also being a lifelong student and learner, as the world of education is ever-changing, and I look forward to taking part in more courses that were just as intellectually-stimulating and valuable as ED 800. I am walking away from this course with an increased, greater insight on education, its history, teaching, and the benefits of using inquiry, and a better understanding of who I am as a teacher and my role in society.