Going the Distance as a Life Long Learner

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2012

As an Industrial Arts teacher turned Technology Teacher I have had some catching up to do. With six years in a traditional woods and metal shop, my focus was on materials and processes as opposed to technology and its integration into classroom settings. With some technology background from my time in undergrad to use as a foundational skill set, graduate school at Michigan State stretched, and molded me into a more proficient technology teacher and user.

Education is heading in a "self help" direction, where the individual is guided by their own desires for knowledge and essentially self taught through the World Wide Web. Much like the Matrix Trilogy of movies, when the movie characters need to learn something, a certain set of skills, such as the ability to fly a helicopter, they are simply programmed with that knowledge after having literally plugged into a computer. Maybe we do not take it quite to that extent, but that basically is how I believe knowledge is currently and will continue to be made available to everyone in the future. Consider one of my many summer home improvement projects; how do I install a glass block window? My first impulse is to head to the internet and run a Google search. After a brief amount of time, some quality pictorial directions, directions in text, and a quick Youtube tutorial, I had my window installed. I recall an instance where I produced my first pod cast for an assignment using Audacity. Mixing multiple sound tracks into one recording seemed to be greatly outside the realm of my abilities. However a quick "how to" search via my favorite search engine produced an infinity of possible hints and tips to my problem, which ultimately yielded a stellar finished product. This is a technique in learning that I have developed along the course of my employment as well as continued education. Many times I have found myself in a position where the best resource or maybe the only resource was through the internet. And why shouldn't information be available to us at the drop of a hat? Wifi is available almost everywhere, even if you are unable to gain access to DSL at your residence. I found that I can use MacDonald's Wifi for free, which I used regularly to complete my MAET assignments.

Aside from the internet connectivity services, mobile technology adds to this ability to learn on the go. I like to carry my lap top with me; on vacations, to school, and any where I know that I will have wifi connectivity. I like being able to answer a question at the drop of a hat. Even my productivity has increased by having access to mobile technology. Considering the main attribute of mobile technology is its portability, I was able to bring my work with me. With an extra 10 minutes here or there I was able to address my course work from anywhere. No more wasted time. Time efficiency equals increased productivity. To top it

off, no more lost thoughts. Whenever I had a new brain storm, I was able to address that in my work within a reasonable amount of time.

In my free time I find myself frequenting several internet web log sites that address technology use. I generally find myself as a "sniper" or eaves dropper rather than a contributor as I follow threads of conversation that interest me. For me, even in an environment that is not face to face, I still prefer not to contribute. Nonetheless, it is in these voluntary moments when I am not looking for anything specific that I walk away with the most. Even the digital distractions in those times of inquiry and curiosity prove useful with frequent positive results. Most spur ideas or connections to prior knowledge that I bring back to my classroom. I love the thrill of the hunt, and the sense of success when following links of interest, and reading other people's ideas. The pursuit of those links and ideas grow me as a life long learner.

Change and new places, uncharted territory, can be a scary thing. Learning naturally takes us into those dark areas of the unknown. For me jumping into social media, creating a wikki, blogging, and even Facebook, were superfluous because I viewed them as methods to hang out online and as a medium to perpetuate an egocentric society. My experiences in the last two years have shown those tools to be much more powerful in being a life long learner than I could have imagined. The MAET Courses at Michigan State took me beyond the edge of my comfort zone and encouraged me to push myself further into the digital frontier.