

When most people reflect on identifying the ways upon which time has progressed – whether daily, or yearly – I feel they look towards physical appearance, or the current age of their offspring. They often remark how “time has just flown by.” With my almost Kindergarten bound daughter almost turning five-years-old, I am no exception to that rule; I remember her first birthday like it was yesterday.

Nevertheless, there is another way I measure the passing of time. I look to the evolution of technology to show progression. I think about my time tucked away in a corner of the library at the Michigan State University with a stack of books and a “burned” CD of the latest Incubus or Jimmy Eat World album. Then, I compare it to where I am now; writing this final exam paper on a HD Monitor, while listening to my I-Tunes (featuring Incubus and Jimmy Eat World...some things never change.)

This final exam is not dedicated to references on musicians and advances with recording devices. Rather, the focus of this conclusive unit will be on key events in my education that show how technological advances have led to new learning opportunities. I will also discuss how my feelings on the use of technology for educational inquiry have developed from these events. The focus of my writing will be on my time spent as an MSU student, as well as over the six years I have spent teaching at North Saginaw Charter Academy in Saginaw, Michigan.

The article I read by David A. Bell – entitled *The Bookless Future: What the Internet is doing to scholarship* – is what gave me the notion of starting this autobiographical inquiry with a reflection of the times I spent at the MSU Library. The article helped to give me perspective on how technology has shaped my own learning. Consider the following paraphrased passage from the article, which discusses how Bell once had to gather information:

“In an old and dreary secondary source, I find an intriguing by fragmentary quotation from a newspaper that was briefly published in French-occupied Italy in the late 1790s. I want to read the entire article...as little as five years ago, this would have required a forty mile trip. But now, I step over to my computer, open up Internet Explorer, and eventually I find a facsimile copy of the article. Total time elapsed: two minutes”

From this passage, I began to see with greater clarity how technology has impacted my education. I remember all the late night study sessions in the library with books on obscure subjects and authors; efforts that required me to leave my apartment for resources that were found in hard and soft cover books. Now, with many books shifting

to the online “e-book” format, significantly less time is spent on locating source material away from my school and home.

In 2008, I graduated with a degree in Elementary Education from the College of Education at MSU. Each year within the program afforded me the chance to hone my skills and ideas. Still, it was not until I found a teaching position at North Saginaw Charter Academy (NSCA, for short) that I truly began to see how technology could further my development within my profession. Take my preparation for standardized testing as proof of this.

Since my school is an owned and operated National Heritage Academies charter school, we administer our students the Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) test three times a year. Being new to the school, and to this form of testing, caused a high level of anxiety. Prior to starting my job, I would have spent time at Barnes and Nobles or the library, researching teaching strategies to help my students perform at high rate.

Luckily, my Mentor Teacher was able to steer me towards using the resources found on the Internet. After discussing with her my nervousness about student achievement on NWEA, she directed me to a program found in our school database that gave tips and tricks to help students acquire higher order thinking skills and comprehension. The program even gave sample NWEA test questions, so I could have a sense of precisely what my students would need to know about test taking strategies! It was a relative gold mine for me, and was one of the first examples that showed how digital inquiry guided me towards a greater understanding on an issue.

Another event that comes readily to mind when I think about how technology has impacted my teaching involves my wife, Jami. About 3 years ago, I was moved from 5th grade (which I had spent the previous years teaching, and absolutely loved) back to 6th grade. Though I had taught 6th grade my first two years at NSCA, I struggled with issues involving classroom management ideas and strategies.

The summer before I started teaching 6th grade, I was discussing this with Jami, and she recommended I look to Pinterest for ideas. “What about Pinterest? Isn’t that just something for decorating and baking ideas?” I scoffed. Eventually, I decided to check out the site, and was astonished to find a variety of information about effective classroom management techniques. The site offered select passages from larger texts on classroom management, as well as gave me visual aids, worksheets, and postings from people who actual taught in the classroom. It would have taken me weeks to gather and order these books, much less consult with numerous teachers on the topic. Digital inquiry led me again to the knowledge I was seeking.

Professional Development opportunities at my school have also been altered by the use of digital information. Over the past few years, we have watched videos that have

addressed issues with teaching Common Core effectively in the classroom. In addition to watching best practices, we have also seen educators from across the country use Accountable Talk (a strong instructional tool) with students. These videos and lessons were accessed through various webinars and websites such as Learning Forward, and really helped me to see how to adjust my teaching to help my students learn to think critically.

Since many of my colleagues were also struggling with applying Common Core and Accountable Talk into their lessons, it would have been extremely difficult for me to learn from someone in my area. Being able to watch videos and resources from effective teachers helped me to see “holes” within my own teaching, and gave me new insight into how to increase the rigor with my students.

Completing the questionnaire “What Kind of Tech User Are You?” also put my feelings on technology and education into perspective. I was classified as a Digital Collaborator, and I feel it is an acute assessment of where I am with digital inquiry. I believe in incorporating technology in all forms (for example, ELMO Projectors, iPads, and PowerPoint) to aid in the development of students. Furthermore, I see the benefit in being able to communicate and learn from a wide range of people and cultures. The internet provides me with benefits that previously would not have been allowed.

Accepting and moving forward with change is an idea that I truly strive to embrace. Yet, I am simultaneously looking at both sides of an argument, to avoid being caught unaware of any potential issues or outcomes. The last key event in my ongoing digital inquiry – my purchase of an Amazon Kindle Fire – is an example of examining an issue from both sides. Up until June of 2013, I was vehemently opposed to any form of “e-readers.” I could never imagine myself being able to enjoy reading on an illuminated screen.

It was during this time, however, that my mother and younger sister were raving about how much they enjoyed their respective Kindles. They spoke about enjoying reading again, as well as how they could actually order magazine and books that could be instantaneously downloaded to their e-readers. So, since I was starting my online MAED program in a few weeks, and had just come into some additional cash revenue from a tax return, I decided to invest in a Kindle of my own.

From the moment I downloaded my first textbook for EAD 801 onto it, I can honestly say my thoughts on digital information has changed. Being able to highlight and annotate paragraphs and passages helped me learn information for my classes immensely. After a few weeks, I had a library card from the local public library, where I could download books to read in a matter of minutes. Over the past summer, I read the entirety of the Harry Potter series, as well as biographies of Steve Martin and Bill Russell. I have

read more books over this time than over the past few years. Digital inquiry actually helped to awaken the avid reader within me, which had been severely.

Above all else, I am also self-reflective. That is why I read the article by Nicholas Carr, which mentioned “power browsing,” text, along with Bell’s argument that electronic reading can hinder the learning process. I see merit in what they are proposing. I feel this fact - that I am able to read both sides of the argument from the internet to formulate my opinion on technological inquiry – is an indictment of the importance I place on digital inquiry. That will not change anytime soon.