ETEC 565A Course Synthesis

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Assignment #4

ETEC 565A

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ETEC 565A has been a very rewarding experience as my fourth course in the MET program.  While I am closing in on the halfway point of this journey, ETEC 565A provided me with a wealth of information and an opportunity to develop my skills as an educator in the selection, design, and application of technology integration and affordance.  I am finding the MET program and ETEC 565A as great opportunities to develop my understanding of the constructivist ideas and importance of communities of practice and the social construction of the experiences that I aim to create will further enable my students to become successful 21st century learners.  The weekly discussions, together with the content assignments and activities were very enjoyable.  Use of a Wordpress site in conjunction with the Blackboard Management system, while taking some time to get used to, provided me with an alternative method for delivering an online learning experience.  To refresh my memory of the past thirteen weeks of this course, I have found this assignment rewarding in and of itself as it has given me an opportunity to reflect on this learning experience and put the ideas created together into a systematic and logical sequence for further use.

To begin this course, we as a group were asked to develop our own individual flight path or learning goals for this course.  As I look back at this experience, I am reminded of Wiggins & McTighe (2005) Backward Design Model, where I was asked to think about the end goal first prior to engaging in the experience or to begin with the end on mind.   Thus, my goals to start this course were as follows:

*What Do I Hope to Learn During the Course:*

* Develop a better conceptual idea of how assessment and technology bridge together
* Discover how I can further implement technology in both a synchronous and asynchronous manner
* Develop a stronger understanding of best practices when selecting technological affordances to better support authentic learning in the classroom

*What Technology Skills to Improve Upon:*

* Become better acquainted with the variety of Learning Management Systems (LMS) available
* To improve upon the integration of these LMS’s in direct relation to face to face teaching instruction
* Create a toolbox or repository of technology tools that are successful at challenging students in relation to their different learning needs and levels
* Become better acquainted with WordPress as I have been consistently working with Weebly
* Use of social media as a means to engage students in authentic learning opportunities

Right away, my first learning goal in this course was addressed through examination of Chickering & Ehrmann (1996) and the ISTE Standards for Teachers (2008).  These articles addressed the conceptual idea of how assessment and technology can be bridged together.  Further to this, these articles started me on a path to better address how to assess the technologies that I currently use in the classroom and to better help in making positive choices around those I might use in the future.  Chickering & Ehrmann’s (1996) Seven Principles are what stuck with me the most throughout the first few weeks of the course.  These principles are what I see myself doing in the classroom when utilizing technology.

A second component of this course that addressed my learning goals as well as pushing my thought process around technology use in the classroom was Bates (2014) ideas and contributions as seen in the SECTIONS method of analyzing technologies and the ways we utilize them.  While I was exposed to this reading in previous courses, I found that further opportunity to read about this method of technology analysis further solidified the importance when selecting technology tools and elements to create authentic learning opportunities.  The first technology affordance that I have thought more thoroughly about is the use of my class blog and website as a tool and element to enhance the learning experiences of my students.  After careful examination of this tool, I find that while I see positive uses around Sustainability, Ease of Use, Cost, and Organization, I also can see that my site and blog are lacking somewhat in the Novelty, Interactivity, and Teaching and Learning components.  I will endeavour over the next month to look at challenging these areas of affordance that need improvement.  Perhaps, after looking at the LMS platforms in greater detail through this course, I will endeavour to change the ways in which I present information and challenge my students in the classroom.

In terms of further developing my understanding as to the importance of asynchronous and synchronous forms of communication, I feel as though I had my eyes opened yet again as to the many different methods of communication that technology affords.  While I feel I utilize the affordances that GAFE has in my classroom and the communication tools that it offers, I know that this is just the beginning for tools that support communication.  The LMS platforms and digital tools utilized throughout this course certainly demonstrated their capabilities, but I was quickly reminded in looking at this goal again through our discussions centered around mobile technologies and the affordances of Social Media as forms of communication.  I have recently given my students opportunities to use mobile devices in class and find that the discussion surrounding UBC's Digital Tattoo initiative to be very practical in ensuring protocol are followed when using these technologies.  Further to this, the discussion around educational multimedia provided food for thought when actively teaching students about digital citizenship.  Morozov’s (2013) article painted a very strong (and somewhat scary) picture around digital footprints and the abilities for you to be tracked and traced when using internet based tools.  However, his ideas also suggest that there is a great opportunity to learn here, teaching and educating our students about the proper ways to utilize all of the technologies available to them in the 21st century.  Finally, the discussion around social media and having the opportunity to address the affordances of Twitter against Bates & Poole’s (2003) SECTIONS model was an eye opener for sure.  As I have yet to jump into using Twitter in the classroom, I learned of the strengths that it affords, including Novelty, Speed of Knowledge acquisition, and Ease of Use.  These were all opportunities to further develop my understanding of how to best utilize tools and elements which best support both synchronous and asynchronous forms of communication.

Building upon my goals that I developed for myself at the beginning of this journey in ETEC 565A, I was pleasantly surprised to learn about some of the other integral components that support the selection, design, and application of learning technologies.  One of the more interesting discussion forums was centered around Anderson’s (2008a) effective learning attributes and the six types of educational interactions.  In moving forward and utilizing any of the technology tools and elements, I will be in constant thought about the learner, knowledge, assessment, and community centered components that will make up my classroom experiences.  In particular, Anderson (2008a) suggests that ¨learning is about making connections with ideas, facts, people, and communities¨” (Anderson, 2008a, p. 49).  This statement really resonated with me as to how we should be addressing education in developing 21st century learners.

Moving from the discussion forum topic to the assignments and activities, I found my experiences working with the different Learning Management Systems (LMSs) to be the most enjoyable component of the course along with the opportunity to learn from others about the wide range of digital tools that are out there.  Given the affordance and opportunity to work with others in collaboration to assess and analyze a variety of LMS platforms through the creation of a content module utilizing one of these platforms speaks directly to Anderson’s (2008a) community-centered opportunity to develop understanding in a community of learners.  Upon looking back at my reflections around the three assignments, I draw two conclusions.  First, I thoroughly enjoy the opportunity to learn along with others in a collaborative manner, and two, that it is very important to use concepts such as Bates & Poole’s (2003) SECTIONS method of technology analysis when choosing the right LMS platform for my students learning experience.  I am grateful that the first assignment afforded me with the opportunity to carefully analyze a few of the different LMS platforms available.  While Moodle was not my groups’ first choice and clear cut winner after analysis, I chose to utilize it with a colleague in the course to create a Digital Citizenship Unit through the Backward Design Model.  This was a most rewarding experience as the unit that we have created is centralized around the promotion of Anderson’s (2008) learning attributes.  After practicing with Moodle for a lengthy period of time (and at times becoming frustrated with ability to navigate and position artifacts within the LMS), I found that I became very confident in developing an aesthetically pleasing unit that delivers content, affords learners with creative ways of demonstrating this knowledge, while keeping the experience learner and assessment-centered.  In particular, what I find to be one of the best experiences here is that I have now created a content module that I can use within my own professional and academic practice.  Finally, one of the most enjoyable weeks of discussion focused around creating digital stories.  This week’s topic best utilized a large scale community of practice in that everyone brought something different to the forum and we were given an opportunity to see a variety of digital elements and tools that we can utilize in the classroom (A great Professional Development Opportunity in my mind).

Overall, ETEC 565A was a fantastic experience.  As with each of the four courses that I have now completed, ETEC 565A provided a unique learning experience and knowledge construction through the course components.  ETEC 565A provided a great list of reading materials.  While some of the reading materials were ones that I have come across in other classes (Anderson, Bates), having the opportunity to read through them again added to the construction of knowledge that I am acquiring throughout the MET experience.  I found all of the reading materials to be current to the topic at hand, and each provided a unique experience in constructing meaning.

Discussion themes and questions on a weekly basis were well constructed and provided a great dialogue between those participating in the class.  In particular, the weeks surrounding Frameworks, Assessment Challenges and Social Media in Education left me thinking about and reflecting on my own practice of technology incorporation and the experiences that my students gain while enrolled in my class.  I felt that the activities that went along with the discussion themes and questions were relevant and provided an opportunity to gain a deeper meaning to the week's topic.

As a part of the way that I feel I learn, I chose to work with a group for the first three assignments.  I would argue that I am someone who learns best when given the opportunity to construct meaning and work in a community of inquiry with others.  I gain valuable knowledge and feel I am able to contribute to group settings in a very effective manner.  What I particularly enjoyed about these experiences was the opportunity to choose how I was going to proceed (be it individual or in a group) and the collaborative nature through the use of the wide range of digital tools available to support the process.  Given the push for collaborative 21st century learning opportunities for our students, I can certainly see the benefits in my own learning to being able to collaborate in a group setting.

Having been exposed to very few LMSs in my current position, as they are not frequently used in the elementary setting, I thoroughly enjoyed working with and learning about the affordances that each LMS provided.  While I chose Moodle in the end (it worked out well in the unit that my partner and I prepared and will continue to develop), having the opportunity to compare, evaluate and assess the strengths and weaknesses of each was a fantastic experience.  That being said, if possible to incorporate the opportunity to work with each of the LMSs in greater detail could be afforded in the future, it would add to the strengths of this course.

Given that we were to create and maintain a Wordpress LMS for our course to add to, I found this to be rewarding as well.  Having a place to keep the wealth of knowledge and experiment with the LMS opened my eyes to the strengths that other LMSs have as prior to this, I had only ever worked with Weebly as both a blog and website.  Throughout all of the activities, discussions, and assignments in ETEC 565A, I would argue that the greatest emergent effect that I had was the ability to look at the different platforms in the three stages outlined in the course title.  I now see how vital and important the selection, design, and application are in utilizing both digital tools and LMSs.  I argue this as I have found previously that the selection process in particular is more of a process that I would take for granted, and would subsequently choose the tool or platform based solely on very few of Bates (2003) SECTIONS model.  Further to this, another area where I experienced an unexpected, emergent effect was in that this course was the first where there were a large number of the students who were not directly teaching in the classroom.  I found the opportunity to discuss and learn with them about their perspectives very engaging as ideas suggested further developed my ideas around seeing growth in my professional pedagogy.

As mentioned earlier, as the course began, I did find it challenging to be looking at an open access Wordpress version in addition to the password protected discussions and assignment submission pages.  However, as the course proceeded, I found the ability to access the necessary requirements without having to login to be but one of the advantages to having the course built in Wordpress.  I found that the need to work synchronously through both to be a very smooth transition once I was accustomed to the Wordpress version of the course.  In the future, I would most certainly see the use of both working synchronously together.  ETEC 565A afforded me with the opportunity to learn about the selection, design, and application process of integrating technological affordances in the classroom setting.  I am grateful for the wealth of knowledge surrounding the LMSs and digital tools that are available to use along with the community of learners that I was a part of.

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