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# Digital culture: An autoethnographic report on assimilation and self-change

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DIGITAL CULTURE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC REPORT ON ASSIMILATION  
AND SELF-CHANGE

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts in Teaching.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

I have often felt disconnected with the younger generation. They are learning at a constant rate from the wealth of options available through today's expanding digital world. The tools accessible are incredibly fast and instant. I have found that world to be exciting, yet I'm not convinced that competency in digital media alone will create a well-rounded educated person. I am a teacher, and I take my role seriously. I want to better understand the students I am teaching, this understanding is the foundation for building community in a classroom. From a teacher's perspective and also from personal curiosity, I must transition from my current position into the realm of digital media and culture. My personal journey through this new landscape will serve as a documented experience of how a teacher tries to assimilate to a culture that is ever present and pertinent in our student's lives. What is one teacher's experience moving into the digital world? What does this experience look like? These are the questions that form the base of my interest and research. The three areas of focus will be: *personal journey*, *teacher implications* and *balance*. The *personal journey* aspect will be my own transformation as I move into the digital world starting as a skeptic and non-user of digital media. *Teacher implications* will focus on how the digital world impacts teachers today and how they might include or exclude digital media in the classroom. The section on *balance* strives to find that spot

where balance is achieved on a personal level and as a teacher in regards to over/under use in life. Currently, I believe that the values I have are different to those who indulge and obsess over digital media, therefore I under-use digital media tools in comparison to others. Achieving balance will unfold in terms of content as the research begins.

The values I have correlate to what I have learned in school from valuable teachers and texts that changed my perspective and allowed me to understand lives different from mine. I grew to love learning as it expanded my mind to new ideas; I have physically felt my brain stretching and flexing as I learned Spanish in an immersion setting. I value text, the written word and all that comes from a traditional education in classical reading and critical thinking. I believe there is much to be learned and applied from theoretical thinkers of our past. When I first took a theory-based class and delved into the world of Foucault and Lacan my universe doubled. I enjoy watching old films and television to gain an awareness of the way things used to be, so that I can reflect on how we have progressed, and come to be the society we are today. The nagging thought that I cannot escape is how to understand the world that is presently surrounding me. Where can we look for clues and answers about what our world represents now? Do we look to YouTube or the plethora of movies that emerge each year? Do a number of hits on a YouTube posting signify the interest of people? If media is a result of what society desires, then how is this a reflection of the people we have become? In short, what do we value?

As an undergraduate student I studied film theory within a cultural studies program. In this program, I focused on how films reflect the way people perceive the

world around them- through these films I could see what was valued at the time. For example, in early silent films simple human expressions were captured. Industrialization and the social crisis of workers in a capitalistic society are boldly depicted in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* in 1927. Mutiny and opposition are emotionally displayed in the classic, *Battleship Potemkin* by Sergei Eisenstein in 1925. The simple comedic expressions and actions of Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton would be lost on today's generation. In my perspective, films are no longer the representation that they used to be. Just as the move from celluloid to digital changed the laborious and important role of filmmakers, so has the quality and value that was attributed to capturing a moment in time. If we imagine people looking at what we are leaving as value-attributed archives, they would find tweets, blogs and cryptic fragmented thoughts muddled in the immensity of the Internet. They would see strong value placed on self-importance in the world, a world where having a bad day or your car running out of gas is worthy of publishing on the Internet.

### My Perspective

My desire to explore this topic derives from intuitions I have had about the role of technology in our society. My concern began when I observed the growing obsession my little sisters had with their mobile phones. I watched them text through dinner- under the table- while having a conversation with someone at the table. Although they would seemingly be "multi-tasking" they were non-engaged with the people they were *physically* with. The lack of presence one has while interacting with their phone or computer is a valid concern for research into how the adolescent is functioning socially

and emotionally. How much is the person missing while engrossed with a piece of plastic with a screen?

I believe humans are losing touch with important social and emotional cues due to an over reliance on digital media. Are these products of innovation progressing the human race, or are they detrimental to us? The question comes down to values, what is valuable to an individual, and what is valuable about life... I want to ask this question from many perspectives to understand why and how digital media can be used without losing touch with *us*.

I must be honest in disclosing that I missed the boat on the digital media wave. I was the last of my friends to even desire a mobile phone- it was never on when I did have one and I rarely retrieved my messages. Up until recently I worked on a Dell computer from the early 1990's that had a Microsoft Word page open, and one Internet page that hosted my email. I only upgraded to a new computer when mine was incessantly beeping at me for no reason. I don't have cable television and staring at a screen whether it television, computer or phone is the least desirable thing I'd like to do.

I still traditionally write thoughts down on paper with a pen that holds ink, I read books that have pages bound together that I physically buy from a bookstore. I touch the book I'm thinking about. As I caress the cover I wonder if I will like the book while considering the title. I turn the book over to read the back and leaf through the pages; the ink-stamped paper is filled with the promise of a good story. As I make my way through the long corridors filled with classics, science fiction, and romance, I glance at people that are sitting down to read, I make eye contact with someone and smile- they smile

back. I wonder at the magnitude of varied interests people have to mine- a bookstore can easily categorize people into interest groups. I listen to a mother reading a book to her child; I like the sound of her cadence and tone while the child sits on her lap intently following along.

All of these described interactions are sensory experiences that make up our days, how we perceive the world and make assumptions and connections based on what we see and experience. They are available to us in this immense wonderful world we live in, with other humans that share the world. The person who walks blindly through the aisles with their attention focused on their phone, not looking, feeling or hearing anything but their own world of applications is missing life, the real life. We shop, make friends, have conversations, meet potential partners, play games, virtually travel, even exercise through digital media. At what point does digital media replace reality, and what are the consequences for this constant supply of information and instant gratification?

### The Role of Teacher

I am concerned that digital media is a practical problem in our society. The technology cannot be contained or subdued; however as a teacher I have a responsibility for teaching new forms of literacy and engagement that comes from the multitude of learning opportunities available through digital media. I have no intention of moving backwards on the technological path, or reverting back to slow computers, floppy disks or dial-up modems. I want to track and document my transformation as I enter into the digital world to bring perspective to the challenges and opportunities that arise with digital media. Within the three areas of focus lies the implications for teachers; this

section will reflect how a teacher can apply digital media use and ideals into the classroom.

If a student is more competent in the field of technology than a current teacher, so be it. There is no shame in being incapable, only in an unwillingness to learn. Many students have had digital media in their lives for years; they may have innate abilities that are hard to compete with for those with less experience. However, digital media is not exclusive to younger generations; many people regardless of age have embraced digital media and have achieved fluency and success both professionally and personally. Yet, those of us without digital media weaved into our daily lives have something to offer as well. As teachers, we are charged with the responsibility of learning the digital language *and* with showing students where we have come.

True education comes with a broad understanding of the past, present and a glimpse of the future. Where we have commonality is the future, we must partner with students to bridge the gap of understanding in our digital world (Prensky, 2010). It is also important to understand how technology is changing the upcoming generation, we must be able to navigate through their mindset and know how to capture *interest* through the use of digital media, while staying true to important traditional values of literacy and learning.

The ability to adapt and combine these literacy skills will help students be successful in the world as adults, while hopefully instilling a sense of patience and respect for where we have come in terms of literacy, knowledge and history. I will explore the role of social networking as a place where adolescents are making friendships and connections with their peers. I want to talk with students about the role of Facebook in their lives and how

if effects them. Is this form of socializing so different to the times before Facebook, and if so- what can teachers expect to understand about those differences?

### My obstacles

I am faced with obstacles. I am not familiar with the options available in the digital world, e.g. Facebook, iPhone, Twitter, blogging, iChat... In order to fully understand what can be used for the benefit of the student in the classroom, I must become familiar with these tools.

I have very strong feelings about the over use of digital media tools in society and the seeming lack of presence and focus people have while engaged with them; yet it is a valid tool for instruction and cannot be ignored lest we completely neglect the needs and wants of the future generation. This dichotomy of wanting both worlds brought together is a shared emotion that many teachers of an older generation and those technologically inept feel.

Therefore, my research will begin with immersing myself into a world that is reality for most, a world where photos are downloaded instantly and chatting with a friend via computer is totally normal. I will join Facebook and Twitter about my feelings, I will do these things not because I want to, but because I am curious and there is no way to satisfy my curiosity other than doing, for I am quite traditional in my life, I need to physically do something, be somewhere, touch, smell, hear and look at what I am trying to understand.

This first chapter is an introduction to my initial perspective and spark on the issue of digital media. I disclosed how digital media is not a part of my life currently, and

how I value traditional learning and appreciate the physical world in comparison to digital media. It is important to think about values and how they contribute to my perspective on the use of digital media in our society today. I passionately declare my loyalty to a reality that does not include digital media. However, as a teacher, I am in a role that must become familiar with digital media in order to be a successful teacher. A willingness to learn and adapt to the changing landscape of education that includes digital media will foster a more effective learning environment. The obstacles that I have put me in a unique position. I will take advantage of my naïveté with digital media tools to answer my research question. What is one teacher's experience moving into the digital world? The answer that will grow out of this question will be broken into three categories: personal journey, teacher implications and balance.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Literature Review

#### Introduction

This literature review is driven by my desire to explore the new digital world. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century we are confronted with many changes; namely the growing importance and value placed on digital media and technology. The volume of information doubles at an increasingly rapid rate, and the youth of today are effortlessly navigating through what seems for some of us- disorienting. Outside of the classroom, students are learning through digital media in ways that aren't conceivable to some, two-way literacies of creating and producing are common daily activities for many. Accessing multiple databases for social networking, researching and gaming are commonplace as after school activities. Presently, the digital movement is front and center for educators, therefore I observed the magnitude of differing opinions and haste with which scholars are researching a subject that is not mature. Even though for some a life without the Internet seems obsolete, the Internet is not old, its effects and future accomplishments have yet to be understood and discovered.

What is one teacher's experience moving into the digital world? This is the driving research question. The literature review is fueled by this question and formatted around three categories: personal journey, teacher implications and balance. The section

on personal journey will begin by describing Transformational Learning Theory. This theory is a strong tool to gauge how a teacher is adapting to new environments. This literature review has been a jumping off point for me to begin my own journey through the new bumpy frontier of digital media. The entire process is focused on the personal journey, however the chapter is divided so that emphasis can be paid to the theory of personal transformation (personal journey), to the more specific case studies involving teachers (teacher implications), and to research that has been done regarding those searching for balance (balance).

Using transformational learning theory practices, the personal journey will be documented. The section on teacher implications seeks to uncover research that has already been done on the effects of digital media training and integration on teachers. Five case studies (King 2002, Leon and Pena 2010, Gilmore and Warren 2007, Churchill 2006, Blin and Munro 2008) involving educators' experiences with digital media/technology training are described to shed light on how teachers have moved through the landscape of digital media. Also within this section, New Literacy Studies (Mills, 2011) is explored, an idea which includes digital media as new form of literacy that should be integrated into our formal educational system complete with standards and curriculum rather than just a tool. Key theories of learning are described which gives a foundation for the inclusion of digital media into the classroom as a valuable and worthy component to literacy. The section on balance will focus on what digital users are like; issues of identity and over-use will be discussed along with challenges that come with the

use of digital media. Balance in this sense would mean a constructed usage to maintain a healthy life educationally, socially and emotionally for the teacher, student, and person.

### Personal Journey

Documenting personal changes that occur during my research is a vital aspect of understanding how digital media is affecting my life and values. In order to accurately track these changes, the theoretical tools provided by Jack Mezirow will serve as a template. Transformational Learning Theory is a qualitative tool to gauge the transformation that occurs in adults when new concepts are introduced. Jack Mezirow introduced Transformational Learning Theory as a model to understand adult learning in 1978 (King, 2002). His research for the past two decades on Transformational learning works to delineate generic dimensions of learning for adults and specifically educators. As adults gain new experiences and insights about the world, they encounter a *disturbance*; Mezirow's followers have also coined this as a "trigger moment" (King, 2002). Within this "problematic" experience, transformational learning can occur through self-reflection and perspective-changing growth.

Transformative learning refers to transforming a problematic frame of reference to make it more dependable in our adult life by generating opinions and interpretations that are more justified. We become critically reflective of those beliefs that become problematic...Frames of reference may be highly individualistic or shared as a paradigm. Transformational learning is a way of problem solving by defining a problem or by redefining or reframing the problem (Mezirow, 2000, p. 20).

Transformational learning theory uses description, critical reflection, and self-examination to understand a new perspective that requires reorganization of one's frame of reference (Taylor, 1998). This theory can greatly assist our understanding of educators' experiences with digital media as a new concept.

Using transformation learning theory techniques, people are able to reflect and take time to track their growth through the process of learning something new. Also, the theory provides a sound platform for creating an ethnographic report on change over time. The section below on the implications for teachers gives further support to the idea of personal journey.

### Teacher Implications

In 1997, Clayton Christensen believed the rise of the Internet would empower teachers to take advantage of options that beforehand were limited due to resources and money. He talked about the Internet as a disruptive innovation, one that would transform the educational dogma for teachers and students (Christensen, Aaron, & Clark, 2002, p. 30-32). These grand visions have yet to materialize, despite much enthusiasm and promise that comes with digital media integration, evidence as of yet has proved quite mundane (Selwyn, 2007). Theorists such as Dewey (1916), and Friere (1972) envisioned that e-learning opportunities would encompass democracy and enliven the experimental processes (Blin & Munro, 2008). Although many of the promises of e-learning can be seen today very successfully, teachers have not taken advantage of what is available to them (Selwyn, 2007). The quote below from Laurillard succinctly describes how technology is currently being used in the classroom.

[...] we tend to use technology to support traditional modes of teaching- improving the quality of lecture presentations using interactive whiteboards, making lecture notes readable in PowerPoint and available online, extending the library by providing access to digital resources and libraries, recreating face-to-face tutorial discussions asynchronously online-all of them good, incremental improvements in quality and flexibility but nowhere near being transformational (Laurillard, 2007:xv).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has expectations of teachers that exceed what was formerly the norm for instructional practices. Pressure from the media, parents, government, organizations and administrators expect teachers to incorporate current digital media into the classroom in a cohesive and responsible way (Prensky, 2010).

The Fox and The Grapes by Aesop:

Driven by hunger, a fox tried to reach some grapes hanging high on the vine but was unable to, although he leaped with all his strength. As he went away, the fox remarked, 'Oh, you aren't even ripe yet! I don't need any sour grapes.' People who speak disparagingly of things that they cannot attain would do well to apply this story to themselves (Gibbs, 2002, p. 125).

### Case Studies

Five qualitative case studies are reviewed to describe how digital media and technology training affects the teacher emotionally and pragmatically.

Case study 1. Kathleen King poses the question of how pressure to conform to the digital movement deeply affects teachers and how they experience the shift through

professional development in her research-based project. The bridging of educational technology- professional development- and transformational learning are the key bodies of information in this research study (King, 2002). In her research, King uses Mezirow's theory on transformational learning as the theoretical foundation to guide teachers through self-examination and critical reflection. Mezirow's theory is rooted in the basis that adults will experience a disturbance that allows for the redefining of perspectives; therefore, the learning of new technology directly correlates as cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is greater or lesser depending on how much the teacher wants to use, meaning the simpler the idea the lesser the dissonance (Leon & Pena, 2010). If the task is simple then the teacher is more likely to accept the technology.

The qualitative research study used a sample of 175 teachers who took a graduate level course developing technology applications in the classroom. The nature of the findings and emerging themes were shown through journals, assessment and interviews. 89.1% of the teachers had a perspective transformation in the context of learning educational technology. Through the lens of transformational learning, the teachers changed their perspective and had a paradigm shift as a result of learning new things. Their view on the role of themselves as an educator changed, and also their worldview. Below are quotes from teachers after the course (King, 2002).

Technology is not anymore a pure addition, but a crucial source of knowledge communication (p. 291).

My view of technology and the Internet has changed radically. I saw it just as a highway; now I view it as a landscape (p. 291).

I have developed a lot of my own material for classes such as new curriculum and I feel much more empowered and confident in teaching (p. 292).

In summary of King's study, the teachers found their perspective shift after the introduction of new digital media tools. Many of the teachers experienced excitement and positively connected their new skills to improving their teaching and increasing their worldview. This study is a good example of how technology affected teachers and also how the tool of transformational learning theory is used in practice.

Case study 2. In a study conducted by Leon and Pena (2010), the comfort levels of pre-service teachers were tracked in a disorienting dilemma- technology training (Leon & Pena, 2010). Learning and stress are compatible; when stress levels rise in a learning situation, cognitive psychologists call it "cognitive dissonance". Cognitive dissonance happens when a person holds conflicting ideas simultaneously, in theory one works to reduce the dissonance by changing their beliefs or patterns (Leon & Pena, 2010, p.142). Therefore, the stress involved with technology learning can be tied to the theory of cognitive dissonance that parallels transformational learning. In this study, pre-service teachers learned a new program called Hyper Studio. The study focused on how teachers dealt with the learning process through the lens of transformational learning theory and cognitive dissonance theory.

There are six stages of adult learning according to Russell (1995), in the study conducted by Leon and Pena (2010) these stages are used to base how the teachers dealt with the process (Leon and Pena, 2010, p. 175).

1. Awareness

2. Learning the process.
3. Understanding and application of the process.
4. Familiarity and confidence.
5. Adaptation to other contexts.
6. Creative Application to new contexts.

There were 66 participants in the study. They learned about computer hardware, Internet integration, web page design, and productivity software in a required course (p. 144). The study concluded that the result of pre-service teachers' success or failure was highly dependent on their perceived attitude towards the technology *before hand*. Teachers who came into the study with a negative attitude didn't find the value in technology to enhance instruction; rather they relied more heavily on instructional practices sans technology, whereas the teachers who were open to receiving new ideas excelled (Leon & Pena, 2010, pp. 147-148).

Case study 3. In an article written by Gilmore and Warren (2007), the emotions experienced by teachers participating in a virtual environment were recorded. Using an online chat-room program, WebCT, the authors examined the experiences teachers had with virtual reality and how it affected them emotionally. The article does not compare the differences between face-to-face teaching and online teaching, but rather sheds light on how feelings are transformative in an online or virtual learning atmosphere.

The virtual nature of discussion boards and chat-rooms as forms of communication and teaching are discussed, with stronger attention paid to chat-rooms

that take place in real-time or, synchronous learning. In synchronous learning, all participants are virtually present, whereas discussion boards that are not done instantly are considered offline, or asynchronous (Gilmore & Warren, 2007, p.585).

The research was performed over a 12-week seminar. The qualitative data results consisted of individual ethnographies reflecting on the emotional experience during and immediately after the seminar in relation to the online chat-room program. After describing the areas of emotions witnessed: *play*, *intimacy* and *pride/shame* from those participating in the survey, the researchers used codes to determine the emotion shifting that had taken place. In the section describing *play* this chat-room discussion is recorded (p. 598):

Sam (tutor)- Believe it or not guys we have come to the end of the session...!!

Louise- that went so quickly

Matthew- ahh, nooooo, I was just getting into it

Wendy- time flies when yr having fun

This example portrays how “play” affects learning, and creates a sense of timelessness among students; the chat-room virtual world lent itself to this kind of intrinsic motivation seen within digital media.

To describe *intimacy*, there are two ways to think about it that go back to the dichotomy between the liberation and isolation of the Internet (Gilmore & Warren, 2007). Some say that the socio-bodily cues available in the classroom lend the physical space to hold a kind of presence, in this situation; students can react to facial expressions, non-verbal modes of communication and perceived notions of who and what is happening.

Others find the lack of visual ability to be liberating and can more easily participate and have enlivened conversations without worrying about the physical space (Gilmore & Warren, 2007, p. 593). Online presence and face-to-face contact is divided between those who believe the Internet to be a place where relationships are vacant and hostile, and those who find it to be a place for liberation and an opportunity for intimate connections.

In the section on *pride/shame* associated with emotion online, the teachers talk about their shame in underestimating their student's ability based on the student's lack of participation in open seminars (Gilmore & Warren, 2007, p. 600). When the students became much more engaged and responsive online in the chat-room they understood their perceptions of aptitude were not correctly based.

This is relevant to my research question because it offers a critique on the differences humans possess when presented with digital media tools. The values attributed to technology and digital media stems from an internal core belief system that will determine your willingness and availability to the digital movement. For me, it is invasive and unnecessary; yet following what the research is saying on transformational learning and cognitive dissonance theories, one has the opportunity to experience a change in attitude and perspective given the proper guidance and tutorial in the new forms of digital media. In the field of education, proper professional development is key for educators. Finding their level of frustration and fear as the driving force of stress that will ignite learning will bridge the understanding.

Case study 4. Teachers hold private theories that drive their pedagogical thinking. These theories are behind the kind of instructional practices that exist in their classrooms.

The decisions they make daily, and what is held valuable in the learning environment derives from cognitive constructs, preconceptions and guiding principles (Churchill, D. 2006).

In a multi-case qualitative study conducted by Daniel Churchill, four teachers are studied in Singapore over a six-month period as they engage in the design of technology-based education for their classrooms. Substantial support was given to the institute to train teachers in implementing technology in order to improve and better serve students. Therefore the pressure to assimilate to the digital world is a strong implication in this study.

There were two guiding questions for the research (Churchill, 2006, p. 562):

- What interlinked areas of private theories mediate the participating teachers' design of technology-based learning?
- How do the participating teachers' private theories change through reflection during the design of technology-based learning?

At the beginning of the research, the four participants had 4 different dominant areas that impacted their design decisions: technology, students, teacher and learning. All the teachers used direct instruction except one who focused on student-centered learning. After the technology instruction, two teachers became focused more on student-centered learning as a result of technology opportunities while the other two remained devoted to direct instruction. The shift towards student-centered instruction supports the claim that technology instruction promotes a stronger constructivist approach in teachers (Churchill, 2006, p. 572).

The author found that teachers' private theories are a strong focal point for supporting the successful integration of technology into curriculum and pedagogy. The teachers were asked to reflect and journal through the process allowing for change to come from within, the focus inward when presenting teachers with new technology allows them to accept and embrace new instructional practices. The author also calls for a deep consideration of private theories and reflection for anyone interested in reforming teacher instruction. This study is related to my research question because private theories that I hold will ultimately have an impact on my study. The process of reflection is a valuable tool because those private thoughts, biases and judgments are documented.

Case study 5. Blin and Munro (2008) focus on the introduction of Moodle, a computer-software program for professors to utilize for their classrooms in a study conducted at the University level. The evidence proved the non-transformation of the teaching style due to the introduction of Moodle was a lack of familiarity with advanced functions and an overall lack of awareness and professional development. There was no perceived need to change teaching style, therefore the motivation was missing and the training.

Compared to the previous case studies in this literature review, it is apparent that transformational learning theory applied within a strong professional development course is far more effective at not only improving the competency of teachers in the realm of education, but also offers a chance for teachers to view pedagogy and learning from a new perspective. Proper training is invaluable, and when one enters into the world of digital media, there must be support, therefore this study relates to my research question

because it gives a good idea of what a pre-service teaching program should look like for successful integration into the digital media world.

In the first case study, King (2002) brings together the importance of training, technology and transformational learning. Her study concluded that teacher's perspectives shifted due to the new experience of digital media incorporation. The second case study by Leon and Pena (2010) focused on how attitude was a deciding factor in a teacher's success or failure with digital media as a new tool. In this study, they described the idea of cognitive dissonance as a parallel to transformational learning that ties into the first case study. Gilmore and Warren (2007) documented the emotional attitudes of teachers when using a new online tool, WebCT in the third case study. Sections included, play, intimacy, and pride/shame to show how teachers and students reacted to the new interactive synchronous learning. In the fourth case study, the private theories of teachers involved in implementing technology into the classroom were tracked (Churchill, 2006). The research was asking what private theories affected the teacher's ability and usage of technology and also how those private theories changed after the introduction of technology. The final case study showed how a lack of professional development and implementation led to ineffective usage at the university level (Blin & Munro, 2008).

The case studies presented in this literature review suggest the importance of digital media training for teachers. There is strong evidence that emotion and values have an effect on teacher's adaptability and willingness to learn. What each teacher values will correlate to their instructional practices, therefore, their use or non-use will also be affected by emotion and values. When a whole generation of non-native digital media

users is in charge of teaching an already fluent generation, there poses a problem for the position of authority. The case studies were presented to shed light on how crucial training is for teachers and to show that being a digital immigrant in the 21<sup>st</sup> century requires a positive attitude and a willingness to conform.

### New Literacy Studies

A review by Kathy Ann Mills looks at the current trends within the digital strand of new literacy studies. It examines the power of pedagogy within digital media and gives recommendations for educators and literacy curriculum. As a consequence of globalization and the wide range of possibilities technology and digital communication has to offer, the “digital turn” is of great interest and focus.

“Extending beyond the “limits of the local” (e.g., Collins & Blot, 2002) the New Literacy Studies has generated new knowledge about recent global shifts toward user-generated, collaborative, democratic, and interactive forms of online participation” (Mills, 2011, p. 258).

The new literacy studies are interested in the exciting trends that digital media is providing within the “multimodal” context of literacy. Multi-modal refers to the use of visual, audio, spatial and gestural modes alongside text. This can be seen in the form of movie-making, interactive digital art, spoken word and digital media production. Barton (2001) noted how new literacy studies works without strict borders to examine links to different forms of literacy that embody the same kind of interaction therefore are worth investigating and considering as a form of literacy.

Gee (1996) uses the word discourse rather than literacy to connect the forms of new literacy such as visual, audio, etc. as a way to describe the meaning of text and semiotic codes. This can be better understood by looking at theories of learning that work within the scope of digital media.

### Key Theories on Learning

The key theories of learning listed below provide context for understanding digital media in the formal education system. Secondly, it explores the crucial role of the teacher that is sometimes misunderstood.

Constructivism. According to Bruner (1966) the theory is based on students reflecting on their own experiences to make meaning. Every person sees or constructs the world through their perspective; it is within this individual mode that we generate meaning. Therefore through the use of digital media, students generate individual meaning out of the experiences they are having while digitally interacting (Futurelab, 2004, p. 12). Traditionally, constructivism places the teacher as a “guide on the side” rather than the “sage on the stage”. Removing the teacher as the all-knowing master allows students to form their own meaning that is at the core of constructivist theory. An offshoot of constructivism is discovery/experiential learning that relies on the rhetoric of play as a valid form of learning (Futurelab, 2004, pp. 12-13). This type of learning is often associated with a 60’s ideology of learning and is difficult to adapt to a formal educational setting. However, the connection between play and digital media is strong. As was noted earlier in the literature review, the idea of *play* is parallel with digital media

use as a tool for learning (Gilmore & Warren, 2007), and creates a timeless, natural learning for some students and teachers.

Vygotsky. The work of Vygotsky can also be applied to digital media use by children (Sefton-Green, 2004, p. 12). Vygotsky articulated a socially driven theory of learning in contrast to the individuality of constructivism. Vygotsky places the teacher in the highest regard because his theory relies on ‘expert’ scaffolding to build on prior knowledge. If a teacher intervenes at the right moment when learning is ripe for a student then the maximal benefits will be achieved. Vygotsky (1962) calls this the “zone of proximal development”. In the report by Futurelab, comparisons are drawn between Vygotsky’s learning theory and the natural scaffolding that occurs with digital gaming systems and within the informal learning environment using digital media. The technology itself provides scaffolding in order to achieve goals and progress. This can be seen in video games, but also in learning tutorials and the plethora of information available on the Internet on problem solving, searching, etc. If we take digital media into the classroom, then the role of the teacher maintains and provides an even stronger context for what the digital media can provide. To me, if teachers can become the ‘expert other’ in conjunction with digital media then the strongest form of learning can occur for the students through the lens of Vygotsky’s theory of learning.

Situated learning. Lave and Wenger (1991) developed the theory of situated learning that brings together social and cultural contexts to make sense of learning. The situated cognition that happens is within a web or network of knowledge in real contexts. Much like Vygotsky, situated learning is a socially driven dynamic force. By simply

using digital media we are part of a larger social community embedded into the very program. The meaning comes from this coherence of community.

A sharable theory for advancing everyday learning to incorporate digital media is an ideal hope for classroom instruction. However there is much resistance and differences in beliefs to fully progress forward in the formal educational setting (Hsi, 2007, p. 1523). Those interested in researching the effects of digital media span from many different disciplines such as: the sciences, education, communication and media studies, semiotics, literacy, and information technology just to name a few (Prensky, 2010). Therefore educators are presented with conflicting and overwhelming amounts of information about how to teach using digital media (Hsi, 2007, p. 1520).

If students want to learn and be part of the digital movement- educators should take this invaluable opportunity to use digital media as a tool for engagement. Ito (2008) describes how adults can join with youth in the digital movement to create a, “pedagogy of collegiality” bridging the gap between them.

The boundaries of learning spaces and who has control over the technology will have to be revisited and renegotiated. In addition, the role of educators, parents, and caregivers becomes one of stewards of activity-helping to recognize, bridge, and link everyday thinking and activities of digital kids from school to home, and from every activity to classroom activities in a reciprocal “two-way literacy” (Hsi, 2007, p. 1517).

### Balance

The concern for balance is of the utmost importance in this capstone. Reaching a comfortable level of use as a teacher for classroom pedagogy, and equally important in my personal life is the goal of performing this research on the self. In this section on *balance*, research is disclosed that has been completed regarding the impact web exposure and digital media has on people, namely students. This section will highlight research on usage rates (Hsi, 2007), youth digital fluency profiles (Hsi 2007), ethnographic reports on learning outside of the classroom (Ito, 2008), societal concerns in the face of the digital movement (Futurelab, 2004), and will question the validity of digital learning (Kellner, 2002). Although the reports themselves do not have *balance* as the goal, it is this research that speaks to the importance of finding said balance in my own research.

In 2002 more than 78% of children ages 12 to 17 were online, in 2005 the number increased to 87%. In the U.K. 41% go online and 90% use mobile phones, 95% of Japanese children ages 15-24 owned web-enabled mobile phones (Hsi, 2007, p. 1512).

A vignette of a 10-year-old “digital kid”:

James has access to the Internet at school and at home, he has multiple personal media devices with which he communicates wirelessly with his friends. He enjoys watching television while simultaneously connecting with friends via social networking pages. He downloads music and updates profiles about himself daily and finds information on the Internet for game playing he is interested in. James has an alternative identity that he publishes on the Internet through his facebook

account. With his control, James creates a version of himself. This identity takes work: updating photos, choosing friends and “liking” products all add up to the person he is online. Like most of today’s youth James is a digital kid, gaining access to digital media throughout the day and moving effortlessly to edit and control his identity in the digital world, he is fluent (Hsi, 2007, p. 1509).

Sherry Hsi seeks to describe youth’s digital fluency through her paper, “Conceptualizing Learning from the Everyday Activities of Digital Kids”. According to Hsi, when kids are learning from digital media the following is what digital fluency looks like (Hsi, p. 1513):

- Digital kids build on their own knowledge and share with others, building community and knowledge sharing to have a broader understanding of the world.
- Digital kids take on multiple personalities and different roles through game playing and social networking.
- Digital kids are creating digital media; their production and creativity can be shared with their peers, they are creating and participating.
- Digital kids are learning to be fluent voluntarily, their motivation to participate is the driving force for how huge digital media has become for the youth.

Hsi (2007) sheds light on the prevalence of social networking among youth.

Language development and cultural linguistics are used to decode and understand how social networking can be viewed. How a person is considered a “friend” is much like being accepted into a group as a member, digital media is seen more as social inclusion compared to individual needs. Youth develop online identity through pictures, symbols,

narrative, music and other representations. Kids are able to show a version of themselves that could greatly differ from reality. Gender, Race and Class are irrelevant in the digital world of creating identity. Identity is an important lens to study digital fluency because youth are able to create and adapt *who* they are, it is a good way to capture how young people feel about themselves and their place in global society (Hsi, 2007, pp. 1516-1517).

Ito (2008) conducted a large scale research using 5,000 hours of ethnographic field notes, 659 interviews, 400 videos and 10,000 online profiles from MySpace, Facebook and Neopets and questionnaires from 400 participants to examine how young people socialize, play, learn, participate in civic life within the digital movement. Social networking has replaced the common meeting places such as malls and created a virtual place for peer connections and friendship building. They found that there is distinct difference between what youth and adults deem as knowledge. Youth have ownership over self-presentation, learning and evaluation of others.

In 2004, the Futurelab group conducted a study regarding learning that was taking place inside and outside of the classroom. Our conventional understanding of the term *education* does not include the informal learning that is taking place today through digital media *outside* of the classroom. Digital media has provided new opportunities for students to make connections and develop new skills that are different from traditional learning styles (Sefton-Green, 2004).

How young people use digital media outside of the classroom as a form of learning are primarily viewed as “leisure activities” compared to formal education standards of learning. Informal learning comes with many challenges because the nature

of learning is experiential and not easy to categorize, assess or evaluate. Informal learning is not meant to imply all fun and games, and formal learning as solely grave and mundane, rather the implications are- how the learning is different and the affect it has on the student and the experiences they gain.

There is need in our educational system for a “wider ‘ecology’ of learning” (Sefton-Green, 2004, p. 4). The evidence collected in the Futurelab report suggests a misplaced fear and resistance against digital media and technology as valid forms of learning. Digital media does have a place in formal education and the public anxiety regarding their inclusion needs to be redirected or better understood so that schools can operate under conditions that are conducive to learning in our 21<sup>st</sup> century world.

A large societal concern for the extensive use of digital media exists today among adults who worry about exposure to online bullying, gaming addiction and pornography. Teachers report that online chat rooms, social networking and games are serving more of a distraction from learning than an informal experiential learning engagement (Sefton-Green, 2004). How do you regulate what kids are learning? All of the theories of learning can of course be applied to the use of digital media, but will kids use it for educational purposes or is it a newer way of socializing from note writing and video games, it must be regulated if digital media is introduced as a form of literacy.

A cultural tension continues to exist between institutional views of academic learning with the everyday learning that takes place among digital kids. Some promising work is being conducted to bridge the gap between kid’s voluntary leisure activities and academic learning, examining closely the interactions of

digital kids in online game play and the mapping of those interactions to standards of scientific literacy (S. Hsi, 2007, p. 1520).

The culture of young people is discussed by Hsi (2007) as a curiosity from adult perspective, namely what is different about today's youth in respect to the effects of digital media, the changing nature of 'childhood'.

Kellner (2002) and Buckingham (2000) are both critics of the overuse of digital media's influence on today's youth through commercialization and marketing as the driving force. Also there is concern for the incorporation of youth in Internet interactivity, specifically in chat rooms and social networking, the concern lies in the safety of children from direct marketing and also predators. The safety of children in regards to digital media forms common grounds where formal and informal education meet, where classrooms can be safe places for learning and exploration with digital media and can also teach the dangers and unreliability of Internet use. By the same token, a study of children's use of chat rooms by Willet and Sefton-Green (2004) highlighted how a group of girls used a virtual chat room as a place to form peer connections and the study showed how the girls asserted control and agency with digital media. It seems that the youth today have an aptitude and confidence with digital media, in controlling, adapting and creating it.

Baudrillard (1981/1994) gives rise to the question of the "copy". When we only see copies of actual events, it is the copy that we are actualizing not the real event. The myriad of copies we are presented with dilutes the actual happening, leaving the

consumer a distorted view of events. This concentration and control that media has on today's society is a concern for student's broader understanding of the world.

A study conducted by Gaudellie, W. and Siegel, B. (2010) reveals that although dynamic visual texts have advantages they alone do not constitute an education; the study also gives recommendations for pedagogy in the summary. The study examines how students view the world through digital media. For example, a study by Stoddard (2009) was done that involved high school students viewing full-length films about historical moments in history without further supplementation. They watched films that were made more recently and compared them to older versions; in this particular case, students found the more recent films to be a stronger representation of actual events. Students felt they understood the U.S. war in Vietnam simply by viewing *Forest Gump*. Another interesting part of the study revealed that students never questioned the validity of documentaries; they gave all authoritative control to the filmmaker because of the genre of documentary. This study reveals how impressionistic young people are, and given the non-stop barrage of digital media being served to them it is imperative to question, who is really in control of the visual images and messages being sent to today's youth?

The dedication and motivation with which users of mobile phones, gamers, web-users and social network users have with digital media is a key area of interest in kid's digital media culture (Harkin, 2003). Today's youth culture has an emotional connection to digital media, and it builds on the construction of their personal identity and their social environment. Hull (2003) noted that not all digital media that youth are engaged in is meaningful and educational. We must celebrate youth culture with excitement and

enthusiasm without romanticizing it by believing that all youth are constantly in a learner state while working within digital media.

### Summary

It is at a defined moment in my life described by Mezirow as “problematic” that my curiosity was evoked by my lack of competency and knowledge regarding digital media. Watching the younger generation excel, create, and utilize a resource I am so unfamiliar with prompted a cognitive dissonance in my life. This realization is the driving motivation behind my capstone and will drive my research further as I work within the model of transformational learning theory to experience profound change and find a new perspective on pedagogy and life in the world of digital media.

The major points of learning that were captured from the literature review are:

- Transformational learning occurs in adults when they are willing and able to adapt to new situations that oppose previously held beliefs. The theoretical work of Jack Mezirow (1978) is a template used to document and understand this perspective change.
- Digital media in the classroom has been non-transformational to the overall learning happening in schools, Laurillard (2007), speaks to the mundane quality that technology brought in contrast to what was expected.
- The case studies (Blin & Munro, 2008; Churchill, 2006; Gilmore & Warren, 2007; King, 2002; Leon & Pena, 2010), give support to the powerful impact of digital media on today’s teachers. They also highlight

instances where teachers underwent change through adult learning in the face of something new to them.

- A review by Mills (2011), gives examples of how digital media can be incorporated into the classroom in an effective way for teachers and students. The key theories on learning give pedagogical reasoning and support for the inclusion of digital media as a legitimate source for learning.
- How students may be using digital media outside of the classroom as a form of learning and how prevalent digital media is today for some students is described (Hsi, 2007; Ito, 2008; Sefton-Green, 2004).
- There are those who criticize the overuse of digital media, some negative consequences are speculated, and misinterpretations are revealed (Baudrillard, 1981/1994; Buckingham, 2000; Gaudellie & Siegel, 2010; Hull, 2003; Kellner, 2002).

## CHAPTER THREE

### Method

#### Introduction

As a teacher who is just arriving into the field of education fresh from graduate school, I am eager and curious about the population of students I will be educating in the near future. In the first chapter, I stated a disconnection from the younger generation, this gap between what I know and what they know was the initial spark that has driven my research thus far. How does one teacher move into the digital world? What does this experience look like? For students, this digital world is remarkably important, judging from this observation it is my duty as a teacher to understand this world if I am to build community and trust in my future classroom. I used the qualitative method of autoethnography to perform a self-study on my experience as a teacher moving into the digital world. Chapter three consists of a general explanation of the autoethnography method, its importance and validity as my method of choice. The setting is described along with prospective participants that will contribute to my research. I then describe how I conducted my research, what tools I used and guiding questions that assisted me along the way. At the close of the chapter I explain my current perspective on the beginning of my personal journey. The chapter provides the framework for understanding the research that was conducted and reported in chapter four.

## Method

The method of autoethnography lends itself to the paradigm of qualitative research practices. First, I will describe the method of autoethnography as a valid tool for uncovering and researching my question. Ethnography is core to the qualitative research paradigm stemming from the early 1900s. Artifact collection, observation and interviews are part of gaining an in-depth understanding of a specific culture (Teddlie, 2009).

Ethnography is the patient observation, the collection of meaning in a cultural setting that is different from the ethnographers' own. From the observations come meaning, the self is removed in order to study the "other". In the practice of *autoethnography*, the person is treating the self as the "other"; it is the action of understanding the self in a different cultural setting (Genzuk, 2003). There is no way to remove the self completely from the "other", therefore it is imperative that the autoethnographer reveal as much honest information as possible through the reflection process, so that the research has validity. The role of the autoethnographer is that of a performer, an active player in their body of research.

In autobiographical narrative performances, the performer often speaks about acts of social transgression. In doing so, the telling of the story itself becomes a transgressive act, a revealing of what has been kept hidden, a speaking of what has been silenced—an act of reverse discourse that struggles with the preconceptions borne in the air of dominant politics (Linda Park-Fuller, 2000, p. 26).

I used the transformational learning theory as a template for understanding and

documenting changes within the self-study. This theory is specific to adult learning and reflection; it is a tool that has been used to understand the role of teacher in new cultural settings.

### Setting

My project is a documentation and observation of myself as I moved into and transformed within a new cultural setting-digital media. The location was always the digital spaces- they were accessed from my computer and smart phone. The location varied, but was always centered on my goals, insights, obstacles, and involved the community of the digital world.

The participants of the study included myself along with a myriad of contacts that I encountered throughout the process that served as guides. I interacted with people who have successfully navigated the digital world, and also those like me, who have found the digital world confusing, overwhelming or unnecessary at times- they became contacts that supported me, led me in new directions, and gave new ideas to the project. The role of the teacher is at the forefront of my research; therefore teachers in practice with digital media and without were observed. I became a member of a public blog spot through Wordpress where I shared reflections and invited participation from the public. Also, Facebook as a social networking host was a space that I belonged to and actively used. I experimented with Twitter to compliment and enhance my social network also. These common digital spaces along with additional environments hosted my presence, as I became part of the digital world. They served as the object of my research as well as the tool to perform this specific research.

### Research Plan

The burning question is, how does one move into the digital world? I answered this by using myself as the “other” and documenting my changes in the form of an autoethnography. The research plan began by creating a public blog spot where I began the reflection process, and kept all field notes documented. I immersed myself into a new cultural setting-the digital world. My research therefore is a viable source for teachers and others interested in how a non-fluent person integrates into the digital culture. Digital media tools were essential for my research; therefore I withheld any new interactions until the project began, creating an authentic and honest documentation of the self through transformation. The research commenced with a public blog set up for daily reflections that were the foundation for an ethnographers’ report on self-change. This blog was a documentation of my progress, while using an important digital media tool that is useful; therefore the blog served a double purpose. As the self-study progressed through time, I was able to track my changes through the daily journaling and note any obstacles and modifications that needed to be made along the way. My blog site served as the focal point for reflection through every step of the research. Tools that I had no experience with that I interacted with include: Facebook, Twitter, blogging, and much more that came from this beginning step into the world of digital media.

### Guiding Questions

There were three categories that my research was focused on: personal journey, teacher implications, and balance. Each category fulfilled a general direction for the research and within each there were guiding questions. The transformation of self that

happened using the method of autoethnography was where the heart and truth of the research lived, therefore as the research continued many questions were modified, or removed from the pool of ideas. Below is a list of the guiding questions within each category that started the project.

Personal journey.

1. How is my fear of digital media manifested? What does this fear look like, feel like?
2. What biases and judgments do I carry with me about digital media?
3. What limitations do I set for myself?
4. How have I changed- the way I perform a task, communicate, read, and shop?  
Where is my sense of self in the world?

Teacher implications.

1. What does student-teacher interaction look like when digital media tools are used in the classroom?
2. If the youth of today have a natural affinity for digital media, what is the potential for disconnection with an older non-fluent generation?
3. Does using digital media in the classroom mean that curriculum needs to be shifted towards its use or can a teacher use traditional curriculum with digital media? What does this look like?
4. What challenges do teachers face who are incapable or unwilling to change in today's new digital media culture?

### Balance.

1. Can a person live in between digital media and reality, or does becoming a digital media immigrant require the all or nothing mentality?
2. In what ways has a digital media tool(s) changed my quality of life? Has it improved the way I perform a task that I normally would have done without?

### Reporting Findings

The researcher is the detective looking for trends and patterns that occur across the various groups or within individuals (Krueger, 1994). An ethnographers' findings are synthesized from extensive raw data into a condensed narrative reading that reveals a qualitative example of the consistent, patient observation of another cultural setting. The sheer volume that comes from the process of ethnography can become exhausting for readers; therefore focus and reduction is key to synthesizing. Consideration for tone, internal consistency and context are important aspects when reporting findings. The analysis of the research includes my reflections sorted into the three categories: personal journey, teacher implications and balance. These areas of focus followed consistently from the research into the findings, providing a context and framework for the research *and* analysis. Description of the setting and transformations occurring along the way were included in the analysis. Description is important because it brings the reader into the setting and perspective of the researcher, the observations and conclusions can be better understood if descriptive detail sets the tone and internal consistency. Chapter four provides these organized results with a strong interpretation of the meaning attributed to the findings. The interpretation explains the patterns and finds linking relationships. Each

reflection was categorized based on what guiding question it focused on. Therefore, chapter four answers the questions in chronological and thematical order; these reflections come from the blog site, Twitter, Facebook, and closing revelations as the research concluded. I saved each reflection in files on my computer that represented the three focus areas of: personal journey, teacher implications and balance, with the theme of *personal journey* being the underlining concept for the whole of the research.

### Closing Thoughts

Before the research began, I wanted to disclose that I held judgment about digital media. I didn't claim to be objective or inoffensive in the beginning, on the contrary the research is on the self, and I disclosed my biases so as to begin on an honest foot. Below is my first blog perspective as the journey began in early November of 2011:

To be "into" digital media is a full-time job. One does not simply check their facebook or twitter once in a while. It requires devoted citizens, asking not only for time, but your soul in exchange for instant gratification and a global sense of self. There are those who jumped immediately into the great pool of possibilities that have arisen with the growing ease and accessibility of digital media. An entire generation is now being inundated with everyday living driven by digital media. I wish at this point I could list all the interesting and unique ways of communicating and living through digital media tools, however I cannot-because I am not one of those who jumped. I decided to stay on shore and wait. Still nobody has returned to explain or relieve the nagging thoughts some of us have about this new place the world is going. Maybe I'm scared-scared of what I don't

know. Maybe I stayed because flashing lights on a screen seem unimportant next to the real physical world. Those nagging thoughts have kept me on shore for all these years- now as my curiosity has gotten the best of me I am ready to sail out, but I will be doing so cautiously and armed with a writer's pen and rooted in the strength of all of us who still look outward and up at the sky. Fear? Yes. Fear that I will like it (Foslien, 2011).

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Results

#### Introduction

The results presented in this chapter showcase the reflections and growth that emerged from my core research theme and supporting questions. I am a teacher who is curious about the students of today, I wanted to understand the different skills they have as 21<sup>st</sup> century learners in the digital culture, in particular their use of digital media. As someone without any prior experience or interest in digital media, I performed an autoethnography to study myself in the new cultural setting of digital media. I focused on how a teacher might experience assimilation into the digital culture of today. What is one teacher's experience moving into the digital culture? What are the implications for teachers in the face of digital media as a source of learning and communication? How can a person find balance in their life to maintain a strong physical and digital presence? These questions and more were answered during my research as I delved into the digital world and performed a self-study, using myself as an example for others who may face similar obstacles and feel that the disconnect they are having with the younger generation is tied to digital culture.

## Paradigm

To perform this self-study, I used the autoethnographic method to uncover what personal transformations occurred while I was engrossed in the new culture of digital media. This method is qualitative, and relies on focused reflections and field notes as a way to document and analyze changes and growth. As an autoethnographer, I was an honest reporter on self-changes during the process of assimilation into the digital culture. I bared my weaknesses, obstacles, and skepticisms and as I progressed into the research my disclosure remained true and accurate. The literature review in chapter two described Jack Mezirow's transformational learning theory as the framework for understanding adult learning helping me apply the theories of adult learning to my own research. It was evident that at one point I experienced a "trigger moment" prompting me to begin the assimilation into the digital culture. Many have described the "trigger moment" as an event that prompts the beginning of transformation; it creates the space for wanting change. For me, I was at a crossroads of emotion and opinion about the digital culture, but with no experience. I was unable to make an educated comment because of my naïve perspective. When I realized this, it prompted me to begin the research and use myself as the object of an ethnographic report. Mezirow's theory also calls for consistent reflection in order to change your perspective or frame of reference. Mezirow states, "Transformational learning is a way of problem solving by defining a problem or by redefining or reframing the problem" (Mezirow, 2000, p. 20). I decided to use this theory; it proved to be a solid foundation for conducting my research, giving me assistance in how to analyze reflections.

### Setting and Participants

The setting and participants for the research remained true to the original format described in chapter three- methods. I am the main participant as the “other” in the ethnographic research. Throughout the research process I touched base with many people who led me in new directions, persuaded me to try new digital tools, contacted me through social media networks, and shared their feelings about digital culture. These participants who inadvertently contributed to the research were expected and discussed in chapter three. The setting, originally described as any digital space that I may discover and explore, was larger than I could have ever imagined. These virtual places were not specifically named in chapter three due to the exploratory nature of an autoethnography. However, one unexpected revelation did occur that is noteworthy- the digital spaces cross the physical. For example, I began using iPads to augment learning for students in mathematics and reading comprehension. The tools we accessed in the digital world were experienced by us together in the physical world. This is noteworthy because previous to this research, I perceived digital media tools as a solitary virtual experience.

### Process and Procedures

The blog served as the host of all my reflections, I set this up as the place where I touched base throughout the research. I was able to elicit comments, advice, and suggestions from the blog site. I also utilized Facebook as my social networking host, I used this more than I had expected and gained a lot of insight into how people communicate through this social media tool and use it as a networking device for

relationships. To enhance the social media piece, I enabled a Twitter feed, however, this did not suit my needs, wants, or writing style.

### Data Analysis

The remainder of this chapter will present an analysis of the data from this research project. As was stated in chapter three, the analysis will be divided into three categories with corresponding guiding questions as the framework for organization. The overarching theme of the research question is on the *personal journey* that took place with the ultimate goal of finding a healthy *balance* with digital media use. Because I am a teacher, there is a strong focus on how digital culture affects the *teacher* and education specifically. Each category will include a brief introduction and reminder of main themes and guiding questions that were presented in the previous chapters. The questions will appear after the introduction, followed by a breakdown of the questions alongside posts taken directly from my blog, comments from others, and/or Twitter feed comments that support the conclusions made through the analysis. I created three files on my computer that held the collected reflections from the various digital mediums used during the research. The files were organized by content, on what questions they answered, and were ordered chronologically from the start of the project to the end. I also created hard copies of the files to work both on the computer and hands-on. As the analysis unfolds in this chapter, it is imperative to keep in mind where the journey began- I had never communicated over the computer apart from email, social networking did not exist in my life, my attitude towards digital culture and tools was highly skeptical and disenchanting. The transformation that occurred is clearly seen through the chronological and thematical

organization of this chapter. Many unexpected emotions and activities became associated with the research; the guiding questions developed at the beginning of the research did not sufficiently cover the magnitude of change. The themes, and habits that happened are described below to set the tone for how I transformed and learned valuable lessons.

### Unexpected Themes and Habits Developed

During the immersion process I changed. When the research began in early November of 2011, I felt that being part of the digital culture was an all encompassing, solitary activity, that from my perspective seemed to dominate one's life. Even though each individual makes a choice, I couldn't see past the skeptical picture I had painted in my mind. I started the process in fear that my being would change if I immersed myself into the digital culture, I prepared myself for these changes; I gave the project a time limit daily and from start to completion. In one of the first blogs I note that I will not immerse myself less than 30 days, and no longer than 90 days. I can now see this limitation was set in place because I was fearful of the powerful pull that digital media has. The habits I developed during the research process are described to give a sense of setting, and how the research was conducted. There were unexpected themes that arose during the research process that were not in the original plan; they are also described below.

Habits developed. My first leery steps into the digital culture were slow, and I kept my identity private. Each day I spent time searching the digital spaces carefully, choosing words and key phrases with delicacy as if someone were monitoring my moves. For a while I only read and clicked around to different sites provided by links from people's blogs or online newspaper articles, etc. I started the public blog to serve as the

tool for reflection and to hopefully elicit comments from outside perspectives. The blog gave me focus, I spent a lot of time setting it up to reflect the research project themes and supporting questions. All my online activity was directed or connected to the blog site to create a seamless web of communication between the multiple digital tools that I soon added to my daily immersion experience. I began experimenting with the downloading of podcasts, videos, and audio to my personal computer, iPod, and smart phone. I actually utilized the tools I had accessible to me to serve a usable purpose. These fun digital tools were something new to me that gave me excitement, joy, *and* enhanced a lot of online experiences. For example, I explored links people sent me that included content that beforehand I would have ignored, the audio and visual attachments enhanced the textual content. I experienced excitement at receiving feedback from a comment I posted on the New York Times online newspaper, the excitement came from communicating with people across the country-united by a shared interest. Here is a comment I posted through Twitter; I was feeling compelled to share the article with whomever was interested: “Just read through some great commentary on the use of mobile devices in the classroom from Will Richardson's article in the NYTimes” (Foslien, 2012).

The joy was experienced through out loud laughter at comments and photos that old friends posted on Facebook, these were real interactions with real friends- so different from my original standpoint of skepticism towards the legitimacy of relationships that can exist in the digital culture. I listened to people discuss topics I desperately care about through subscribing to podcasts. I followed blogs that were earnest and sincere in their intention. I watched YouTube videos and learned from them, finally figured out how to

tie a particular knot in knitting, laughed extremely hard at some really creative and funny videos. These are examples of how the digital culture surprised me and led me into a conclusion that was unexpected about the digital culture and about myself. Every day I spent on average 1-2 hours on my computer reading, writing, and participating in the digital culture. After receiving a smart phone at the start of the research I spent on average 1 hour daily connected to the Internet engaged with digital tools such as Facebook, Google Mail, and general Internet surfing. One particular habit that I was uncomfortable with was using my phone in the evening, when sleep would be a better option. As the research really took hold, I was no longer forcing the time I had to spend connected to the digital culture, it had become a part of my life that needed no prompting, it became innate-expected-desired.

Unexpected themes. The content that I sent out into the digital spaces through my public blog, Facebook, and Twitter were mainly related to the research that I was performing in the format of an autoethnography, therefore I elicited comments that were meaningful and related to the effects of digital media. For example, after a posting on balance called A New Perspective, I received this comment:

Balance is the key...you continuously make great observations that I feel more people need be aware of. Digital culture is so much apart of our world today, but we can't get to far away from the essence of who we are and natural connections that happen between us. Keep on keepin on Kirt!

(Foslien, 2012)

However, as the process continued, and the digital culture became a consistent habit in my life, I began writing about more mundane, daily occurrences. It was interesting to find that of all the comments, blogs, and links that I posted through Facebook the comment that received the most attention was one of the very rare comments by me that was silly and/or unnecessary. The comments kept coming in, but below is an example of how it started (Foslien, 2012).

Kirsten- not regarding my research but I just found a flaw in Peter Jackson's Lord of the Rings, Two Towers, editing crew fired!

Sally- what flaw?

Amy- Tell me, tell me!

This brought to my attention how Facebook can be used as a tool to connect and network oneself on a professional level, but the heart of it lies in casual conversations that aren't meant to be remembered, or documented. It is this realization that prompted me to use Facebook in a variety of ways and to explore how people's responses varied due to the content that was being sent out.

Another interesting facet that came out of the research process was my devotion to personal privacy in all matters of digital media tools that I accessed. I currently have 42 friends on Facebook and they are my actual friends, I will not accept acquaintances or people from my past that I have no desire to know in the present. The information that I have posted is quite minimal, and I do not disclose information about my family, children, etc. For this I am not bending, I knew there would be a lot of conforming,

changing and assimilating, but I found that I was able to maintain a comfortable level of privacy while still being present and available to other digital users.

There were three overarching guiding categories that helped keep my research in focus as I ventured through the digital landscape and gave format to the extensive and narrative qualities of performing an autoethnographic report. As was previously described, the focus of the research is on the personal journey aspect, which seeks to track the personal changes I underwent as I assimilated into a culture that was unknown to me, the digital culture. This self-change is at the root of the research and each reflection is rooted in this main idea. Within this personal journey I focused on how the findings relate to and affect the teacher. Being a teacher puts me in a position to be surrounded by young people and my desire to become part of the digital culture stems from the realization that I had often felt disconnected from the younger generation. There will be specific examples of how digital tools relate specifically to teaching, and also from a personal standpoint of being a teacher experiencing self-change and adult transformational learning. I have full confidence that my questions were answered and that I underwent a personal transformation that was pivotal for my personal life and also for my career as a teacher.

### Personal Journey

Personal Journey is a category, and an overarching theme that crosses all the sub-categories; therefore the posts provided in this section will seem to address all the ideas, themes and guiding questions presented thus far. Each question will be answered with supporting reflections from the research along with present thoughts; the question will be

highlighted with responses following. The original guiding questions for *personal journey* that were posed in chapter two are:

1. How is my fear of digital media manifested? What does this fear look like, feel like?
2. What biases and judgments do I carry with me about digital media?
3. What limitations do I set for myself?
4. How have I changed- the way I perform a task, communicate, read, and shop?  
Where is my sense of self in the world?

How is my fear of digital media manifested? What does this fear look like, feel like?

This question relates to the fears I held at the beginning of the project, before I had immersed myself into the digital culture. Fear was a tangible feeling that I possessed about the solitary-obsessive like nature that I felt portrayed a lifestyle dedicated to digital media tools. I am able to understand now at the endpoint that this fear came out in strong skepticism and criticism for digital media and its users. My fear created false judgment, and also created the space for me to grow. Below is a reflection that will showcase this fear and skepticism; I also question the validity of learning with the aid of digital media tools.

Nostalgia

For years I worked on a slow Dell computer that incessantly beeped at me for no reason that I could understand. This beeping added to my annoyance with how much time I had to spend staring at my computer screen editing and revising essays and papers as an undergraduate student of film theory. This “laptop” was

huge; the battery didn't work so if I ever wanted to travel with it to a coffee shop the long black power cord and a wireless network card came with, it was a process. Then the beeping... Most of the time I would turn it off and work with a pen and notebook, nice and quiet. I still have all my notebooks filled with notes and ideas, sentences that were written and re-written, I can almost feel the long pauses I spent searching for the right phrase, the right word. I feel nostalgic for those days of critical thinking, of the expansion of my mind to new theoretical ideas. And presently I'm doing the same things but the process is less manual, less physical. My computer saves me from carrying loads of books around and spell-check corrects me when I am "wrong", this computer does not beep and I can take it with me anywhere. Yet, I feel a sense of longing for those days when everything was a little harder. Am I nostalgic for more work? For heavier lifting? What is it that makes us want to work harder for success? For me and others like me, we are nostalgic for a past that required more work, which filtered out those who were not worthy of academia, not able to do the work. We did that work, we understood how to navigate the library borrowing system, read books in library basements until midnight. Walked the long silent corridors while taking a break, shared a look with someone who was equally suffering, working, learning, and growing. This hard work is what used to make successful students strong and they shared that commonality. I am still a student and I still love to work from a book in the library, but honestly all the work I do can be done from a computer. Academic journals retrieved through online search engines is a much preferred

technique than weeding through them, typing thoughts down and cutting and pasting saves hours, there is bibliographic digital tool that organizes all sources in correct format, amazing. I know all of this- it is much more efficient, and dare I say easier...If I use the word easy, you can understand how one could criticize the fact that digital tools are doing more of the work than the student, therefore is the student of today less capable, more dependent on a digital tool than their own brain? Or, is the use of digital tools creating new spaces in our brain that allow for more growth and learning- much like learning a foreign language? (Foslien, 2011).

#### What biases and judgments do I carry with me about digital media?

The judgments are a form of fear that I carried with me at the beginning as was noted in the previous section, therefore I believe these questions are tied together. Below will give further examples of the weight of fear that was with me at the beginning.

##### A Copy

Recently I read a post from Dan Cohen's blog about the problems that arise when someone is an anonymous blogger. For one, they lose out on credit for their hard work, they also leave an unmarked path for any future connections. I believe there is something appealing about writing under a pseudonym, a sense of freedom exists when your thoughts cannot be tracked to you. I am not writing under a pseudonym, but I *am* allowing myself to have an alter ego that exists in the digital realm, it is my virtual self. The building of this identity has begun slow, I decided to enter into the digital culture in order to understand it, to become part of it from

an ethnographer's perspective. This "self" that is evolving is literally a creation, she is my very own Frankenstein. I am able to control my tone, my looks (no photos yet available), my ideas, they are all representative of this person I am creating. This was not intentional to start, but the landscape of digital media allows for the publishing of one's life, real or not. Your real self, that person who is actually sitting down in front of the computer typing, is not always a pure reflection of the digital self, the one where every photo on facebook is attractive and all your interests and hobbies are exciting and wonderful. So this basic idea of writing under a pseudonym creates that same feeling of a divergence from the real world. As I continue on my journey through the digital spaces of the digital culture, I am finding that what I see is not what I will be getting in reality. The digital world is a copy without an original, it is giving the facade of coming from the real physical world, but it is only pretending. The line is no longer blurred but simply does not exist. These ideas of a "copy" come from the theoretical work of Jean Baudrillard and I believe directly apply to how the digital world functions as copy of a copy. For some, the digital world is far more "real" than the physical world. I wonder how this effects their idea of themselves, and if the digital world was removed how their life in the real original world would be formed (Foslien, 2011).

#### What limitations do I set for myself?

The idea of setting limitations was important for me because I was unsure of what would happen when I entered into the digital culture, I had visions of myself growing

large, playing virtual war games with a friend that was sitting right next to me, computers on our laps sucking down slushies. Turns out these imagined images and scenarios were false, but still the limitations were set in place. The first reflection gives the outline by which I intended on following, the second blog demonstrates my thoughts about signing up for Facebook for the first time.

#### Limitations and Expectations for Research

The autoethnography requires daily immersion. I will be spending up to 2 hours each day navigating through the digital landscape. My first step into the digital community is the introduction of this public blog, I will also be setting up a facebook account to serve as a social networking host. Twitter is also something I will be exploring in the near future. I invite any and all advice, comments, questions and criticisms. There are three main categories that need to be addressed within the research, they are: Personal Journey- what inner transformations are happening due to the daily interaction with digital culture? Teacher Implications- what tools and ideas contribute to a more effective educational experience for students and teachers? Balance- how does one achieve a balance between being a digital community member without losing touch with themselves on the physical plane? I hope to answer these questions in no less than 30 days and no longer than 90 days, when this is accomplished the research will be concluded. Here I go! (Foslien, 2011).

Hello? I'm In.

I just entered into the vortex of Facebook, I'm blank faced, numb from sitting in the same position for too long, and my brow is furrowed. All I did was sign up, I put my name in the correct box and clicked submit... and I'm in. I am stunned by the amount of people that were linked to my name, people I haven't thought about in years. I can't help but imagine how they are all interconnected to different aspects of my life. A computer program did this? I was silent at my computer but inside my brain synapses were firing connecting old memories and faces, it made me feel like my life has been long so far. I'm not able to reach into my past like that all at once and see it visually displayed on a screen, it was an incredible and horrific experience all at once. I didn't create any kind of profile for myself, I just clicked on names and photographs of people I know, knew, forgot about. Two hours- gone. I learned that a really old friend has a young child, she looked peaceful and happy in the picture. I stared at that photograph for a long time, wondering about her. I saw two of my neighbors listed under "people I might know", um creepy I never entered my address. With the click of a button I am on the grid- exposed. I imagine my profile is being linked or shall I say "liked" to companies that I may be interested in. Let the tracking begin, I'm already excited for what the internet thinks I will like based on my online activities (Foslien, 2011).

The above post, "Hello, I'm In" marks the first time I began using Facebook, the experience was intense and sparked a curiosity in me that continued to grow as the research progressed. A noted change happened mid-way through the process- I connected

my Facebook account to both my Twitter feed and Wordpress Blog. This type of *publicizing* made me self-aware as a writer, and conscious of my ideas being shared with friends I had on Facebook, Twitter and the greater public of the blog site. My uneasiness is expressed in the reflections below as I seek to describe the feelings I have about being self-conscious and vulnerable.

### Vulnerability

It's been three days since I last posted about the limitations and expectations I have for myself. Each time I open my computer to peek around at other blogs and each time I begin to write a post I feel a level of anxiety about the experience. I am very conscious of every word I write and even though presently I may be the only person viewing it, it is a strange feeling to be "published" on the Internet. I am wondering if this feeling of anxiety and carefulness towards my words will change over time, and instead of writing observations and insights I will become one of those people who write about their coffee spilling. Is this worthy of publishing and sharing to the world? Who really cares about that? I am totally perplexed at the amount of irrelevant nonsense that I am finding (Foslien, 2011).

"Old School Facebook" reflection was written near the beginning of my Facebook experience as I flip flopped between loving and hating the social networking tool. Some things change, but not all. I still think the way Facebook provides instant gratification for those seeking to "reconnect" with lost lovers or friends provide an inaccurate reality of the person. The post will show my discontent with broadening my friend base beyond my friends presently in my life. "An Old Friend" is a post that will support the same feeling

attached with the first post regarding Facebook and the non-reciprocal “catching up” that people believe is happening when they pour over someone else’s profile.

#### Old School Facebook

I used to dream about people from my past. I would dream that we were re-uniting as old friends, lovers or enemies. In my dreams, we would talk, interact or kiss. When I woke up I would feel a strange sense that I had really reconnected with that person, and I would spend the day thinking about them, about our past. As the day concluded I would hope that maybe they were thinking of me too, and that all the energy spent dreaming and thinking about them would transmit on an existential level. Now this is some serious old school facebook, I never got to see photographs or read what sports team they like but I would, and maybe they would *remember us*, find the emotions connected to a time in the past and connect it to what is the present moment. I don’t think there is a way to make a computer program out of that, and I hope that the digital culture never even tries to compete with that level of awareness and dream state interaction. However, now I am on the facebook, I’m not sure what to say about myself so I will keep it blank for now, I’m going to explore others before I feel comfortable enough disclosing my own favorite sports team- for now I am a lurker (Foslien, 2011).

#### An Old Friend

I found someone on facebook that I have been wondering about for a long time. I looked through the photos, feeling so scandalous, so voyeuristic. The temptation

to look while not being seen is a divulgence that members of facebook take part in. I've heard this being referred to as "facebook stalking". Snooping around people's lives is not something I have ever been interested in, I don't "curtain shift" at home to see what the neighbors are up to or look into lit up windows at night driving by, it's not really my style. But being a voyeur on facebook is just so darn easy and acceptable that I just wasted a good 30 minutes looking at photos of someone else's life without them knowing it. I was so happy to see this person, smiling and experiencing life- I was glad to see these photos. But the aftertaste was anything but sweet. What, I thought was the point of that? That wasn't "catching up" because I was only able to see what was posted, what this person chose to disclose as a representation of their life. And it was one way, I was looking- that's it- pure surface. There is no way to know if a facebook page is a reflection of reality for that person. Have you ever seen photos or information describing arguments, stress or disappointment in one's life? Lurking around facebook to get an idea of what lost friends and lovers are up to is as pointless as guessing, and far more harmful. The healthy separation that life provides as people naturally move apart makes room for new friends and lovers. Facebook slows this process, makes it impossible to forget by always reminding you of these people from your past, tempting you to look, to feel again. I'm not drinking the cool-aid (Foslien, 2011).

The last question that was posed under the heading of personal journey is a culminating question that will be answered in the section titled, *Balance*. Because it is

clear to me that a chronological sequence better serves the reader to have clarity in how I progressed, this question will be answered further on in the disclosing of the autoethnographic report. The journey continues to be personal and with a goal of achieving balance as the endpoint, therefore the implications for teachers are another facet of the journey.

### Implications for Teachers

The challenge for teachers who are unwilling to adapt to the new tools that are accessible to them will affect their students in ways that are unique to each school and student. When I first posed the questions below, it was under the assumption that every student of the younger generation was a fluent digital user and also that teachers of an older generation were non-fluent. These assumptions were proven wrong and I experienced working with a wide variety of people with varied levels of interest that did not correlate to age. It is my belief that a teacher who is inherently a good teacher will find a way to reach their students using digital media tools when they are necessary or beneficial to their overall education. I have decided to include the original questions as evidence of my mindset towards the teacher's role in today's digital culture, however, as I look at them now they seem incomplete compared to conclusions and findings I discovered in myself regarding the role of digital culture for education and teachers.

5. What does student-teacher interaction look like when digital media tools are used in the classroom? If the youth of today have a natural affinity for digital media, what is the potential for disconnection with an older non-fluent generation?

6. Does using digital media in the classroom mean that curriculum needs to be shifted towards its use or can a teacher use traditional curriculum with digital media? What does this look like?
7. What challenges do teachers face who are incapable or unwilling to change in today's new digital media culture?

The first reflection is my description of myself as a teacher; the blog sheds light on my fear/worry about the educational system as a product of innovation and an overreliance on technology to replace teaching.

I am a teacher

I am a teacher. My research is focused through this lens. As a teacher, what will my experience be as I move into the digital world? The implications of this research will bring to light the importance of digital media for teachers and students. I am not convinced that digital tools are the answer to a sound education or that giving every student an iPad means they will learn how to do algebra or apply critical thinking skills. There is a plethora of people who support and insist on the immediate inclusion of digital media tools in the classroom as a way to bring our educational system up to the 21st century. I am not questioning the amazing power that touch and visual tools has for students, however, it seems that no one is asking what the consequences are. I am. (Foslien, 2011).

What does student-teacher interaction look like when digital media tools are used in the classroom? And If the youth of today have a natural affinity for digital media, what is the potential for disconnection with an older non-fluent generation?

I was fortunate to have employment with a company that hires teachers to work with small groups of students in an after school setting. Each student had an individual plan that enriched his or her academics in mathematics or reading comprehension. In November the program was granted iPads for every student with built-in curriculum that program directors could tailor to the needs and abilities of the students. Not all programs were offered on the iPad, so some students still used a large binder that included their lessons and many hands-on materials. From the teacher's perspective the iPad saved a lot of time and made assessing and leaving comments extremely easy. It also didn't allow for the teacher to improvise or modify a lesson that maybe wasn't appropriate, and many times an answer would be incorrectly labeled. As this post below will support, some students loved using the iPad, they focused and worked well within the program. Others disliked the non-versatility it offered, they wanted to touch paper, use more tactile materials. This experience helped me understand that the luring effects of digital media are not generational but more closely related to personality and personal preference.

#### I Want A Stylus Pen!

Being a teacher I have just had the opportunity to use iPads for one on one student tutoring. The program is designed to be used by both the teacher and student. I recently had a student who is 7 years old tell me he hates the iPad, wishes he could use the old tablets with the stylus pen instead. I was so curious about this, because up until this point I hadn't witnessed a child having difficulty navigating and using touch screens. In fact, it has been remarkable to watch a child move their little finger pad around a touch screen, putting a puzzle together or steering a

racing car around a track. The intuitive design of iPads and iPhones has opened a door for different types of learners to excel outside of the traditional learning styles. But what about the students who prefer to use traditional methods? I thought the usability of digital tools was highly dependent on age and generation. Now through this one student, I am seeing that maybe we are not all built or wired for digital tools, maybe writing with a stylus pen and doing things the long way is not the wrong way or the outdated way but just a different way (Foslien, 2011).

Does using digital media in the classroom mean that curriculum needs to be shifted towards its use or can a teacher use traditional curriculum with digital media? What does this look like?

This overarching question is answerable from my personal experience and employment as a kindergarten teacher, but I cannot speak to the effects of digital culture in a classroom at a higher level. It is possible that the effects of digital culture are not as pervasive in my students because of their age and life experiences thus far. Kindergarten is a special time in a child's school career where social identity is being formed and the complexity of letter sounds and blends takes precedence over Facebook, or communicating with a broader community. In my classroom, the students are all different and this knowledge supports my previous claim that from my experience digital media usage is tied stronger to preference and personality. I can think of kids I went to school with 20 years ago that would have loved opportunities to work with digital media tools today, and others that still would have been running wild in the mud, or painting a watercolor picture.

### The Mighty Role

The role of the teacher is a great balancing act. I have found my best moments are not when all students are staring at me quietly, seemingly all learning the same thing at the same time. I am most proud of a busier, more interactive feeling classroom. Let me paint a picture. Me in the center of small kidney shaped tables, each table has manipulatives, paper, and little hands working hard to create. About 13 students are actually doing the assigned activity; the other 7 are all needing something- from me. Scissors in one hand, paperclips hooked onto pocket I swirl around- answering a question, listening to a quick story, tying a shoe, and patting heads. I love this job- it is never the same and students are always full of surprises. The mighty part of being a teacher is recognizing that each student is different, needing different things, different teaching styles, and it is okay if all students are not learning the same thing at the same time. Some students love the iPad- they maneuver effortlessly and are able to swiftly navigate around and flourish- their learning is enhanced, in this I have no doubt. Other students are less interested, they prefer tactile materials and ask for paper, or in many cases a whiteboard with a dry erase marker. Students of today are coming into school with a strong sense of what digital media is- they understand it and are familiar, but this still does not create an entire generation that has a similar interest in just this one thing. It is a comforting thought that no matter how crazed technology gets, they will still be students who sketch elaborate pictures with a pencil, and prefer a marker, scissors and glue (Foslien, 2012).

What challenges do teachers face who are incapable or unwilling to change in today's new digital media culture?

The implications for teachers are relevant in today's expanding digital culture, if students are changing then teachers should be aware of why and how a generation is different from their own. Using the mass amounts of tools available to teachers through digital media is not the answer to good teaching or current teaching from my perspective, and is a concluding thought post-research. The invasiveness of digital media has not changed students into zombie-like individuals who write only in acronyms, like all changes it is gradual and depending on where you are, the digital movement is not tied to generations but rather to those who are inclined to use it and be excited by it. The disconnection that I felt was not singled out to students of a younger generation but rather to the digital movement that captured people of all ages. However, being present and participatory in the digital culture presently has made me aware of how people communicate. It has broadened my perspective and given me a larger framework for understanding different kinds of interaction in the physical and digital world. In this expansion of the self I feel that I have become a better teacher. I no longer am afraid of using a tool that is suggested to me from a colleague or student, it is the exploration that has become fun for me, and if teachers embraced digital media from this changing perspective that I have gained they would greatly benefit.

Balance

It became clear as the research grew into my lifestyle that the ultimate goal of the whole project was to see if a healthy balance could be achieved between keeping my feet planted firmly on the ground- and by having a digital identity. Before I leapt into the digital spaces I was out of balance. I had a strong belief in the power of excluding myself from the digital culture; it gave me a sense of pride that I was not included in something that seemed at the time- fake. This imbalance was hidden from me by my own pride and fear of the unknown. The first moments I had writing and peeking around the digital spaces were surreal, I felt like every click and word type was being monitored, I felt exposed to the digital world. Some of the early blog posts reflect that nervousness. In this section that has been simply named *Balance*, the reflections will show a chronological succession of feelings and emotions as I moved from a place of great unknown that was shown in the reflections from *Personal Journey* to a quiet, content place as a digital user that will be shown below.

8. Can a person live in between digital media and reality, or does becoming a digital media immigrant require the all or nothing mentality?
9. In what ways has a digital media tool(s) changed my quality of life? Has it improved the way I perform a task that I normally would have done without?

Can a person live in between digital media and reality, or does becoming a digital media immigrant require the all or nothing mentality?

“January” gives a solid answer to this guiding question that inquired whether I could find balance in my life after digital media was integrated. I had been spending time in the digital spaces for two months prior to this posting and it is evident that the fear that

I was holding onto had all but disappeared. There were aspects of Facebook that I was and still am uncomfortable with. For example, I never wanted Facebook, Twitter, or Wordpress to “alert” me when new messages came through on my accounts. Making these decisions on limitations and personal privacy settings became pivotal in allowing me to achieve balance.

### January

I am still here in the digital spaces. However, the novelty and newness has worn off and I am left with the normalcy of using digital media daily. I check my facebook page everyday usually, I often enjoy reading people’s little insights, often times I do not-but it is not intrusive as I once thought it to be. I was told that to be fully inundated I need to have my phone alert me when new messages, friend requests and comments happen. I understand why this constant “alerting” is important, it is the digital world saying, “here I am, you better check what someone has to say about you”. It reminds me of those toddler toys that “talk”. We have one that sounds, “Hey, I want to play” after a period of non-use. Every time I hear this I vow to destroy this toy and send a letter of complaint to the creative department at the toy company. How rude of this toy to interrupt a child’s play with something that actually doesn’t exist, some lame toy. I put those toys in the basement and I don’t set facebook or my email to “alert” me. This is another lesson in balancing my life in and out of the digital world. But now I need to move beyond facebook, twitter and the blogosphere...(Foslien, 2012).

“Validation through Publishing” was an important piece to the puzzle for me during my self-transformation. My vulnerability to the digital public was a strong feeling that accompanied the first part of the research, as is described in the post below, my writing reflected a more careful and conservative tone. I wrote for an academic audience with my research topic as the solitary reason for participating. As time rolled on, my actions changed and I became a more comfortable member of Facebook, Twitter, and Wordpress. I posted a comment about one of my favorite films, it was meant to be a funny comment and it was the first time I had written anything outside of my research topic. Within hours, I received many comments from people, I couldn’t believe the participation this one comment elicited as compared to all my other “academic” comments and posts.

#### Validation through Publishing

The first time I published a post on my blog I had a momentous feeling as I sent my first words out into the digital spaces of the unknown. I chose my words so carefully, I wrote- then deleted- rewrote and edited again. I felt vulnerable to my audience that did not exist, as if I were being judged and my writing was being critically analyzed for content and grammatical correctness. These feelings have subsided, and a new feeling of confidence and excitement has replaced the more timid self. I am eager to share what I am learning through this process to those interested, I am getting cocky in my beliefs and feel the power of words. Then it happened... I posted something dumb, something pointless. This was the very thing I loathed as I began the process of assimilation into the digital world. At the

moment (of my dumb post) I wanted to share something interesting albeit silly with the digital world, it wasn't directed at anyone in particular just a little posting on twitter. Oh no! Next will be a post that real cranberry juice is actually kind of gross. Here's my defense: twitter. Unless I have a website link to share I struggle with what to write in 140 characters. Also, I think there is a level of self-importance incorporated with publishing oneself in the digital world. I used to ask at the beginning of this, "Who cares???", now I feel I can answer that. It is not the intended audience that cares, it is the person publishing that cares- they care about their feelings, and these feelings are validated by those who respond and comment right back with their equal non-sense. It's not all non-sense, but the idea of validating oneself by the almost immediate comments of others is interesting to say the least, and dangerous to speculate the consequences at the most (Foslien, 2012).

Finding a healthy balance became the concluding thought that resonated the most with me during the research; once I realized that it was attainable I developed a better attitude towards digital media and accepted the new routines as a part of my life.

#### A New Perspective

Eating too much tofu can cause brain atrophy apparently, years ago on the local news it was reported that eating too many apples could have adverse consequences. Everything is not good in excess or in extremism. I always imagined people connected to the digital world as zombie-like obsessive users who sought to remove themselves from the beautiful world and enter into an

altered-created version of reality. I still think those people might exist and that there are many consequences that are yet to be understood from the digital move, yet I am realizing that balancing the use of digital media with being a normal person who looks up at the stars and notices people's faces in a bookstore is not so difficult. The digital world is there just as caffeine is there- it's good, oh so good but I won't let myself have more than two cups a day because I know how to balance, how to moderate. Once I realized this, digital media and social networking is not so scary, not so foreign (Foslien, 2011).

In what ways has a digital media tool(s) changed my quality of life? Has it improved the way I perform a task that I normally would have done without?

Communication. Digital media tools have made space in my life to help me communicate with people who are important in my life. I use Facebook to send and receive messages from my select group of friends that are in my network. Having access to this social networking device brings me closer to events I care about that are publicized through Facebook. When I move around the blogosphere I feel connected to people who have similar interests to mine, digital tools allow me to communicate with them if need be. I have a fulfilling life outside of the digital spaces; therefore I have felt no desire to make new friends in the digital world. "Moving Forward" is a post about the daily routines that were being formed, as digital tools became part of my life. It is an optimistic post about how the research I was doing transformed into real life patterns.

Moving Forward

I have grown in many ways through my experiences assimilating into the digital world, as I said in an earlier post, I feel that it has become a normal yet important part of my daily routine. My computer stays plugged in and rests on the living room couch always. If I am tempted to watch bad t.v. my computer reminds me of my capstone, and my promise to embed myself into the digital world. I wonder how this luring sense of duty will change or not change when my research is finished, master's degree in hand. It is not always my responsibilities as a student that bring me to open my computer, swirl my thumbs on the mouse pad, anxiously awaiting what gems the digital spaces will throw my way- it comes from genuine curiosity. I have laughed out loud seeing pictures that people have "tagged" me in, tempting me to write the infamous acronym, "lol". I have passionately written a response to a very dramatic blog post concerning education and technology. I read other's people's blogs with a kind ear knowing how much heart goes into writing personal thoughts for the public. I work exclusively on an iPad when tutoring students using a built-in program that caters to their specific needs, I feel they are gaining academic skills valuable digital skills. I have used facebook as means for communication, reuniting with old friends, finding references, making inquiries to many people at once- I have found it to be useful and practical. The myriad of uses and benefits are overwhelming yet it seems the digital world is accepting of every person along the spectrum of dedication. I'm not the most dedicated user, nor am I enchanted- I am not skeptical anymore or

leary that the digital world is stealing humanity. I am in a quite mundane position, content-comfortable.

The idea of time was an interesting note to leave as my last blog before I began the process of compiling information that I have gathered to be analyzed and composed into my capstone. It takes time, lots of time to navigate around the digital culture. The passage of time slips away through bridging links with ideas, matching them to people, sending messages, extending comments and thoughts to others, receiving and fielding those sent to you. It is something I enjoyed; yet when life outside of that world happened, there was no option other than to abandon the digital spaces until once again I had time.

#### The Luxury of Time

I spent time away. I swam in the ocean, played with my children. I didn't open my computer- it wasn't even with me. My grandmother passed away and I didn't have time to write or think about what other people were writing. Life happened and the digital world was not a part of it. It takes time to sit and write your thoughts, to look at what other people are thinking and doing. This luxury of time is not something everyone has (Foslien, 2012).

How have I changed- the way I perform a task, communicate, read, and shop? Where is my sense of self in the world?

The change was documented, the questions were answered, the goal of having a shift in perspective towards being engaged with the digital culture occurred. The research surprised me, morphed into something that was unexpected and brought to light more ideas and questions for the future. This type of research on self-change and growth could

keep going, especially when the culture I had chosen to become part of is ever expanding and changing. There is a profound difference in how I interact and view the digital culture and those who were already members. The disconnection with the younger generation and with people who are fluent digital users has lessened-the gap has been bridged. Finding a healthy balance is a unique process, one that is individual. There are no roadmaps for helping people assimilate to the digital culture; it is a personal journey that cannot be replicated.

The major points learning from the research findings are:

- Fear fueled the fire of insecurity towards the use of digital media at the beginning of the research project.
- The starting position was anywhere but neutral, the high level of skepticism created room for exponential personal growth.
- Limitations were set in place as one of the first steps taken to ensure balance and to provide framework for the research.
- Digital media tools have the power to create enhanced learning in an educational setting. A disconnection only exists between individuals, not generations-capability is in the willingness to try.
- A good teacher need not worry about the impending role of digital media; traditional curriculum is valid and works in conjunction with the digital culture.
- The expansion of the self through admittance of incapability fosters growth in unfamiliar territory. Teachers can learn from this experience to be open to change and embrace the digital culture.

- The blogging community is forgiving and mutable, writing and participating was an experience that helped me achieve balance.
- Digital media increased the level of communication available. New spaces were created that added depth to the physical spaces- they were not replaced but enhanced.
- The immersion of the self to discover something new was pivotal in transformation as a teacher, and as a person willing to grow and learn as an adult.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusion

It is the beginning; this is the concluding chapter of my capstone, but not the conclusion of the impact of this research on my life. Unlike most others, my capstone will continue to affect my life. It is an interesting thought that all my explorations and endeavors with the digital culture will be tied to this first experience, this first step into the digital spaces. I started out asking the question, “What will one teachers’ experience be moving into the digital culture?” I thought about how this experience would change my life, I imagined this capstone would end up being a strong reflection on the negative effects of digital media, I assumed I would strengthen in my opposition. The truth is, I am not an extremist. I sought honesty in self-change and that is what my capstone will reflect; there is not any incredible claims or outrageous cries of negative consequences. For those seeking extremism, they will be disappointed in my conclusions of moderation and balance.

The research was focused on how digital media affected me in my personal life, and in my career and perspective as a teacher. The implications for teachers seemed especially important because teachers are in a unique position. We are surrounded by cycles of young people; we are witness to fads, trends, and the evolving differences that come with each passing generation. The role of the teacher is also changing, I wanted to

explore if the expanding digital culture was an important asset that a teacher should be comfortable accessing. The focus that became the strongest theme was how to maintain a balance between being a member of both the physical and digital worlds. This is where the heart of the conclusions lie- I achieved the balance I was seeking. The reflections posted on the blog support how this change occurred over time. Looking at my own thoughts chronologically over a period of four months focused on one main theme was an extraordinary experience. I was not aware of how much change had happened until I began organizing the reflections and was able to visually witness self-transformation.

The major themes that came out of the research were closely linked to the original supporting ideas of personal journey, teacher implications, and balance. It became clear during the research and analysis that the theme of personal journey overarched the whole project with an end goal of achieving balance. The research was always focused on myself, my self-transformation; this is what paved the way for using the autoethnographic method. This qualitative method was enhanced by the use of Jack Mezirow's theory on transformational learning as a tool to document and track adult learning after a "problematic" realization. The crossroads in my life of becoming a teacher, feeling disconnected, and building a strong extremist skeptical opinion about digital media was the "trigger moment" when I knew exploring the topic of the digital culture was going to become part of my life. Therefore, the process of self-transformation was at the forefront of reflections and other sources of documentation to gather support in answering the research question: What is one teacher's experience moving into the digital world? What does this experience look like, feel like? As the time passed, it became

evident that achieving a sense of balance using digital media and being connected to the digital culture was important to me, I wanted this experience to become integral in my personal life and in my career as a teacher.

The implications for myself as a teacher were strong and also reflected the process of change and self-transformation as I grew more confident and understanding of how and why digital tools are used for educational enhancement. One unexpected theme that ran consistent from the beginning of the research through to present is my desire to remain very private with what I am willing to share in the digital spaces. I didn't know how private I was in the digital world until I began participating and communicating using different digital media tools. Even at the height of my excitement and participatory actions, I never wanted to share many photos or personal information about my family or myself. Some skepticism still remains in that sense. I don't fully trust that information that I provide won't be used or shared without my knowing or without my consent. The topic of privacy is one that emerged strong and will remain to be undisturbed for the time being.

Looking back on chapter two, I found key research from the literature review that supports and correlates to the research that I performed on myself. There was a case study by Kathleen King (2002), which focused on how teachers responded to the introduction of digital media tools through a graduate level course. Their emotions and attitudes were tracked using the theory of transformational learning by Jack Mezirow (2000). Her findings were similar to my own. Using reflective tools, she assessed change over time in

the teacher's perspectives on using digital tools in the classroom. My research differs because I was both the researcher and the "other".

A third strong resemblance to the findings from my research is the work done by Churchill (2006), on the private theories of teachers. The teachers were asked to disclose their private thoughts on the impact of technology in the classroom; this data was used afterward to compare how change if any was connected to the perspectives prior to learning new information- digital media tools. My own private theories on the effects of digital media are shown in chapter one, it remains as evidence of my original standpoint. It is difficult for me to read chapter one and not revise. I want to keep it as documentation of where it all began- of how much change and perspective shifting occurred during the research.

The case studies that were highlighted in chapter two provided research examples of how emotions and values affect a teacher's willingness to learn something new, in these particular studies- learning to adapt to the digital world. Creating space in life to learn something new and have a paradigm-shift towards capability and fluency was generally the result of a positive attitude and professional training and support according to the case studies from chapter two. According to the Futurelab report (2004), people hold a misplaced fear and anxiety regarding the use of digital media tools as forms of learning. Looking back at this report, I find commonality with that piece of research; the fear is coming from a legitimate place, it is also coming from a lack of understanding and knowledge on the topic. As I came to use and understand the digital culture through the process of immersion the fear and anxiety lessened. This decrease was the result of

becoming educated on the topic, and then using it and gaining actual experiences rather than having artificial judgments. Now I am in a place where having had experiences I can make judgments and form opinions that are coming from an educated perspective. The Futurelab report (2004), in the same section calls for a “wider ‘ecology’ of learning”, I agree with the call, and believe smart, restricted incorporation of digital media tools into the classroom can enhance learning for the student and teacher. The literature review provided support for the research that I conducted, I am now able to connect previous research to my own, and connect the above-mentioned correlations.

Research that directly reflects my own would showcase unique recounts of personal journeys through immersion into the digital world. I think this type of research will always be interesting and worthwhile. If one person is feeling a disconnect and they are willing to commit to documented change then their findings will find people with similar feelings. My research will benefit teachers and non-teachers alike who feel sympathy towards the disoriented person in the wake of the digital world. Teachers can look to the literature review to uncover how emotions, values, and attitudes will affect the adaptability and overall capability in learning new digital media tools. My research asks questions that many people have regarding the possible consequences and effects that overexposure and a lacking sense of balance has on future generations who are seemingly engrossed with the digital culture. I ask the questions, I try to answer them through my own experiences, but the truth is reached on a personal, individual level, therefore the research could be used as an example of one teacher’s experience moving into the digital world. The tone of the research is at first: opinionated, skeptical and reveals a lot of

inquiry and curiosity. The ending tone and overriding messages of the research are honest, reflective, thorough, and qualitative-based responses to questions that are personal to me, yet reach the broader public in their simplicity and relevance to today's expanding digital culture.

### Limitations

There are limitations for research conducted in the autoethnographic method. The research results presented in chapter four reflect my own personal journey, implications for myself as a teacher, and reflect my goal of achieving balance. These aspects of the research are based on my personal values, attitude and experiences prior and during the research. Therefore, the research data is selective and limited to this one particular experience. However, my autoethnographic report on self-change would be a great example of: adult learning, digital immersion, educational uses for digital tools, a teacher's honest perspective, moderation and balance with digital media tools. It would be beneficial to the field of education to continue research into the effects of digital media on today's youth. Creating professional development to serve teachers if they choose to become more fluent with digital media tools in the classroom would help bridge the gap between teachers and students. I would be interested in pursuing specific aspects of digital media currently, such as privacy and the Internet, who has access to private images, comments, etc. Now that I have been immersed in the digital culture, I will be able to look more closely at specific aspects of digital media.

### Amendments

Duality is a strong underlining pulse that runs through the capstone. Each digital tool that I worked my way through served as part of the assimilation into the digital culture, and also provided a tool for use. For example, the blog site was a source of learning and adapting to a new way of communicating, and also was the site of my personal reflections regarding the research. Facebook was used eventually as a social networking device, but was also a source of stress and vulnerability for me as I allowed new forms of communication into my life. On a broader scale, the entire capstone from chapter one through five is a reflection of change and perspective shifting. Each chapter, though modified at the time of writing is archived as further proof of the self-transformation that occurred during the research process. However, there are amendments that need to be addressed. 1.) Chapter one signifies the beginning stance on digital media and it's supposed effects. This chapter reflects the fear and skepticism that initiated the project. 2.) In chapter one, it is noted that I hope to speak with students about the effects of social networking in their lives- this never happened. 3.) In chapter two, much of the research revolves around online learning in the classroom, and professional development as a key aspect to increasing teacher willingness to learn and apply technology and digital media skills. From my current perspective I believe that professional training will not secure the success of teachers in the digital culture, but rather an immersing, willing attitude accompanied by reflection is the only route for true understanding. This will be unique and different for each individual; therefore a generalized training session would

not suffice. The focus of online learning in chapter two is reflective of my inadequate knowledge on how digital media and technology should be learned.

### Conclusions

According to Russell (1995) there are six stages of adult learning that were discussed in the literature review in the second case study. I find them so interesting now looking back. *Stage one: Awareness-* This was my chapter one, I explained my perspective on digital media with a full detail of reasoning and how I came to be interested in the topic. *Stage two: Learning the Process-* I began using a blog through Wordpress, I became a member of Facebook, these steps forced me to learn the process of important digital media tools. *Stage three: Understanding and Application of the Process-* I became oriented with how the digital media tools worked, I familiarized myself with the tools available. I lurked around other people's blogs, watched videos, and participated from a passive position. *Stage four: Familiarity and Confidence-* This is the step when my words became stronger on the blog site. I commented on other's opinions, became a member of online discussion boards, posted comments on Facebook; I was consistent in my daily use and participation. I felt that I had something to contribute to the digital culture and that maybe someone was listening. *Stage five: Adaptation to Other Contexts-* Digital culture became something I could balance, I learned that my life on the physical plane was and could be connected to the activities in the digital spaces. I discovered that for me, both could happily exist in my life. Teaching with digital media tools was acceptable and helpful, even enriching. However, teaching a lesson without would not be depriving my students of an educational need. *Stage six: Creative*

*Application to New Contexts-* Using my experience in the digital culture to expand where I am to further places. Now that I have found confidence and capability with digital tools, I will use them to create new experiences for myself that will grow out of further use and exploration. This thought explains how the conclusion of the capstone is the beginning for me with my presence in the digital culture. The conclusions are two-fold: first- I have learned how to balance my life with the inclusion of digital culture, second- I have opened my mind to accept new answers to questions I thought I had answered. The lessons on balance have been influential in my personal life and in my career as a teacher. Being open and willing to change and self-transformation has been a humbling and interesting experience. So now I continue on with the knowledge I have gained. I will teach and live life with an open mind, knowing that in cases of extremism and high skepticism there is usually room to bend, and learn from a different perspective. I carry the voice of moderation and balance as the key for being part of the digital culture.

My last post:

I am 75 pages in and still typing, typing... My capstone is coming to a conclusion- in writing that is. I discovered that learning how to become a member of the digital culture is a process that will never end. I could search, find, interact, comment, get excited, lose interest over and over again and I probably will. I set out to find a balance between participating in the digital culture and keeping my feet firmly planted on the ground. The visions I had of people who “clicked” were not desirable and involved: obesity, slushies, online war tournaments, and massive amounts of time. I discovered these images I had conjured up were false,

or saved for those with an extreme love of the virtual spaces. In sincerity, I found the digital culture to be: pleasant, slightly addicting, humorous, incredibly helpful, fun, a huge time suck, and many more adjectives along the same vein. I have enjoyed having a blog where I can express myself during this journey into the digital landscape. I will continue to be a member of the blogging community, the topic will most likely change to reflect my life but what will remain consistent is the fact that I will be present in the digital culture- something that is profound in itself! Now I will keep type, type, typing... Til next time (Foslien, 2012).

What is one teacher's experience moving into the digital world? What does this experience look like? The ultimate conclusions were so simple. Yes, balance was achieved. Yes, I feel confident in myself as a member of both the digital culture and rooted on the physical plane. Yes, the implications for teachers are strong, yet manageable. Yes, I have experienced a profound paradigm shift in how I perceive our changing world. Yes, I will apply all I have learned to my career as a teacher in order to benefit the needs and wants of my students. No, I am not afraid anymore.

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