

The Great Unknown

by Don Erickson

Brian Emerson's poem "A Different Path" captures how I see my own individual future as a lifelong learner:

The unknown awaits, as it does

For foolish few who dare.

Is it foolishness?

Curiosity perhaps?

Or something I'm not aware.

I leave behind what I comprehend

And even with all communication.

I know for now without doubt,

I drift, en route a new location.

This future is unknown, but certainly not something to fear. I will shortly find myself leaving behind the affordances of the intellectually stimulating development the Master of Arts in Education (MAED) program has provided for the past year and a half; however, contrary to the poem, I will be escorting the wealth of knowledge gained during my tenure at Michigan State University into this unknown future as I transfer this information into my personal and professional lives. As I begin to "drift" toward this "new location" in my life, I find myself asking "What now?" What will I do with this knowledge, and how am I going to ensure I continue to learn long after I leave MSU behind?

As online education continues to flourish, I find my future learning plans and goals are draped in technology. The use of technology in education has shaped, and continues to shape, the way we all learn and even influences what is considered important enough to learn. For example, due to more technology being used in schools educators and students alike have found an ever changing definition of audience. Pre-technology we all looked at the teacher as the audience, but now social networking sites such as Twitter or Facebook have altered our sense of audience. In addition, we communicate differently. When something is funny, we "LOL". When ending a conversation with our "BFF's" we might simply say, "TTYL". Our learning communities are much broader and encompass much more

through the utilization of technology. Teachers and students can now discuss homework, post assignments, and interact with peers as they work on projects real-time while online.

This is not to say technology has no drawbacks. William Powers, author of *Hamlet's Blackberry: A Practical Philosophy for Building a Good Life in the Digital Age*, explains the major disadvantages of technology, "The more we connect, the more our thoughts lean outward. There's a preoccupation with what's going on 'out there' in the bustling otherworld, rather than 'in here' with yourself and those right around you." When we are connected all the time (even when we are sleeping) to literally everything and everyone in the world, we feel an obligation to "reach out and touch the whole world." It can be derived from Powers' work that educators must be mindful of the negative effects technology can have, and that it is acceptable to disconnect intermittently.

With all this in mind, I have been searching for the best methods of integrating technology into the classroom, specifically how to utilize the affordances of online learning in the traditional classroom setting, since I began my teaching career in 2007. I plan to develop the work completed in CEP 820: Teaching K-12 Students Online – a fully functioning online course employing Blackboard's CourseSites as a content management system. What better way is there to engage in and learn more regarding technology than to bring my students (digital natives who have been immersed in technology from birth) along for the ride? I plan to use technology, and all its affordances, to the greatest extent possible in order to meet the diverse needs of all the learners within my classroom. I am resolute in my belief that online learning coupled with the traditional classroom can create the best possible learning environment for both teachers and students.

Additionally, the MAED program has rekindled my passion for acquiring more leadership roles within my school. Ultimately, I would like to exercise my knowledge of exemplary leadership in my future role as principal. During my time in CEP 815: Technology and Leadership, I learned how to best answer the question, "Why should anyone be led by you?" I plan to expose some vulnerability and selectively show my weaknesses, thereby showing my approachability and humanity. I intend to rely on intuition to know just when and how to act in most situations. I will practice empathy for my employees, showing them I care about them and the work they are doing. Leaning on the work I completed in CEP 815 (a 100% sustainable technology integration plan), I will manage technology confidently as an educational leader.

Personally, I hope to continue my quest for authentic lifelong learning through writing. From a very early age I have sought after my goal of becoming a published author. I have always wished to convey my thoughts through a novel. The themes of my potential novels have changed over time, but the original goal is firm and intact. As I find myself with slightly more time on my hands, I plan to resurrect my writing dream, and technology (Microsoft Word, Google Drive, etc.) will assist me in reaching this goal.

As I look to the future with hope and a trace of apprehension, Brian Emerson's words find me again:

Yet still I follow my perilous path
To wherever it might be leading.
And well it may, onto something new,
And strangely more inviting.