ABSTRACT

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ABSTRACT

This autobiographical inquiry was an exploration of personal and professional life experiences that contributed to the convictions, decisions, and transformative ethical questions of a developing instructional technologist. Using rich descriptions and historical fictional recreations of seminal interactions, the author explored moments of emotion, epiphany, and conviction, categorizing these experiences into a series of themes related to his formation as an instructional technologist. Instead of describing every memory, the author identified and described a smaller number of central representative life experiences.

The author’s exploration began with formative childhood experiences related to family, technology, and spirituality. Moving into adulthood, the author explored experiences of identity formation, feelings of otherness, a growing devotion to the nostalgia of the written word, and budding convictions about the ongoing importance of community in both physical and virtual environments. Amid this exploration, the author revealed ongoing struggles and unresolved personal conflicts. He described his efforts to reconcile empathy for Neo-Luddite literature and a passion for and immersion in the digital world, virtual learning, and educational technology. He analyzed his struggle between his roles as a
commissioned minister and theology teacher with his growing role as an instructional technologist.

The author concluded his autobiographical journey by acknowledging the unresolved nature of these struggles, but by also gradually coming to accept, even embrace these struggles as part of an enduring exploration of life in a technological society. He proposed that his dissertation serve as a means of encouraging further exploration of the role of the individual in ethical dialogue, even amid the collective codes, standards, and expectations in the field of educational technology.
NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

ETHICAL EPIPHANIES OF AN INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGIST: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY,
RESEARCH AND ASSESSMENT

BY

BERNARD DEAN BULL

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I am most appreciative for the blessing of my wife, Joyanna. Knowing that your love was not dependent upon my success in this endeavor allowed me to pursue
it with freedom, transparency, and a willingness to go down paths less traveled.

You have never doubted my ability to achieve this goal. Thank you for your unwavering support and countless sacrifices.
DEDICATION

To my Father
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Personal Journey to a Topic

Autobiographies are for the famous, the brilliant, and those with a length and wealth of life experience that far surpasses my own. At least that is what I thought in the past. I have long been a bibliophile, but more recently one who is intrigued by autobiographies. I experienced spiritual renewal through Augustine’s *Confessions* (trans. 1991), Thomas Merton’s *Seven Storey Mountain* (1948), and Corrie Ten Boom’s *Hiding Place* (1984). As I read *Malcolm X* (1992), Dorothy Day’s *The Long Loneliness* (1981), *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (1998) and Gandhi’s *My Experiments with Truth* (1957), I was introduced to new levels of social awareness and justice. More than any others, these are the individuals who served as examples and inspiration for my writing. I cannot imagine writing something that surfaces truth, reveals insights, or evokes action like these texts. Nonetheless, I find myself desiring and attempting to write a dissertation that is the autobiographical inquiry of an instructional technologist, commissioned minister, and teacher, and his ethical epiphanies regarding educational technology. I do so after an enlightening and personally challenging journey that seems to unfold a bit more each day, and yet other days this journey seems confusing and inaccessible.
This is not my first attempt at writing a dissertation. I wrote entire literature reviews for several topics prior to this one. Among the many topics were an historical analysis of the Payne Fund Studies, a cross-case analysis of ethical perspectives among technology leaders, a discourse analysis of ethical writings in the field of educational technology, and a history of ethical research in educational technology. I researched and, in some cases, nearly completed studies on these topics over the past several years. They have most certainly shaped this dissertation. But in each instance, I found myself dissatisfied with these topics. It was not that I lacked interest in the subjects. I had read dozens of books on each of the topics and had spent countless hours writing and reflecting upon them. However, I slowly came to realize that I was struggling with writing a dissertation about these topics on what might be described as ethical grounds. The ethical dilemma was the fact that I had a hidden agenda amid each of these studies. All of these initial research pursuits were, at the center, an effort to validate or identify parallels to my personal ethical and faith journey. To a larger extent, each of these studies were and continue to be a part of my journey to explore the ethical dimensions of the field of educational technology and to grapple with what it means to live in a technological society.

A central goal amid my doctoral studies has been to expand my personal understanding of ethical issues as they relate to technology, education, and society. I was interested in the topics stated earlier, but I knew well that I already had begun to develop a variety of deep and lasting convictions about ethical matters in the field of
educational technology. My great passion has consistently been to further explore and record this personal journey of ethical formation as an instructional technologist, understanding that everything I write then becomes a part of this journey and formation, and that the very process of writing the dissertation is a form of research - surfacing, shaping, and informing my personal perceptions and convictions. To write any other study prior to this is to cloak my truest intent. It is for this reason that I venture into the realm of autobiographical inquiry as my first published work in the field of educational technology.

My ethical convictions are ever-changing as new experiences unfold and new ideas are assimilated, but these ethical epiphanies deeply influence my thoughts and actions. I have little to offer in terms of dogmatic or highly systematic explanations of many of the ethical issues that I explore in the following chapters. Instead, most of my discoveries thus far have been growing levels of perspective, conviction, and the development of new and challenging questions. If nothing else, these perspectives and questions set the agenda for many of my thoughts as an instructional technologist and educator. I have come to believe that the previously mentioned research topics are important and will likely, in due time, receive further research and attention. However, I find myself compelled to first explore the role of ethics in educational technology on a raw, candid, and deeply personal level.
Introduction to Autobiographical Inquiry

It is for this reason that I have turned to a less frequented research methodology in the field of education, autobiographical inquiry. While infrequent, it is not absent, especially not from the broader field of education. It was less than a year ago when I discovered a text by William Pinar (1994) entitled *Autobiography, Politics, and Sexuality: Essays in Curriculum Theory 1972-1992*. In this text, Pinar illustrates and affirms the role of autobiography as a means of inquiry in the field of education. Pinar, building from a definition of curriculum as a highly subjective and personal road of discovery, describes autobiographical inquiry as a path to liberation and personal discovery. Inspired by Pinar and other proponents of autobiographical inquiry, Peter Hilton recently wrote and published a dissertation entitled *Fictionalized Autobiography as Curriculum: Relationships in the Making of a Teacher Educator* (2004). In this dissertation, Hilton explores and muses upon 10 life experiences that contributed to his journey and formation as a teacher educator. This is a 300-page autobiographical analysis that incorporates reflections on life experiences, but also entails related reflections on a wealth of research and literary works. The fictional element of Hilton’s dissertation was informed by Banks and Banks (1998) and others who describe using narratives that are representative of lived experiences but may not recount the exact details. In a different but related fashion, Ju-Ling Shih of Columbia Teachers College published an autobiographical dissertation in the field of educational technology entitled *A Study of Web-Based*
Higher Education Courses: An Intellectual Autobiography (2002). Shih creates an autobiographical work that is distinct from Hilton in that it limits the autobiographical analysis to the author’s role as a web-based instructor over a period of two years. Unlike Hilton, Shih’s autobiography excludes explorations of childhood and most of life outside the role of instructor. Nonetheless, both utilize the self as a primary research tool, and both dissertations result in, to a greater or lesser degree, a study that points beyond the individual to topics that are important for the field of study. For Hilton, this field is curriculum and teacher development. For Shih this topic is distance education.

Carolyn Ellis (2004) also contributed to the discussion about autobiographical inquiry in The Ethnographic I: A Methodological Novel About Autoethnography, and Ethnographically Speaking: Autoethnography, Literature, and Aesthetics (Bochner & Ellis, 2002). Ellis (2004) identifies this methodology as one where “social scientists view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative stories specifically focused on their academic as well as their personal lives” (p. 45). Furthermore, autoethnography “refers to writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness” (Ellis, 2004, p. 37).

Especially influenced by Hilton, Brown, and Ellis, I have set forth in the following pages an autobiographical inquiry into the ethical formation of an instructional technologist. While it is highly personal, often venturing into personal
experiences not directly connected to my role as an instructional technologist, these reflections are intended to explore several distinct ethical experiences and thought formations in my development as an instructional technologist, more generally as an educator, and often as a commissioned minister in the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. Experiences are grouped and divided into separate chapters, although most chapters include more than one experience and share a common and evident theme. Influenced by Hilton, the experiences are surrounded by a variety of personal reflections on the topic that reference important publications, literary references, or cultural artifacts that parallel the personal experience. When possible, I seek to show lived experiences, placed alongside evolving patterns of thought and summaries of seminal texts and artifacts in my formation.

In addition to the research on autobiography, it is also important to note the way in which the experiences were selected for inclusion. While there is an acknowledged and valued degree of creativity and subjectivity to the process, there is a commonality among the topics that I have included. All of these experiences incorporated a deeply memorable and emotional element to them. Martha Nussbaum (2001) in *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, argues that emotions are central in shaping personal understandings of ethics, that ethics and emotions are inseparable. She points out that emotions have a central role in forming personal values, priorities, and ethical positions. As illustrated by Nussbaum, these emotional elements of ethics are often closely connected to the
narratives and stories that one recalls. Emotions are not simply connected with ethics, but play a "discretionary role" in the lives of individuals as they consciously and unconsciously respond to life experiences. Having these assertions in mind, I have identified a variety of emotional life experiences related to ethics and educational technology. At times, these emotions may appear subdued or subtle, but they were nonetheless central to the selection process and experiences that I believe to be seminal in shaping my thoughts and actions about ethics and educational technology. Some experiences share a common characteristic of personal conflict of a concept, decision, or life experience. Others represent a strong element of nostalgia. Some experiences were added in order to provide historical context or to frame how earlier experiences influenced, related to, or contrasted with later experiences. Each chapter represents a personal struggle or formation of a position, and the yearning to understand or come to terms with life in a technological society.

Given the countless number of potential life experiences, I began the process by crafting lists of these events from my life. These lists were reviewed, edited, and refined over more than 12 months. As I reviewed the lists, several broad categories began to emerge. A central theme, and one that is rich with vivid emotional memories, revolves around spirituality and identity. As such, this is the second chapter of the dissertation. The second theme to emerge, described in Chapter 3, revolves around interactions with and through video game, computer, and Internet technologies. This theme includes varying struggles to understand, on a personal
level, the nature of human-technology interaction along with human-human interaction in technology-mediated venues. It is important for the reader to understand and remember that these first chapters are not always ethical in focus. They provide personal history and context to Chapters 4 and 5, where I present what I have come to understand and accept as the ethical paradoxes of my life as an instructional technologist.

The third and fourth themes, represented in Chapters 4 and 5, describe the contrasting nature of my convictions and experiences. For these two chapters, I drew from a term that I first heard used by the president of Kenyon College at the 2006 Educause Conference. Grappling for a personal position as one educated amid the classics, but also finding promise in the emerging world of technology, Nugent (2006) called herself a "Luddvocate," one who sees potential and peril amid life in our modern technological society. This phrase resonated with me, very closely representing the paradox of my own experiences and convictions about technology. As notes and lists of personal experiences emerged, this term, used to describe an internal struggle and positional paradox, matched well with the themes in my own life experiences. As a result, Chapter 4 is devoted to the Luddite portion of my experiences and convictions as a Luddvocate, Chapter 5 explores the advocate portion of my experiences as a Luddvocate.

These broad themes, while not representing all life experiences related to educational technology, sustain most of the experiences that have emerged over an
18-month period of lists and efforts to identify significant events. It is important to note that all of the experiences are not described in the following pages. Rather, representative experiences are often chosen based upon how vivid a memory was, the degree to which I could verify or revisit experiences, and the extent to which the memory is represented by a tangible physical experience.

Educational Technology Ethics

Ethical dialogue is a fundamental aspect of many professions. Future lawyers, doctors, ministers, teachers, psychologists, and social workers all experience some aspect of instruction regarding ethics in preparation for their respective vocations. In professions like the ones listed above, there is oftentimes a discussion of applied ethics, reflecting upon ethical practice and treatment of others. In other instances, ethical dialogue may focus more on the philosophical nature of ethics, grappling with an empirical foundation for ethical behavior, considering the value-laden nature of certain theories and beliefs (Spinoza, 1677/2000). Whatever the case, ethical dialogue is nothing new. Ultimately, its purpose relates to directing the conduct of an individual and her profession. While there are clearly different and often opposing ethical standards, there is little question that some form of ethical consideration is integral to all established professions.

The field of educational technology is no different. From the beginning formation of the Association of Educational Communications and Technology
(AECT), formerly the Department of Audiovisual Instruction, a division of the National Education Association (Saettler, 1990), ethics was identified as an important part of the field. Early on, a code of ethics was established and an active ethics committee remains a part of the AECT. The perceived value of ethics in the field of educational technology is further evidenced by the 2004 AECT definition of the field: “Educational technology is the study and ethical practice of facilitating learning and improving performance by creating, using and managing appropriate technological processes and resources” (Definition and Terminology Committee of the Association of Educational Communications and Technology, 2007, n.p.). With this new definition we see the addition of two ethical components. The first is the obvious phrase “ethical practice.” However, the word “appropriate” also brings with it the possibility of ethical interpretation.

The AECT code of ethics illustrates the commitment to ethical concerns in the field of educational technology. This code is divided into three categories: commitment to individuals, society, and the profession. The “commitment to individuals” portion represents values of open access to knowledge and learning, diversity, privacy, health and safety, along with resistance to stereotypes and discrimination (Welliver, 2001). The “commitment to society” portion of the code continues by representing values of honesty, integrity, equality, and the promotion of the common good. These and additional values are continued in the last section of
the code, "commitment to the code." This last portion clearly promotes legal and professional conduct. This code is brief but it uncovers a variety of ethical issues.

One of the more evident efforts to promote ethical dialogue in the field of educational technology is the ethical columns published in the AECT publication *TechTrends*. In particular, there was a series of ethical columns and essays published in *TechTrends* from 1980-2004. In addition to articles that addressed ethical topics, numerous case studies were submitted and published in this journal, with each case study facilitating consideration and exploration of one or more aspects of the AECT code of ethics. In a way, these case studies represent a type of fictional autobiographical inquiry about ethical issues in the field of educational technology.

**Statement of the Problem**

In "The Rationale and Decision-Making Process" (2005), Alan Januszewski announced the work of a group of AECT members, a newly revised AECT definition for "educational technology." Among the changes was the addition of the phrase "ethical practice," potentially giving the topic of professional ethics added attention in the field of educational technology. In view of the new definition, this study is an attempt to promote added attention to and reflection upon the role of ethics in educational technology. The new definition, combined with the strong statement of values in the code of ethics, indicates a desire among some leaders in
educational technology to facilitate the formation of ethical professionals in the field of educational technology. But how does this take place? A code does not necessitate conformity or even attention to ethical concerns. Perhaps a graduate program can choose to place more emphasis upon ethical issues in the course of a program. Conferences and publications can also continue to generate ethical consideration through the writings and presentations that are accepted. But the ethical journey remains an individual path, one that may be shaped by these intentional efforts, but will, in the final analysis, take place in unique and highly personal ways.

There is a history of dialogue about ethical matters in the field of educational technology in the form of conference presentations, publications, the AECT code of ethics, and informal discussions in graduate schools. However, a review of dissertations and other publications in the field of educational technology reveals minimal extended research about ethics. The use of autobiographical exploration of ethical issues in dissertations and published writings in educational technology is virtually absent. Simply because it does not show up in such published works does not mean that it is absent, however. Autobiographical inquiry is a part of every professional in educational technology. There is always a weighing of values, consideration of what to pursue, promote, avoid, or suppress. Whether or not one chooses to record such experiences and reflections is a different matter. This is a fundamental assumption to my research and is one reason that I have chosen to write
an autobiographical dissertation: to expose and make public what is already occurring privately among individuals in the field.

However, the primary problem that I explored in this study was a personal one. As I began my career as an educator with graduate study in curriculum and instruction in the mid-1990s, I found myself drawn to the role of ethical reflection about technology in education, but even more broadly ethical reflection about the role of technology in society. There is no question that we live in a highly technological society and the development and use of current and emerging technologies (physical and conceptual) bring with them questions of ethics, considerations of what is good, right, and beneficial. There is no single form of ethical training that prepares one to live in a technological society free from struggles with the proper use and role of technology. A fundamental presupposition in writing this dissertation was that, while there are common ideals and principles that may shape collective ethical convictions, the ethical journey is a highly individual and personal journey. It unfolds amid one’s many roles and experiences in life. Some of these experiences take place in one’s formal academic study, but many of these experiences stem from other areas of life also. To ignore their role in personal formation is to miss part of the authentic journey of a professional in the field of educational technology. To ignore this personal dimension also suppresses the role of the individual in candid and authentic collective discussions about ethics.
The journey that was explored in the following pages is not posed as a model, at least not in terms of specifics. It is acknowledged as a model in one way, to promote the disclosure of personal ethical journeys as a way of discussing ethics in educational technology. The topics selected for consideration in the upcoming chapters are most certainly not the topics that would have been selected by another instructional technologist. They represent a combination of experiences that are, in part, unique.

Defining Self, Defining a Field

Having stated the problem to be explored, along with an introduction to the purpose for the study, there is an additional need to illustrate the purpose of an autobiographical dissertation and how I see it contributing to the larger field of educational technology. In order to do so, following is what may temporarily seem like a deviation from the topics of ethical reflection and autobiographical inquiry. What follows is a brief reflection upon the history and role of the definition of educational technology. I am doing so in order to make a comparison to the role of autobiographical inquiry for ethical reflection. Just as the diverse backgrounds of individuals have shaped the notion of a definition of the field, so has this diversity contributed to ideas about ethics in the field. Furthermore, these notions of ethics extend beyond what is written in a code of ethics. Just as the definition of the field
must be placed in a context, there is also a need to add context to the formal code of ethics.

A review of historical research in educational technology reveals a consensus that the origin of the term "educational technology" is unknown (Januszewski, 1999; Saettler, 1990; Seels & Richey, 1994). Furthermore, each attempt to outline the history or evolution of the field brings about differing perspectives. In the same way, as the field has evolved over the past century, there have been differing definitions and proposed directions for research.

Some suggest that this lack of consistency reveals a weakness in the field of educational technology (Gentry, 1995). However, a lack of consistency can just as easily be called a wealth of diversity. Perhaps it is this diversity and eclectic nature of educational technology that is one of the greatest strengths of the field. Furthermore, amidst the uncertainties and varying histories and definitions, certain patterns and consistencies are evident. These consistencies offer a common ground for dialogue and a means to set general parameters for the field of educational technology. Finally, a general review of the changing perspectives, along with an understanding of the current definition of educational technology, offers a map of what has been pursued and a foundation upon which to pursue new research.

Definitions serve to provide a constant meaning for a word or phrase (Ely, 1983; Januszewski, 1999). Because of the brief nature of most definitions (in comparison to a history), definitions are exclusive by nature; they exclude ideas,
theories, methodologies, and concepts. This is not intended to serve as a criticism; without this quality, definitions would lack the precision that most expect to find in a definition. In the case of the definition of educational technology, the definition serves to identify those aspects which an individual or group of individuals consider to be essential elements of a field. This coincides with Gentry's (1995) comments regarding the role of a definition: that a definition can help to clarify purposes and limits for a field. Without limits, how can one distinguish oneself from another field? In the face of this question, many are likely to see the value behind a formal definition for educational technology.

An additional series of questions also grow out of Gentry's use of the word "limit." How clear or ambiguous should these limits be? Is it appropriate to have a substantial amount in common with another field such as communications, educational psychology, or technology education? How important is it for one to know if one's research has suddenly stepped out of the field of educational technology and into the field of communications?

Ely (1983) notes that definitions exist to explain the functions, purposes, and roles of a field, rather than to create the field. Granted this idea that definitions do not serve to create a field, how is it then that a field evolves or changes over time? While there are certainly a variety of theories on this subject, it is clear that the contributions of members within the field play an essential role in this evolutionary process. It should also be stated that the very use of the word "evolution" is a
controversial one. Saettler (1990) prefers to say that the field of educational technology is revolutionary in nature, not evolutionary.

Whether one believes that the field of educational technology is molded by gradual or sudden changes, the idea of change is a constant. The brief history of the field from the 1920s to the present reveals this notion. Unless one desires to halt all change and uses the definition of the field as a rigid litmus test of inclusion into an exclusive field, the definition itself will not suffice in describing the field. It is here that using history offers benefits for establishing, maintaining, and creating identity that are not offered by a formal definition.

Definitions of educational technology need not be the only source of defining the field. Rather, the historical influences of the field (i.e., psychology, audiovisual education, and engineering technology) offer a foundation that transcends any specific formal definition. They reveal the influences that were evident enough to be recorded by several historians. In *Evolution of American Educational Technology*, Saettler (1990) noted, "It is clear that educational technology is essentially the product of a great historical stream consisting of trial and error, long practice and imitation, and sporadic manifestations of unusual individual creativity and persuasion" (p. 4). As long as the history of educational technology is a valued aspect of the education of future instructional technology practitioners, such an historical map provides a source of identity for the field. Just as families often retain or promote their unique identities through histories and genealogies, so the
field of educational technology can utilize history as a source of identity. This style of identity does not threaten the creative research of current and future practitioners, but does provide a root or foundation to the field. As new influences arise, they can simply be added to the rich and diverse history of educational technology research.

The 1994 definition of educational technology is packaged in a book that is nearly 200 pages long (Seels & Richey, 1994). This alone is evidence to support the need for something beyond a formal definition. The rest of the book provides context to the definition, much of which is historical. Just as definitions are required to foster a common reference, context is important to provide a deep understanding of the definition and the field of educational technology. It is this rich description offered by historical accounts that is one means of protecting the field of educational technology from an exclusive and reductionist mindset. Using history has the potential to provide a vivid and constantly changing picture of the field of educational technology.

Using histories of the field in order to establish and maintain identity in educational technology offers several benefits not afforded by simply using a brief formal definition. This does not mean that a formal definition is not of value. Rather, such formal definitions become another aspect of the multiple histories that make up the field of educational technology. Histories leave room for contradictory definitions, opposing historic and contemporary influences, and yet offer the stability of a substantive identity or common story. The common threads throughout
the field offer common ground for discussion and research, and yet leave room for diversity and creativity.

A definition does little to assist the new educational technology student in learning about the nuances of the field. As a matter of fact, a definition may give a false view of the field. A personal experience clarifies this point. As a new student in educational technology, I took what is considered the introductory course to educational technology at Northern Illinois University. I initially developed the idea that educational technology was about using the Internet for education, using technical gadgets for teaching, and using a somewhat rigid behaviorist model for planning instruction. Having studied the 1994 AECT definition on the first day of class I also had a sense that educational technology entailed administration and planning, but that everything revolved around instructional design and using mental or physical tools. I had no idea of the various historical influences on the field or the rich diversity that made up educational technology.

It was my introduction to Saettler’s well-known texts that offered me a more in-depth sense of the field. Exposure to his histories described a field that included much more than behaviorist thought, planning lessons, or using gadgets. It was within an historical context that I sensed my role as molding and defining the field, rather than simply conforming to a brief established definition. Learning that the definition has changed so frequently over the past 30 years revealed that I was becoming a part of a rapidly changing field. At the same time, this history offered
significant boundaries. Saettler's histories, for example, clearly distinguished educational technology research from other fields such as biology and physics. Nonetheless, it also revealed the field of educational technology as one interested in the study of education and technology, but through the lenses of diverse fields of thought, using varied methodologies, and rooted in sometimes opposing theories.

Having stated this, my dissertation developed as a result of my personal experiences with and convictions about ethical dialogue in the field of educational technology. These experiences were informed by religious training, personal life experiences, personal and professional reading, dialogue with others in and out of the field, and a variety of additional and often surprising sources.

This reflection on the role of the definition in the field of educational technology closely parallels the way in which I have chosen to explore ethics in the field of educational technology. As evident in the history of the field, diversity is central, and surfacing this diversity is part of how identity is shaped in the field of educational technology. How much more is that same notion true when it comes to ethical reflection among those in the field of educational technology? There is, as previously stated, a common code of ethics posed by the AECT, but this code could never represent the diverse and unique experiences that shape the ethics and perspectives of professionals in the field, just as a brief definition fails to give history and context to one's understanding of a field like educational technology. With this in mind, it is my desire to contribute to the ongoing ethical formation and
context of the field by engaging in autobiographical inquiry, the open and rigorous exploration and disclosure of a single individual (or case, if you will) and his struggle to grapple with the nature of life in a technological society and a career as an instructional technologist.

Dimensions of Autobiographical Inquiry

While I have already set forth my foundational ideals and influences in thinking about autobiographical inquiry, I understand that it is a new mode of research for the field of educational technology. And for that reason, this section is devoted to further discussion about this growing method of research. In addition to describing several ways of thinking about autobiographical inquiry, this section will also address autobiographical inquiry as a methodology.

“Autobiographical research,” as I am using the term, fits into the broader category of narrative inquiry. “Narrative inquiry,” as the name indicates, involves the pursuit of understanding experiences within the context of life and the stories that are told about life. Clandinin and Connelly (2000), in *Narrative Inquiry*, note that “experience is what we study, and we study it narratively because narrative thinking is a key form of experience and a key way of writing and thinking about it” (2000, p. 18). So, narrative inquiry involves both the study of life stories and the writing about these experiences in narrative form. This may take the form of a case study, a life history, or ethnography. But, autobiographical inquiry also fits within
this broad definition. Carolyn Ellis (2004) prefaces her definition to
autoethnography by stating that “stories are the way humans make sense of their
world” (p. 32). She continues by defining autoethnography as “writing about the
personal and its relationship to culture” (Ellis 2004, p. 38). So, for Ellis, this form
of inquiry juxtaposes the self and the cultural context of self through narrative
writing.

While not prevalent in dissertation research in educational technology,
autobiographical inquiry does play a role in the broader field of educational
research, especially in the area of teacher education (Adams, 2001; Anderson, 2002;
Barclay-Smith, 2002; Chacon, 2002; Harris, 2005; Hilton, 2004; Patten, 2004;
Roberts, 2006; Rondinone, 2002; Schaller, 1995; Shin, 2003; Sundeen, 2006). Over the past 10 years, such dissertations have been written and successfully
defended at Columbia Teachers College, Florida State University, University of
British Columbia, New York University, University of Illinois at Chicago, Michigan
State University, and the University of New Mexico. A majority of these
dissertations constitute the personal and formative journey of educators with
dissertation titles using phrases like: The Making of a Bilingual Science Educator
(Chacon, 2002), Relationships in the Making of a Teacher Educator (Hilton, 2004),
or A Journey of Moments: On Being and Becoming a Teacher (Harris, 2005). Each
of these dissertations stems from a fundamental understanding of the role of
individual experiences and reflection in the formation of teachers.
In *Teacher Lore: Learning from Our own Experience*, William Ayers and William Schubert gather a collection of autobiographical reflections by teachers (1992). In these reflections, the reader comes to see that the formation of a teacher is one that extends far beyond formal study and preparation. It is a lifelong journey that is facilitated and enhanced by personal reflection. As teachers engage in, experience, and reflect upon teaching, they further develop as educators. This is at the heart of autobiographical inquiry, and it was my approach to autobiographical inquiry as I reflected upon ethical issues related to technology and education.

Being a means of personal formation, autobiographical inquiry is also an avenue for healing. Louise DeSalvo (2000) in *Writing as a Way of Healing: How Telling Our Stories Transforms Our Lives*, notes that many great writers describe writing as a way to “heal from thorny experiences of their lives, especially from dislocation, violence, racism, homophobia, anti-Semitism, rape, political persecution, incest, loss, illness” (p. 4). It is a means of bringing order to one’s thoughts and experiences, and a means by which one seeks to create something valuable or even beautiful out of a painful or difficult life experience. It is, for that reason, an activity of supreme hope and good will, and reflects a desire not only to find healing but to facilitate the healing of others also.

Closely related to the notion of healing, autobiographical inquiry oftentimes entails a pursuit of liberation. The autobiographical researcher is allowed to candidly include his personal experiences and dispositions, perspectives and
experiences that may well be absent, or at least unacknowledged, in the literature of
a given field. Kathryn Church (1995) illustrates this in *Forbidden Narratives: Critical Autobiography as Social Science*. Church was actively involved in what she describes as the pursuit of objective research on former psychiatric patients. Amid the time of her research and work, she found herself a mental health patient. What she once wrote about from the outside, now became a lived narrative. Using autobiographical inquiry, Church was able to incorporate her personal experiences into her research. She was able to give voice to these lived insights.

Autobiographical inquiry is not, however, a simple recollection and compilation of past events. In reflecting upon and writing about experiences, one is creating a representation of self. “The self that is writing the story is changed by the process of writing it” (Bochner & Ellis, 2002, p. 91). The very act of writing for an invisible audience and organizing one’s experiences in writing is a creative process; it is not only a literary creation but also an ongoing creation of personal identity, a construct of one’s public identity.

Modes of Ethical Exploration

In 2000, Robert Payton wrote a brief essay entitled “Ethics and Morals.” In this essay, Payton provides a distinction between morals and ethics. Ethics is “the science of morals,” morals is “the practice of ethics.” He goes on to explain that ethical formation is not a clear and simple process. Rather, it is an ongoing journey
of coming to understand not only what should be done, but exploring why it is right
to behave in one manner rather than another. It is with this distinction in mind that I
have chosen the word “ethics” throughout the dissertation. My analysis is one that
is inseparable from my moral perspectives, but emphasis in this study is placed upon
a growing awareness of the multifaceted dimensions of ethical inquiry. Instead of
avoiding the seemingly gray or uncertain moral dilemmas, I have chosen to embrace
and emphasize these as central to ethical formation.

The forthcoming chapters are first and foremost an autobiographical inquiry,
a journey of self-discovery related to life in a technological society as an educator
and instructional technologist. However, as I have already indicated, I have chosen
to focus my inquiry upon ethical epiphanies and events leading to perspectives that
have direct relevance upon personal ethics. As such, this does warrant a cursory
discussion about the ways in which ethics have been written about in the field of
educational technology. I have therefore identified three ways in which ethical
exploration takes place in writing. The order in which they are presented is
intentional, starting with traditional publications, second discussing the code of
ethics, and finally referencing the use of scenarios. This is done in order to place my
dissertation within the existing body of writing about ethics in educational
technology. These are not the formal categories that philosophers of ethics may
choose but are instead divisions based upon the ways in which several individuals
have chosen to make known, promote, or write about professional ethics in educational technology.

Ethical dialogue is active and present throughout the field of educational technology. A review of the publications in AECT over the past five years alone reveals dozens of articles centered on the exploration of ethics and educational technology. Names like Januszewski, Eastmond, Nichols, and Yeaman are common among these writings. Some of these articles are philosophical explorations while others are historical writing, and yet others are more editorial in nature. The issues are vast, although a majority of them revolve around the AECT code of ethics.

In the field of educational technology, a central piece of writing about ethics has been the AECT code of ethics. Such a code of ethics is used as a means of highlighting, in a succinct manner, ethical issues in the field of educational technology. However, there has been much discussion about this code and it is far from a universal ethical position in the field. In an issue of *TechTrends* that focused upon the discussion of ethical issues, Amy Bradshaw, Christopher Keller, and Ching-Huei Chen (2003) cited Kultgen to note that codes of ethics are "developed to protect members of professional services and to secure accreditation of professional groups. They continue by describing the challenges and limitations of a code of ethics when looking at the field from a global perspective. Issues of cultural differences, along with thoughts about universal compared to relative understandings of ethics, were shown in this article. In 2004, Andrew Yeaman
further discussed the code of ethics by noting that the AECT Professional Ethics Committee of that time viewed this code of ethics as dynamic, and that the committee had, “for the first time in over three decades,” made significant revisions to the code of ethics (p. 11). This code of ethics, therefore, becomes a means to identify and prioritize ethical issues in the field of educational technology. It is a dynamic document, evolving as the field evolves and responding to the challenges and opportunities of a changing world.

Many fields of study have formal and informal codes of ethics. The presence of ethical standards that regulate practice, along with processes for self-monitoring, is characteristic of a profession (Darling-Hammond, 1999; Geison, 1983; Goode, 1957). Such ethical standards are evident among clergy, lawyers, medical doctors, and counselors. Early in the formation of the field of study now referred to as educational technology, it was determined that ethical standards are necessary if the field is be understood as a profession (Welliver, 2001). According to Welliver, the present code of ethics for the AECT closely parallels those of the National Education Association. Given that the AECT was once the Department of Audiovisual Instruction, a division of the NEA, this should come as no surprise. However, the distinct nature of the field of educational technology calls for an ethical dialogue that applies to the unique challenges, opportunities, decisions, and practices among educational technologists. At the same time, the field of educational technology has an extremely rich and diverse history. According to Saettler (1990),
fields as diverse as engineering, psychology, communications, library science, and teacher education have all contributed to the current understandings of what is called “educational technology.” The diverse backgrounds of individuals in educational technology further reveal educational and professional backgrounds in various liberal arts, teacher education, corporate training, engineering, medical studies, communications, and law. This diversity is characteristic of the field of educational technology. At the same time, there are common associations among such diverse individuals. The Association of Educational Communications and Technology is, for example, a central organization or community in the field, a place where such diversity is embraced but also where some degree of common ground is established. The very presence of an AECT code of ethics suggests the desire among some for a common ground on ethical matters.

However, the code of ethics has not been the only means of writing about ethics in the field of educational technology. In addition to a wealth of research articles dealing with ethical issues, the AECT has made use of case studies or scenarios. A collection of these scenarios was compiled and prefaced by Welliver in 2001. I have already mentioned that TechTrends, a longstanding publication of the AECT, published a series of case studies, each describing an ethical challenge that had or could possibly occur amid one’s professional life. These scenarios each explored one or more aspects of the code of ethics. However, unlike the concise outline of a code of ethics, these cases personalized the ethical issues, placing them
in the context of situations with which the reader may relate. These cases may have
been fictional to some degree but were clearly drawn from actual ethical scenarios.
While it may be argued that some of these scenarios sought to lead the reader toward
one ethical position over another, they were written in such a way as to facilitate
reflection and discussion about the issue.

These scenarios are, in part, what led me to consider an autobiographical
dissertation. Whether fictional or not, biographical or autobiographical, these
scenarios are narrative reflections on ethical issues. They contribute to the body of
knowledge in the field by facilitating reflection and surfacing real and important
ethical situations. As such, I view the following chapters as building upon this
model of ethical inquiry in the field of educational technology. However, in doing
this, I am making an altogether unique contribution to the field of educational
technology. I am offering my own formation and ethical experiences as a case for
open and public scrutiny, as a means for continued personal ethical formation, and
as a way of contributing to public discussion about ethics. This is not to suggest that
I have selected the ethical epiphanies in the following chapters in an attempt to
instruct others in the field. My primary intent is not didactic. Rather, I offer them as
a series of first-person case studies that may sometimes coincide with the
experiences of others, and at other times deviate significantly from the thoughts and
experiences of other instructional technologists. I offer them as one possible means
of considering the role of ethical exploration among instructional technologists.
Spiritual Roots

I was 12 years old, a time in life that is given a measure of significance in some religious traditions (Dosick, 1995), and it was just my mother, father, and me living together. I have other siblings, but by this time, they were married and living elsewhere. We had just moved to Laredo, Texas, bought a condominium, and were sleeping in our new home for the first time that night. Sometime well into the night my mother woke me up.

"Your father is sick, honey. Get dressed. We need to go to the hospital."

This wasn't a new experience. My father was often sick and made frequent visits to the hospital. He was in his mid-40s at this point and had been struggling with heart problems for a decade, with a heart attack, a stroke, and open heart surgery in his past. The familiarity of the experience didn't lessen the fear, though. I felt my mother's words in my stomach, feeling lightheaded by the news. There was no moment of waking up, but instead a sudden jump from the bed, pulling my pants on, and throwing on the shirt from the day before, still sitting on the floor. The details are not certain as I attempt to recall the experience, but I do recall two
pictures of my father from that night. The first was seconds after I was dressed, and the second was still to come. The first picture was of my father, on his knees at the foot of his bed. His eyes were clenched shut, his hands folded. To this day, I like to think that he was praying, but I cannot be certain. He may just as well been brought to that position by the evident pain in his chest.

It was a blurry and tense series of events to follow as my mother maneuvered the dark, empty, and unfamiliar streets of Laredo in search of the hospital. When we arrived at the hospital parking lot, I directed my mother toward a door. There was construction going on, so it was difficult to identify where to go. My mother tried to help my father out of the van, but he wasn’t able to walk at this point. I ran ahead to the doors, only to discover that they were locked. After what felt like minutes of pounding, a nurse came to the door, motioning to another door to the left. At that point, I looked behind me, watching my mother attempt to drag my father across the parking lot. It was not long before several people ran out of the hospital to help. This is where the second picture of my father occurred. I saw my father, lying on the pavement, with only the whites of his eyes visible. He was surrounded by a group of people in white, and my mother was weeping, with loud snorts accompanying every breath. Before long, they had taken my father away, the last time before the funeral that I would see him, although every attempt to envision him at the funeral is blank. Even to this day, I remember that I did indeed look at my father at the funeral, but no image comes to mind. I am well aware of the potential
psychological explanation for this, but I have convinced myself that it is because my father was not actually at the funeral; that was only his body.

After the news of his death, my mother filling out the necessary paperwork, the calling of a number of family members from the hospital, and a nurse giving me some sort of white pill that was “supposed to make me feel better,” we left the hospital and spent the rest of the night with the only other people that we knew in the city. As my mother sat in the kitchen talking with her friends, I sat in a back bedroom, close enough to hear their voices but not close enough or interested enough to hear what they were discussing. Somewhere in the minutes or hours of sitting in that bed, I started talking to myself. Among the many words, something came to me, something that I have chosen to remember and attend to hundreds of times since that moment.

“Your father is dead, but your Father is right here.” That is what I heard myself thinking. Some of my Christian friends, upon hearing the story, tend to interpret this as a moment where God actually spoke to me, but I can’t presume as much. It was a thought in my head, and there is reason for it. My family was not especially religious, at least not measured by church attendance. We attended churches occasionally, usually on special holidays, and my father owned an organ and enjoyed playing gospel hymns on Sunday mornings. Then he would make us “shit on the shingle” for breakfast, the only thing that I ever recall my father
speaking positively about from his service in the Korean War. But that, in addition to a rote mealtime prayer, was the extent of our Sunday morning ritual.

Despite the lack of religious ritual or conversation in my childhood, I had attended a Christian school for one semester in early elementary school and again for the semester just before moving to Laredo, Texas. That last semester was memorable. The pastor visited the classroom as part of the weekly ritual, and he would take us through confirmation lessons, a form of religious instruction in Lutheran churches that usually culminates in eighth grade, when we are then welcome to attend communion on Sunday mornings. This instruction did wonders for my biblical literacy; it was a time of rapid growth in personal faith and conviction. Confirmation class was, by far, the most exciting part of the week for me. The Bible stories and doctrinal instruction were new for me, unlike for many of my classmates whose body language and lack of participation seemed to indicate a lack of interest.

On one particular morning, the pastor was teaching one of the most basic doctrinal lessons of the Lutheran faith, what he called “the Gospel in a nutshell.” “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV Study Bible). The pastor carefully walked us through the passage, piece by piece: “What does it mean for God to love?” “What is the world?” “How did God give his son?” “What does it mean to believe?” “What is eternal life?” All of these topics were part of the
pastor's talk that day, but one part of his message was of special importance to me. The pastor explained that the world consists of every individual on the planet. So, to say that God loves the world also means that God loves each person individually. The pastor went so far as to say, "Even if you were the only person on the planet, God would have still sent his son for you." I believed that message without a moment of question or doubt. I didn't question whether or not God existed or if He loved and took a specific interest in me individually. I heard and accepted this message fully, and it was a great source of comfort and self-esteem. I walked away that day feeling like God took an interest in me, individually.

And so I sat on the bed in the back room in Laredo, Texas, and I said to myself: "Your father is dead, but your Father is right here." I remember that moment as vividly as I do the moment that I watched my father collapse outside the hospital doors the night that he died. That pastor's words had stuck with me, and from those words I had received a source of security and clarity amid one of the most insecure, confusing, and lonely moments in my life. There is no indication that my Christian faith began during the confirmation class or during that epiphany of divine presence on the night of my father's death. In fact, the content of my faith as a Lutheran Christian defines faith itself as a gift, something God delivers through means, and in my case through baptism at age 5 (Tappert, 1959). Nonetheless, the moment I just recounted is one that I have consistently chosen to assign much value to in my spiritual journey.
I have used those moments as a sort of anchor and tool for decision making in my life. I was granted a means of assigning value, meaning, and purpose to life during my time in that first instance of religious instruction, and it remains an important part of my life. In fact, after that night, I attended Lutheran grade school; Lutheran high school; and completed my B.A. in history, secondary education, and theology from a Lutheran university. I even completed my first graduate degree, a M.A. in curriculum and instruction from a Lutheran university. In addition, in large part because of the community and religious framework for making sense of life, I became a Lutheran teacher. My primary vocation for 12 years was as a middle and secondary theology teacher in Lutheran schools. I now serve as an assistant professor of education and as an instructional technologist at my undergraduate alma mater, and my primary undergraduate instructional responsibility is teaching a course for preservice Lutheran teachers called Teaching the Faith.

In my college years and beyond, the faith component played a role in many activities in my life. I traveled and eventually led short-term mission trips to Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Jamaica; I attended numerous weekly Bible studies and led the world mission organization in college; I even attended a Lutheran seminary for a brief time as I considered the vocation of parish pastor. My identity was not only one of being a son of my heavenly Father, but had now moved into being a servant of my heavenly Father. Meaning in life was found in being loved by God and responding in service to God.
This is the context from which I write and think about instructional technology. I applied and was accepted into a doctoral program in instructional technology as a full-time middle school theology teacher, and a commissioned minister of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod. First and foremost, I identify myself as a teaching minister, not an instructional technologist.

My first experience since childhood in a public school was during the summer of my sophomore year at Concordia University Wisconsin. Returning home for the summer, I decided to take several courses at the state university located in my home town. I took American Government and Polity, The French Revolution, Cultural Geography, and Introduction to Anthropology. Having established a conservative Christian worldview amid my time in Lutheran schools, I was experiencing an extra measure of insecurity about the anthropology course. Prior to the first day of class, I had purchased the textbook and scanned the topics. Evolution was an integrated theme, a theme that went in direct opposition to my beliefs and the position of my church body. I had been taught and believed that God created the world in six days, and that these were six literal 24-hour days. At this point in my life, I had not read Darwin, Dawkins, any primary sources on evolution, nor had I read any of the books written by Christians that attacked evolution, argued for a literal biblical interpretation of origins, or proposed the theory of intelligent design. Nonetheless, at this point in my life, I had no willingness to even consider the possibility that evolution could be an accurate depiction of the world.
After attending several days of the course, I was pleased to discover that evolution was not the central topic of the course, at least not explicitly. Nonetheless, I sat in the back of the class each day with a degree of tension, a discomfort and fear that the instructor would one day demand that we confess our loyalty to and support of evolution.

After the first week of classes, I decided to bring up my sentiments and insecurities to the instructor. I stood in the back of the room one day, waiting for another student to finishing talking with the instructor about some assignment-related topic. Their conversation lasted several minutes, long enough for me to consider abandoning my plans, but I distracted the fearful self by looking at the posters and skeletal models along the back wall. After the student left, the instructor turned to walk into her office, attached to the side of the classroom, so I followed her and introduced myself. This was my first one-on-one conversation with a university professor at a public university, and I was nervous.

Conversations between students and instructors at Concordia were frequent, and in all of my courses, there was an implicit common faith tradition. I had frequent conversations with faculty about all sorts of issues, those consistent with and contrary to the position of the church, all the time having a feeling of safety, with little fear that I would be rejected or ridiculed by the instructor.

This impending conversation was different. I approached the instructor, desiring to ask about matters of creation and evolution, something that I had
believed was taboo in the public university. With the clumsiness associated with nervousness, I quickly muttered words very similar to the following: “Hi. I am one of your students. I sit in the back, and I’m a Christian. I was wondering what you think about creation and evolution. Can a creationist become an anthropologist?” I finished speaking and looked at the instructor, waiting for a reply. I saw no signs of a smile but rather a slight widening of the eyes, a quick glance away from me, and what looked like her swallowing a piece of gum. I listened attentively to her answer, although not fully understanding it. She explained how the spirituality of anthropologists is quite diverse, but that there are certain scientific principles that are important to the field. She never mentioned creationism or evolution in the response, leaving it to me to apply her general comments to the specific topic of my inquiry. But then she was quick to end the conversation. She said, thank you, goodbye, and walked away.

I walked out of the class, proud that I had publicly disclosed the fact that I was a Christian but mostly feeling embarrassment, dread of having to face the instructor in class the next day, and fear of whether or not this situation would impact my grade. I walked to my car reliving the conversation, mentally trying out different ways that I could have initiated the conversation, but eventually left the thoughts unresolved.
The next day of class was uncomfortable, although the discomfort faded with time. By the next week, I had received a favorable grade on a paper, calming the fear that my conversation with the instructor would somehow impact my grade.

However, this was not the end of the experience. At one point not long after this, the instructor had gathered a series of plaster skulls ranging from an Australopithecus skull to a *Homo sapiens sapiens* skull. The instructor asked for a volunteer to come to the front of the class and arrange the skulls in their proper chronological order. After several invitations, none were up to the challenge. Looking down at her list of students, the instructor called my name. "Bernard, would you like to try?" I don't think that she called on me because of her conversation. I'm not even sure if she remembered my name. It appeared to be more a matter of chance that her pencil landed on my name as she looked down to select a name from the class list. I suppose that some Christians might argue that this was not chance, but providence. I am undecided on the matter.

I was surprised to discover that I felt no fear or apprehension. As I walked to the front of the room, I mumbled under my breath, quietly enough that few if any heard me, "I don't know if I believe this, but . . ." I arranged the skulls, only four as I recall, starting with the Australopithecus, then the *Homo erectus*, next the *Homo sapiens neanderthalensis*, and finally the *Homo sapiens sapiens*. The instructor solicited feedback from the class to see whether or not the rest of the class agreed.
with my decision. After a couple of comments and questions, the professor noted that the order was correct, and the class continued.

I returned to my seat in the back row, feeling the pride of a student who "got it right," but as I sat through the rest of the class, I was debriefing the experience, trying to glean some lesson from it. I thought about the differences between knowing facts and believing in something. I knew the order, could record it on a test, but I did not believe or intellectually accept it. I thought about the idea of establishing credibility in a public university by striving for a high degree of knowledge even if the knowledge is in opposition to personal beliefs. I continued to feel like an outsider in the public university, perhaps more than before, but I walked away with a little less fear of rejection and more comfort being an active member of a classroom in the public sphere.

Nonetheless, this one summer in a public university was my only source of direct experience with higher education outside of a Christian environment. I continued to feel like an outsider, someone who had to choose whether or not to hide the extent to which his faith actually impacted his thoughts about truth and the content. I also had come to think that, if my faith did become known to those around me, I somehow had to prove myself to the students and faculty, both by the way that I conducted myself and by the quality or uniqueness of my thoughts. Much of this came from the only book that I had read on the topic, Loving God with All Your Mind: How to Survive and Prosper as a Christian in the Secular University.
and Post-Christian Culture (Veith, 1987). The book was written by one of the professors at Concordia University Wisconsin. Early in the text, Veith referenced a story from the biblical book of Daniel. In this story, the Hebrew people were taken into captivity by the Babylonians. The biblical account describes how the Babylonian ruler, King Nebuchadnezzar, ordered that Hebrew people of royalty and nobility be brought before him:

Young men without any physical defect, handsome, showing aptitude for every kind of learning, well informed, quick to understand, and qualified to serve in the king’s palace. He was to teach them the language and literature of the Babylonians…. They were to be trained for three years, and after that they were to enter the king’s service. (NIV Study Bible, Daniel 1:4, 1:5b)

The story goes on to describe a crisis of faith for the Hebrew, Daniel. The king had ordered a specific diet for the people, one that violated Daniel’s obligations as a Jew. As a result, Daniel proposed a test:

Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food, and treat your servants in accordance with what you see. (NIV Study Bible, Daniel 1:12-13)

Veith used this account to describe the challenge of the Christian in a secular university. He explained that Daniel and his Hebrew peers accepted Babylonian names and studied Babylonian literature. However, this issue of diet was clearly in contrast to their faith, and for that reason, they found it necessary to take a stand. Rather than initiating some sort of rebellion, Daniel worked through the proper
authorities, proposed a test, and was able to show the value of his position (Veith, 1987, p. 33).

While there was much that I didn’t remember from Veith’s text, I had remembered the story of Daniel and had chosen to use it as a way to think about my own experiences in the public university. To some extent, I had walked into the university that summer expecting, even seeking out, the experience of Daniel.

After that summer, it was more than five years before I attended a public institution again, and it wasn’t until my application to the doctoral program at Northern Illinois University that I, once more, turned to the story of Daniel and the Babylonians.

Prior to acceptance into the doctoral program at Northern Illinois University, I was asked to come in for an interview. There were five professors present, all of whom I would get to know and respect over the next several years. I was nervous going into the interview because virtually all of my education from sixth grade through my master’s degree had come from Lutheran Church Missouri Synod schools. Apart from 10 or 12 community college courses in computer information systems, along with a couple of educational technology graduate courses, and the summer experiences in a public university, I had not been part of a higher education that was not church affiliated. I had developed a measure of confidence in my intellectual abilities over the years, but continued to have this secret fear that my education lacked the academic rigor of a public or state school. I also feared being
challenged about my religious convictions and being unable to defend myself.

During my college years at Concordia Wisconsin, I had chosen to memorize a verse from the *NIV Study Bible*, from 1 Peter 3:15: “But in your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to anyone who asks you the reason for the hope that you have, but do it with gentleness and respect.” I had become an avid reader of Christian apologetics texts, books that defended Christian beliefs and doctrines using philosophy, science, and even legal defenses. I frequently cited this Bible passage from 1 Peter 3:15. So, entering the interview, I had the fear of inadequacy, wondering if I had what it takes to be successful at this level of study. I had an even greater fear of failing to accurately represent my faith in this environment, a fear of betraying my faith convictions and the community of faith to which I belonged.

I had already experienced several instances at educational conferences, whereupon stating my employment at a Lutheran school, fellow attendees expressed what I interpreted as words of consolation, that I still had hope to make it to a public school one day. Apart from a few specific experiences, I had little evidence to suggest that people actually felt this way about me. Rather, it was an internal fear, something that I had come to believe or suspect apart from much empirical or experiential evidence. Going into this interview, my hands trembled slightly. I found my vocabulary limited by my self-consciousness; I had the fear of somehow...
being stumped by a challenging question, and of being rejected because of my record as a student in Lutheran universities and as a middle school theology teacher.

My fears turned out to be unwarranted as one of the professors greeted me, introduced the group, and asked a few informal icebreaking questions. I don’t recall the specific questions, but rather remember perceiving her tone as confident, comforting, and accepting. There were a number of questions about my previous study, my role as a classroom teacher, and my academic goals. At one point, I was asked why I wanted to pursue a doctorate. This was a follow-up question to my stating that I would be very happy to remain a middle or high school teacher for the rest of my life. I interpreted the question as not only a question, but also a statement, suggesting that pursuit of a doctorate is not typically the avenue for ongoing professional development of one who desires the lifelong vocation of high school teacher. I felt defensive and responded with passion more than a careful choice of words: “Well, this is only part of my professional goal. If I am accepted in the program and complete it, I hope to pursue a second doctorate, likely in history or the humanities.” I noticed one professor seemed to develop a heightened sense of interest at this point, smiling and leaning forward slightly. I later discovered her interest in history and turned to her for support, advice, and insight throughout my studies. I clung to that slight but important glance of acceptance throughout my study. Without it, I have no certainty that my interest in autoethnography, history, and ethics would have endured throughout my formal study at Northern Illinois
University. My response didn’t really answer the question, but it did communicate my passion for lifelong learning and my desire to pursue the highest level of academic study. More importantly, I walked away from the interview remembering the smile and excitement of that instructor. I had established a connection with someone in this new educational environment. I had developed a sense of hope that I could indeed be accepted and my research interests welcomed.

I repeatedly selected ethical and historical issues as the emphasis for my study. I found both areas to be places where I found encouragement by faculty and where I was able to blend my passion for faith issues with my study in the field of instructional technology. With each course grew a new measure of confidence in openly blending my academic interests with the central role of my faith. In time, I had consciously chosen history and ethics as an identity for myself in the program, choosing virtually every paper and project to revolve around these two interests. I used this as a way to blend two distinct roles in my life. One was my role as a doctoral student in instructional technology. The other was my daytime role as a Christian theology teacher in a Lutheran middle school. I did not fully realize this fact until the start of the dissertation.

Every topic that I had freedom to select revolved around history, ethics, or some combination of the two. In a course on instructional design, I chose to develop a training module that equipped students to learn how to evaluate web-based content, arguing that the emerging world of the web was blurring lines between truth
and fiction, that it was becoming increasingly difficult for students to distinguish between reliable and appropriate sources. When I moved into courses on theory, research, and issues in educational technology, the trend became evident. By the end of my coursework, I had written reviews on critics of technology in society and education like Neil Postman and Jane Healy. I had devoted an entire independent study to an historical analysis of the Payne Fund Study, exploring the context of this early report on the impact of film upon the beliefs and behavior of youth.

I continued to think often about what it means to be a Christian and a doctoral student in a public university. What does it mean to be a Christian scholar? Prior to my entrance into the doctoral program, but after completion of my undergraduate study, I had taken courses at both Wheaton College and Trinity International Divinity School. I had also attended a Christian study center in Massachusetts, and I had attended numerous Christian conferences on academic issues. And yet, I had read few books written by authors who were not Christian. In my personal reading, I had learned about philosophy as I sat at the feet of authors like Augustine, Pascal, C. S. Lewis, Alvin Plantinga, Francis Schaeffer, and Cornelius Van Til. I read books on Christian perspectives on literature and the arts. I read books on Christian theology and world missions. Even being an educator, I had read less than a dozen primary works by non-Christian researchers.

Two years prior to my entrance in the doctoral program, I was meeting with a coworker in the Lutheran school. He and I had committed to being accountability
partners. We met weekly, shared personal and professional struggles with each other, encouraged one another, and prayed together. At the time he was working on a graduate program in a psychology or counseling-related field, and I noticed the textbooks on his shelf.

I asked him, “Do you ever get concerned about reading all of those theories and ideas that may or may not match with your faith? How do you decide what to keep and what to throw away?”

I’m not sure how he answered or if he did. But a question that he posed in the course of this discussion brought to my attention something that I had not realized at this point in my life: “Do you read anything other than Christian literature?”

I read voraciously by this time in my life, but apart from a few textbooks, I couldn’t think of a single book in the past three or more years that I had read that was not written by someone who was openly Christian. I had come to believe that reading literature that was not Christian might endanger my faith or at least focus my thought and attentions on the “wrong ideas.” For this reason, I had read very little in my own field of education, especially few if any primary works. I read the Bible daily, committing to read through most of the Bible at least twice a year, with some parts, like Proverbs and the Gospels, over and over again every month or two. But when it came to the literature of my field, education, I was illiterate. I only repeated and applied the ideas that I had heard secondhand. The question opened
my eyes to the problem, and I gradually began to venture into a new world of reading, beginning the next week with Howard Gardner’s *Frames of Mind* (1993b), followed by Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* (1916) and then the avid reading of as many primary works as possible.

Because of my strong theological training, I found myself comfortable in this world that I somehow previously feared. There were points of conflict with my faith. Gardner’s assumption of evolution and strong sentiments toward humanism were evident. Dewey’s perspective on human nature conflicted with my personal theological convictions about original sin, that individuals are born with a disposition that is disobedient to the will of God. And yet, I found much common ground. Apart from the clear conflicts with my faith, it only took reading these first two books to help me recognize the value and truth in their writing and to see their importance for my role in the field of education.

**Growing Interest in Ethics**

My passion for ethical issues and the unique way in which I chose to frame my study of ethical inquiry took shape in a course where we explored theories in instructional technology. It was a unique class in that we didn’t focus upon one or more required texts. Instead, through the class, each of the students created reviews of different theories, in the process developing a collective overview of dozens. Classmates reviewed people ranging from Piaget to Friere, Vygotsky to Pestalozzi,
Dewey to Bandura. This was the first class where matters of religion became open
topics of discussion, as classmates presented their findings about the different
theorists and we discussed the implications of their lives and beliefs upon their
work. Yet, rather than feeling more comfortable, I found myself sharing less than
normal in class discussions. In previous classes, I was able to engage in research
and reading individually that allowed me to explore interactions between my faith
and study in instructional technology. But now the topics were a frequent part of
classroom discussions. Several classmates openly, even aggressively, inserted their
own religious perspectives.

One evening, early in the semester, I shared an experience at a regional
teacher inservice that I had attended several months prior. There were no formal
published proceedings, so the accuracy of my memory is difficult to validate apart
from the affirmations of others in attendance. The keynote speaker was addressing
the future of technology in education. Many of the initial comments were consistent
with what I have come to expect from such talks. The presenter shared the changing
nature of youth, their lifestyle, and their comfort with technology. She explained
that the nature of contemporary society is such that we cannot afford to dedicate all
of our efforts to ensure that students have mastered a static body of knowledge,
because the knowledge is changing so quickly. As a result, she challenged educators
to focus more upon equipping students with skills to acquire and make sense of
knowledge, comfort with change, and strategies for thriving in such a dynamic
digital world of change. Sitting in the large lecture hall, I leaned forward, even
nodded a few times. Then she continued.

She proposed that our grandchildren and great grandchildren would have
average life spans of hundreds of years, and that information would be something
that one can download into their brains. Was I in an educational conference or had I
just been transplanted to an episode of Star Trek, or perhaps some secret
technological cult? Those were my thoughts at that moment. As the speaker
continued, I read excitement and hope on her face, the passion similar to what I had
experienced during my attendance at some church services over the years. She
continued by alluding to the idea that immortality is more possible than ever, with
the notion that the future may allow eternal conscious existence apart from our
bodies in some virtual digital world. Cryogenics, genetic research, and several other
headlines also arose in her talk.

I shared this experience with the class, being somewhat candid about my
skepticism. I noted that I did not doubt the possibility of the technology, but I
doubted the seeming untouched ethical implications. At that point I heard a grunt,
looked to its source, a classmate across the room, arms crossed, face red, and
anxious to speak. I stopped and nodded, waiting for his response. There was one,
but I didn’t understand it at that point. After class, I stopped him and asked further.
He explained that my religious bias was coming through. I didn’t like the picture
that the speaker painted because it conflicted with my faith. I consented and
suggested that he, too, had a faith in something, that we all do, even if we are not religious. The conversation continued for a short time, with each of us repeating the same points a few times, likely talking past each other. What was clear was our two contradictory positions. His fundamental perspective was that religious faith is a hindrance to solid objective research and rationality. My perspective was that, even in instances where research seems entirely objective, there are belief systems of individuals behind it, and that these belief systems are worthy of attention and discussion, which should serve as a source of dialogue about ethical matters. My position was that faith will not be removed from the human experience, and that it must therefore be shared and used as a source of dialogue. I tried to conclude the conversation by quoting Einstein, although I am almost certain that I failed in the attempt. Now having access to the source, I accurately include it here. “Science without religions is lame, religion without science is blind” (Einstein, 1930). What I did not know until years later was that Einstein may well have been on the side of my classmate:

A man’s ethical behavior should be based effectually on sympathy, education, and social ties and needs; no religious basis is necessary. Man would indeed be in a poor way if he had to be restrained by fear of punishment and hope of reward after death. (Einstein, 1950, p. 24)

There was no resolution to the conversation, nor did I walk away with certainty on the subject. That was my first conversation about the role of faith and ethics in the field of instructional technology. Even to this day, I continue to seek out opportunities to discuss the matter with people from various backgrounds. While I
have grown to understand a variety of perspectives, I find myself affirming my convictions from that first conversation.

While this conversation with an individual represents one of my many one-on-one discussions about ethics, faith, and instructional technology with classmates, instructors, and others in the field of instructional technology, there was also a collective element to my thoughts on ethical issues that was surfacing at the end of my doctoral study. I was sitting in the last course in my doctoral program in instructional technology, Collection Development. I was not a media specialist, nor did I have an interest in becoming one. However, I had reviewed the syllabus prior to signing up and was interested in learning more about copyright issues and intellectual property. As already noted, by the middle of my doctoral program, my research interests had focused almost exclusively on matters of ethics in technology. Little did I know that the topics in this course would be the most ethically loaded subjects in my entire program: intellectual freedom, copyright, and privacy issues being central to the course.

One day in particular had a lasting impact upon me. Either a student or the instructor initiated a conversation about patron privacy. A scenario was described where a student was suffering from severe depression and a parent contacted the school librarian with a request. The parent wanted the librarian to notify her if the books that her daughter checked out began to reflect a somber or dark theme. As I
recall, the parent may even have requested to view a list of books that her daughter had checked out.

The reaction in the class was sudden and unified against the request of the parent in the scenario, and I sat in my desk confused and in full disagreement. How could we deny the legal guardians of a struggling child from having the information necessary to help their child? I felt as if I was the only individual in the class who was having an internal struggle with the scenario, who did not see the proper ethical path with clarity. Of course, this only affirmed my perception of self as an outsider because of my faith convictions; that is the source to which I attributed the seeming difference between myself and others. Due to the forceful values expressed about the unswerving commitment to patron privacy, I experienced hesitance and even embarrassment when speaking up. After all, if this was so clear to everyone else in the class, what was I missing? My question was simple: Why would it be unethical to print out a list of checked-out books and send it to the parent? The parent had the best interest of the child in mind, and it appears that it may have even been a matter of life and death. Furthermore, how did everyone else in the class seem to have a common viewpoint on this topic?

As I thought about this last question, I reviewed my notebook, looking over brief biographical sketches that I had written about classmates during introductions on the opening day of class. With two exceptions, everyone in the class had some background as a librarian or media specialist. It was apparent that the individuals in
the class had a collective ethical understanding of many topics in this course. The majority of individuals in the course were members of a field, library science, that had an established code of ethics. Members of the field supported and upheld this code. It is not unique to library science. A similar ethical position on privacy appears to parallel the role of a priest with confessor, counselor and counselee, lawyer and client, doctor and patient. It is even found among some classmates, when one witnesses another cheating.

Given that the majority of my courses were not in library science or focused upon becoming a media specialist, had I become part of a community with an established code of ethics, one that was commonly known and upheld among people in educational technology? Definitely without intending to reflect poorly on my program or instructors, I was completing the last course in my program and had no idea if there even was a formal code of ethics in educational technology. Furthermore, throughout my coursework it was rare that there was such a collective agreement on ethical positions.

As I have already mentioned, ethics and technology was my primary area of interest in instructional technology. Besides one or two authors and a reoccurring list of ethical scenarios in TechTrends, I have still found very little written about ethics in educational technology. In order to pursue my interest, I had mainly turned to sources outside of educational technology. I read authors like Jacque Ellul, Lewis Mumford, Neil Postman, Jane Healy, Larry Cuban, and Clifford Stoll. In this short
list, only Healy and Cuban were even from the broad field of education. These authors were not upholding an established code of ethics regarding technology and education with their writing. In fact, they wrote as if they were challenging the accepted ideas about technology and education.

While a code of ethics was established by the AECT, as a doctoral student near the end of his program, I had yet to discover any collective sense of ethical perspectives or dialogue in the field. Much of this was due to the fact that I had committed myself so fully to exploring the sources outside of the field and looking at historical issues that I had paid little attention to the idea of professional ethics within the field. And yet my interest in the subject was timely. Just as I was taking this last class, I also established my membership with the AECT and learned about the newly published *A Code of Professional Ethics: A Guide to Professional Conduct in the Field of Educational Communications and Technology*, edited by Paul Welliver (2001). Welliver’s explanation of professional ethics as distinguished from philosophical ethics helped to clarify my thoughts upon the subject, describing the former and focusing upon conduct and the application of the code of ethics among practitioners in the field. The brief introduction by Welliver was an epiphany for me. I could find common ground amid a diverse group of individuals through the AECT code of ethics, but there could still be significant room for difference and dialogue, along with disagreement upon the application of the code in specific situations. As suggested by Welliver (2001), even the code is an evolving
work, something that can be refined, edited, and reshaped based upon the collective members of the field. And so there is room for discussion, even for me and as an individual who sometimes struggles with reconciling the first priority of my faith convictions with the standards of conduct set forth in my field.

While there is ample room to add additional narratives about the role of faith in shaping my ethical explorations and understandings in instructional technology, these instances are representative, capture the central themes that have emerged amid the ongoing challenge of understanding my role and the nature of ethics in the field of instructional technology. I have begun with childhood formative experiences, illustrated the development of a sense of otherness in the field and the public university, described the way in which individual conversations have contributed to my thoughts, and concluded with the ongoing struggle of thinking about collective ethics in instructional technology.
CHAPTER 3
VIRTUAL COMMUNITY AND IDENTITY

The Sinclair 1000

My first magazine subscription, *Popular Science*, was a gift for my twelfth birthday, a source of intrigue at the grocery store from the prior year. While I rarely read the full articles, the magazine included a myriad of brief highlights of emerging technologies. Four issues into my subscription I was intrigued by an article, “World’s First $100 Computer.” There was a picture of this small black box with a keyboard that resembled the plastic-covered buttons on the automatic teller machine at the bank (see Figure 1). The article started: “World’s First $100 Computer, low cost and wide distribution may make this system the cornerstone of the long-awaited computer revolution” (Hawkins, 1982, n.p.). The article continued:

The checkbook balances instantly. The Christmas cards are done in a snap. Your taxes are figured to be just this side of legal. And every number ever given to you—from phone numbers to your Visa account—is available at a touch. Personal computers. People say the silicon surrogates will change the world. And one look at most of the price tags will tell you they're right - you'd have to change your life style to afford one. But now our wallets are in for a pleasant surprise. It's called the Timex Sinclair 1000, and it's the first ready-to-go personal computer for under $100 ($99.95). Connected to your TV set, it's a complete system: Compute numbers, display text, draw pictures, even write your own programs using its built-in BASIC language.
Optional gear? Sure, additional memory and a printer are available—and each is comparably priced to make the 1000 the lowest-cost system yet. But there's more to this computer than just money. "We're aiming the 1000 at the general consumer market," says Daniel Ross, vice-president of Timex.

Watch out (no pun intended). With some 100,000 retail stores now distributing Timex products, it means you'll soon see them in department stores, jewelry shops, and even local drug stores. And wide distribution coupled with low cost could make this computer the cornerstone of the long-predicted "computer revolution." But what do you get for your $100? What are the system's limitations? And what does it all mean to the competition?

Figure 1. Timex Sinclair 1000 released in 1982.

I was intrigued with the idea of something called a computer. I wanted one, even though I wasn't sure what it would be able to do. All of my siblings were out of the house or rarely at home by this time, but my mother, father, and I often spent a couple of hours before bedtime in their bedroom, usually with the television on in
the background, sometimes talking, often each of us doing something a little
different. One might be reading a magazine, another watching the television. When
I read that article, I was quick to tell my parents about it.

I'm not sure if I asked for it outright or just hinted at it, but it was under the
Christmas tree four months later. It was one of the few complete surprises that year.
It had been months since I had read the article and I had forgotten about it. My
father had not. He took a great deal of interest in this gift. I remember him saying
something like, "This is the future." Not only was I excited about the computer, but
this was more than a toy. My father saw this as a valuable investment of my time.
That added to the excitement.

That night, I unpacked the box, skimmed the instructions, and plugged it
into the television. There was a blank cyan screen and a black cursor with the letter
"K" in it. I stared at the screen, wondering if it was working. At the encouragement
of my parents, I took out the manual and read through it more carefully. Included
with the computer was a list of predeveloped programs in BASIC, so I tried
following the instructions. The first program (Vickers, 1982) was two lines:

10 PRINT "HELLO, JACK"

20 GO TO 10

I pressed ENTER on the keyboard and the greeting "HELLO, JACK" repeated,
filling to screen from top to bottom. I invited my parents into the room and
demonstrated my new programming skills.
“Alright Dad, give me a name.” Playing along, he said, “How about Ed?” I retyped the two simple lines of code, replacing Jack with Ed, looked to make sure that both parents were watching and pressed “ENTER,” resulting in the same thing as the first attempt, only with my father’s name filling up the screen.

That was it. My father continued to encourage me and I continued to type in several of the other predeveloped programs, but some of them dealt with math that was beyond my interest, knowledge, or both. While I typed in each of the programs, I rarely understood their purpose. It was less than a week and I had typed in each of the suggested programs in the instructional manual. We had not purchased any of the optional pieces, including a cassette recorder to save my work. As a result, each time that I turned off the computer, everything that I had programmed was lost. My excitement about programming faded quickly and I had lost interest in the computer in less than a month. The process of typing in links of code was tedious and the end result was never anything much beyond the excitement of my first program. So, I devoted my energy to requesting another computer of sorts, an Atari 2600. Two months later, for my birthday, I received it.

This experience was completely different. A quick skimming of the instructions, plugging in a game cartridge, and my attention was captured by the game.

Alone with My Atari 2600

I woke up around 7 o’clock in the morning to prepare for the big day. I’m not sure how long I had been planning it, but I was focused and determined. My
goal was to reach one million points in the Atari game, “Laser Blast,” a game that closely resembled “Space Invaders,” and entailed little more than using the joystick to systematically move a spaceship back and forth along the top of the screen, shooting at triads of enemies below (see Figure 2). It was not a game that required much skill, and it certainly required no need for strategy. You just moved your joystick from left to right and rapidly pressed the red button. When all of the enemies were gone from the screen, you proceeded to the next screen, identical to the last one.

![Figure 2. Activision Laser Blast released in 1982.](image)

Why the goal of one million? Besides the fact that the game ended at one million, a rare experience of completion in video games of my childhood, it was
inspired by a small paper that came with the game, offering a free patch to anyone who reached 100,000 points, took a picture of the screen, and submitted the picture to the company as proof. The patch for 100,000 points afforded you one of the highest honors and read “Commander: Activision Federation of Laser Blasters.”

The only higher prestige was to reach 1,000,000 points and obtain the added one-million-point stripe. On this particular day, there was no goal that was more important to me, not the goal of completing the model car on my dresser, launching the rocket sitting in the garage, or getting ready for a neighborhood soccer game. I remember being five hours into the game, and I only stopped once for a one minute dash to the bathroom during hour 3. I had acquired enough extra men to endure my sister filling in for that minute. Otherwise, my eyes stayed centered on the screen and I found myself needing to intentionally blink a few times to get rid of the burning sensation from dry eyes. This was not a solitary task. I had the entire family involved. My mother and older sister were my support crew, bringing me drinks and snacks, and offering a few choice words of encouragement. It sounds melodramatic as I record and look at this childhood description, but it was an intense day in my childhood and it was, to the best of my knowledge at the time, respected by my support crew. On that day I was able to be a bit more demanding than others. I could “bark out orders” and my self-centeredness and brash tone seemed to be tolerated in light of my goal.

There was such a strong feeling of value and importance as my sister brought me a plate of macaroni and cheese, set it beside me, and I reached one
million points. There were no virtual fireworks, nor was there a word of congratulation from the video game. The screen just froze, all the enemies gone, and exclamation points replaced the point value on the screen. My tense hands and shoulders loosened and I leaned back, looking away from the screen for the first time since my bathroom break hours before. All that was left was to take a picture of the screen, proof of my achievement. But first, a few bites of macaroni and cheese were in order. As I began to take my first bite, my sister walked between me and the screen, the first time anyone would dare do such a thing for hours. As she did, her foot caught the power cord and the screen went blank.

My loose shoulders and hands tightened again, along with my neck, and my teeth clenched. There was an instant flow of tears and screams and groans to follow. It didn’t matter that it was an accident. It didn’t matter that she had just brought me food and put up with my demanding spirit over the last 10 hours. I was most certainly angry at her, but my emotion was more rooted in my grief, my sense of loss. As I saw it at that moment, she had turned hours of work into wasted time and all the energy recently focused on my goal was now poured into my grief. It wasn’t just a game. It was a goal, and I had committed to it, persevered in pursuing it, and had achieved it. I had secured something that I never even considered could be taken away, and now it was lost, with no photograph to account for this achievement, and no hope of obtaining the honorary patch without another carefully planned full-day effort. This is my first emotion-packed memory of computers.
Video games continued to occupy enormous amounts of my childhood. Even in moments where I experienced great personal loss, I turned to video games. While everyone gathered upstairs after my father's funeral, I played *Frogger* (English, 1982) for hours and did not cry over my father's death until my brother-in-law forced me to give him a chance to play the game.

Playing these games was mostly solitary. My brother-in-law and friends sometimes played, but my preference was to play alone, just me and the video game, just the two of us. When I played, my mind rarely wandered. It was not a multitasking experience. I questioned this memory at first, so I bought a used Atari 2600 and spent several days playing the games again, this time as a 35-year-old husband, father, individual with pressing deadlines at work, and one with a strong sense of urgency about completing his dissertation. Nonetheless, when the game started, my attention was fully devoted to the video game. The experience was as I had remembered it as a 12-year-old. The immediate demands of the moment silenced any other thoughts or concerns. Apart from the more recent writings about the educational lessons of video games, I had experienced firsthand the power of engagement included in one of the earlier, more rudimentary games.

These early experiences with video games left me open to the idea that educators and instructional designers could learn from games, but it was only upon reading the recent texts that this basic understanding was translated into something more directly applicable to my role as an instructional technologist. James Gee's *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* (2003), Mar
Prensky’s *Digital Game-Based Learning* (2001), and Clark Quinn’s *Engaging Learning: Designing E-Learning Simulation Games* (2005) are to be thanked for explaining and describing the application of what I experienced firsthand in the early years of video games.

As my passion for video games spread to the arcade at the local mall, the same principles of engagement remained, only there I would end my game able to compare my points to those who had previously played the game. There I had the goal of comparing my skill and achievement to others and, as such, experienced a sense of interacting with other humans. At times, this involved playing a two-player version of a game with a stranger, but more often just working to get on the top 10 or 20, beating others who had played the game an hour or day before. I recall days when I had spent $20 or $30 in quarters and I would walk away feeling empty, because I had no more money and I didn’t even manage to make it on a single top 10 list. At times, this sense of loss brought me to extreme measures, like the time I tried wading for quarters in the wishing fountain in the center of the shopping mall. The security guard was firm, but gracious enough to let me off with a warning. Other days I would walk out with immense pride, even excitement as I had made it to the top 5, only to be disappointed the next time I entered the arcade and noticed that my name was not even on the top 10 list any longer. Although I did not understand it as such at the time, that was my childhood casino. I wasn’t drawn in by the hope of making more money but of getting more points, getting to the next level, getting on the list of top players.
Consumerism

When my father had died, I started receiving social security checks each month and my mother gave me a large amount of fiscal freedom. At this point, we had purchased a house in southern Illinois, less than a block away from my aunt, my mom's sister. With my new allowance of several hundred dollars a month, I had purchased my first 12-speed bike. I had also gone through a several-month phase with aquariums and different fish. I walked to the pet store almost daily and spent hours, collecting and learning about a variety of fish; my favorites were phyrannas, silver dollars, glass fish, and ghouramis. I don't recall a week that I didn't walk the slightly less than one-mile path from my house to the nearby plaza, coming home with a bag of clothes, or even a bag or two of water occupied by my latest pet acquisition.

My consumerism wasn't limited to clothes and fish; I had also acquired an interest in pellet guns, purchasing two rifles and a CO2 cartridge pistol. I would sit on the front porch and attempt to shoot blackbirds off the power lines in front of the house. Beyond that, the guns sat in the garage. My interest in weaponry wasn't limited to pellet guns, as I had also ordered a variety of throwing stars and knives, my favorite being a combat knife with a five-inch blade, a compass on the end, and a hollow handle that held survival gear like fishing line, hooks, and matches. I obtained a variety of these items from the diverse magazines that I purchased from the grocery store, not far from the pet shop. The magazine topics ranged from

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martial arts to popular science, although I don't recall reading a single article. My interest rested with the pictures, captions, the one or two-paragraph editorials, and the many products advertised in small print in the back of the magazines. Ant farms, Chia Pets, and Chinese throwing stars were all on my list. The one item that I often wanted, but didn't order, was the kit that promised detailed instructions on how to build a glider using a shop vac, plywood, and a few unnamed items.

This habit of consumerism continued throughout the year after my father had died. At the same time, my mother had begun to date again, a couple of guys that she knew from her high school days. I, on the other hand, stayed busy with my new role as consumer, visiting with my cousins who lived a couple of houses down, watching a few hours of cable each day, and, during that first summer, going to the movie theatre several times a week. I still had the Atari 2600 from a couple years prior, but at this point in my life, cable television had replaced the hours that I spent daily in front of the television playing computer games. When I was not playing with my newly acquired toys and hanging out with my cousins, I was watching cable channels: MTV, Cinemax, Showtime, HBO, and the Movie Channel. Between cable and my visits to the theatre, I became a fan of ET, The Beastmaster, Star Trek II, Blade Runner, The Best Little Whorehouse in Texas, The Road Warrior, Bolero, Firefox, An Officer and a Gentleman, Jaws 3-D, Rocky, and The Sword and the Sorcerer. While I continued to go to the movie theatre for years to come, this one year following the death of my father was the only year that cable and movies occupied so much of my time. For nearly a year, my time, money, and
attention was devoted to these two elements of the public sphere; like the early video game experience, I was content doing these things in isolation. However, unlike the video game experiences, the television did not require my full attention. Unless I was engaging in a marathon-length effort, I never left in the middle of a video game for a bathroom break or a snack, but to do this during a movie was commonplace. Both were solitary, but the latter both passive and solitary.

The Commodore 64

Only a year after my father’s death and moving into the house beside my aunt, my mother announced that she was engaged. She would marry a friend from high school who had lost his wife to cancer at almost the same time that my father died. When my mom remarried, I found myself living in an unfamiliar home in the country. I used my money to purchase another computer, this time the Commodore 64, complete with a modem and floppy disk drive. My experience with programming was not a positive one, so I also purchased a game on floppy disk at the same time as the computer purchase. The game was “Zork I: The Great Underground Empire” (Blank & Lebling, 1980), a text-based game that starts with a black screen with the following white text:

“Zork I: The Great Underground Empire.”

“West of House,”

“You are standing in an open field west of a white house, with a boarded front door.”
“There is a small mailbox here” (1980, n.p.).

There are no further instructions. Following the introductory text was a cursor. The game came with a single-page sheet of instructions explaining that the challenge was to collect 20 items. That was the extent of the guidance. The rest is learned by trial and error, typing in different commands and receiving text-based responses. So, standing at the mailbox, I typed “open mailbox,” and the game responded with the message: “Opening the small mailbox reveals a leaflet” (Blank & Lebling, 1980, n.p.). Typing, “read leaflet” revealed the following text: “ZORK is a game of adventure, danger, and low cunning. In it you will explore some of the most amazing territory ever seen by mortals. No computer should be without one” (1980, n.p.). And the game continues. There were no animations, colors, or action as experienced with the Atari 2600. The look of the screen was a little different from the Sinclair 1000. And yet, the game was not simple. The computer understood hundreds of words and was able to reply to some of my oddest requests. For example, if I typed, “eat leaflet,” I would get the response, “I don’t think that the leaflet would agree with you.” The game was even programmed to respond to certain four-letter words with a comment like, “What a loony!” Progressing through the game, it became increasingly clear that this was a carefully planned-out world that I could, in most cases, map out on a piece of paper.

It was not unusual for me to spend eight or nine hours a day mapping out this virtual world in search of the next treasure. I never completed the game. I never collected the 20 treasures and returned them to my treasure closet (the latter

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being something that one has to discover as a requirement amid playing the game),
and I never came to a screen that froze or noted that I had somehow won the game
like my experience with "Laser Blast." However, each day had a series of small
achievements, finding one more treasure, finding my way out of a confusing series
of underground rooms, figuring out the necessary trick or word needed to open a
secret passage. These little goals were enough to keep me returning to the game day
after day, week after week, for months.

There was also an experience of communicating with another person. I
wasn't programming a computer to complete a function. I was interacting in a
virtual world, sometimes communicating with other people, and always being
reminded that this is a world that was and is inhabited by other people and creatures.
When I spoke about the game to my brother-in-law or others, I described the
experience as if I were describing a recent journey through the woods or a family
vacation: "I found an underground passage today and ran into a troll. I tried talking
to him, but he didn’t seem interested. So, we got in a fight and I died. But I saved
my game before the fight so I didn’t lose all of my treasures.” My brother-in-law
played the game with me sometimes also. Together we would strategize and try
different commands. I remember him making occasional comments like, "They
wouldn’t have thought to create something like that,” referring to the programming
and others who wrote the game in the first place. From this perspective, the game
was a riddle posed by actual human beings rather than a virtual experience with
fictional characters. By playing the game, we were taking on the proposed riddle of the game's authors.

But what is the significance of my childhood video game and computer experiences as part of this autobiographical inquiry? These memories and experiences describe the nature of growing up in the early years of commercially available games and computers. These were my first experiences engaging in a computer-based environment. From ages 8 to 13 there was nothing that occupied my time and energy more than video games, the computer, and television. This was not the case for the childhood of my older sibling or my parents. Apart from television, these technologies were either not in existence or not for sale at the local stores. In my childhood, some days were still spent playing with friends in the neighborhood or exploring in the back yard, and going to school. But, even at school some of my most memorable moments involved playing games on the computer in the school library. Playing video games was the first longstanding activity of passion during my childhood. Other activities and interests would come and go, but this activity carried through seasons, significant changes in my family, and through moves to different homes year after year.

Looking back upon the experiences, I have wondered if part of my computer use related to the loss of my father. Was it an unconscious effort to fill the void of losing my dad? Was it a mechanism to cope with or avoid grief? Was it an easy way to dodge the fears of an uncertain family structure? Or perhaps it was a symbolic search for approval in the context of the game, something that I could not
receive from a father who was no longer alive. I suspect that there is a measure of truth to one or more of these questions. However, it is not part of my conscious memory. I played the games because they were interesting to me, and I was engaged by the challenge and mystery of the games. I found satisfaction in striving to reach the next level or solve the next mystery.

With that stated, my use of computers and video games almost ceased when I entered high school. Apart from taking a keyboarding class on electric typewriters and having a week where students took turns with a few basic learning games on Apple computers, I did not touch another computer until I became a college student. Even then my activities were limited to word processing and writing papers for classes using a small Apple lab. It wasn't until 1993, my senior year of college, that our school made e-mail available, but I only used it a few times.

Formal Study of Computer Information Systems

In 1994, I accepted my first teaching position, teaching middle school theology in a Lutheran school in Illinois. The days were full of interaction with students and teachers, but the evenings were quiet, even lonely. To this point in my life, there were two consistent communities: church and school. So, I sought out both to occupy my time apart from work related to teaching. I signed up for some courses in computer information systems at the local community college, and I found several evening church-related activities to attend. However, in both cases, I
developed no friendships or relationships which lasted beyond the first year and a half.

The computer information systems courses had a “how-to” nature to them. The courses entailed minimal conversation, most of them involving occasional introductory lectures or demonstrations, followed by opportunities for learners to practice and receive feedback. Even conversations with classmates before and after classes tended to revolve around computers or occasionally job-related topics. I enjoyed the culture, feeling like it was a nice escape from the high-intensity and full-day engagement with other people as a middle school teacher. The computer class environment was engaging and yet solitary, something that I enjoyed after a long day of teaching.

The computer information systems courses were a new experience in my life. Apart from the childhood experiences and word processing in college, I had no experience with computers or the Internet. The first semester at the community college, I took a course called Introduction to the Internet. The classroom consisted of computers lined up in rows with the instructor teaching from the front of the class, writing various notes and Internet addresses on the white board. The course started with a history of the Internet, followed by distinctions between the Internet and the World Wide Web. The instructor then walked us through a variety of categories of tools and resources available on the Internet: e-mailing, browsing web sites, using file transfer protocol. The last half of the course focused mostly on the World Wide Web and the web sites available through the WWW. We used a web
browser called Lynx, developed out of the University of Kansas in 1993 (Grobe, 1997). This was a text-based browser, void of much formatting, graphics, and animations often associated with browsing the web today. By the last several class sessions, we spent the majority of time engaging in online scavenger hunts set up by the instructor. He would give us a list of questions to answer by using information accessed through the Internet. Just in case one of us knew the answer, the instructor had the added expectation that we also provide web addresses, citing where we located the information. We spent hours trying to find the names of artists and authors and looking up statistics available through government and academic sites. Despite the introductory lectures about the history of the Internet, and historic uses for collaboration among researchers, I left the course thinking of the Internet mainly as a tool for getting information and finding answers to questions.

Virtual Community

Prompted by my needs as a teacher and my computer information systems courses, I took out my first loan in order to purchase a Macintosh LC520. At the same time, using the knowledge and skills gleaned from courses at the community college, I built a computer and installed a copy of the Windows 3.1 operating system. The Windows PC was a resource for hours of experimentation, but I found the Macintosh easier to use right out of the box and was soon connected to the Internet through an America Online subscription. Unlike the text-based user-driven solitary browsing of Lynx, logging onto AOL was a social experience, one that

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included both give and take. Logging onto AOL resulted in a welcome message, an image that changed from time to time, including an audible albeit computerized voice saying, “You’ve got mail,” and a predeveloped list of topical chat rooms.

The first time that I logged into AOL, the text-based chat rooms were the first place that I explored. I noticed several rooms with the word “Christian” in the title and entered one of them. In the center of the screen were lines of text with different screen names beside them, names like ilive4jc and glory2god, with an occasional name like heretic666 and luciferrulz. The one-word to two-sentence statements quickly rolled from the bottom of the page to the top, often with two or more seemingly unrelated conversations taking place at the same time. On occasion, a new member would enter the room, obviously someone with friends as they were greeted with what I eventually came to recognize as hugs: “((((ilive4jc)))).” Winks;) and smiles :) were also commonplace. In time, these substitutes for communication in the physical world became easy to recognize. However, it did take asking someone in a chat room to learn that ROFL stood for “rolling on the floor laughing.”

I sat in my chair in front of the screen, with no furniture but a small dining room table and a $20 foam chair that folded out into a bed. Watching the text scroll, trying to make sense of the different conversations, I communicated with complete strangers for hours. This was my first experience in chat rooms.

In fact, because of the odd nature of the conversation, I vividly recall my first chat-based conversation with someone online. I was in a Christian chat room,
watching the text-based chat of others, when a box popped up on screen; I was receiving a private message:

"You know that it was a conspiracy, don’t you?"

This was obviously an attempt to get my attention, and it worked. I was intrigued by the statement, as I had always been interested in talk of a good conspiracy. I typed a reply, “What was a conspiracy?”

It wasn’t before long that the person typing the messages from somewhere in the world claimed to be a former member of the Branch Davidians, the religious group that lived together in a compound in Waco, Texas. The person chatting with me explained that he (or perhaps she) had left the compound before the FBI raided the facility. He/she further indicated that the fire was not an accident, but that it was intended by the FBI. We chatted for a few minutes and then he/she must have logged off of AOL. That was my first chat-based experience in AOL. I had no idea whether or not the person with whom I had chatted was a male or female, no sense of age, and no sense of whether or not this person was telling the truth. But none of that seemed to trouble me. The conversation ended abruptly, but I felt strangely satisfied by the interaction. I continued to visit and participate in the AOL chat room for the months to follow. I must have engaged in hundreds of different topics, although I spent all of my time in rooms designated for discussion of spiritual matters.

I would scan the list of possible chat rooms for those that revolved around spiritual issues. At times I would join one of dozens of Christian chat rooms where
there was more often than not a debate between people of different belief systems. Other times I would enter rooms with titles like "Witchcraft," "New Age," or "UFOs." As far back as I can remember, spiritual matters were of great interest to me. These chat discussions were always about explorations of belief. Some entered these rooms to instruct or influence others. Others visited with questions. Still others seemed to visit with the intent purpose of striking up controversy or dominating the conversation. This could be done easily by typing in a single message over and over, not giving others a chance to respond. At other times, it took the form of interjecting a seemingly random thought, sexually crude statement, or by making an unrelated personal attack. "Jesus was an asshole!" "Satan Rulz!" and "I'm horny" were not uncommon sentiments. When these messages appeared, AOL included a feature that allowed me to ignore that user, a feature where their messages would no longer appear on my screen.

It took time for me to get acclimated to these discussions. I was a theology teacher by this time, was an active member of my church, and used to discussions about theology. In most of these other environments, people had significant opportunity to fully explain their position before others would respond. But chat-room discussion was not conducive for such dialogue. It was rare that any person had the opportunity to post more than two to three sentences in expression of a position. I experimented with a variety of methods of communication but found questions to be especially satisfying in these environments. I did not have the opportunity to state in a full paragraph why I disagreed with the position of another
person. So, I instead carefully considered the position of the other person, tried to identify if they were representing the beliefs of a particular religion or belief system, researched this system by quickly browsing the web in a separate window, and then took note of one or more areas of common ground and disagreement. Finally, I would craft and pose a question that helped make evident what I saw to be a weakness or error in their position.

All of this often took place in a matter of one to three minutes. While others exchanged single-sentence declarations of their personal beliefs, I posed questions, and I found myself establishing conversations with one or more people for three or four hours at a time. As such, this too became a sort of video game for me. A text-based challenge or thought was introduced, and I must then consider how to respond with a question or clever statement that would challenge the position or perspective of the other individual. In most cases, I would leave the chat room and never be in contact with those people again. This does not mean that I did not perceive them as actual human beings. Getting to know the life and experiences of an individual was central to communicating with them about beliefs. For that reason, my questions sometimes revolved around the beliefs of a person, but other times they related to their life experiences.

There was a handful of individuals that I would see multiple times, and we even began to develop a sense of community and friendship. Some in the chat rooms communicated strong bonds with one another, asking about personal information. I often wondered how many of these people knew each other in some
face-to-face capacity. At times this fact was clear, but in other instances it did indeed seem like it was a bond developed exclusively via the web. In most cases, however, all of these interactions took place with little knowledge about the age, gender, race, size, color, or character of the others in the room.

It was sometimes difficult to discern how honest a person was being. I could be chatting with a Christian pretending to be Buddhist, a 12-year-old pretending to be a 60-year-old priest, or a construction worker pretending to be a Protestant minister. I never did play such a role. To some extent, I always played the role of myself, taking positions consistent with my actual beliefs and describing my life experiences as they had actually occurred. I did, however, choose to withhold a good deal of information about myself, and while I did not think about it in ethical terms at the time, this in itself may be considered deception. For example, it was rare for me to actually state that I was a theology teacher. I also rarely distinguished between knowledge that I had gained 30 seconds ago and three years ago. In my communication with a Catholic priest from Milwaukee, I quickly looked up a series of web sites about the saints and referenced this in my discussion. From his perspective, there was no way to discern if I had thoroughly studied the saints or if I had just looked upon the information on the web site. In a face-to-face conversation, such matters are easier to discern. I can see when a person references a book or web site for information. And so my identity in these chat rooms became interconnected and indiscernible from the information available on my bookshelves and the web sites that I could quickly access.
In my early days of chat rooms in America Online, I remember receiving messages or warnings from AOL staff not to disclose password information, and to be cautious in disclosing personal information with others online. I heeded this warning, intentionally avoiding reference to the specific town where I lived, where I worked, or even where I had attended college. At the same time, I found myself quickly disclosing information and engaging in conversations that I had never engaged in so abruptly in person. In these few weeks online, I had more conversations about spirituality with people outside of my church and Christian community than I had in my entire lifetime up to that point. When it was in a group, with a few up to 20 or so individuals in a room, the discussions rarely went into depth on a single subject, unless one person was the center of the discussion, and everyone else was responding to this person. This sometimes occurred as a person would enter the room, sharing a problem or posing a theological question.

But I was much more interested in the one-on-one conversations that could emerge. Entering a room, I would scan the profile of individuals, a section in AOL that allowed a user to post information like age, gender, occupation, hobbies, or a favorite quote. From reading profiles and noting the messages that people typed in the room, it was common and easy to strike up a one-on-one conversation with someone, sending them a private message, allowing the two of you to text-chat out of the viewing and participation of others. There were many times in these first weeks when I sent a private message to a person and he never replied, but I rarely felt a sense of rejection. I did the same thing at times if someone instant messaged
me and I didn’t feel like chatting with them. I occasionally tried to envision something similar occurring in a face-to-face environment, someone directing a statement or question directly to me, and I completely ignoring her, not even acknowledging that she had spoken to me. But I found the rules of communication to be entirely different in this online chat-based world.

On another occasion in those first months online, I had been contacted by an individual who considered it his purpose to enter Christian chat rooms and help what he called fundamentalist Christians see the error of believing in an actual place called Hell. He instant messaged me soon after I entered a Christian chat room one day with an abrupt question: “Do you believe in Hell?”

Not wanting to disclose too much too soon, I replied, “I try to keep my beliefs as close as possible to what the Scriptures teach, even if I find that difficult or uncomfortable.”

The conversation quickly led to an exchange of Bible passages on the topic of Hell, a discussion of the Greek and Hebrew words that are often interpreted in English translations as Hell or similar words, and discussion about whether or not God was just. After well over an hour of exchanges, he wrote, “This isn’t the best environment to have such a conversation. If you are really interested in discussing this further, call me on the phone.” He typed in his phone number.

I replied that I would be calling, and he responded with a message that clearly indicated his skepticism. I wrote down the phone number on a piece of paper, and grabbed the telephone. I started to call the number but paused at the
thought that this could be some sort of scam. I didn’t recognize the area code and I recalled hearing that calling some numbers automatically charged you exorbitant amounts of money on your phone bill, sort of like calling a 1-900 number. I hung up the phone, went back to the computer, and typed in “phone area codes” in one of the online search engines. It was not long before I discovered that it was an actual area code from the state of Washington, so I picked up the phone again.

Phone calls to unfamiliar people were never comfortable for me. I dreaded making phone calls to the parents of students in these early years of teaching. I feared the unknown, some sort of conflict, or worried that I would not be able to answer a parent’s question or that I would not be able to come up with the right words to say at the right time. This call was even tenser, and for a moment I connected the experience with a summer job that I had for a total of four hours in the summer after my sophomore year of college.

I was searching for a job and, on my way home from a friend’s house, I saw an insurance company. On a whim, I walked into the front door and asked a receptionist if they needed any summer help. To my surprise, one of the people in leadership overheard me, noted being impressed with my initiative, and gave me a job on the spot as an evening telemarketer. My first night I managed to call and ask for three deceased family members (or so I was told on the phone), two current clients of the insurance company who were angry because I didn’t realize that they were current clients, and the last call of my three hour career as a telemarketer. The last call was to a person with a common last name and a woman answered the
phone. I started the conversation reading the greeting from a script provided by my employer, inserting my name at the appropriate place. The woman recognized my name.


Boom was a nickname that I had since birth. It was so common that most of my teachers throughout school called me by that name, and I even submitted papers in elementary school simply with the name “Boom” at the top.

It turns out that I was speaking with the wife of my fifth-grade teacher, and somehow she remembered my name from 10 years prior. I was embarrassed. I couldn’t hide behind my script and I certainly couldn’t try to sell her insurance at this point. She was polite and her husband was not at home at the time; otherwise she assured me that he would love to talk with me. The conversation was short, but she encouraged me to call back and talk with her husband, but not about insurance.

I hung up the phone and realized that I had been making facial expressions as if I were speaking to her in person. I had hung up the phone already, and yet I still had a large, slightly nervous smile on my face, the sort of smile that one might have when a parent walks in the room just after you had done something wrong. The smile faded and I could feel my face turn warm with embarrassment. I felt as if I had betrayed some sort of trust. Telephones are for relationships, for keeping people close at a distance. At that moment I actually believed in the spirit of the ATT slogan, “Reach out and touch someone.” Living in a different state every year of my life before age 12, the telephone was an important part of my family. It
literally kept people connected from hundreds and thousands of miles away, and this instance of a personal connection amid my brief attempt at telemarketing brought this conviction to my attention. I walked out the door of the insurance company that first evening never to return again.

So years later, I stood with the scribbled number of a mostly unknown man from Washington in my hand and the telephone in the other, and I was thinking about this experience years ago when I called people to sell life insurance. I suppose that one could argue that I sought to sell something this time also, but my experience at the time was much different. In this instance, I felt a sort of confidence, a pride in breaking through an assumed rule of the virtual world. I called the number, he answered, and I struggled to find the words to introduce myself.

"Hi, I am the guy that you were just talking to online," I explained.

There was silence on the other end of the phone, but only for a moment. He explained his surprise that I actually called his number, and he attempted to pick up where the conversation had ended online, but something felt strange about it. The rules of telephone conversation were in stark contrast to the text-based chat world where we had both met hours before. The conversation was awkward, with many moments of unanswered silence between almost every statement. The lack of visual cues, the presence of vocal intonation, and the faster pace of conversation left both of us at a loss of words. At this point, I had one phone line and I could either be on the telephone or on the Internet. So, during this telephone conversation I no longer
had free and easy access to my Greek and English Bible, an online concordance, and an ability to rapidly search the web for anything that I didn’t know. While he never said as much, he seemed to be facing the same challenge. Far more evident than when we were online, it seemed increasingly evident to me how fully unequipped both of us were to engage in this telephone conversation in an informed and intelligent manner. It would have been different if I had thought ahead or somehow taken the time to prepare for this conversation by further study. As it was, I had little to say and, after his initial five-minute restatement of what he had just communicated online, he also failed to contribute much to the conversation. So, we sat silent on both ends of the phone. Finally, after what seemed like a full minute of silence, I explained that I had to go, with no explanation as to why and no actual pressing need. He accepted my bow out of the conversation with a prompt and sudden goodbye, and that was the end of the conversation. We never communicated again on the telephone or online.

This early experience with interaction on the web has come to mind frequently as I have sought to explore the literature on dynamics of communication in the virtual world. These early experiences were mostly synchronous; it was not for another year that e-mail became a primary means of my communication on the web.

While I did “get to know” certain individuals as days and weeks passed, I only recall one individual with whom I had an extended conversation. His screen name was something like Considerlillies, or some similar name that was clearly
intended to reference the Bible passage where Jesus comforted the people by stating:

See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? (NIV Study Bible, Matthew 6:28-30)

His screen name and this passage matched his demeanor, as I came to think about it through these text-based chats. We talked quite a bit about Catholic theology, the Saints, the Church Fathers, and especially about some of the devotional writings of Catholic mystics. I “spoke” as I came to think of it, much more than he. Even in a chat-based environment, I found myself imagining his appearance and mannerisms.

From early in our conversations, I had imagined him to be an elderly man, soft spoken, slow to speak, and cautious in his movements. Perhaps it was his frequent pauses between chat messages. I pictured him hunting and pecking on the keyboard, reviewing every sentence for misspellings and typos before sending it for me to read.

It wasn’t until the third week that he shared with me that he was a Catholic priest in the Milwaukee area.

“Really! I went to college in the Milwaukee area,” I replied. “I only live a couple of hours away and I visit the Milwaukee area often. Maybe I could visit your parish some Sunday! In which parish do you serve?”

I was excited and, once discovering that he was a priest, I thought nothing of moving the conversation into the physical world. He, on the other hand, was
“silent.” He never responded to me on that topic, but instead abruptly shifted the conversation to a seemingly different topic.

“Not that it matters much, but I am assuming that you are a woman,” he wrote.

What? A woman? I remember a series of sudden thoughts, none of which I shared with him at the time. The first thought involved a series of questions about whether or not I should be offended by this. However, mixed with this thought were a series of questions about communication in this new virtual world. Is there something feminine about the way that I write and communicate? Is there even such a thing as feminine and masculine text-based chatting? What was it about my messages that led him to believe that I was a woman? Why did he choose to bring the topic up at this point? Did it have something to do with my suggestion to visit? Does this guy have different motives than to just talk theology? Nowhere in these thoughts did I ever doubt that he was a priest, nor do I doubt it when I recall the experiences at this moment. However, this question about gender did result in a personal mistrust, my experiencing a degree of discomfort with him. I explained that I was indeed a man and the conversation quickly came to an end. Neither he nor I made an attempt to continue the conversation. That was the last time that I saw him online, the last time that we conversed.

This experience stuck with me for days. Somehow based upon this anecdotal experience, I had become fascinated and sometimes troubled by the nature of interpersonal communication in a virtual environment. At this point, I
wasn't aware of Sherry Turkle's seminal text, *The Second Self: Computers and the Human Spirit* (2005). This was also several years before I had read another one of her books, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (1995), a text that explored the type of experiences that I had encountered that day with the priest.

So, my formal reading on community, identity, and communication on the web were preceded by many personal experiences that helped form my thoughts about interaction in the virtual world.

**Virtual Community and Education**

I used AOL as my provider for a little over a year, but then decided to gain Internet access through a local Internet service provider. This meant leaving the ready-made community and chat rooms behind, but the new account was less expensive and it allowed me more freedom to a web server, engaging in web design and other activities that I had been learning through my evening computer information systems classes.

This was the beginning of a new phase in my involvement in the Internet community. I used the web to get information and I had interacted with others in web-based chat communities. Now I was actually contributing to the information on the web. I had gained an interest in writing at this point also, so I decided to start a web site called "Worth Words." My plan was to post poetry, short stories, and essays that I was writing, solicit feedback from others, and also invite others to e-mail contributions to the web site. I had little more than a dozen pieces to post, but
I did so. I visited several search engines and submitted a request for my site to be listed in the directory, and I waited for visitors. I waited weeks and no e-mails arrived, so I found a site online that would allow you to put a free counter at the bottom of your page, then visit their site, log in, and get details about who had visited. This step allowed me to discover that four or five people a week visited my site and most stay for only a few minutes.

I was disappointed. My first attempt at contributing and building an online community had failed. Little more effort was devoted to the project, but the skills that I had acquired allowed me to consider, for the first time, projects where I would use technology for my role as an educator.

I left the writing site up for another year or two but now focused my attention on creating a web page for my class. This was 1995, my first step toward instructional technology. I came up with a plan for the site. In each of my classes I handed out weekly “task forms.” These included a list of graded activities, each with a different point value. Usually the point value added up to more than 100%, allowing students to pick and choose from the list based upon their interests and learning styles. This was the first item to go on the web site. I also create a web-based form where parents or students could e-mail me, but few made use of it. I also began to add links to useful sites for the course, and would direct students to the sites in class.

With the launch of this site and my frequent use of e-mail, a new opportunity also arose. I had a student engaged in a semiprofessional sport that
required her to miss weeks of class at a time. She would collect assignments from
teachers, but being out of contact with teachers for so long was a difficult academic
challenge. I contacted the parents to see if we could get Internet access for the
student while she was away. It turned out that she already had it, so I suggested that
the student and I communicate daily by e-mail and that I would post the class notes
and activities on the web site. I was excited by the prospect and looked forward to
our daily communication. I would assign her journal reflections on the course texts,
give her web sites to read and review, and she would submit her responses for
feedback. In the most basic form, this was my first experience with e-learning, and
it opened my eyes to the possibilities for education. I had the childhood memories
of how engaging computer-based interactions could be, I had learned about the fact
that community and relationship could be fostered online, and now I had firsthand
experience at a successful educational application. This first experience sparked my
excitement and resulted in explorations of educational uses of the web at my first
school and in the M.A. that I would start at Concordia University River Forest the
next year.

With the positive experience of my class web site, I suggested to the
principal that we also start a web site for the school. He agreed and I volunteered to
be the web master. I didn’t use much strategic planning, although I did review
dozens of other school web sites for ideas and then put together a basic web site for
the school. Throughout my time at the school, I was never sure about the extent to
which it was being used, apart from visiting it for contact information and the librarian's contribution of research and study skills web links.

My interest in the application of technology in schools continued to grow and I intentionally sought out the high school computer education teacher who also served as the technology coordinator, managing the school network and computer labs. I learned a great deal watching him and asking him questions, but he soon accepted a position as a district technology coordinator. I had some computer background by this point, so I volunteered to help out while still serving as a full-time teacher. A brilliant graduate, only 19, had been helping the former technology coordinator for the past several years, and we still called upon him to help keep the network up and running, an area where I was still developing my skills.

One of the first challenges while I was playing the role of technology coordinator was the need for additional computers. The principal explored a variety of prices, but having taken a computer hardware course I assured him that we could build the computers ourselves. After all, I had built my home computer. So, we ordered all of the parts, invited some computer-saavy students, and the group of us set up a small assembly line in the library one Saturday, resulting in close to 20 new computers. I walked away from the day feeling good about the day and how we had saved so much money. Unfortunately, I had failed to consider some of other important factors, like support. I had purchased the least expensive products and it was only a matter of months before hardware problems were arising at a faster level than ever before. By the second year with these computers, we had a new teacher

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who had much stronger computer skills and the two of us shared the responsibilities. Without his help, teaching almost a full day and dealing with the growing support issues would have been overwhelming. Most of the computers that I had helped build needed replacement by the third year.

While some may not consider it an ethical epiphany, I have no doubt in the matter. In the big picture, this investment wasted time, money, and human resources. My poor decision had a negative impact upon the school, and it was a decision that could have been altered by careful planning. I continue to use this early experience as a reminder that technology-related decisions have consequences, often those that are unexpected. Nonetheless, careful research and planning can help bring to light the potential consequences and inform the decision-making process. This is not to suggest that I learned the lesson the first time, nor do I always heed my own advice to this day. The excitement of what is possible is sometimes difficult to temper with words of caution and calls for preparation.

Still taking evening computer courses, serving as a full-time teacher and part-time technology coordinator, I also decided to start my M.A. at this point. Concordia University River Forest had an extension site and happened to use my high school on the weekend to offer classes. So, I took as many classes as were available and applied to my program in curriculum and instruction. My interests were now focused on two areas, my role as a theology teacher and my exploration of the educational potential for the web and other technologies. As such, my papers were devoted to one or the other throughout the program, culminating with a thesis.
titled Utilizing Internet-based Technologies to Expand the Ministry and Services of Lutheran High Schools. Describing the purpose of my study, I wrote:

The Internet is a growing part of American society. More and more individuals and organizations are utilizing it as a means of expanding current services. Schools are not absent from such efforts. In 1995 President William Clinton stated the goal of having every classroom in the United States connected to the Internet. In addition, universities and secondary schools are utilizing the Internet as a means of distance learning. Lutheran high schools can benefit from investigating similar possibilities. With sufficient research and planning, Lutheran schools can utilize the Internet to expand their current educational ministry. Promising possibilities exist for using the Internet to provide high-quality distance learning courses that are rooted in the Christian faith. (Bull, 1998, p. 2)

The thesis was a proposal for initial research into the use of web-based learning for Lutheran schools. As such, I proposed and attempted to review six areas that I considered to be important for Lutheran schools: the notion of web-based learning as evangelistic outreach, integration of faith and learning, stewardship of human resources, understanding the world in which we are preparing our students to live, understanding the nature of interpersonal communication via the web, and establishing a plan for evaluating web-based learning initiatives in Lutheran schools. Once I successfully defended the thesis, I set it aside, despite the fact that writing it had inspired me to propose and begin a web-based learning pilot at my school, what I understand to be the first effort to offer web-based courses for Lutheran high schools in the country. Only amid analysis of my former writings for this dissertation did I recognize that this thesis remains a formative piece of research in my current thoughts and activities related to web-based learning. The paper set a foundation upon which I have been building to this day.
The effort to start a pilot web-based learning program was an exciting one. I spent hours planning and researching needs for software, reviewing other distance learning programs, learning about instructional design and the course development process, and developing a proposal to share with the board of education. Writing proposals was new to me and I failed to include a very important part to the proposal, a budget. I shared my vision for the value and benefit to the board and they unanimously voted to give me the go-ahead. None brought up the question of money, so I walked away from the meeting excited to start a pilot web-based learning program with a zero-dollar budget.

Follow-up meetings with the principal resulted in identifying funds for course development, however. So, I invited all of the faculty to consider a course that they had always wanted to teach, something that they thought would be engaging and useful for the students, and something that our faculty resources would not allow us to teach traditionally. The result was the plan to design a number of courses: art history, a history of American leaders, a team-taught creation and evolution course taught by a science teacher and a theology teacher, world literature, and an American government course. Each week throughout the semester, I gathered the group together, teaching and demonstrating the nature of teaching online and establishing a step-by-step plan for course development. With the busyness of the school year, some were unable to keep up with the schedule, but we did end up with the completion of three of the courses. Unfortunately, I had also failed to consider the audience and the importance of marketing, so we had one
student sign up for American government. That was the spring of 2000 and it paralleled my early study in the doctoral program at Northern Illinois University.

By this time I had also applied, been accepted, and taken a number of courses in my doctoral program. That spring I also received a call from the Lutheran high school in Milwaukee where I had student taught in 1994. Despite my excitement about the web-based learning initiative, it was difficult to turn down this new offer. As much as I valued and cared about the use of technology in education, at that point my greatest passion was still classroom teaching, spending my day teaching and interacting with the students. It was an offer to serve as a full-time theology teacher, leaving behind all of the educational technology activities of my current capacity. Continually pulled between these two passions, I accepted the new position, returning all of my attention to working directly with students and teaching high school theology.

While the new position removed my responsibilities for educational technology, my connection to the web-based community was stronger than ever. Having moved, there were more friends with whom to keep in contact. E-mail and AOL Instant Messenger were the tools of choice, and I spent most nights keeping in touch with friends that I had left behind with the move. Sitting down at my computer at night, working on a paper for class or preparing for my theology classes, I would also type occasional chat messages back and forth. This method of communication continued for three years, and it would be enough to sustain and even develop stronger relationships with many friends. One friend in particular was
someone with whom I spoke a couple of times a week when we saw each other every day. Now, at a distance and via the web, we were spending hours each week instant messaging and e-mailing, working together on potential projects, but mostly helping each other refine our thoughts about everything from politics to education to theology. This continued for a number of years.

In the meantime, this friend was developing his technology skills and using the web as a place to facilitate dialogue with people about the Christian faith. His tool of choice was an open source message board, a tool that allows a layer of privacy through user accounts and passwords and allows people to post messages, reply to messages, and revisit previous discussions in an asynchronous manner. With this online technology, my friend was able to create an online community of hundreds who gathered to debate and discuss faith matters.

Having used the message board for his “Internet ministry,” he also set up a separate message board for old friends to gather and stay in touch. The idea spread quickly among a number of individuals with whom I attended undergraduate study. A group of over 20 of us, many of my closest friends from college, signed up and began to rekindle friendships that been on hold for seven years in some cases.

Without seeing each other face to face, I quickly felt as strong of a connection with several on the message board as I had when we were hanging out in the dorms every night in college. In this online community, we shared our personal struggles with one another; offered prayers for one another; shared about what was going on in our lives; and continually talked about sports, politics, theology,
education, challenges and joys with our children, and anything else that came to the mind of one of us. Reading and writing messages, I have cried, laughed, had my face turn red with anger, and even nodded off to sleep, wanting to spend just a little more time at night reading and sharing messages.

Many nights, after putting our daughter to sleep, both my wife and I would sit in my wife’s office, each using our laptops but on the message board, posting to the same topic. At times we would verbally share a comment as we wrote, or seek input about how to phrase something. This message board is alive and well. However, for me, I was unable to balance the amount of time that I spent on it. I found myself logging on in the mornings before work, at work before starting my day, during lunch, and sometimes even at other free moments in the work day. For this reason, I found the most effective method of addressing this challenge was to remove myself from the community when engaging in pressing projects like working on a dissertation or a work-related project that demanded evening hours. While my wife remains involved in the message board, I have not logged on for several months. Nonetheless, the conversations and relationships remain alive in my life, as my wife and I have evening conversations about our friends at a distance.

The theme of this chapter has been virtual community and identity. I have traced representative experiences of my interaction first with the computer in isolation, but leading to my experiences and understanding of virtual community, first relationship to the computer, but later focusing more upon relationship through
the computer, even relationship in the virtual world, a shared space within the computer. Interspersed in this reflection are what one might typically identify as ethical issues. The following two chapters will focus more fully upon issues more directly related to my ethical challenges. Without understanding the role of technology in my life, the following chapters would lack perspective and context.
CHAPTER 4

THE LUDDITE

Neil Postman

In the introductory chapter I referenced the term “Luddvocate,” used by the president of Kenyon College in a presentation at an Educause Conference. According to Nugent (2006), this is a word that she uses to describe herself, one who has both concern (the Luddite) and hopes (the Advocate) for technology in contemporary society, more specifically education. I first learned of the Luddites from Neil Postman (1993), in his book Technopoly. Despite being an undergraduate history major, no memories of this movement emerged as I read about them from Postman’s perspective. At this point, all that I knew about the Luddites came from one page in Postman’s book.

We also must not omit mentioning the rise and fall of the much-maligned Luddite movement. The origin of the term is obscure, some believing that it refers to the actions of a youth named Ludlum who, being told by his father to fix a weaving machine, proceeded instead to destroy it. In any case, between 1811 and 1816, there arose widespread support for the workers who bitterly resented the new wage cuts, child labor, and elimination of laws and customs that had once protected skilled workers. Their discontent was expressed through the destruction of machines, mostly in the garment and fabric industry; since then the term “Luddite” has come to mean an almost childish and certainly naïve opposition to technology. But the historical Luddites were neither childish nor naïve. They were people trying desperately to preserve whatever rights, privileges, laws, and customs had
given them justice in the older worldview. They lost. So did all the other
nineteenth-century nay-sayers. (Postman, 1993, p. 43)

As little information as this was, it was enough to gain my intrigue.

Postman's (1993) book is rich with tales of caution about blind acceptance of
technology, but this paragraph, rooted in the historic struggle of a people against
change and uncertainty, captured my interest on a different level. From that point
forward, I started to use the word “Luddite” in reference to myself, even though I
didn’t know the details of the movement and the fact that I was spending my days
promoting the use of technology in my schools, often without adequate
consideration for the impact. By the time that I finished Technopoly, I was a
Luddite, a concerned citizen, one troubled by the unquestioning acceptance of
technology in society. At the same time, I was unquestioningly accepting, even
promoting, technology in my school.

This internal struggle did not go without notice. It was personally troubling,
so much so that there were days early in my doctoral program in instructional
technology that I wanted to abandon the program and devote my graduate study
entirely to history, theology, or philosophy. For me, the problems posed by Postman
were so large scale that I didn’t know what to do with them. I wanted to stand by
his side, but how? How does one transfer these lofty ideas about the Luddites and
others into practical applications for educational life in a technological society? My
answer was to keep things separated. At school I was a technology advocate, but
when it came to reading, I immersed myself in what I considered to be the literature

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of the Luddite. But because of the central role of Postman upon my thoughts, and
because the personal experiences were actually the readings themselves, let me take
further time to highlight some of the significant Postman contributions to my
technological conscience, aligning several of his ideas with the specific ways in
which I sought to apply his thoughts to my actions in the field of education.

Neil Postman addressed the topic of technology as a professor of
communications and a social critic. Something distinct about Postman is that he did
not spend a significant amount of time critiquing specific technologies. Instead, he
discussed the notion of technology in broad and general terms in society.

In *Technopoly*, Postman introduced the topic (1993) by referring to an
Egyptian myth called “The Judgment of Thamus.” In this myth, King Thamus is
offered the gift of writing. The wise king responds with the following words:

Those who acquire it will cease to exercise their memory and become
forgetful; they will rely on writing to bring things to their remembrance by
external signs instead of by their own internal resources. Writing is a receipt
for recollection, not for memory. And as for wisdom, your pupils will have
the reputation for it without the reality: they will receive a quantity of
information without proper instruction, and in consequence be thought very
knowledgeable when they for the most part are quite ignorant. (Postman
quoting Plato, 1993, p. 4)

Postman’s (1993) reference to “The Judgment of Thamus” is not to critique
the technology or tool that we call writing. Rather, Postman used this story to
illustrate the point that all technologies entail a give and take. In some instances, the
benefits may far surpass the drawbacks. In other cases, the negatives may drown
any proposed promise. There is, however, no such thing as a technology that is full
of benefits and free of negative effects. With this in mind, the primary goal of Postman’s comments on technology is to promote serious reflection about the role of technology and specific technologies in society, and to discourage an utopian messianic attitude toward technology.

Postman (1995) criticized many technology advocates in education. In *The End of Education*, he expresses serious concern about those who speak of technology as the potential savior of the problems of the modern educational system. He refers to hopes of a former assistant secretary of education who painted a picture of students having trouble sleeping, waking up, and working on algebra homework via the Internet. Postman explains that such a picture does not describe a new technology but rather a new type of child. Postman called for a measure of realism amid those who claim that new technologies will turn students into active, self-motivated learners.

Postman (1995) also expressed alarm at those who argue for the use of technology in education simply because technological advancement is seemingly inevitable. Rather than molding technologies to meet our goals and agenda, he argued that the use of technologies in schools often results in the opposite, becoming the kind of people the technology requires one to be.

Instead of spending an increased amount of time in schools teaching students how to use computers and other emerging technologies, educators should spend time teaching students to think critically about technology itself. In Postman’s (1995)
words, there is less need to teach students "how to use them, but how they use us" (p. 44). With this in mind, Postman proposed that technology be included as a subject to be critiqued and analyzed. Where many in education think of technology as a tool for teaching, Postman argued that it is less important to use the technology for teaching and more important to study technology as a subject area. What is the history of various technologies? How did the emergence of a given technology impact society? What are the unexpected consequences of technologies that, on the surface, appear to have great promise for society? For Postman, exploring these questions with students is more important than using technology as a teaching tool, or teaching students how to use various technologies and software packages.

In *Technopoly* (1993), Postman's criticism goes beyond the use of technology in schools. It is here that he expressed his belief that the United States has become what he called a technopoly: a society that elevates efficiency as the primary measure of success and worth, one that values technical calculation above human judgment, and one that has become convinced that the affairs of citizens are best ruled by the experts. All of these characteristics, according to Postman, have come to be as a result of the rule of technology in American society. He gave examples of the increased emphasis upon measuring intelligence using numbers and quantitative formulas, and the immediate turn to technology for solutions when psychological, social, and even moral problems arise. Both of these examples reveal a society that relies heavily upon technology and the characteristics of technology.
The problem, according to Postman (1993), is that technology is unable to solve all psychological, social and moral problems. Rather, technology often creates new problems. While some view the Internet as solving the problem of communication across great distances, Postman points out that this same technology has resulted in a type of information gluttony, where data are valued above meaning or wisdom.

Postman (1993) sought to promote dialogue about technology that is open to look at both sides of the issue. He was not calling on society to renounce technology but did call for individuals to take an active role in shaping the nature of technology in society rather than being shaped by it.

My first attempt to speak for Postman was in a professional ethics course in my master's degree program. The class met at an extension site which happened to be at the school where I taught, even the classroom of a good friend. The group of seven or eight had the undersized desks arranged in a circle as we shared various case studies and explored some of the ethical implications for the educator. The course was not about technology ethics. Most of the time was spent exploring more general ideas about the professional ethics of the educator. We talked about educational policy, moral ethics, the idea of what it means to provide a democratic education, along with many general ideas connected to equality and personal integrity. However, on this particular morning, a brief question about technology was initiated by the instructor. I can't remember the context of the question, but he asked, "Is technology good, bad, or neutral?" It was a leading question. I remember
that much. Several classmates quickly responded, explaining that technology was neutral. It was not the technology that is good or bad, but how one chooses to use it. The instructor responded with affirmation and started to move on to another topic, but I raised my hand to interrupt.

"I don't think I agree with that. I've been reading on this subject lately, and it seems to me that every technology brings with it a bias, that every technology is values-laden." I tried to continue by summarizing Postman's ideas on medium as the metaphor (Postman, 1986).

I continued. "Postman argues that every technology brings with it a metaphor for thinking about the world, like the idea of how having an invention called a clock leads us to measure our lives by moments, minutes, seconds, hours. Can the clock be used by people without pushing us in that direction? I think every technology is that way. It has a bias. Maybe it isn't good or bad, but it definitely isn't valueless."

I was ready for a good conversation on the subject, but I honestly expected everyone to quickly see my point and accept it. Instead, other classmates and the instructor returned to their initial point, that technology is neither good nor evil. I tried again to represent Postman's ideas, likely inaccurately, but the instructor ended the conversation quickly, and we moved on to the next topic.

I sat in the circle, no longer paying attention. I remained absorbed in what happened, wanting another chance to explain myself, dissatisfied that everyone did
not agree with me (or rather Postman) on this important issue. I argued to myself that this was the very reason that so many of us do accept technology without thought. If everyone else is like this group, believing that every technology is neutral, then it is no wonder that we fail to see the importance of reflecting upon the impact of technology on society. Silenced, I continued to argue in my mind long enough to be convinced that, given another chance, I could change everyone’s attitude on this subject.

Looking back, I consider this my adolescent years with Postman, when I was trying to refine my thoughts and beliefs by arguing about them, even if I still lacked certainty about some things. At times, it was more important that I win the conversation than that I and my classmates understand the topic more deeply. Whatever the case, this conversation served to added emotional reinforcement to my convictions and desire to read, think, and talk about what I started referring to as “Postmanisms.”

I referenced Postman’s books like manuals as I first came to think about the dangers and challenges of life in a technopoly. And the specific recommendation that I first chose to act upon was the idea of having technology included as a subject in school, one to be critiqued. My first effort was brief, but it set the stage for a much larger project years later.

It was my first semester teaching a high school sociology course. Much of the material was new to me as I had only taken two sociology courses myself up to
this time. But on this day I had planned something different. In order to get students thinking and discussing, I often used a game called “either-or.” The premise was simple. I would pose an argument or position and students had to take a side. Do you agree or disagree? If you agree, then move to the right side of the class. If you disagree, move to the left side of the class. Before the debate would start, I required each student to take a few minutes to write out his/her position. Once the entire class was prepared, the debate would begin. If, at any point in the conversation, a student was convinced to change his position, then he could move to the other side of the room and explain his/her change in position.

Being the first class of the day, this type of an activity was a risk. I knew that there was a good chance that students might not be ready for deep thinking first thing in the morning, but I was prepared to add more controversy as needed. Students walked in to the class, many with the look of sleep still on their faces. They sat at their desks and waited for the morning devotion over the school sound system. As the devotion ended, I announced that we would be playing “either-or.” Four students were often quick to contribute to discussions, and their enthusiasm at the announcement started the activity well. Before posing the situation, I warned them that this was a pretty heavy position.

“It is a full paragraph and a half, so I am going to put it up on the overhead projector for you to view. Take your time, read it carefully, jot down a few of your
thoughts, and sketch out your initial position. I’ll give you 5 to 10 minutes and then we can take our sides.”

1. The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have greatly increased the life-expectancy of those of us who live in “advanced” countries, but they have destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to indignities, have led to widespread psychological suffering (in the Third World to physical suffering as well) and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world. The continued development of technology will worsen the situation. It will certainly subject human beings to greater indignities and inflict greater damage on the natural world, it will probably lead to greater social disruption and psychological suffering, and it may lead to increased physical suffering even in “advanced” countries.

2. The industrial-technological system may survive or it may break down. If it survives, it MAY eventually achieve a low level of physical and psychological suffering, but only after passing through a long and very painful period of adjustment and only at the cost of permanently reducing human beings and many other living organisms to engineered products and mere cogs in the social machine. (Kacynzski, 1995, n.p.)

All of the students were juniors or seniors and I knew that most of them had read 1984 in their English classes. I had already challenged the students with some difficult writing, including excerpts written by Emil Durkheim, Georg Hegel, and Karl Marx, so I wasn’t surprised when the students accepted this challenging excerpt without complaint. I was excited to see them writing. I remember thinking that, perhaps for the first time in my educational endeavors, Neil Postman would be proud of me for this one.

The conversation was lively. Students captured the essence of the piece. Technology has a price. Sometimes that is a price that we have to pay, but other
times it is a price that others pay for us. Is it ethical to support and use a technology that is having a negative impact upon the lives of others around the world? One student brought up the idea of buying products that come from places that rely upon child labor. Another brought up concerns about the ozone layer. Yet another argued that we don’t have a choice. What is the point of “ripping on technology” when society is not about to give it up? It can’t be stopped. At that point I entered the conversation, unable to hold back any longer.

“Yes! You are probably right. It can’t be stopped. But can it be shaped? Is it possible that we can direct it in some ways that are better than others? Is it possible that, by thinking and talking about these things, we can become more aware of the potential consequences and take that into account in our lifestyles?”

Several students nodded in agreement, but my interjection silenced the conversation and it was near the end of class. So, I shared one last bit of information. “By the way, the excerpt up on the screen was written by a former math professor named Theodore Kaczynski. Have any of you heard of him?”

I expected more of a reaction from the class, but from the looks on the students’ faces, only one recognized the name. I could see the look of surprise in his face and he explained to the rest of the class that Theodore Kaczynski was the Unibomber. The surprise spread to the faces of everyone.

I waited too long to bring this up, with only a few minutes remaining in class. So, instead of helping students sort out the implications of the author through
discussion, I suggested that some of the ideas can still be valid. There are many people who have similar opinions and beliefs but use them in different ways. Kaczynski turned to violence, but we have other options.

“That is your assignment for tomorrow. Come up with a list of what you consider to be five positive and ethical ways to respond to our discussion today. Make them practical.”

I could not imagine a more positive first experience applying Postman’s ideas in my role as an educator. Other efforts followed. Media and technology literacy were not a formal part of my classes, but from then on, when I noticed a natural opportunity to help build this literacy, I took advantage of it.

The culminating effort to think through Postman’s suggestion for teaching students to think about technology didn’t occur until 2006, as my final project for a second graduate degree, the first being in curriculum and instruction, and this second one in liberal studies. I applied to the program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee weeks after completing my candidacy exams at Northern Illinois University. My search for a dissertation topic continued and I wanted to explore the possibility of infusing methods of inquiry from the humanities into my dissertation. Toward that end, I took American studies interdisciplinary courses, a course in comparative religion, film studies, a graduate writing workshop with South African novelist Sheila Roberts, a history of science course, and a class in the philosophy of perception. It was amid this study that I formed my thoughts and
interests in autobiography, both reading autobiographies and autobiography as inquiry. But nearing the end of the program, I thought it wise not to choose the thesis option, especially given the fact that the deadline for completion of my dissertation grew closer each week.

Instead, I elected to complete a final project and proposed that I write the curriculum for a one-semester high school elective entitled “Life in a Technological Society.” My project proposal began as follows:

For the past 12 years I have served as a Lutheran high school educator, teaching Christian theology and social studies. In addition to my role as an educator, my formal graduate study has been in curriculum and instruction, followed by doctoral work in instructional technology, where I have devoted much time to ethical considerations related to technology, education, and society. As I neared the end of my doctoral studies and began to consider an area of research for my dissertation, I found myself desiring a stronger understanding of humanistic and interdisciplinary approaches to research. As a result I continued my graduate study through the Master of Liberal Studies program at the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee. Now, being at the end of the MLS program and considering a final project, I find myself returning to my first passions, teaching and building learning communities. With that in mind, as a final project, I am proposing to develop a one semester interdisciplinary high school elective entitled Life in a Technological Society. This course will challenge participants to explore a variety of themes and issues related to contemporary society, expose participants to interdisciplinary ways of thinking, and address a number of Wisconsin state high school standards related to digital and media literacy. (Bull, 2006b, p. 1).

The proposal was approved. With the help of my advisor, I found an outstanding chair for my project. His name was Dr. Peter Paik, a film studies professor with strong interests in issues related to media, spirituality, and philosophy. As I met with him the first time, I shared my interest in making the
course as interdisciplinary as possible, challenging students to consider the implications of life in a technological society by study of a variety of artifacts from academic research, film, fiction, web-based content, and art.

Looking at the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction Model Academic Standards for Technology Education (Albrecht, et. al., 1998) and drawing from Postman and others quoted by Postman, I crafted a 15-week course, each week exploring a different topic like social implications of technology, what it means to be human, democracy and privacy, quality of life and personal empowerment, technology and our relationship to the planet, advertising, virtual worlds, visions of the future, and Neo-Luddites. Most weeks included a film along with related or contrasting readings. For example, in a week dedicated to visions of the future, students would watch the film Gattica (Niccol, 1997) and read The Machine Stops (1970) by E. M. Forster. In the week dedicated to advertising in a technological society, students would study Nike commercials, read a research article on neuro-marketing, and go on a field trip to Eisner American Museum of Advertising and Design. I also incorporated and shared excerpts from Postman's books throughout the course.

While it took much time, research, and effort, this project flowed. I could sit down, begin working and eight or nine hours would pass before I noticed it. Stacks of all of the books that I had read on technology and ethics surrounded me along with some of my favorite fiction, lists of movies, and other artifacts that I had
developed in the planning process. By the end of the project, this course represented virtually every one of my research interests and passions in life. I pulled from theology, philosophy, Luddite literature, instructional technology, curriculum theory, history, short stories, web-based resources, and popular culture artifacts. It continues to be the project about which I am most proud, and in which the technological conscience planted by Postman is most evident in my work. Nearing the end of the project, I sat down to write the introduction to a sample syllabus for the course.

This course will challenge you to explore the deep and significant relationship between technology and modern society. We will explore this through personal journaling, group discussion, and the analysis of a variety of social artifacts (film, music, short stories, journal articles, etc.). Each week we will explore a different theme along with a series of questions about the nature of life in a technological society.

Technology is so intertwined into modern life that it would be impossible to explore every aspect of technology in society. For that reason, our focus will be to consider a number of “big questions” about technology and society. We will do this in a variety of ways. Some weeks we will explore a broad theme, looking at the topic from a distance. This may be a bit like driving your car through a national park. You will see a number of different things in a short period of time, but may not have learned a great deal about any one thing. At other times, we will explore a general topic (like the environment, for example) by looking at one or two specific cases or issues. This is a bit like driving to the park, spending the entire day at a specific location, and then leaving the park. There are many things that you don’t even get the chance to discover, but knowledge of that one location will be richer, and you will hopefully be able to transfer what you learn to other situations in life.

You are expected to keep track of your thoughts and experiences throughout the class in the form of a learning log. A large number of your course assignments will be in this learning log. In addition, you are encouraged to use this as a place of personal reflection about the topics addressed in the
class. This may take the form of poetry, fiction, traditional essays, sketches, collages of images, references to outside sources that you found insightful or other methods of reflection and communication that you deem meaningful. (Bull 2006a, p. 1).

I successfully defended the course proposal as the final project for my graduate degree in liberal studies. I promptly set it aside, returning to the completion of my dissertation. To this day, I am excited about the prospect of teaching such a course, although I suspect that the course content may be more suitable for a college course than one for high school students. Despite the fact that I have yet to teach this course, the process of writing it allowed me another opportunity to incorporate Postman's ideas into my own thoughts and values about the importance of helping individuals to explore the implications of life in a technological society.

Jane Healy

Where Postman helped frame my thoughts about technology and society in the broadest sense, Jane Healy aided me in applying these broad principles to specific and practical educational issues. In 1999, I overheard a classmate in my doctoral studies mention a book by Jane Healy, *Failure to Connect* (1998). The classmate described the book as unfolding some of the important health and developmental issues important for those promoting the use of technology in schools. My impression was that this was a Neil Postman for the K-12 schools and the issues pertinent to children. I do not recall the details of my classmate's
comments, but it was sufficient motivation for me to purchase and read the text.

Like the experience of reading Postman's books, memories of reading Healy's book are full of excitement about discovering or being informed about new and important ideas for my life and work. Having completed her book *Failure to Connect* (1998) in two days, I purchased one of her other books, *Endangered Minds* (1999), started reading one evening, and stayed up all night to finish it. Both books evoked the experience of many readers when they exclaim, "I couldn't put the book down!"

In these two books, Healy focuses upon empirical and practical issues in education. Her thoughts are directed toward the use of technology, particularly the computer, in schools. She cites several ways in which she sees computers as being positive and useful in learning environments. Nonetheless, the emphasis in both *Failure to Connect* (1998) and *Endangered Minds* (1999) is upon the adverse impact of technology integration in education and in the general lives of children. *Endangered Minds* focuses upon the impact of television and *Failure to Connect* places a heavy emphasis upon the impact of computers.

In *Failure to Connect*, Healy (1998) begins by questioning the enormous push to have computers in every classroom and the immense financial investment made by schools for computer and Internet technologies. She asserts that there is little evidence that computers are actually enhancing learning, especially with younger children. Is it fiscally wise to make a large financial investment in products that have yet to reveal significant enhancements and improvements in learning? She
emphasizes her point by explaining that class sizes are rising in many schools, music
and arts programs are being cut, and teachers are oftentimes not provided with the
technical support and staff development resources to utilize the computers and
Internet resources that have been purchased.

Having stated this initial concern, Healy (1998) dedicates the remainder of
her book to issues of physical health along with the social, emotional, and
intellectual development of children. Healy expresses concern that neither of these
issues has received adequate consideration before integrating computers in schools.

Concerns regarding vision are among the many health issues mentioned by
Healy (1999). She cites the American Academy of Pediatrics in stating that children
should not stare at televisions and computer screens more than a total of two hours
in any given day. Granted the popularity of television as an evening and weekend
activity, Healy questions the health of exposing children to more screen time during
the school day. Furthermore, Healy (1998) calls for more consideration of vision
when making technological plans in schools. She asks schools to have research-
informed decisions about lighting in computer rooms, whether or not to put shields
on screens, and when developing policies on how much time students will or will
not work in front of computer screens.

Another health concern posited by Healy (1998) dealt with postural and
skeletal problems. Providing very practical advice for parents and teachers
regarding posture while using a computer, Healy explains that very few schools take
into account health when purchasing computer furniture, selecting mice, placing monitors, or selecting appropriate lighting. Healy cites very little solid research to demonstrate the effects of improper furniture, placement of computers, and lighting, but she reminds the reader of the importance of such practical issues on the health of children. Teachers and parents are encouraged to further investigate such issues in order to care for the well-being of their students and children.

Having some background in brain research, Healy (1998) expresses an additional concern about what is being sacrificed to younger children are exposed to computer activities at home and during the school day. There are critical or at least sensitive periods in both childhood and adolescence, when learning environments wield special effects and when certain activities and stimulation are most appropriate and necessary for the brain to reach its full potential. Most children learn about the world through physical interaction with it. As more time is being spent interacting with a computer screen, there is concern that important time to interact with the real world is being sacrificed at the social, emotional, and intellectual detriment of the child, at a time when these physical and social experiences are essential to her development. Healy goes so far as to argue that, because of the decreased interaction with the physical world and the sedentary nature of using a computer, overuse could hinder brain development in young children.
Again, with intellectual development in mind, Healy (1998) distinguishes between two types of computer software: educational software and what Healy refers to as "edutainment." The former is software that has been carefully developed with educational goals in mind. Educational psychologists, classroom teachers, parents, medical doctors, instructional designers, and other professionals are consulted in the development of the software. In addition, rigorous evaluations of the software are done initially, and ongoing studies take place after the software is distributed. Edutainment, the most readily available type of software according to Healy, is quite different. It is marketed as having educational value but lacks the rigorous development and evaluation of educational software. This software tends to have the primary goal of entertainment, but the software company wants to reach the educational market. There is limited educational value with such software.

With this information in mind, Healy asks: What type of software is being used in most classrooms? Are teachers informed about the educational software that is being used in their classrooms? What selection process is utilized in most of our schools? All of these questions certainly make sense if schools seek to utilize computers in order to enhance and improve learning.

Healy (1998) asserted that there is no need for a student to spend time with computers until he is at least 10 years old. Those in disagreement with Healy would likely argue that students who begin using computers at a younger age would have a significant advantage. However, Healy's personal research reveals otherwise. She
found that students who had not been exposed to computers in the early grades were able to achieve computer literacy in a very short period of time. Furthermore, the computer skills of a student starting earlier had no measurable superiority over the student who had not been exposed to computers until a later age.

As previously stated, Healy focuses upon practical and critical issues regarding technology in education. She poses questions about fiscal responsibility and educationally sound practice rooted in current research and calls for more intentional considerations about the health of children. While one may disagree with some of Healy’s ideas, the issues that she makes known certainly call for further investigation by educators, parents, educational technologists, and educational policy makers.

As I read about these ideas, several questions continued. Like the experience with Postman, I wondered how I had gone this far without considering these ideas. Few or none of Healy’s concerns were considerations as I served in the role of technology coordinator at the time. I read the book, full of guilt, and was overwhelmed at the thought of applying this new knowledge in my school. To what extent have I been jeopardizing the health and well-being of the students by not considering these issues? I was promoting the use of technology, while not challenging educators to carefully critique these exercises. The notion of a reflective
practitioner regarding the ethical use of educational technology had escaped my attention; it had not been a priority in my thoughts about the use of educational technology in schools until reading Healy's book.

A Voice for Values-Centered Thinking

With the broader social context introduced to me by Postman and the educational issues revealed to me by Healy, I extended my reading on the subject. I began to explore a variety of other writers. Starting with the references in Healy's and Postman's books, as well as engaging in related searches at the university library, I collected names and titles of dozens of authors, quickly working through the books. Jacques Ellul (1964) caught my attention because of his exploration of theology issues, so I read *The Technological Society*, where Ellul poses broad social concerns about education and what he referred to as Techne. Venturing into media and communications I discovered Marshal McLuhan's *The Medium Is the Message* (1967), I read *The Child and the Machine* (2001) by Alison Armstrong and Charles Casement, Todd Oppenheimer's *The Flickering Mind* (2003), Larry Cuban's *Oversold and Underused* (2001), Sven Birkerts (1995, 1996), David Noble (1997), and Lewis Mumford (1934, 1957).

My expectations of technology leaders in schools increased significantly. But this was the same time that I decided to take a full-time teaching position in Milwaukee, leaving behind my role as an educational technology leader. Still
convinced that this message deserved more attention, I began to craft plans for a conference proposal. Relying upon Healy, Postman, and the other texts, I put together a presentation titled, “A Valued-Centered Approach to Technology-Related Decisions,” and sought an opportunity to submit it to a conference. I found a regional conference in the Midwest, submitted the proposal, and it was accepted. This was my first conference proposal.

The conference was several hours away from home, but I had to be at a meeting at school in the evening, so I woke up at four in the morning, gathered my presentation materials, and made my way to the conference. I gathered my registration materials and wandered my way through the building seeking out my room. Fortunately, I arrived early, as the task of locating the room was a 30-minute endeavor. The small room, with enough seats for 30, was on the top floor in the far corner of the conference center. I didn’t know how many people had signed up for my session, but given the size and location of the room, I expected a small group. Getting my computer and presentation prepared was quick and easy, and I sat on a table in the front of the room, waiting for people to arrive. Ten minutes before the start, people began to gather and by the starting time the seats were full, and there was a line of people standing against the back wall.

Fear and insecurities about my faith background and the sense of being an outsider arose a few times. However, excitement along with confidence about the importance of my message dominated my emotions and thoughts that morning.
While I was driving to the conference, I reminded myself that I had nothing to lose here. I live and work in a different state, I don’t know anyone in the crowd, and they don’t know me.

I started the presentation, sharing a brief personal background, although leaving out the fact that I taught theology. I thought it sufficient to share that I was a high school teacher at a private school in Wisconsin. In order to explain my personal investment in the topic I shared a personal experience that occurred around the same time that I started reading through Neil Postman’s books.

Several years ago, I was offered a position as a district technology coordinator in a technologically progressive district in the Midwest. As a means of helping me make a decision about the offer, the superintendent took me on a tour of the district’s schools and resources. The superintendent’s excitement about student learning and technological innovations was contagious. He took me from location to location, highlighting computer labs and technological innovations for which he clearly took great pride. The tour ended in a large open room with a few carousels of computers. The superintendent proudly identified this room as the library. I looked around, a bit puzzled, as this was the high school library and there were only three bookshelves on one outside wall. The rest of the room was either open or filled with computers. He explained that all publications for student use were available through the computers. The budget for books and the traditional library

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had been redirected in order to provide this room full of computers for student research.

I left the tour with excitement about the position, but also a feeling of discomfort. With all of my personal commitment to emerging technologies for the improvement of student learning, I still had a strong commitment to paper-based texts. I had so many questions about this “modern library.” How will this impact the ways students conduct research? How will it impact student reading in general? Is research the only purpose for a school library? My intellectual and emotional reaction to the situation even touched on ethical and moral levels as I went back and forth about the decision made to replace the traditional shelves of books with computers. For a variety of reasons, I decided not to accept the position, but that experience served as a turning point in my thinking and research about educational technology. Writings of individuals like Neil Postman and Jane Healy also contributed, but the reading combined with this personal experience focused my interest in the role of values and ethics in technology-related decisions. In a sense, I established a personal mission or agenda to promote personal and widespread reflection about technology-related decisions. I decided to find ways to encourage dialogue about the role of values and ethics in technology-related decisions in education and society in general.

I shared something very similar to this at the beginning of the presentation and continued by explaining my goals for the presentation: to promote discussion of
both the positive and negative aspects of technology in education and to encourage
decision making about technology that is consistent with the values of our schools.
Slide by slide, I introduce the questions and comments of Healy, Postman, and
others. Is the cost justified? Do computers make kids smarter? How does this
impact reading? What is the nature of writing with computers? What does your
school do to address health issues related to technology? What are the dangers of
early exposure? Does adding technology change what happens in the classroom?
Why is it important to accompany investment in computers with investment in staff
development? Do our values drive our technology decisions or do our technology-
decisions drive our values (Bull, 2002)?

My formal presentation was complete, with 15 minutes to spare for
questions. I felt good about the presentation. The body language of the audience
indicated interest, and I saw many nods and smiles. Yet, the first question posed by
a person in the audience was, “Do you have a suggestion for math software for early
elementary?” This question was followed by several similar questions. Not one of
these related directly to what I had presented, not until the last individual. He was
standing in the back of the room and identified himself as one of the vendors who
worked with schools to purchase software. He explained that most, if not all, of my
sources are people known to be biased, to have an agenda. Excited and ready for the
comment, I responded with comments similar to the following:

Agreed! My point is that technology itself has a bias, and that thoughtful
values-centered decision making seeks to surface and take into account that
bias. All schools should be biased, biased toward their mission and core values. If the technology does not support that mission and those values, then it should not be assimilated. The authors that I cite have values that drive their writing, values like the health of children, the importance of a liberal arts education, or the importance of wise and thoughtful fiscal leadership. If these are the values, then they should be used in decision making about technology. Your values don’t have to be the same. All that I am suggesting is that they be surfaced and used in decision making, specifically regarding educational technology.

I was speaking these words, but I felt like I was in the audience listening to myself at the same time. I had never put all of the ideas together quite like this. I may have sounded like I had believed these ideas for years. In fact, I was just coming to terms with them at that moment, convincing myself of them in the heat of a challenge in front of an audience. As much as I was able to later reflect upon the conversation and agree with what I said that day, it is impossible to deny the fact that the challenge and emotions in that moment also clarified and deepened my convictions.

By the time I had finished my response to the challenge, the session time was up, so I had the last word on the subject. From the body language of this gentleman in the back of the room, he did not appear offended. In fact, he greeted me afterward, commended me on my style of presentation, and we had a brief discussion about his work. I drove home that day, feeling good about the position that I had begun to shape in myself. It was one that heeded the wisdom of Postman, but unique from him. I was still an advocate of technology, but had come to terms
with a position that allowed me to pull from diverse and sometimes contradictory sources.

I shared the presentation once more formally, and in more informal environments a few others times. With each presentation I found myself more confident and convinced of the message. I added new sources as I discovered them, even if I didn’t have a scheduled presentation. I gradually added sources like Todd Oppenheimer’s *The Flickering Mind* (2003), Quentin Schultze’s *Habits of the High-Tech Heart* (2002), and most recently, a few ideas from Thomas Friedman’s *The World Is Flat* (2005).

This time of having to present and defend my ideas about the importance of values-centered decision making about technology helped me to solidify my own position on the matter. I knew that technology was an integrated part of my own life and I found it impossible to honestly argue the full position of some Luddites as my own. I didn’t always heed the advice of Postman or Healy. I often embraced technology in my own life without much thought. At the same time, I had come to believe more strongly than ever that it is good and valuable for schools, organizations, and individuals to carefully consider the implications of technology in society, education, and our personal lives. I rarely found myself able to argue emphatically for or against a specific technology, but I did argue emphatically for the importance of thoughtful dialogue and reflection.
The Payne Fund Studies

Backing up a year in time, during the fall of 2000, I proposed and completed an independent study as part of my doctoral study at Northern Illinois University. Still searching for angles from which to explore ethical issues in the field, the Payne Fund studies caught my attention during a doctoral course dedicated to history in the field. Saettler’s (1990) *Evolution of American Educational Technology* was the primary text and in the chapter titled “Early Educational Film Research,” Saettler noted:

The first comprehensive, careful studies that dealt with the effect of theatrical films on the cognitive and affective learning of children were the Payne Fund studies, made during a four-year period (1929-1932). These studies, supervised by W. W. Charters of Ohio State University, were made by professors and their associates from several major institutions of higher learning. (p. 228)

On the next page, Saettler explained:

The studies fell into two broad groups: one was to measure the effects of motion pictures, as such, on children and youth; the other was to study theatrical film content and children’s attendance at commercial theaters. In measuring the effects of films on children, the studies focused on five areas — information, attitudes, emotions, health, and conduct. (p. 230)

These topics paralleled my reading, and I argued that, if I am going to focus my study upon ethics in the field of educational technology, then it makes sense to start with “the first comprehensive . . . studies that dealt with the effect of theatrical films.” The logical choice for an instructor was my advisor, an individual known

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for her interest in the history of the field. After a few informal conversations about the subject, I proposed three primary research questions:

How have the Payne Fund Studies influenced research in instructional technology (with an emphasis upon the research done by Edgar Dale)? What is the historical and cultural context of the Payne Fund Studies and how did this context influence the research questions and findings of the study? How do the research methodologies and findings of Edgar Dale in the Payne Fund Studies compare to recent studies (1980 to the present) on the impact of motion pictures? (Bull, 2000a, p. 1)

In order to answer these questions, I proposed six papers and extensive reading of both primary and secondary sources. Over the course of the semester, I immersed myself in the Payne Fund studies and related literature, reading over 1,300 pages of reports and supplementary contextual documents, and I finished the study exhausted by the work. My passion for ethical issues and historical research was strong, but the intensive work with the Payne Fund studies, often with obscure aspects of the research, lacked the direct application that I was seeking in my effort to promote current discussion about ethical issues. With that in mind, I wrote a seven-page informal reflection on the independent study where I candidly explained:

I must admit that my interest in the Payne Fund Studies is minimal at this point. I feel that I have a solid understanding of the studies along with a good grasp of general research on the influence of motion pictures and television. It appears, from my review of the literature, that the influence of motion pictures and television is thorough and unquestionable. It is equally unquestionable that the influence will continue. With this in mind, one future research interest is using motion pictures for instructional purposes along with an investigation of motion picture appreciation curricula in secondary education. (Bull, 2000a, p. 5)
This tedious historical research represents my most intensive and thorough analysis of an historical topic. It was an introduction to the discipline needed to engage in historical work. While I tired of the process, this experience led to another central contribution to my self-proclaimed Luddite title. Upon completing the independent study and submitting my last paper, the information reflection, I wrote a few more lines that I recently located in the same folder as all of my other documents for the class. It was a brief Word document entitled “Thoughts,” a type of title that I often use to jot down a quick thought, an idea that is important to me, that I want to think about again someday.

Reading all of these old musty books helps me feel connected to something larger than this generation. The smell alone is enough to remind me that we are shaped by our history and that looking at old books helps me to see new books with perspective. (Bull, 2000b, p. 1)

This quote naturally leads me to another area that closely relates to the Luddite aspect of my life.

Books and Reading

I graduated from high school, and as best as I can recall, I had only read two books in their entirety: *Good-bye Mr. Chips* (Hilton, 1962) and *The Road Less Traveled* (Peck, 1978). The first was prompted by a required book report and the fact that I found a dusty copy of *Good-bye Mr. Chips* beside the untouched encyclopedias that my parents bought from a door-to-door salesman. I read the entire book in one day, “skimming” more than a few pages. There was no reading
for fun or interest; it was a pragmatic endeavor: read and understand enough to write a book report that would earn me a passing grade.

The second book, *The Road Less Traveled* (1978), was the result of a high school chemistry class. I sat in the front row, right in front of the teacher’s desk, and I noticed that she had a stack of books. There were a few textbooks, a Bible, and a copy of *The Road Less Traveled*. I didn’t ask her anything about the books, but there was something in the title, *The Road Less Traveled*, that caught my attention. Perhaps it was because I only recall having to memorize two poems during my childhood schooling, and both were Robert Frost poems: “The Road Not Taken” and “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening.” Of course this was eight years prior to seeing Dr. Peck’s book on the desk in a high school chemistry classroom, but the lines from that poem stayed alive in my thoughts throughout the years:

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I--
I took the one less traveled by,

And that has made all the difference. (Frost, 1949/1995, p. 2207)

I do not know how much I had reflected upon the words or meaning of the poem and, it was only in beginning to writing this chapter that my interest in Robert Frost was renewed. Instead, both of these Frost poems were memorable, more because of the feeling that they evoked in me. As I read and learned and recited them, I had created a sort of internal memory of myself, walking on lonely paths or a
road but not feeling alone. Instead I was captured, at least momentarily, by the things around me: the paths, the leaves, or the woods being filled with snow. And so after school that day, I promptly drove to the nearest book store and purchased *The Road Less Traveled*. Like *Good-bye Mr. Chips*, I did not pace myself as I read. Instead, I read the book in well under a week, and I was captivated by the ideas.

Until recently reviewing the contents of the book, I had not realized how altogether opposed several of Dr. Peck's ideas were to the content of my faith tradition as a Lutheran. But, like the poems, my memory of the book is more of a feeling than a series of ideas. I remember the physical sensation of being altogether intrigued by another person's statements, the experience of reading about spiritual ideals that I was hearing for the very first time. I remember this all taking place internally, alone with the book, intimately connected with the ideas of the author, but also completely distant from him. It was like I was stopping by the woods on a snowy evening, or standing alone in the woods, choosing between two paths.

As much as I was enchanted by the ideas of this book, it did not result in my reading more books. I rarely read the assigned chapters in class textbooks, and I never checked out books from the library. The pattern of not reading continued throughout my high school years into college. It was two summers in college when my habits began to change.

The summer after my freshman year in college, I returned home. The first weeks of the summer entailed recovery from an unpleasant hernia surgery, but the
second portion was more favorable. I signed up for a few classes at the local university, and my best friend and I got to house sit for a high school teacher. This was a teacher that both my friend and I had come to admire during our high school years.

Much of the summer is not memorable. All that I do recall is how I spent a good deal of most days. This teacher had shelves of books on a variety of topics along with back issues of a publication called the *Skeptical Inquirer*. Motive is often difficult to ascertain; I am not certain of mine. Whatever the case, I decided to read one book from the shelves each day of the summer. I doubt that I followed through on this commitment, but I did begin to read like I had never done before.

The first book that I took off the shelf had the picture of a man in a wheelchair with a backdrop of a dark night filled with stars. It was Steven Hawking’s *A Brief History of Time* (1988). Parts were difficult to understand, but the sensation of mystery being revealed accompanied each page and the more I read, the more I imagined that I was getting to know the author, his passions, values, and worldview. Other books followed, day after day, until the summer ended and I returned to school.

The following summer I was introduced to science fiction. Even to this day I am not a science fiction fan, but that summer I was living in Iowa, living in an apartment with three other college students, all of us working for a corn detasseling company. The days were long and the work monotonous, but the pay was good and
I enjoyed getting to know my roommates. They were all students at a different Concordia University, one in Nebraska, and knew each other. In fact, they had all attended high school together at a boarding school.

Each day after working in the fields we returned to the apartment and fought over who got to shower first. The details of evenings are uncertain apart from the fact that all of them had brought books with them for the summer, and they actually read them. One even read, to my horror, while he was driving us to and from work every day. I was struck by their interest in reading and inquired about the authors. One of my roommates was interested in science fiction and I decided to try it out. I asked for suggestions and he provided two: Roger Zelanzy and Isaac Asimov.

Either I borrowed or purchased a Roger Zelanzy book, *Lord of Light* (1967). It was the third in a series and I have no idea why I started with the third, perhaps because it was the only one available. I don't remember much about the plot, but I do recall that it had an intriguing blend of science and Hindu religious ideas. The book was interesting, but it took me the entire summer to finish it. I was more interested in being a person who read than actually reading the book. I saw my roommates as interesting, intelligent, and far more disciplined than I. That was my reason for reading and for persevering through the difficult pages of that book.

When I returned to school after that summer, my interest in reading continued. I began to frequent the library, eventually getting a job there for the last two years of my undergraduate study. My work in the library varied: vacuuming
books, shelving books, mending books, sorting periodicals, and sorting files in the archives. I wandered the aisles of the library often, both when I was and wasn’t working. At first I rarely read a book. I would stop, scan books in a particular area, pull out one of interest, sometimes reading a few pages, sometimes a chapter or two.

The smell and font of the old books are two of the strongest memories. One day, as I was reshelving, I saw a large leather-bound book. It wasn’t the title or subject that interested me, but the craftsmanship of the binding. I picked it up and opened to the first page. On the front book cover was a handwritten note. I couldn’t make out what it said except that it was signed, The Von Trapp Family. Could it really be that Von Trapp family? I shared it with one of the librarians, asking about it.

"Is this real?" I asked.

"Probably," she said, not seeming as interested or excited about the possibility.

Concordia University Wisconsin was originally in Milwaukee and moved to the Mequon campus in the 1980s. They purchased the building and property from the Sisters of Notre Dame, as it had been a convent for the years prior. It turns out that many of the books were also left behind. So, there was a chance that this was actually a gift to the Sisters of Notre Dame from the Von Trapp family.
Similar interesting finds occurred during the following months in the library, and the more time that I spent wandering the aisles and browsing the books, the more my love for books grew.

On occasion, when they were weeding the collection, they would put out a stack of books along one of the window sills, free to take. I scoured the sill weekly and collected hundreds of books the next two years, most of which I never read, but many at least kept my attention for a few chapters. Amid those collected books was a green hardback entitled, *Our Movie Made Children* by Henry James Forman (1934). Years later, while working on my previously mentioned independent study, I revisited the introduction and read:

The basic material which Mr. Forman has used in preparing this volume is found in the studies which are listed by title on the opposite page. These investigations, made during 1929 to 1933 at the request of the Motion Picture Research Council, were supported by the Payne Fund, an organization interested in the radio, motion pictures and reading in relation to children and youth. (Forman, 1934, p. vii)

This was a summary of the Payne Fund studies and I had owned it for years! This was the type of magic that I remember about my work in the library, wandering through aisles of books for the rest of my college years.

Eventually, the discipline of reading the books grew and I found myself enjoying three or four books a month in addition to my studies. By the second semester of my junior year, browsing the library shelves engaged me far more than the content of most classes. I decided to start writing up reports on the books that I read. I gave myself assignments on various research topics and wrote them up,
sometimes with the plan of potentially using them in a current or future class. I was interested in Haiti because I was going on a trip there over the next summer, so I started reading a number of books on the subject and wrote a report about the civil unrest over the past decades. When it came to taking a history of Latin America the next year and each student had to give an oral report on a topic, I chose Haiti and used that research to shape my report.

I read and skimmed books on every topic, but retained a preference for old books, the way they looked, felt, and smelled. I did not use the card catalog, ever. I thought it difficult to find connections between topics in the catalog, but browsing the shelves, trusting in the Dewey Decimal Classification System as I browsed, touched, and skimmed different titles led me to far more interesting combinations of sources. If I was taking a course in theology, I would wander the 200s, knowing that the 230s would take me right to the doctrinal resources but moving up to the 240s would expand my exploration to ethics and practical theology. Or, if I wanted to contrast doctrinal sources with commentaries and other books about the Bible itself, I would walk down to the 220s.

Moving into the last fourth of my junior year, and having had a transformative trip to Haiti that summer, I returned and lost interest in anything besides theology. Apart from what was necessary for classes, I only read books about Christian theology, church history, missions, evangelism, Christian philosophy, devotionals, and the Bible itself. My senior year in the library was
almost exclusively in the 200s. This habit continued past graduation and into my first teaching position, until the shift prompted by the conversation with a friend (see Chapter 2). After that conversation, I obtained a library card and made weekly visits to a couple of the area libraries with my wife. Each of us would wander the aisles for an hour or two and come out with a stack of books to read or skim that week. My wife, being an English and reading teacher, might have a stack of adolescent novels, while I tended to have some odd collection like a book on butterflies, American history, origami, and how to start your own business. Yet, somewhere in my stack there was almost always an old musty book, one that I might not even plan on reading, but that I wanted to have around me.

I have dozens of old book bags because I developed a habit of carrying 10 to 20 books to work and back home each day, convinced that I might want to reference one, and the thought of not having it was disturbing. My classrooms always had rows of books in the back, even though only half of them related to the subject that I taught. I often kept the more controversial ones in my desk drawer or closet just to avoid the potential complaints of a parent. Not that I wanted to shelter my students from them, but my Koran, Book of Mormon, Upanishads, Dianetics, Science and Health, and similar books stayed in the drawer, waiting for the few times that I would reference them each year. When I started turning to the Internet as a resource, I found myself engaging in some of the same habits that I had developed with paper texts in my life.
When I began to browse the web, I quickly developed similar browsing habits, jumping from one topic to the next. But in the case of the search engines, I had no knowledge of a useful pattern, and no knowledge where the next link would take me. There was also no smell of old books and, unless they were scanned in, there were no visible cues to the age and style of the text. However, as I learned more about the power of different search engines and databases, I could not argue with the superiority for exhaustive research compared to my nomadic meandering up and down the library aisles.

It did not take long to find great delight in having immediate access to a world of information. Soon I considered it essential to be connected to the web, searching a topic the moment that it came to mind. Ordering movies from the video store, checking my bank balance, watching the news for five minutes only to look further into a subject by moving to my computer, scanning the CIA World Factbook because someone mentioned something about Hungary and I wanted to know more, looking up information about the author of the book that I was reading, the list was endless. And yet, one of the more frequented sites that I visit is an online bookstore, where I browse and compare books, order new and used copies, and have them delivered to my door. Since purchasing books online, my collection of books has moved from hundreds to several thousand.

Sven Birkerts addresses the nature and fate of reading in what he calls “an Electronic Age” in The Gutenberg Elegies (1995). In this series of 14 essays, he
begins the book with an essay describing his primary concern: that reading, in its historical sense, is fading away as a result of computers and the Internet. In addition, he explains his belief that the nature of reading is changing as a result of current and emerging technologies. All of this is expressed utilizing stories and experiences from his life. His ideas, while certainly not formulated utilizing quantitative or formal qualitative techniques, draw me into considering my own experiences with reading and language. This text is best described as a think piece that grew out of the life, values, and experiences of a man who is passionate and speaks romantically about reading and books. Toward this end, I related intimately with his ideas and the way in which he wrote about technology and books.

Birkerts is not a scientist. His text does not serve the purpose of proving or disproving anything, at least not in an empirical way. It is anecdotal and rooted in deeply held values. As I consider the role of his thoughts in making sense of my experiences with reading and the book, the validity of Birkerts’s concerns is not as important to me as the door of discussion that is opened by them. Early in his book, Birkerts poses a question that is fundamental to the ideas endorsed throughout: “What is the place of reading, and of the reading sensibility, in our culture as it has become?” (Birkerts, 1995, p. 15). He articulates a concern that few are discussing the philosophical ramifications regarding life in a technological society. Birkerts wonders why so few have sought to discuss and seek answers to
such fundamental questions. Seeing a lack of such initiative, he explains that he wrote the *Gutenberg Elegies* to fill such a void.

One issue that Birkerts (1995) emphasizes is the concept that the experience of reading a book is different from the experience of reading on a computer monitor. He argues that the thought process is even different, that there is a very personal and private aspect to reading a book that is lost amidst reading text through an electronic medium. How does the nature of reading change as a person moves from a book to a computer screen? Is something gained or lost in the process? Along these lines, Birkerts alleges that the imaginative power of words on a page is not likely to be nurtured by text in an electronic medium.

Birkerts (1995) quotes a number of individuals to explain the conviction that the book is on decline. He tells the story of an English professor who was selling his entire library of books. When asked about this seemingly strange act, the instructor explained that the future is digital and that he was moving into that future. Appalled by such an act, Birkerts uses this story as an introduction to discussing more concerns about reading in an electronic age. While the English professor saw the future of reading as promising, but simply changing, Birkerts is not nearly as hopeful. He expresses the concern that the incline of technology will result in the decline of literacy. In his rare reference to statistics, Birkerts claims that while book sales actually increased in the 1990s, this growth came primarily from individuals who were over 30. He explains that those under 30 are buying and reading
significantly fewer books than previous generations. Assuming that Birkerts’s statistics are accurate, what impact will such a decline in reading books have upon the literacy of new generations? How will this decline impact the greater society?

Another concern that Birkerts expresses is his suspicion that the decline of books will change the way in which society values or thinks about history. He argues that print and the book have promoted a culture that values tradition and the thought that ideas have built upon each other throughout time. The example is given of a person doing research by moving from older texts to newer ones or vice versa. This process offers historical depth and understanding to contemporary ideas and events. In electronic text, Birkerts argues, this historical perspective disappears. Instead, texts from various periods of time are interwoven and flattened. While this concern may seem unimportant to the scholar or historian who already has a rich understanding of the historical evolution of ideas, Birkerts (1995) expresses concern about how such a change will impact students of the current and future generations. Students will have a different view of history than past generations.

While somewhat unclear, Birkerts also expresses serious concerns about the nature of private and public space in an electronic age. Reading a book, according to Birkerts, is a private venture. Reading a book, no matter what the content may be, “is understood to be a one-to-one communication: Henry David Thoreau or Roland Barthes to myself. In this, reading has always been the verso of writing; the two acts are more intimately bound than we usually imagine them to be” (p. 89). Birkerts
suspects that this is not true with reading text on the Internet, that there is an underlying assumption of a public sphere, that it is not nearly as private as a book. The Internet emphasizes the collective over the individual. As such, it becomes less important who actually wrote the text that one is reading.

The notion of style is an additional difference perceived by Birkerts between the book and text in an electronic medium. He explains that style is valued and considered to be of utmost importance when reading a book. Style on the web or in e-mail, for example, is viewed by many as an extra. Perhaps Birkerts's (1996) own words best describe this point:

This is my fear: that if the screen becomes the dominant mode of communication, and if the effective use of that mode requires a banishing of whatever is not plain or direct, then we may condition ourselves in to a kind of low-definition consciousness. There may result an atrophy, a gradual loss of expressions that are provisional, poetic, or subjectively nuanced. (p. 196)

I first read Birkerts several years ago for part of my candidacy exams. As I read his opinions and assertions, my love for books and fondness of the Luddite label compelled me to align myself with him. When I wrote about Birkerts in my candidacy exams, I posed his ideas as important because they cause one to pause and think. And yet, as much as I love reading books and have nostalgia for the experience, it is somewhere amid his ideas that I began to move from Luddite to Advocate, that I found myself enchanted and inspired by the nature of the emerging digital world, the potential for education, and for society.
As much as I valued and pulled from Postman, Healy, and Birkerts, I also felt like an outsider around them. I perceived Postman and Birkerts to be far more well read in the classics, likely having taken Latin in their primary grades. I thought of all three as being consistent between what they wrote and how they lived. Of course, I did not know if this were true. Nonetheless, I couldn't imagine any of them promoting technology in the way that I had in my M.A. thesis on the value of web-based learning.

So, where did this leave me? As much as I wanted to be a Luddite when I discussed ideas, I was not a consistent one. My words and actions did not align with one another. I was contradicting my Luddite arguments by my choices and lifestyle, something that I will illustrate in Chapter 5. This was a fundamental ethical dilemma. Was it hypocritical for me to challenge others to do what I failed to do well myself? Was it time for me to set aside the works of these authors that I had come to value so much, and instead choose to fully stand on the side of technology as some unquestionable given or societal savior? Or might it be possible that my love for the Luddite and my immersion in technological life could serve as a source of balance, each side keeping the other from taking me to an extreme that is neither healthy for me nor those around me? As I will note in the final chapter of my dissertation, it is in the process of writing this dissertation I that I have come to answer this last question in the affirmative.
CHAPTER 5

THE ADVOCATE

New Applications and Convictions

Accepting a new position in Milwaukee, I left my role as a school technology leader and web-based learning activist at my first school, returning to the high school theology classroom full time for the next five years. I continued to look for opportunities to share my presentation of values-centered decision making, even incorporating some of the ideas into my chapel messages at the school. I quickly became involved in various instructional design, curriculum development, and staff development initiatives in my new district, but those were secondary. Most days I arrived by 6:00 or 6:30 a.m., walked through the quiet halls praying for the students that day, having a morning devotion time at my desk, preparing for classes, and then pouring all of my energy into the students and the learning community the rest of the day.

I woke up each morning excited to go to school and sometimes dreaded the end of the day. Being back in the classroom full time I had few other responsibilities, so I had more time than ever to make use of my training in instructional technology. I was seeking ways to establish feedback loops for
improving instruction, striving to carefully craft learning objectives, being vigilant to develop authentic assessments, and identify strategies that best matched the objectives and learners. It was a time of experimentation and finding ways to apply my reading and research to my teaching. C. F. W. Walther (1864/1986) is a central theologian in my church body and I returned to his text, *Law and Gospel*, seeking how to accurately distinguish between the two and how it would inform my teaching. I returned to Howard Gardner’s ideas; identifying applications for his work on multiple intelligences (1993b, 1999), creativity (1993a), and disciplinary thinking (1999). I discovered Ruth Clark and Richard Mayer’s *E-Learning and the Science of Instruction* (2004) and hunted for ways that cognitive load theory might aid students in learning. It was also during this time that I developed a preference for *Designing Effective Instruction* (Morrison, Ross, & Kemp, 2001) over some of the other instruction design texts. I appreciated the straightforward explanations and their model applied well to the classroom. This was a time of refining my teaching skills, experimenting, and continuing to learn but consistently seeking to apply my learning to my classroom.

By the time that I left the school in Illinois, I was so occupied by my other responsibilities that I often failed to put in the careful and intentional planning necessary to meet the needs of my students. Now the students were my focus during the school day, and I was spending a great deal of time seeking ways to meet their needs, applying these different ideas to the classroom.
Years prior I had come across a small book written by a German Lutheran pastor and resister of Nazism, who had started an underground seminary. As a reflection upon the seminary community, Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote *Life Together* (1939/1993). I do not remember the first time that I read *Life Together*, but something in the text resonated with me so much that I committed to reading the text annually and continue to do so to this day.

In the text, Bonhoeffer describes a theology of Christian community, opening the first chapter with, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (King James Bible, Psalm 133:1). Not long after this Bonhoeffer explains:

> The believer feels no shame, as though he were still living too much in the flesh, when he yearns for the physical presence of other Christians. Man was created a body, the Son of God appeared on earth in the body, he was raised in the body, in the sacrament the believer receives the Lord Christ in the body, and the resurrection of the dead will bring about the perfected fellowship of God’s spiritual-physical creatures. The believer therefore lauds the Creator, the Redeemer, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, for the bodily presence of a brother. The prisoner, the sick person, the Christian in exile sees in the companionship of a fellow Christian a physical sign of the gracious presence of the triune God. (Bonhoeffer, 1939/1993, pp. 19-20)

Setting these types of theological foundations to his work, Bonhoeffer devoted the second to last chapter of his book to explaining what he describes as seven ministries that are important in Christian community: ministry of holding one’s tongue, ministry of meekness, ministry of listening, ministry of helpfulness, ministry of bearing, ministry of proclaiming, and ministry of authority (Bonhoeffer,
1939/1993). He describes each of these, noting the importance of listening before speaking, of humility, of not always having to get your way, of being intentional and active in helping one another. This book struck me as different from some of the ideas that I had heard or read about learning communities or good relationships in the workplace. As I understood Bonhoeffer, there was no sense of behaving as a community in order to accomplish some external goal. Rather, community is described as a lifestyle, a fundamental value of the Christian church. It is a gift and what Bonhoeffer called “a divine reality” (Bonhoeffer, 1939/1993, p. 26). It is not simply a means to an end.

Similarly to my experience with Neil Postman years before, I chose to align myself with Bonhoeffer. It wasn’t because I agreed with or understood everything that Bonhoeffer had written. It was because of a more general but fundamental value for community. Bonhoeffer spoke theologically, but when I read his book, I found romance in it, despite the fact that he did not promote building community on an emotional foundation. Bonhoeffer’s understanding of community was not a utopian ideal. Community was seen as messy and not something that was dependent upon perfect behavior from all involved. In fact, the disillusionment of recognizing the flaws of others in the community was seen by Bonhoeffer as an important part of coming to understand the nature of community. He wrote, “Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be.” (Bonhoeffer, 1939/1993, p. 27).
I resonated with what he wrote. When he talked about the yearning for physical presence, I remembered the feeling of losing the physical presence of my father as a child, the emptiness. When he wrote about the importance of listening before speaking, I experienced guilt at the many times that I spoke too soon, rather than taking the time to listen to my students. When I read Bonhoeffer regarding the ministry of bearing with others, I remembered the many times that I grieved over the suffering of my students, but sometimes tried to avoid the students rather than get too close and experience their pain. As I read about what he called the ministry of helpfulness, my mind was filled with thoughts of the faculty and staff at my new school, people who consistently set aside their own immediate tasks and needs to help students or colleagues. Bonhoeffer’s book called me to care for my students and draw near enough to them to know them well, to suffer with them, rejoice with them, and help them, and somewhere amid all of that, to also teach them what was planned for the course.

Being at this new school, I also found myself experiencing Bonhoeffer’s ideas firsthand, and even began to consider the implications for my class. I craved to apply his ideas in some concrete way, sometimes struggling because I wanted to apply Bonhoeffer like I might Piaget or Gardner. As much as I tried, it did not work that way with community. It was not simply a matter of applying five strategies for listening or starting every class with a community builder. Nonetheless, I tried. I started classes with ice breakers, read about how to gradually build community over
a period of time, and taught lessons on listening. I tried to set objectives about
community. I even conducted a task analysis and worked to craft learning strategies
for each element. At times, these strategies were effective in terms of external
behaviors. Students developed listening skills and there was a positive learning
environment. But I knew that all of this was very different from what Bonhoeffer
described as community. It would take the students to help me understand this, and
with the story of each student, Bonhoeffer's ideas about community grew in value to
me. Consider the following story. It isn't the story of one student, but
representative of dozens of students.

Life Together with Gary

Gary was always late for class. He was new to the school as a junior and
came from a challenging family background. A few years ago his father had died,
money was limited in the house, and his mother worked two jobs to keep Gary and
his two sisters fed, dressed, warm, and in a Lutheran school that charged several
thousand dollars a year. Speaking to Gary's mother, she was always full of energy.
She sought out teachers to encourage and share words of thanks.

Gary was not so cheerful. Always late for class, the moment he sat in his
desk in the back row, he put his head down. I knew from tests that he listened on
occasion, but he was skilled at keeping you from recognizing this fact. When he did
speak, he was angry, and studying theology from a 2000-year-old book appeared to be his last interest.

I understood the problematic family situation and that transportation was difficult for the family in the mornings, but I checked with school leadership to get advice about how to address Gary’s daily lateness, sometimes 15 or 20 minutes into class. It was explained that this bordered on skipping class and that first hour was not the only problem. This was a habit for Gary and he seemed to be using the sympathy of the teachers to take advantage of the situation.

It was time for a meeting, with a school administrator, teachers, Gary, and his mother. We opened the meeting in prayer and the school administrator explained to Gary that this meeting was for him, that we cared about him, enough that we needed to hold him accountable. Despite the fact that he was withdrawn and a young man of few words throughout the meeting, it seemed like he got the idea. The next few mornings Gary was in class.

His attendance and timeliness was not perfect by far over the upcoming months and the next year. There were more meetings, and there were cases where we had to hold Gary accountable for poor decisions. Gary’s disposition improved with time, and by the end of the year his head spent half as much time on his desk.

Gary did not graduate summa cum laude. He didn’t even graduate on time, having to take a summer of courses after his senior year to catch up in English and math. But, several years later, on break from college where he was studying to
become a Lutheran school teacher, Gary requested permission to address the student body, to share part of his story to the Lutheran school community.

Gary is not a specific student, but the combination of dozens of students during my time at the Lutheran school. Nothing in the story is overdramatized, as every aspect of the story did occur with one or more students. Gary represents the many challenges, opportunities, and experiences during my time in Lutheran schools, and Bonhoeffer’s ideas about community were what I used to make sense of them. Sometimes the students responded like Gary, but other times they persisted in their destructive behaviors, unable to break loose of the emotional wounds of their past. As much as I wanted what was best for Gary, in another way the outcome did not matter. My first responsibility in the community was to live in community with him, despite his behavior, until the time that he, his mother, or school leadership might decide that the school was not a good fit for him. And that type of decision was rare. To be in a school was about teaching students content, skills, even helping to foster dispositions. However, there was another important aspect to the Lutheran schools as I understood them; it was about “life together.”

Merging of Two Worlds

During the first years in my new position in Milwaukee, I still had half of the courses to complete for my doctoral program in DeKalb. In fact, the distance between Milwaukee and DeKalb, combined with my struggle to make sense of the
differences between my life as a theology teacher and my life as an instructional technologist, almost led me to consider dropping out of the program at Northern Illinois University and instead enrolling in a more general doctoral program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. For some reason, I didn’t drop out. I treasured leaving my life as a Lutheran school teacher behind some evenings and joining in the engaging discussions and diverse learning community in the instructional technology program.

After work once a week, I would drive two hours to class and drive back home that night. The drive was relaxing and gave me time to think, record my lesson plans with a small digital recorder, and listen to a few books on tape. Arriving on campus those nights, I felt like a different person, like an instructional technologist. When I returned home, I was a theology teacher.

It was not that I separated the two lives in my thinking, but I did feel an amount of freedom at each place, thinking that if I somehow failed in one of these worlds, that I could always escape to the other. Traveling between these two worlds only fed the outsider identity that I had clung to for so many years, but I also reasoned that not working in a technology leadership role gave me the freedom to be the contrarian and to take whatever position that I wanted about the good or bad of educational technology. At the same time, I had no question that having the instructional technology education was feeding my creativity, my ability to strategically plan learning activities, and to effectively teach. As much as I aligned
myself with Postman, I knew that I was an advocate of technology in education and that I was spending an increasing amount of my free time in the digital world.

Going to classes in the evening reminded me of a part of myself that I sometimes forgot about as a theology teacher. I was an instructional technologist. I decided to be one each time that I showed up for another class, and with each class period I recognized more clearly the inevitability that I would eventually use my knowledge and skills beyond the high school theology classroom.

There is no moment of epiphany that I recall, but the desire grew, and I became aware of it like a gradual but certain rising sun. As much as I have searched for an explanation, the most authentic explanation that I can suggest is the instructional technology community. I had invested in the community. I had listened to the community through classes, readings, and conferences. I had contributed to the community. And even amid my immersion in Luddite literature, I did not abandon instructional technology. Instead, I did what Bonhoeffer might call “bearing with it.” I beared with it despite what I sometimes considered to be flaws and dangers in instructional technology, dangers of mechanizing education, allowing technology to overshadow learning, or failing to adequately discuss the underlying values. Not that these criticisms were accurate, but they were my perception, and none of them led me to abandon the field. I remained a part of the community, accepting the challenges with what I saw as the promise and benefits. Besides, amid my learning about the history of the field, it was clear to me by this time that the
field was not determined by formal definitions as much as it was by the eclectic group of individuals that chose to call themselves instructional technologists.

As much as I continued to struggle between my world as a theology teacher and sympathizer to the Neo-Luddite agenda and my world as an instructional technologist, the immense affirmation that I received in the instructional technology community must not be ignored as a contributing factor in my unwillingness to abandon the world of instructional technology. I knew that I brought unique perspectives to class discussions and my research. As I noted in earlier chapters, I even chose this path from the beginning of my program, electing to explore topics and areas less prevalent in the field. As much as it may or may not be true, I reasoned to myself that my background as a theology teacher prompted me to look at things from a different perspective.

In time, I received words of encouragement and affirmation that confused and sometimes embarrassed me. Instructors consistently praised my work and writing. On a few occasions, I was introduced as “one of the stars in our instructional technology programs” or by stating, “Expect to hear his name in the field for years to come.” In a culminating word of affirmation, one instructor explained to me in a one-on-one conversation, “You are a prophet.” I did not interpret the statement in the strict theological sense, but I also did not ask the instructor what was meant by it. What I assumed it to mean was that the instructor saw me as one who reveals or uncovers things not seen by others. I was
embarrassed by these comments and waited for people to realize their errors in thinking such things, but in time, I started to believe some of these affirmations, or at least wanted to believe them. Whatever the case, I found myself wanting to be the person they described, wanting to prove the affirmers correct in their statements.

Somewhere amid those drives between the two worlds, the worlds began to come together and I accepted that they were not separate. Moving forward, I blended them together, continuing my studies, and choosing to engage in writing and inquiry that allowed me to merge my life as an instructional technologist and a theology teacher: the Payne Fund studies, historical research, continued study of the technological contrarians, and even a candidacy exam on a Moravian Brethren minister named Johann Amos Comenius.

Leaving the Classroom

As much as I loved my time in the classroom, I suspected that my training and passions would eventually lead me elsewhere, and by the fourth year in the theology classroom in Milwaukee, I started to look for potential opportunities to make use of my instructional technology education in a leadership capacity. As providence would have it, a stranger walked into my classroom one afternoon. He was the parent of a student, explained that he had a recent change of employment, mentioned a rumor that I had an instructional technology background, and told me that he was interested in starting a virtual Lutheran high school, even describing
some of the reasons that I had argued seven years prior in my M.A. thesis on the benefit of web-based learning for Lutheran schools.

The more we spoke, the more the excitement grew. We fostered the ideas over the next year, planned together, and a small group of advocates acquired an $180,000 grant to pilot an e-learning program. The next year I accepted a full-time position with the Lutheran Initiative for Virtual and Existing Schools (LIVES Education). My title was to be creative director and my responsibility was to create a vision for a virtual Lutheran high school, oversee the course design, program development, and anything else that dealt with the learning environment. I was excited about the position, and fostered by these new relationships, I had already started catching up on the latest research in distance learning.

A Vision for E-Learning Community

Now that I worked full time in distance learning, I also had opportunities and responsibilities to present on the subject of virtual learning. Over my one year in that position, I presented in several places around the Midwest and Florida, and served as a guest speaker for a few graduate courses. In most of these groups, I was presenting to Lutheran school teachers and administrators. As I considered the different audiences, I developed a presentation that started with a quick anticipatory set, asking the audience a sequence of questions: What is the largest high school in the country? What is the largest university in the United States? What new
graduation requirements are being considered by the Michigan Board of Education? How many virtual schools are in Wisconsin? Of course, it never took the group more than a question or two to get the idea, that the right answer had something to do with online learning.

As I presented, I tried to answers some of the common questions that I had been hearing from people. Is online education just a fad? Why would anyone take an online course? Do people actually learn anything in online courses? Is online learning better, worse, or different than face-to-face learning? What does online learning look like? Question by question, I shared and we discussed these ideas. In almost every presentation, I learned to expect another question, and I kept it at the end of my presentation.

What about the community? What about the relationships? From my experiences in Lutheran education, I had come to believe in the value of a Lutheran school community, and this value was not in isolation. The more I presented, the more I heard this question, and agreed with the concerns behind the question. It seemed like whatever I presented, no matter how much I tried to defend the possibility of relationship online, there were looks of mistrust, occasional verbal scoffs, and even one or two outraged walk-outs. At the same time, there were always a small number who would come to me after a presentation saying something like, “Thank you for your work. I know that this is something that we have to prepare for. This is part of the future of education, but it concerns me.”
From the perspective of the Lutheran teachers, community was a central element, a core value, and something that must be adequately addressed if one were going to “sell” others on the idea of an online Lutheran high school. I knew that there were excellent and academically challenging programs available for free in public schools, but the idea of faith development and Christian community are what Lutheran school educators note as a fundamental difference.

Driving home from a presentation one day, I started to recall the different faces and ways that people brought up the idea of community. The more I remembered, the more intense my emotions became, even remembering the priceless gift that I received from the community of Lutheran schools only months before the childhood loss of my father. On that drive I committed to creating a vision for an online Lutheran school that was rich with community, deep in relationships, one that connected with students on as many levels as possible. I would use my background as an instructional technologist and theology teacher to craft a vision for a school that infused values for which Lutheran teachers and principals could be proud.

Returning home that night, still hearing the questions about community in my mind, I sat down in the living room, not bothering to turn any lights on, and booted up my laptop. Looking at the dark wall past the bright screen, I talked to myself. “This is my chance. My job is to create an online Lutheran school. I know that every curriculum development and educational leadership text that I would read
on the subject would tell me to poll, gather focus groups, and collaborate with stakeholders. But I have been doing that with every conference that I attend. It is time for me to create something. The word is even in my job title.” Opening a blank page in my word processor I began to type, delete, cut, paste, browse the web for ideas, and create. I typed and revised until morning. The next day I brought a draft of what I called “core commitments” (Table 1) to the executive director, placed it on his desk, and said, “This is a distinctive online Lutheran school. This is the type of place that we need to create!”

This vision had community infused in as many places as I could identify. In addition to a teacher for each class, every group of 15 to 20 students would have an assigned cohort mentor whose role was to build community, hold students accountable, get to know each student individually, and even plan an annual service trip with the cohort. Having written these core commitments and presented them to the executive director, I was confident that I had crafted something powerful and more than consistent with the values that I heard from Lutheran school principals and teachers. The executive director guardedly shared my excitement and supported the idea. Of course, we now had to consider the financial implications for such a plan.

Our offices were connected by a sliding glass door that was open unless one was on the phone and didn’t want to disturb the other. It was common for us to meet and discuss for hours, each sitting at our desks, typing notes, browsing the web
Table 1

Lutheran Virtual School Core Commitments

*Lutheran Virtual School has six core commitments that shape all aspects of the school experience:*

**Christian community and lasting relationships**

While LVHS is an online high school, it is committed to fostering strong and lasting relationships and a trusting community of believers. While we will infrequently share the same physical space with one another, LVHS is committed to creating a common space where friendships are developed, students work collaboratively, LVHS members find ways to serve one another and others, and there is a strong and valued sense of community.

Related to this fact, LVHS plans annual educational tours and/or servant events where members of the LVHS community can come together with a common goal. While students are allowed to complete at-home work in lieu of these trips, all members of the LVHS are highly encouraged to attend these annual gatherings.

**Christian leadership formation**

Lutheran Virtual School is a Christian learning community where all activities are focused upon equipping each and every student to “shine like stars in the universe” (Philippians 2:15). Christian discipleship is central to the mission and activities of Lutheran Virtual School. Every student will be challenged to explore all areas of life and learning from a Christian biblical worldview. Because of our high academic standards and focus upon Christian discipleship, parents and students are encouraged to be prayerful and thoughtful before applying to and attending Lutheran Virtual School.

**Commitment to support multiple intelligences and diverse learning styles**

LVHS is committed to creating learning environments that allow students to use their unique intelligences along with their distinct learning styles to achieve high levels of competence in all content areas.

(continued on following page)
Disciplinary thinking and interdisciplinary problem solving

Students at LVHS will learn to think historically in history class, scientifically in science class, and mathematically in math class. Each discipline has a vocabulary and set of rules or principles that guide the way that one learns to think in that field. LVHS is committed to helping students learn to think from these different disciplinary perspectives while always understanding the implications for their Christian faith. We also recognize that the complex problems of our world call for students to learn to think in interdisciplinary ways to solve problems. They will, for example, learn to combine historical, scientific and theological thinking to address real and important needs in contemporary life.

Accountability

We believe that consistent accountability is a key to helping students pursue and achieve academic excellence and personal growth. With that in mind, each student is assigned an adult mentor who will carefully monitor student progress, needs, successes and challenges. This will come in the form of checking with teachers, interacting with students in a required course called “Connections”, weekly phone/live/online/email communication with the student and family members, and whatever other methods are deemed helpful.

Family, church, community, and global connectivity

LVHS views Christian education as beginning in the home and supported by the church and school. With that in mind, we have built a school that intentionally incorporates family and church in the learning experience of every student. Most courses and every semester enrolled at LVHS will challenge students to make connections between what they are learning and their role as a family member, member of a church, and as a citizen (national and global). As a way to emphasize this, students will have multiple assignments each semester that call upon them to engage in meaningful interactions with their family, church members, and local community. Some of these activities may be as simple as conducting interviews, while other assignments may involve students participating in acts of service.
in response to an issue that arose in our conversation. It was the same this day.

After I shared the details of the idea, the executive director pulled out a copy of old budget plans and began to edit them. In less than an hour he was ready to gather more information from me, and this budget was now a tool with which to experiment. By the end of the day, we had developed a seemingly reasonable budget, one that would put the tuition slightly below what was common in many Lutheran high schools. Over the next weeks we refined the budget, what I had developed that night, and we started to work on plans for marketing and recruitment.

But our passion and planning was not sufficient to make the vision a reality. Many things occurred over the next months, and an analysis of the events would warrant a full study on its own. In addition, a recounting of these events would require a telling of details about which I do not have permission to write. These months were challenging, but my convictions about community and Lutheran virtual education remained and even grew over these months. As I began to accept that our efforts would not result in success, I explored other options and quickly found myself having to choose between two of them.

One option was a faculty position at a Lutheran university where I would once more position my role as an instructional technologist as secondary but also have an exciting opportunity to mentor and teach future Lutheran school teachers full time. The other option was an intriguing blend at another Lutheran university. I would teach a required course for all preservice Lutheran teachers called “Teaching
the Faith." I would have the opportunity to teach a couple of graduate educational technology courses in a program that sought to help Lutheran educators align themselves with the National Educational Technology Standards for teachers, and I would serve as an instructional design consultant for program directors and faculty members engaging in e-learning. The decision was not an easy one, but I was already working on my dissertation at that point. I had begun to unfold my thoughts and life experiences. As I did, I could not help but suspect providence in this last position, and I accepted it. I accepted it as a theology teacher, a Luddite, an active citizen in the digital world, and an advocate of relationship and community in education. I accepted it as an instructional technologist.

I saw this move as an affirmation. It was indeed possible for me to combine my different roles into one, even in instances where there was a perceived contradiction. I could teach about the dangers of technology while also helping faculty develop e-learning courses. I could use my history as a theology teacher to help future teachers learn about teaching the Christian faith to others. Then, in the afternoon, I could work on developing documents and processes that would help instructors explore best practices with the use of technology for face-to-face, blended, and online learning. What I once saw as internal contradictions, I could now see as the ability to see educational needs and issues from diverse perspectives, something that allowed me to bring divergent ways of thinking to solve problems and promote reflection.
With this new transition, I began to experience less anxiety about my diverse interests and backgrounds. I started to see myself less as an outsider, suspecting that all people have similar threads of diversity and seeming internal contradiction. I started to see how my different thoughts and experiences could work together. At the same time, I had also developed a deep conviction about the role of community in education, and this sometimes blinded me from looking at things from other perspectives. Following is an experience that illustrates this point.

Community Convictions Reframed

I walked into the large auditorium, scanning the room, watching pockets of people gathering, waiting for the start of the panel discussion. The session was called “Linking Research to Practice: Answering Real Questions from Practitioners” (2006). I was walking into the auditorium as a newly appointed assistant professor of education and instructional technology consultant. Most of the others in the room were from universities around the country, in a few cases around the world. Some were having quiet conversations, more than a few had their laptops out, potentially checking their e-mail, looking at the conference web site, browsing the web, or checking the latest sports scores. As usual, I found a spot in the back row, close to an outlet for my laptop and to a way out just in case I found the discussion less than interesting.
Three panel guests occupied the stage, representing diverse research interests and years of experience. Each of us received results from a preconference survey, asking practitioners to share their questions about the field of distance education. The moderator came to the stage, shared introductory remarks, and then gave each of the panelists an opportunity to present initial comments, describing what they considered to be important questions or information for the field. After these initial comments, we divided into small groups, with the assignment of sharing our thoughts about the important questions and issues in the field.

The conversations varied: questions about ensuring course quality, student assessment, student confidentiality, and the growth of blended learning. I had spent the last year getting up to speed on the latest literature in distance learning, and I was comfortable with the conversation, growing in confidence as I listened to the questions and challenges of others in the group. These were mostly issues that I understood well and about which I had read a great deal, even issues that I had intentionally addressed in planning e-learning initiatives.

I had many ideas, but I wanted to learn about how others were dealing with what I had come to frame as the ethical and values-laden elements of learning in the virtual world, specifically my personal value of building an environment that fostered community. To what extent do you find it possible to build community with the online learners? What strategies are you taking to identify and address experiences of student isolation? How much priority do your e-learning initiatives
have upon student-student collaboration? I asked at least one of these questions to myself and wanted to ask all of them to the group. Knowing that others had things to share and not wanting to dominate the conversation, I kept most of these questions to myself.

But when the small-group time ended, and we moved to large-group discussion, with audience questions and comments directed toward the panel, I looked for a chance to pose my questions. The topic of interaction arose, but the discussion was lively, and by the time I had a chance to speak, there was a new topic. Despite that fact, it was my turn with the microphone. “I’d like to go back to the question of human interaction in the course environment, in a program environment, and an entire university learning environment, if that is alright.” I received at least one nod from the panel, so I continued:

I’m curious about the role of human interaction, not just in terms of its impact on learning, but as a fundamental value. And I think that becomes an issue, and it may even go back to the question of why some individuals choose to or choose to avoid some practices. It may have to do with certain belief systems or values that they bring to the table. Perhaps it is that some university faculty genuinely believe that human interaction is more important than student learning, that perhaps I would be willing to face the fact that the students learn a bit less if I am developing an authentic genuine relationship with the student. I happen to come from a Christian university so perhaps that is part of the background, but I don’t think that this is fundamental to even just a religious perspective. (“Linking Research to Practice: Answering Real Questions from Practitioners,” 2006, n.p.)

At the point where I brought up my being at a Christian university, a woman two rows in front of me turned around with a look of what might have been disapproval, confusion, or frustration on her face. I paused for a moment at that point, as I
realized that the Christian university comment was irrelevant information for the conversation. There was no need for me to bring Christianity into the conversation. All that I wanted to do was find out if there were any kindred spirits when it came to the value of community and learn about how that value impacted their work. Why didn’t I simply keep the conversation on topic? Beating myself up briefly for the unnecessary distraction of infusing the comment with theology, I continued:

I think it’s part of the human experience. I’m wondering if anyone has conducted research or takes into account those kinds of issues as they think about the design of e-learning environments. ("Linking Research to Practice: Answering Real Questions from Practitioners," 2006, n.p.)

I knew that people had conducted the research and written about community among online learners (Bender, 2003; Conrad & Donaldson, 2004; Hanna, Glowacki-Dudka, Conceiocaao-Runlee, 2000; Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Salmon, 2003), but I was more interested in the research of the specific people in the room, especially action research. I sat down, with a brief fear of awkward silence, and still frustrated at myself over the Christian university comment. Robert Threkeld was one of the panel guests and he responded first:

Let me just touch on that a bit. From my interviews with people, both faculty and managers, they sort of light up like a Christmas tree. The faculty are surprised at the quality of interaction that they have online and the students are hungry for it. So I guess I probably would put my belief system pretty close to yours. The content may not be that much more significant than the relationships that you build online. I think in the long run, we’re gonna … sense that what its [the Internet’s] real power is, is not the content. It’s the communication. And that’s the real power of network communication. It’s the ability to interact with people and not the information that’s on the Internet. ("Linking Research to Practice: Answering Real Questions from Practitioners," 2006, n.p.)
I was delighted with the response, pleased to find our common values about the idea. But then another panelist responded, Traci Sitzmann:

I would look at it from the exact opposite perspective. If I’m in an online course, I signed up so I could avoid people. I mean, so just as many people who are looking for the human interaction, I’m sure there are plenty of students that would much rather... I would rather just get through the material. I feel like I can learn it on my own. I like the solidarity of the Internet. (“Linking Research to Practice: Answering Real Questions from Practitioners,” 2006, n.p.)

I was surprised by her comments, but not because I was unaware of the literature that supports her position. I was taken aback because I had been so emotionally engaged in my values, my convictions, even my agenda to keep community alive in schooling amid the digital age, that I failed to recognize a simple and important point, that there are perfectly valid and pragmatic reasons for wanting to engage in online learning without needing to devote the energy necessary for community, to devote one’s full attention to mastering the course content or skills.

I spent the rest of the session distracted, thinking about what had just occurred. Before the session was over, it struck me that I already had a solution for this dilemma. In fact, it wasn’t a dilemma at all. Years ago, when I was challenged by an individual who claimed that I was presenting the ideas of biased individuals, I responded by stating something similar to the following:

The authors that I cite have values that drive their writing, values like the health of children, the importance of a liberal arts education, or the importance of wise and thoughtful fiscal leadership. If these are the values, then they should be used in decision making about technology. Your values
don't have to be the same. All that I am suggesting is that they be used in decision making about technology.

I was approaching the topic of distance learning with certain values in mind. I had decided to promote and devote my energy to initiatives that value community. It took this moment to remind me that there are ample positions for instructional technologists in the world, and there is no reason for all of them to focus upon fostering learning communities. My intrigue with Postman and the larger social landscape had temporarily blinded me to the fact that there is room for people with different values in the field. Not that my passion for building community was diminished by the conversation, but I walked away from that session a bit more empathetic to the cause of the panelist.

My Technological Life

In 2001, I started suffering from chest pains and had several incidents where I blacked out, with the doctors unable to identify a cause. The fainting wasn’t new. I had experienced it a few times in my youth and a couple of times in my adult life, but now the frequency was increasing. After months of tests, the doctor explained, in laymen’s terms, that the thermostat on my heart doesn’t work properly and that it sometimes lets my heart rate drop too low, resulting in light-headedness and even fainting. The treatment was medication, but I was also encouraged to keep running, a habit that I started months earlier, in response to the health concerns and an obvious increase in weight. So, I continued to run.
I started by running a two-mile route near my house, sometimes needing to stop and walk a few times. As my weight dropped and my fitness level increased, I added mileage. By the next year, I had run my first half marathon, followed by my first marathon. The new hobby occupied a growing amount of my time. Not only did the hobby involve time running, it also entailed hours searching the web for articles on running and fitness. I developed a detailed spreadsheet where I monitored distance, time, pace, weather conditions, and personal commentary on the run. I researched and crafted detailed exercise plans, leading up to the next marathon. I shopped for the latest products. I read inspirational books on running.

Running was also a time that I came to value for personal reflection. Running on a quiet trail at night, only a few miles from home, I was beginning to shape plans for an autobiographical dissertation and started to list in my mind events and seminal texts in my life, especially those related to what I referred to as Neo-Luddite literature. As I finished the run, I turned off my MP3 player, stopped the blinking red safety light that I had attached to my clothes, stopped my GPS watch, and turned off the heart rate monitor that I had in a separate watch on the other arm. Realizing the irony of the moment I laughed out loud. “Me, a Luddite?”

Returning home I browsed our house for technologies. Walking into the living room I smiled as I looked at the large-screen television that I built into the wall, with mounted surround-sound speakers. Months before doing that, my wife and I had considered removing television from our lives altogether. I saw my laptop
sitting on the floor, beside it several DVDs rented from the library. I also noted the fact that I had a stand-alone computer in the third bedroom, and another computer that I had built from spare parts running the Linux operating system in the basement. I continued the walk through my house as I sat down to the computer to plug in my GPS watch and download my running data to my computer, then transfer it to my spreadsheet.

Thinking about the role of technology in my life, I skimmed the list of applications on my computer, well over 80 open-source applications that I had likely spent hundreds of hours tracking down and even more time experimenting with. Having found a new application, I then wanted to find a problem to solve with it. Then I opened my web browser and looked at my bookmarks. They were not organized into folders, just one long list and it took several minutes to scroll to the end. Given my train of thought at the time, I was curious about how many I had collected. I went to the bookmarks folder on my computer and discovered that I had collected almost 900 bookmarks.

This somewhat spontaneous survey of my technological life continued. I started to think about the several hours a day that I spent on a computer: shopping; banking; e-mailing and instant messaging my closest friends; web site design for myself, friends, and nonprofit organizations; involvement in social networking sites; and collecting music for my MP3 player. I thought about my hobbies: reading, web design, playing guitar, running, researching cultural trends, and watching
documentaries. Every one of these had an integrated web-based component, even
the ones that at first glance might seem unrelated. For example, years prior I
stopped purchasing guitar music. Now I obtain all music and guitar tablature online.
I rarely watched a film without reading online reviews first and usually ordering it
online through a rental store or the local library. Even my commitment to daily
devotions was increasingly connected to the web, as I often read the Bible from an
online web site that included multiple searchable Bible translations.

Sitting at my computer, amazed at the amount of technology in my life, I
realized that I had to set this thought experiment aside because I needed to shower
before a meeting, a synchronous online conference where I was presenting on digital
storytelling to a group of my online graduate students. My laughter continued.

For the next several days, I persisted in this inventory of my digital life,
adding to the list my PDA, cell phone, webcam, digital camera, digital camcorder,
digital recorder, and a wealth of other technologies. In addition to listing the
technologies and activities, I also asked myself “why?” Why did I have all of these
technologies in my life? How many of them were necessary? Some of the answers
clearly had to do with my job, but most of them were choices that I had made, not
much different than the choices that I made for style of clothing or what food to eat.
Like the clothing and food, there were practical components, but much of it had to
do with preference of style. My technological life was cultural. The Luddite
questions and concerns that I sought to conjure in myself in these self-inventory
moments had little effect. I liked the lifestyle, and as much as this technological immersion seemed contrary to my pleas for thoughtful deliberate choices about the use of technology in education and life in general, I had no intention of changing.

It wasn’t that I ceased to care about the important issue of life in a technological society. My Neo-Luddite tendencies are evidenced throughout the last chapter. However, this self-inventory helped me to see an evident contradiction, or perhaps paradox, in my life and thought. As much as I had called for reflection and deliberation, I had come to create a daily lifestyle that was bathed in technology.

At an earlier point in my life, I might have been more disturbed by this contradiction. However, at this point, I instead chose to embrace it as a positive, something that allowed me to look at topics from a unique perspective. I was indeed an individual full of seeming inconsistencies in my thoughts and actions regarding life in a technological society. But I had come to uncover these inconsistencies, recognizing them in myself, even accepting them. This process of discovery left me feeling more freedom than in previous years. Where I once tended to think of myself as an outsider in one area or another, I now started to think of myself as one who belongs to a number of groups. Nothing had changed in my behaviors, but I was now able to see things in my own life and thought from a different perspective. This newer perspective left me feeling proud and excited rather than falling into the moments of guilt and confusion of previous years.
CHAPTER 6

REFLECTIONS

The story of my search for ethical epiphanies remains unfinished and unreconciled. There is an ongoing internal battle between my immersion in the technological life and my intellectual questions and concerns about thoughtless or careless acceptance and promotion of technology. Like my first leaving behind of technology leadership for five years, I sometimes consider the same path again, but it is less likely this time. Having written this dissertation I have come to better understand the struggles in my life, not necessarily to resolve them but to understand and accept them as part of an ongoing journey. I have come to see these struggles as representative of important paradoxes that help me to blend relevance and wisdom, technology and tradition, progress and commitment to certain unchanging faith values.

Through this writing, I have come to see, embrace, and value a variety of paradoxes in my life. I have strong and enduring convictions about the dangers of unchecked technological acceptance, but I also see great promise in technology for education and society in general. I commit myself to promoting the importance of community, and yet I devote endless hours in isolation, working alone with various technologies. I value my role as a commissioned minister, but I equally value my
roles as professor and instructional technologist. I read and love old dusty books and write or discuss them in the dustless, scentless online world. I continue to read and agree with many ideas of authors like Postman and Oppenheimer, but I read and agree just as much with individuals like Presnky and Quinn, who praise technology and posit that educators have much to learn from video games.

Prior to writing my dissertation, these contradictions were sources of great internal strife. Now, coming to the end of the project, I finish with a measure of perspective that both heals and affirms. It is not that I have resolved the internal conflicts nor that I have decided to ignore them. Nonetheless, somehow amid writing and looking at my life, I have come to a new level of contentment with the diversity and paradoxes within. As a result, it would suffice that I end the dissertation at this point, but I cannot do so. I anticipate a few questions about my writing and write the following pages in response to these potential questions.

Where Is the Instructional Technologist in This?

I never struggled with whether or not to use the phrase “instructional technologist” or “educational technologist” in the title of this dissertation. In a document prepared for the AECT Definition and Terminology Committee, the authors explain that “instructional activities imply an external agency that is guiding the learner toward a goal by means of some specified procedures” (Molenda & Robinson, 2004, p. 1). As this dissertation reflects, as much as I have traveled a unique path, I embrace my role as one who seeks to be systematic and intentional in
shaping education, with clear outcomes in mind. At the same time, I also embrace
the field of educational technology, with the idea of education as that which
encompasses both the planned and unplanned, the student-directed, and the
instructor-crafted. But mostly, I call myself an instructional technologist for the
simple reason that I am a doctoral candidate in a program called instructional
technology. I accept the title as part of my academic heritage, part of my identity,
and a record of the path I have traveled.

Insecurities and Perseverance

How can I write about these childhood experiences? How do I even know
that they are accurate? Did these experiences really make a difference in my life?
The early stages of writing this dissertation were riddled with doubts and
insecurities. Having such doubts, I sought out and connected with another who took
the inward path of an autobiographical dissertation. Searching the existing literature
of others who had written and successfully defended an autobiographical
dissertation, I managed to connect with one of them on the phone. Calling a
complete stranger is something that I had not done since my one day of
telemarketing and the brief theological chat that I recounted in the second chapter.

Hi. My named is Bernard Bull. I am a doctoral student in instructional
technology at Northern Illinois University, and I am interested in
autobiographical inquiry for my dissertation. I found and read your
dissertation, and I thought maybe I could touch base with you.
This is similar to what I said on the phone that day. What I remember is the open-arms embrace from this instant friend. Here I was, a complete stranger, calling with little or no warning, and for the next hour he shared his personal experiences and challenges, cautioning me that this is not an easy emotional journey. He assured me that it is a rigorous task, not only in the traditional sense of research but also on a deeply personal level. He shared priceless resources and even gave me the opportunity to connect with others who were also working on autobiographical dissertations.

I hung up the phone inspired, immediately ordering seven or eight of his book recommendations online, most of which ended up in my first chapter as an introduction to autobiographical writing. Weeks later, I shared my plans with the dissertation committee and received their excitement and support. I returned home from this meeting and began the continued work of brainstorming, listing, writing, and researching. Months later, I received an e-mail from my instant friend who had encouraged me in the first place. His e-mail was brief, simply asking about the progress of my writing. I responded with an e-mail similar to the following:

It has been a few months since our last contact, but I have to thank you again for your support and encouragement as I attempt to write an autobiographical dissertation. Despite my reading and the warnings of many authors, I am finding that I was not prepared for the emotional experience of writing this dissertation. I am finding myself struggling through a sometimes overwhelming measure of insecurity, perhaps partly rooted in fear about how far my committee is willing to go with me. All that they have read so far is the first chapter, which, while it does contain some anecdotal reflections, is not much different from what they might read in a first chapter phenomenology. So I find myself panicking as I read over five pages of anecdotes about the role of video games in my childhood. I suppose I am
fixating on three main fears. The first is a fear of rejection from the committee and others. The second is a fear of becoming altogether self-absorbed. The third is a fear that my writing is somehow lacking the characteristics of a “good autobiographical inquiry,” falling too much into commentary and lacking the rich detail of specific lived experiences.

The friend promptly replied, acknowledging each of my concerns as valid and important. He accepted my concern about falling into too much commentary but also shared enough to encourage me not to become so concerned about this that I stop writing. He included words of advice from Stephen King about getting past the internal censor in each of us (King, 2000). His words were enough for me to keep writing.

What Is Ethical About This Dissertation?

The title of the dissertation, *Ethical Epiphanies of an Instructional Technologist* was selected before the vast majority of this dissertation was written. At that point I had a long list of ethical issues with which I had grappled over the past years, and I had originally suggested to my committee 10 chapters, each dealing with a different specific predeveloped ethical issue. This was done before I had conducted much autobiographical writing. The committee helped me to realize that, while this may be a nicely organized plan, it would betray the nature of such a dissertation. Just like any dissertation, I had not yet conducted my research. The dissertation is meant to be an inquiry, not a retelling of what I already knew about myself. As such, I was encouraged to write and not direct my writing by a list of 10 predetermined topics.
The title is written in such a way as to suggest that the dissertation is about epiphanies, but it may have been more accurate to entitle the dissertation “In Pursuit of Ethical Epiphanies: Reflections of an Instructional Technologist.” Even amid these concluding reflections, there is much that remains uncertain about my ethical perspectives. They are continually taking shape, being informed by new study and life experiences. Yet I have succeeded in coming to terms with and categorizing reflections into four central themes in my life as an instructional technologist, represented in each of the four middle chapters in this dissertation. To that extent, I have achieved the first goal set forth in the dissertation, and the second goal is being accomplished by my offering this candid case study of self to the field, as a way of encouraging reflection about the role of self.

Amid my writing and thinking, I have come to understand the “self” in this dissertation in three ways. The first self is me, the author of this text. Ultimately, I suggest that this is the least important of the three meanings of self. My experiences as described in the dissertation may serve as a starting point for some readers as they compare and contrast experiences with their own. However, it is my hope that the self of author will quickly turn into the self of reader, as you use this starting point to consider your own ethical influences and perspectives, as you continue to reflect upon your own convictions, experiences, and positions. This is my second use of the word “self.” During the latter portion of my study at Northern Illinois University, an instructor once noted that "we learn too late that our convictions
matter." It is my hope that this contribution to the field will help to address that challenge.

My third use of self is the abstract self, the notion of the individual amid the collective. I decided to engage in autobiographical inquiry in order to better understand my own experiences and ethical understandings, especially as they relate to my role as an instructional technologist. At the same time, I sought to offer this case study of self to the field for consideration and reflection about the role and dynamics of self in the formation of the instructional technologist's ethical life.

As I began my doctoral study, I did not perceive myself to be an instructional technologist. That portion of my identity evolved as explained in the previous pages. It was only as I started writing this dissertation that I accepted my first position where my primary job responsibility was instructional technology, and more specifically instructional design. As I look back at the last four chapters, this point is important in understanding the topics and shape of the dissertation. From the beginning of my formal study in the field of instructional technology I was approaching this study, to some degree, viewing myself as an outsider. In fact, as the previous chapters reveal, I had crafted a view of self and a role for myself in the field by relying upon this feeling of otherness. From the beginning of the program I tried to engage in the study of instructional technology from an interdisciplinary perspective and, as my study progressed, I discovered that my uniqueness was not unique.
As I learned about the history of the field, I discovered that the field itself was eclectic. It had been fed and nurtured by a wealth of other fields and by a diversity of individuals. I was so interested in this notion that I proposed and wrote two of my candidacy exams on the topic. In a doctoral program in biology, a student is likely to have former undergraduate and graduate study in biology or a closely related field. This is not the case in instructional technology. Instead, my experience as a doctoral student involved interacting with classmates from a dozen or more different fields: health sciences, business, higher education, elementary and secondary education, communications, the humanities, library science, history, psychology, and art.

Instructional technology as I have experienced it is interdisciplinary by nature and a tapestry of life experiences. As such, I find myself increasingly confident of the value of autoethnography in the field, in contributing a wide variety of individual stories to the body of knowledge in the field. My story is unique, and so is the story of every other instructional technologist. Each story adds to our understanding of the way in which our field is made up of a tapestry of life experiences, beliefs, and values. To that extent, the third notion of self that I give attention to is the abstract self, the notion that the uniqueness of this field is partially found in the sum of the individuals.

As previously noted, my original intent was to start writing with 10 predeveloped ethical themes, then to craft a series of personal experiences related to each theme. If I had continued with this first process, I suspect that readers would
more easily see the different ethical themes in my writing. For example, if I chose
to devote a single chapter to the exploration of identity and honesty, then the reader
could more easily connect that writing with the importance of honesty and integrity
as an ethical topic. The reader could then relate such a chapter to portions of the
AECT code of ethics. Instead, my dissertation blends struggles with honesty and
identity throughout. The end result is what I believe to be a more authentic
representation of my journey. Instead of forcing myself to focus upon those topics
that are identified as ethical and central to the field, I have written about the more
vivid and emotional of my memories, topics that I have come to believe have an
important role in shaping my ethics. In some cases, these issues may relate to the
AECT code of ethics, but it was not my intent to make those connections. My goal
was not to recreate a personalized version of the many ethical scenarios that have
been written alongside the AECT code of ethics. It was to explore my personal
ethical journey.

In the first chapter, I referenced Robert Payton (2000) to help the reader
realize that I am approaching ethics as an ongoing journey of coming to understand,
not only what should be done but exploring why it is right to behave in one manner
rather than another. I also noted my desire to embrace the gray and seemingly
uncertain moral dilemmas of my life, even to emphasize these as central to my
ethical thinking.

With this understanding of ethics in mind, my dissertation has ended up
focusing upon one main ethical dilemma. This dilemma is my ongoing struggle to
discern when and why it is right for me to embrace or reject life in a technological society. It is my journey to come to terms with the seeming inconsistencies of my values, beliefs, and behaviors related to technology. Can these things be reconciled in a way that I can move forward in life with confidence, believing that my life and actions might promote good, that they can be ethical, and that they are consistent with my faith? This is the central ethical question and theme that has emerged from my writing.

Future Research

There were many opportunities to divert my attention from the primary task at hand and focus on a single topic. For example, during my writing of the chapter about video games, I spent much time reading about the history of video games and the history of the products and companies that I mentioned in that chapter. The intent was simply to verify the accuracy of my memories about the different games. Were the games that I mentioned actually available at the times when I remembered them in my life? When were the products released? What version would I have experienced and how long were the different products on the market? Amid my verification of such facts, I often found myself intrigued by the many facets of the video game industry in the 1980s and the emergence of web-based technologies in the 1990s and beyond. However, as helpful as the process was, there was a need to be careful not to diverge from my primary task. My goal was not to surface all of the interesting facts about the different technologies that I mentioned. It was more...
to understand my experiences with them and how they shaped my ethical thinking and my understanding of self.

Leaving out these potential periphery topics as areas for future research, the most evident need is for more individuals to engage in a similar process of autobiographical inquiry, especially related to the theme of ethics and instructional technology. I offer the case of one instructional technologist, but there is need to hear the stories of many others, highlighting the diversity of the field and promoting an understanding of the individual differences that we bring to our professional lives. This may, but need not be, in the form of a dissertation. It may even be more widely received if these future autobiographical stories are more modest in size, in the form of presentations and journal articles. However, many of the autobiographical dissertations referenced in the first chapter come from teacher education, where each dissertation tells one more story of an individual journey of self-discovery as a teacher. Themes of gender and ethnicity are present in this literature. I propose that a similar category of literature is needed in the field of educational technology. As much as I could continue to write and explore more personal epiphanies, the need for the field as a whole is now to hear from other perspectives.

Serendipity

In “Professional Ethics for Everyday Use,” Andrew Yeaman (2006) explains,
An important way to assess and define the profession of education is to think seriously about the stories that are told inside the profession. It is an old question in cultural anthropology: How do a people see themselves? The most insight-provoking tales are seldom straightforward. Their quality of being held together by congruent elements in a logical progression is frequently balanced by mystery. Similarly, the stories technologists tell about what is and what is not professionally ethical can be informative. (p. 52)

Yeaman (2006) was writing about professional ethics and explaining the role of the ethical scenarios about professional ethics that are included in each issue of *TechTrends*. He was not writing about the need for full-scale autobiographical dissertations in the field. Nonetheless, I was writing the last parts of my dissertation when I received the November/December issue of *TechTrends* and read Yeaman’s quote. I took a break from writing and skimmed a few articles. I was delighted to see an ethical scenario written by the chair of my dissertation committee. Reading on, I came to the last article in the issue, even the last page. I laughed out loud, continued reading, looked around my office to see who might be watching me and secretly wiped away a couple of tears as I read. His focus was much more specific but broadened to the idea of life stories informing our role as instructional technologists. Yeaman’s quote captures the essence of my hope and intent in writing this dissertation, that I and we “think seriously about the stories that are told inside the profession” (Yeaman, 2006, p. 52), but also that we continue to uncover our individual values and beliefs, that we discuss these with one another rather than...
silence them, that we take stands on our individual convictions, but that we also continue to negotiate common values. These things are already present in the field, but by writing my story, I offer one more addition to the conversation.
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