Reflective Journal

September 17 – 23

It looks like I was able to get back into "the swing of things." I was successful last year when I started and completed the Graduate Certificate in Instructional Design at UW-Stout, so I figured if I applied the same techniques, they should work as well. So far that has proven to be true. However D2L is different this time around, so there is a new wrinkle.

For the first five months of that program, I was unemployed. Then I got the contracting job, out of state, for another five months. Being an online program was an advantage. The only problem was the week I moved from Illinois to Oklahoma, but I survived. That is until I decided Oklahoma was no place to be and returned to Illinois. Fortunately that week coming back I was between classes. I finished the certificate in December and at the same time started my new job with the Department of Veterans Affairs. Life and school should be a bit easier this time around.

My first "worry" about this class is that this is a small group (I thought I remembered seeing that only eight had signed up). Not that I think a small group is bad, but it could cause some delays in getting the weekly coursework completed if my fellow students waited until the end of the week. I know life sometimes gets in the way for us adult learners.

Reading the icebreakers revealed a wide variety of backgrounds, education and experiences of my fellow students. As in classes before, this can definitely add to the learning.

September 24 – 30

Two down and six more to go. During the first week we had a couple of late starters, but it looks like everybody showed up. I'm still trying to get as much done at the beginning of the week as I can. Then the remainder of the week I can take it a bit easier and respond to the discussions.

Some of the terminal objectives for this week are the same as they were in my M.S. Ed. in Adult & Higher Education. The biggest difference is the addition of the online component and the impact of technology in the delivery of e-learning.

I got to explore different Web 2.0 tools. Having previous education and experience in multimedia definitely gives me an edge in this area.

The area of etiquette (or netiquette) is one I would like to hear about other's experiences and how to make it work. As a writer, I may be overly sensitive to spelling and grammar usage. I have seen so many "violations" in the business world, especially in e-mails. To make matters worse, things like shorthand and emoticons have left the character-limited medium (e.g., SMS, Twitter) and are appearing in formal e-mails, documents, and instant messaging. And don't get me started about word usage. It seems fewer and fewer people know the difference between "you're" and "your." And there is no such word as "prolly" (but I suspect it will eventually show up in the dictionaries).

October 1 – 7

It is the end of week three. This has been one of the most trying weeks yet. In addition to using two different content management systems (CMS) for this class, I have started another UW-Stout online class this week. It uses D2L, but also we are using a Wiki (PBWorks) in class. So I'm jumping around trying to keep myself straight, on time and on track.

It is great to see that even in this small group taking this class, we are diverse. We have various level educators (e.g., high school, college, trade school, volunteer organization) and each brings a different perspective. There are a lot of good ideas and experiences being shared.

October 8 – 14

Week four is down the drain. To add to my frustration (and workload), my other online class has added even more technology…a blog. I had to create one and also maintain it throughout that course. Talk about technology overload. CMS/LMS, wikis, blogs…what's next?

Basically what I am discovering is that there are many different tools and methods to get education online. However this is no real surprise seeing as I have been involved with learning and using different multimedia tools for my studies as well as my full-time profession. Many of these e-learning tools are an extension, or evolution, of the multimedia tools. I'll end up putting some of these tools into my "toolbox" and will find a use for them sometime in the future.

I now find it fortunate that this class is a small group. So is my other class. Had one or the other (or both) had been "full" classes, my stress and workload could have gone through the roof. Perhaps the Yoga class I'm taking twice a week at my local community college is really helping. Yes, I am a very busy man.

October 15 – 21

Wow, week 5 is over and only three more to go. Another week of frustrations…it's just a very busy time these past two months with school, work, and "real-life."

The Knowledge Seeker — Investigative Searching activity was quite challenging for a number of reasons. The objective was:

> "You will experience investigative searching that combines search skills with website evaluation tactics to help you professionalize your approach to using digital resources."

Well we did that and more. This self-paced course had some glitches/problems (or what software engineers I have worked with call "undocumented features"). I'm still not sure if they were intentional or not. However, the actual content of the course is very valuable to me not only for this course and future online teaching or developing, but in my current full-time position as a Technical Writer.

I do a lot of research in my position. I now have a few more tools that I can immediately put to use.

October 22 – 28

Week six and all is well (for the most part). This week brought something new to me. I didn't realize you could create a "custom search engine." I did take a class in 2004 as part of my masters called "ETT 549 Online Searching" at Northern Illinois University (NIU). Perhaps creating custom search engines are now part of that course. It would make sense. However reading the currently course description does not say any more than it did in 2004.

In our readings we were assigned the 2011 Horizon Report. What stood out to me was the use of gesture-based computing. With what gaming systems (Xbox, Wii) are allowing by using physical gestures as controls within the games, the leap to using this technology in the online or distance learning environment is not too far off. Creating training specific to a particular gaming system may not be the way. But it was revealed that there is work being done to interface parts of those systems, such as the Kinect, with a web browser and the Internet. I could see the use for some courses that I currently teach face-to-face, that do not translate well to online.

I also went a little "above and beyond" this week. A "tip sheet" was provided to us to aid in the creation of our custom search engine. It had relevant information, however was missing some key items to truly make it easier/clearer for the reader. I took it upon myself to rewrite and enhance this document. It was shared with my classmates and may be used in future classes.

October 29 – November 4

Week 7! My, how time flies. This week we started creating our e- Portfolio. Or is it E-Portfolio? It's a chance to "brag" about ourselves (OK, we're actually presenting ourselves to the online world). Though I'm still busy as usual, what helps is that I've done similar projects in the past. I have a lot of the elements for my e-Portfolio already created in one form or another. Some will require rewrites or updating, but it beats starting from scratch. Also my experience with HTML has helped with my editing of Google Sites. There are a few things I wanted to change, but couldn't with the GUI provided. Fortunately they allow you to look at the HTML and make direct edits.

Also in my thoughts are those who were affected by Hurricane Sandy this week. Those of us in the Chicagoland area got hit with high winds and rain. It was the outer-edge of Sandy, and a relatively minor inconvenience. I have co-workers and online classmates in the regions affected. A fellow technical writer at the VA, Dave, lives and works in New Jersey. He's been offline for several days now. He has his hands full.

November 5 – November 11

Woooo hooooo! Week 8, this is it! My life has been really busy, especially the last six weeks or so. Besides work, I have been taking two online courses through UW-Stout and training/coordinating Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training for my local Emergency Management Agency during the month of October.

We are wrapping things up in class to include enhancing and fine-tuning our e-Portfolios. I have a habit of "tweaking" it daily making changes and updates. Some of these changes are thanks to peer reviews

and comments made by my fellow classmates. I used Google Sites to create these web pages, but find that the HTML editor is a bit limited and "clunky" for my taste. Fortunately I know enough HTML to fix some of the items manually.

We also explored the subject of disabilities as they relate to online education. So we were introduced to the topic of [section 508](#) compliance. In my case, I have been exposed to this because of my involvement or employment with two government agencies. By no means am I an expert. I am now more aware and making the efforts and adjustments in the products I develop.

This is a bitter-sweet ending. I still have three more weeks with my other online course, then I get a few weeks to recoup. It looks like in January I will be taking two more online courses simultaneously.