Beta Testing – Methods and Process

The overall goal of this master's degree project was to create a resource collection that would assist educators in providing a strong foundation for their students in the principles of being a responsible digital citizen. Issues such as sharing information, acting appropriately online, developing positive digital footprints, effective research practices, respecting copyright laws, and being open to exploring and learning with new technologies were researched. Following that appropriate technologies and programs were chosen, and lesson plans were developed that would help encourage students and teachers to work and learn online in a safe and responsible manner. Intended deliverables, as outlined in the project proposal, included a resource website to house the work, 56 lesson plans covering various outcomes listed in the Digital Literacy Framework, a presentation to accompany the website explaining how to implement the various lessons, and this process paper to detail the development, testing and implementation phases of my major project.

Upon the completion of the work of creating the resource hub website, an online presentation and 60 (four more than originally intended) lesson plans tied to the British Columbia Ministry of Education's Digital Literacy Framework (https://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning/digital-literacy.htm, I chose to request a peer review of my work in order to test the validity and usefulness of my project. In doing so, I was depending on the experiences and expertise of my colleagues in both lesson planning and technology use in education. I felt that my cohort group and trusted colleagues would be able to provide critical and insightful feedback relevant to my needs and to the technology use in education subject area.

In preparation for the peer review, I requested feedback via a variety of resources. First, I posted a link to my website, Digital Citizenship in the Intermediate Classroom

(http://ksviudigitalcitizenshipdlf.weebly.com/), to my OLTD cohort members on our private Facebook page, requesting that they review my work and provide me with any ideas, recommendations or resource links that could improve my compilation. Then I posted similar requests on three Google + Communities that I am a member of (EdTech, Technology in Education and OLTD). I also requested a review from friends, family and local colleagues via Facebook and email. Finally, I posted the link publicly on Twitter, asking for a peer review of my master's work (#digitalliteracy, #edtech). In addition, I have had the opportunity to observe my own students experiencing a number of these lesson plans in years past and was therefore able to personally reflect upon their effectiveness in the educational environment.

I presented my published site for peer review from August 8-20, 2014. Although school was not in session at this time, I chose these dates for a number of reasons. First, I felt that my teacher and OLTD colleagues would be enjoying a relaxing summer break and would have time to peruse my work at their leisure, hopefully gaining momentum for their back to school planning routines by finding usable lesson plans and garnering some level of excitement to try them out when they got back to school. My hope in sending the link out via Twitter was also to reach some of my American counterparts as they also return to the classroom mid to late August and might be able to implement and test out the lessons sooner. Even though the curriculum was created for use in B.C. classrooms, most of the themes are relevant in all educational technology settings. Secondly, with the current job action going on in the B.C. public school system, it remains unclear as to when school will return to session and I was hesitant to leave the implementation phase open indefinitely for fear that it would never be completed. Finally, I had set a personal goal to have my master's degree work completed prior to the proposed school start date in September and worked diligently throughout the summer in order to achieve that goal.

For all of these reasons, a review of the process and potential impacts of the lesson plans was requested and feedback was gathered over a 13 day period mid-August. The intent was to determine whether there was inherent value in the work that I had completed and decide if the lessons would be relevant and usable in today's intermediate classroom. After the August 20th deadline passed I reviewed each response and compiled them into a single document attached as Appendix B.

Findings of Beta Testing

My 'testers' spent time on my website, read the lesson plans that I created, critiqued their value, analyzed the resources and information provided there and generally navigated the site to determine its relevance and ease of use. Though I was initially quite anxious at putting my work out for a peer review, I was quite relieved when the response to my work was overwhelmingly positive. Upon reflection I found that each of the suggestions made would vastly improve the overall functionality of the website and quality of the lesson plans. Further consideration of each suggestion is outlined in Chapter 5 - Conclusions and Recommendations.

I received a total of 15 responses to my work in various forms including emails, blog responses on my website, informal discussions with colleagues, personal reflections for improvements and comments in the Google + communities in which the link was posted. These responses included much praise for my work and 36 suggestions for improvement, 19 of which were simple grammatical or spelling errors. I also received three requests to share my work with others and one further suggestion that it be shared with my district and the online teaching community in general. It was particularly gratifying to receive accolades from three of my OLTD instructors as I feel that they are truly in tune with the educational technology field.

Overall, my reviewers felt the site was well laid out, clear and concise and generally easy to use. They noted that the lesson plans were well organized, easy to follow and had some very creative ideas and links to excellent resources. I received compliments that my project was an "[i]mpressive consolidation of work that ties back to your work in the OLTD program. Well done! You have created an overwhelmingly useful site for you and others. This is a great Masters project and great work for you, your district, and the online teaching community" (LaBonte, R. as cited in Sward, 2014). It was also noted that I had "done an incredible amount of work. Such an important topic and your lesson plans will be valuable to many" (Holtkamp, M. as cited in Sward, 2014). Coordinator of the OLTD Diploma Program Mary O'Neill stated, "[y]our work is of the highest quality and is testament to your dedication to teaching and learning in an online context." And one of my longest and most trusted advisors, Sue Antonson (my mom and a recently retired teacher/administrator) responded, "May I say that I am impressed. What a quantity and quality of work you have compiled. I am proud of you. Then I need to say I am ticked I did not have all this stuff last year when I could have made good use of it. I would love to be able to share all of this with students of my own. This needs to be shared with educators" (Sward, 2014). This recognition of the value of the project speaks volumes. The purpose of the site was to provide educators with a resource collection to help build a foundation of digital literacy skills and it seems clear that it has achieved this goal. The project was recognized to have both value in the education community and relevance as student technology use increases, both in and out of the classroom.

One notable suggestion for improvement was that the lesson plans and other documents attached to the site as files should open into a separate window when clicked on. The reasoning for this is to allow the user to have multiple files open at once, as well as to remove the need to navigate back to the previous page, as opposed to simply closing out of the file. As testers

navigated the site and proceeded to close out of a lesson plan, they unintentionally closed out of the site because the lesson plan had not been opened into its own tab. This is simply a formatting suggestion to promote ease of use and to make it less frustrating for users as they work their way around the site. Having experienced this frustration many times on other sites, I can see the benefit of opening files into new tabs. I was not aware that this was even an issue on my site, but appreciate the fact that people removed from the process of creating the site could pick up on this aspect prior to the site being fully published and distributed.

Another suggestion of huge importance was the copyrighting of the material that is contained within the site. Though I cannot take credit for the resources linked to on the site and in the lesson plans, I did create 60 unique and engaging lesson plans of my own and did not indicate any copyright of my work at all, something which stands directly against the copyright issues discussed in the Digital Citizenship section of the site. This is also a simple fix with the use of Creative Commons permissions that will protect my work from being copied and sold for profit.

A question was raised as to whether the lesson plans were linear or could stand alone and be used individually to suit a teacher's specific needs. It is important to emphasize that each lesson, and for that matter, each topic contained within the Digital Literacy Framework, can stand alone and be used individually to achieve specific goals, however, they can also be used in conjunction with other chosen lesson plans to complete a themed unit of lessons that covers many aspects of digital literacy. The use of the site and the lesson plans within it are dependent on each teacher's specific needs and interests.

One reviewer suggested that I include a 'required materials' section on the lesson plan template. About halfway through the lesson planning phase I came to this conclusion myself and felt at the time that it was too late to add it in as I would have to go back and fix all of the lesson

plans that I had already completed, however, I do agree that it would be a valuable section to include on the lesson plans and will amend them so that teachers can quickly review each lesson to determine whether they can implement it based on the tools and resources available to them.

Other suggestions were made, such as an additional resource to be shared, the shift to attribute sources of pictures used to the bottom of each page as opposed to housing them all on the References page, and the creation of a community collaboration blog page where educators could share their experiences, add to the resource collection and identify favourite lesson plans or note issues that arose from the implementation of one of them. Upon reflection, I have also noted a few housekeeping issues such as shortening the links to some resources and adding names to the top of each lesson plan.

The field testing phase of this project provided me with valuable suggestions on how to improve the end product. Though I did not receive as much feedback as I had initially hoped for, based on the responses I did receive I am confident of the inherent value in the work that I have completed. This project was always intended to be a continuously evolving entity as new ideas, new resources and new technologies were developed and as new issues or concerns around technology use in education arose. Though this curriculum is by no means complete, the goal of developing a comprehensive resource base that would help build awareness of digital literacy issues and develop rules and guidelines for the effective use of technology in the classroom was achieved. This project stands as a valuable resource for teachers who are looking to implement technology use in their classrooms and will hopefully assist students in transferring the digital literacy skills they learn through the lessons into their everyday technology use, thus creating a safer, more effective online learning environment for all.