As I reflect on the role of technology in my life, I am grateful for what it has offered me in my educational and professional journey, but also consider its impact on the way I now think, teach and make personal connections. I feel fortunate to have lived a good portion of my life during a time when the computer was not standard or necessary within the home or outside of it, when printed books were valued for reading pleasure and research, and when communication most often occurred face-to-face. This unit really has helped me to gain an appreciation, as well as a feeling of unease, for how easily technology entered into my life, essentially unnoticed, and has since become a larger and larger component of each day.

I was born in 1985, and when I contemplate my childhood experiences, or lack thereof, with technology compared to what I see today in the fourth grade students I work with, I am shocked at the difference in exposure. As a child, I occasionally watched television and had never even engaged with a computer until I was in late elementary school. At that time, it was utilized only for educational games and word processing. I signed up for an AOL account when I was in high school, but even then, did not use it often, possibly due to the fact that the Internet connection was also our telephone line and proved to be unreliable. In my view, the computer was only necessary for typing essays for school. Once in college, I purchased my first laptop and began utilizing the Internet more for research, which was a welcomed improvement to Encyclopedias, but maintained my distance from the social networking sites that had begun to pop up in my circle of friends. I, like the majority of my classmates, handwrote notes in all of my college courses and only at the very end of my time at Michigan State in 2007, were laptops making an appearance in my classes. Just six years later, and there has been an obvious difference on college campuses.

Now, with the constant attachment to our computers and mobile devices, concentration in college classes is tested as students have access to countless distractions right at their fingertips. Mark Bauerlin explores this alarming trend in his article *A Very Long Disengagement*, in which he references the increased exposure to technology contributing to student "boredom" in class, in addition to a decreased quality of work and overall attention span. Sherry Turkle, a professor at MIT, echoes Bauerlin's assertion in *Digital Nation* explaining that college students need to be stimulated in ways they never have been before; the lecture format no longer fits into our fast-paced technological world.

This same trend is even beginning to reach elementary classrooms, and I recognize the ways in which teaching has required me to keep up on the technological developments as well as hold the interest of my students. I find myself incorporating technology frequently into my lessons despite teaching in a low-income, under-resourced school, in an attempt to better relate to my progressively digitally adept students. Additionally, I have certainly become more acquainted with new websites, and have benefitted from the seemingly unlimited online resources and communities aimed at improving educator

performance and effectiveness. Through my own exploration and research, I have taught my students to demonstrate their knowledge in a variety of subjects through technology, utilizing creative sites like Glogster and Prezi. In an increasingly high-tech world, these skills are important to grasp, and for educators, to teach to their students. After watching *Digital Nation*, however, I do question the potential consequences and lack of understanding that accompanies this constant attachment to the Internet on our students' cognitive development and overall success later in life.

Recently, as I've come to realize my own increased reliance and involvement with digital media outside of my job, I appreciate how much I miss the lack of attachment and constant connectedness to my devices. Currently, my husband and I have a laptop, desktop computer, iPad and iPhones in our home, in addition to our work laptops. As a result, we are always linked, and find ourselves checking email, Facebook and simply browsing the Web several times per day. As Sherry Turkle alludes to in her article *Can You Hear Me Now?,* we have become so attached to our machines, we don't think for ourselves anymore. Furthering that sentiment is *New York Times* Columnist Tom Friedman who argues, "Increasingly the world does not care what you know. Everything is on Google." The Internet has granted us the possibility to find information at any time in a matter of seconds, and in turn, we have come to expect that quick response in all aspects of personal communication. There is no longer a time when we cannot be reached, and we have begun inviting our devices into times of our day that were once reserved for contemplation and relaxation. Even the idea of vacation has shifted to accommodate these advances in technology, allowing everyone to "check in" while away from work or home.

Although I understand the inevitability of technology reaching even further into our personal and work lives in the future, I, like many researchers and writers who study this issue, question if there comes a point when we are simply too connected and dependent on our computers and mobile devices. Reading Nick Carr's article, *Is Google Making Us Stupid?* and listening to his interview on NPR, helped me to further reflect on my relationship with technology and address some existing trepidation I had. Carr contends, "Never has a communications system played so many roles in our lives—or exerted such broad influence over our thoughts—as the Internet does today." This is true for most people I know; the Internet has come to serve as our source for up-to-the-minute news, for shopping, social media, job seeking, e-mail, current trends in popular culture and online degrees. We have come to regard our mobile devices as necessary to make us feel whole, informed, and connected to the outside world. Despite its convenience and common necessity, some thought must be devoted to the potential impacts all this time spent engaging with a screen and not human beings has on our society, and even more concerning, as Carr argues, how our obsession with the Internet is actually neurologically changing the way our brains work. Again, the issue of attention span and multi-tasking is addressed, and I recognize that like Carr, I have also noticed difficulty in maintaining concentration in a way I never used to experience.

I believe my inquiry on the evolution of digital media in my life is especially important as I contemplate my role as an educator, frequently required to meet the latest

technological curricular demands, and consider my decision to pursue my master's degree online, a concept I would have never thought possible ten years ago. To reiterate, while I value what technology has done for me academically and in my career, I admit I am apprehensive about its influence on the generation of young people who know nothing other than the digital age. With mounting evidence revealing a decrease in academic motivation and lower test scores in US students, attention must be given to this growing concern overtaking education. I am dedicated to instilling in my students a love for life-long learning, but sometimes question my ability to compete with the rapidly changing digital media that has come to consume their lives. I also ponder whether I am hypocritical to judge this as a current problem, considering my own "always on" lifestyle, and wonder whether researchers like Pensky, who believe this is an important evolution to be embraced just as others have in the past, are credible.

Engaging with this form of autobiographical inquiry on the increase of technology has really helped me develop my own thinking with regards to its role in my personal life and in my teaching career. While the readings and videos from this unit helped mold my opinion, I understand that this is not exhaustive research, and that much of my beliefs and doubts are a result of my own experiences and upbringing. I believe this has served as an important form of investigation, as it allows for in-depth self-reflection that will further my awareness on a topic I had never taken time to contemplate, but that is central to my life in so many ways.