Reflection Summary

At the start of this course, I found my school district implementing a Learning Management System (LMS) that we needed to have up and running for at least one of the courses we teach in a six week time frame. Having taken online courses previously and utilized Google for sharing and communicating with students I wasn't as intimidated as some staff. However, I had a lot to learn. This course came at the perfect time. I enrolled in this course primarily to satisfy a requirement for the E-Learning and Online Teaching Certificate as part of my Master's Degree, but found much more immediate relevancy.

During the first week as we got to know each other in the course and become familiar with our instructor's requirements, we delved into the myths and constraints involving online teaching. Having only taught in a traditional classroom, I wasn't quite sure what online teaching truly entails. I was happy to have some thoughts clarified in this week's readings. The realization I came to is that many components remain the same. Connection to students, interactions, group work, and socialization are still cultivated in an online environment. The difference is in how they are carried out. I also felt very reassured that there are limitations to online teaching. The amount of time is still rigorous as an online teacher and I can't have a higher amount of students just because the delivery method is different. Many people perceive online teaching as easier, but its challenges and rewards are similar to that of a traditional classroom, they just appear differently.

During the second week we looked into building our online communities. I found this to be highly relevant to my current situation. "Netiquette" is something that needs to be addressed with students. We can't assume that they know how to responsibly engage in an e-environment. Those skills need to be specifically taught. In my district, we jumped feet first into a one-to-one technology initiative. We didn't have the groundwork clearly laid out for our students, but are monitoring and adjusting as we go forward. I shared several of our readings with my administrator for reflection and possible use with our students. My rule for online communities is to communicate as if you were face to face.

Week three brought on much stress. Not only was I utilizing D2L for coursework and Haiku LMS for my school district, but now I also needed to utilize a third LMS, Moodle.   As I familiarized myself with another platform, I found there to be many commonalities, just appearance differences. In reading about critical thinking, I found myself reflecting back to the work in week two. How is teaching critical thinking online any different in person? Aren't the questioning techniques similar? How about our responses to students to promote further discussion? Also, my tone and voice in my physical classroom is a positive one to help students feel safe in sharing and participating. I would need to create this without being able to flash a smile or thumbs up. I would need to choose my words carefully to create the environment I desired. I found myself focusing on my rule to communicate as though I was face to

face with my students. Thoughtful questions created thoughtful responses in which reflection and further questioning can grow from.

During week four, we read about questioning techniques and academic dishonesty. I struggled to connect how I would utilize online quizzes or assessments to evaluate my students' progress in my math classroom. Math is difficult to assess online. I can use it for students to check progress on ACT type questions or respond to a prompt, but skill checking is challenging. It is difficult to type mathematics while working out a problem. I chose to focus the quiz I created around academic dishonesty because this is a concern of mine. I enjoyed reading the suggested readings. Having watched many of my peers cheat in classes in high school makes me very suspicious of my students. I carefully plan assessments to curb these behaviors without having to call them out. Maintaining positive relationships with my students has been instrumental in curbing cheating in my classroom. I enjoyed the feedback I received from my Moodle Questionnaire. It helped reinforce my philosophy and strategy.

The following week, week five, left me wondering where common sense has gone to. I was discouraged with the Web Site Investigator (WSI) activity. I was shocked reading the studies of how many people actually thought the tree octopus site was factual. To me it was clearly a red flag, but pinpointing why was challenging. I felt like I was on a treasure hunt through a very muddy website. I tried investigating all the sites, but ended up just going back to the tree octopus site. Yet another skill I will need to help my students prepare for. I really enjoyed the plagiarism readings and game. To me it was much more concrete, which better aligns with how I learn. The WSI activity was beneficial as it stretched the limitations of my thought and exposed me to a red flag that needs to be addressed. Common sense to all is not the same.

Week six brought much delight as I learned a valuable skill that I could implement immediately. There have been many online sources that I have bookmarked for various reasons and uses in my classroom, but I never effectively categorized or shared them. What a waste of time and energy. Curation was new to me and I am a huge fan. I am creating a Scoop.it site for each course I teach with links to resources that I use and find that relates to the standards I am teaching. I am hoping to create a vital resource for my middle school professional learning community. I value the work of my colleagues immensely, but being the only middle school teacher with a math degree, I find myself being assigned the task of searching out or creating activities for all of us to use. It is my content specialty, so it is a task I take on happily for the success of our students. Having resources that we have used with success or that are content and grade level appropriate at the fingertips of all middle school math teachers will be beneficial in many ways. However, I did not start these for my assignment. Instead I chose another topic of immediate relevance to my current position, remediation and intervention. It is still a work in progress and something I will continue to use and value.

Before I realized it week seven was already here. Where had all the time gone? I was really impressed with all the strategies and content that was learned. My Haiku site for my students is progressing and I am learning new features on a regular basis. However, as is anything in education, it is a work in progress. Just when I think I have something that works, I reflect and find new ways to modify.

When I did the reading, I continued to find myself reflecting back on week two and the rule I had for the online environment. In reading the 147 Practical Tips for Teaching Online Groups I questioned whether or not this is truly any different than what I am trying to encourage in my traditional classroom. I came to the same conclusion once again, no. The skills and goals that I have for my students will remain constant, what changes is the way that I teach and cultivate those same skills.

The course was concluding before I knew it. I feel my time and commitment to the work in the course has been of high value. My Haiku sites are up and running for all four of the courses I teach. I am settling into a rhythm of current implementation and am finding room to tweak and add in more features and strategies. The timeliness of the course material aligned to my needs in my current position quite well and provided many prompts for self-reflection.