Life in the “Learning Society” has prepared me for the new information and communications technologies (ICT). I believe that knowing what a “Learning Society” actually is and what it demands, allows me to better function in this “globalizing” world. I understand my role in my own education and learning, and how I influence where I will end up in this society according to my abilities to use ICT.

Searching the Internet for information plays a large role in my life and work. By working on my Masters from a “distance”, I have had to learn how effectively evaluate the information on the Internet. I have learned how to distinguish the resources that will be sufficient and those that are just a waste of my time. This is not only true for my research purpose in my personal education, it is also true for my “navigating” as a teacher. Although I have access to many traditional supports and resources to teach my children, I feel that the information available to me via the Internet is valuable. I have had to learn how to “filter” through educational sites, informal sites, and various other digital mediums to retrieve information that will be beneficial to my students. I also have to be sensitive to what is out there and what my students will be exposed to. I have to teach my students how to begin to “navigate” so they are able to learn what will be good for them on the Internet.

I have recently been dealing more and more with the issue of “continuous partial attention” like Lee Rainie offers. I am a mother, teacher, wife, and student. I have many roles that require a great deal of my attention. I find myself doing homework with television in the background, on a laptop with numerous windows open to view other chunks of information that may be essential for my everyday happenings: email, weather, etc. I shop online on my desktop while my son watches streamed children’s programs on the laptop. I research lessons and projects for my classroom in between teaching and homework assignments. I feel, at times, a complete victim of this self-imposed technological world like Todd Gitlin discusses. I do identify myself as an “Ironist”, and I do allow myself to be “involved” in this world, even with a sense of humor at times. And although I understand my role that I have created and most of the time I feel comfortable with it, I do feel that I let it control me at times and that I need a more assertive stance with it if I am to prepare myself completely for ICT.

The one major change in my professional life that has afforded me the best opportunities for strengthening my abilities to use ICT is my opportunity to participate in this online MAED program. I started my graduate studies in a traditional campus program. I felt that this was a natural course to take since I have been in a “classroom” setting since preschool. But I quickly found that with all of my commitments to work and my personal life, I wasn’t able to fully participate in a “classroom”. I didn’t want to sit with peers and colleagues to discuss what I knew or read. I quickly became disinterested in the process. I knew that I had to complete a graduate program (with all of the new “highly-qualified” standards, this is almost impossible to avoid), but I wasn’t sure how I could find one that suited me. I went onto the Internet and began researching. Somehow I stumbled upon Michigan State’s online MAED program description and the rest is history.

This program has allowed me to pursue my education in the way that best suits me. I am an independent learner. I don’t respond well to having to actively discuss my views in real time. I don’t have the time to sit in a classroom up to three times a week, for a few hours at a time, and still complete
homework during other leftover hours of my week. By participating in a distance program online, I create my own schedule, am personally responsible for my work, and can depend upon my self-reliance and motivation to keep me successful. I appreciate this use of technology and feel that it is very beneficial when a person can use it to the best of their advantage.

I feel that the most important thing for those around me to know about the nature and uses of the Internet, hypermedia, and other features of ICT, is how to “navigate” successfully. By this I mean that people need to know that the Internet offers information, lots of information, from tons of source, from across the spectrum. People need to be aware of where the information is coming from, how it is delivered, and where it can take someone. Kids and adults need to know how to distinguish valuable information from garbage. People need to know ways to evaluate what information is present and whether it would be a source to trust. As adults, we are responsible for “navigating” this content so we can further our educations, research, and remain active participants in this society. We also need to be aware of how to “navigate” so we can be aware of what is out there and how to teach our children to do the same. As teachers, we need to teach our students (or children) how to “navigate” so they do not become a victim of useless information and turn into versions of Gitlin’s “Fans”, that cannot distinguish fantasy from reality. Our kids need to be prepared for what is out there and how to deal with it without our help one day.

In conclusion, this unit offered some valuable insights to what exactly we are facing and some reasons as to why we need to prepare ourselves for dealing with ICT. I believe that my awareness of the “Learning Society” and all that that label entails better prepares me for what ICT will demand.
I did have certain knowledge and beliefs about education before taking this course. I, like most people, associated education and learning as one in the same. I felt that as long as I provided students with an education, they would learn. I especially took this assumption for granted because I remember learning from the education offered to me. Through various readings and hypermedia resources, I now know that my education and resulting learning happened in a very different time than present day and what my students are experiencing. My students, and even myself, are learning in a time that requires differing methods of instruction to “get through to” kids of today.

I did feel and still do feel that education should be based on fundamental behaviors such as motivation, self-reliance, and independence. Today’s “Net Geners”, as Carie Windham described in her article from Unit 5, supposedly require these tools to be supplemented nurtured by instructors and teachers. Students must be directed and offered opportunities to work in groups, stimulated to participate in discussions, and prodded to complete meaningful assignments. Teachers should be aligning curriculum to account for the way that “Net Geners” learn. Although Windham offers a compelling account of how she prefers to learn, and probably how many kids prefer to learn, but she didn’t convince me any differently than what I thought coming in to this course. I feel that kids may need curriculum to meet most of their “needs”, but they must also meet us halfway. If we taught kids completely aligned with their wishes, we would be texting them in shorthand about their assignments, emailing them with tips on how to complete assignments and hyperlinks on where to find the information to complete the assignment, and calling their cell phones to remind them of deadlines. It would be something straight from the nightmares of Todd Gitlin.

And although I came into this course with a mainly “traditional” view of education, Todd Gitlin’s book didn’t completely convince me that all of our media is the “bad guy”. He offered me some wonderful examples and notions of why things are the way they are. His book actually made me think of how to restructure my approach to education and learning in response to my students. I did not feel that a “Secessionist” style was the way, but maybe a variation of the “Abolitionist” style is more suitable. His summary of the “Abolitionist” actually made me return to Mary Catherine Bateson’s approach to lifelong learning through submersion. I now believe that the answer to some of our doubts on “where to go from here” in regards to education and globalization may be, as she would refer, a return to “home”. Robert Putnam’s reference to “bowling alone” seems to characterize the one main issue we face as educators and members of today’s society: lack of community. Maybe if we all approached learning as an “experience” much like Bateson, we could renew a real sense of community. Today, we rely on virtual communities to find people like us, or to experience cultures other than our own. We may need to “secede” from technology and media in the sense of actually living, speaking, and interacting with the people we wish to know more about. I believe that if we “learned” how to be people again, we would have a renew trust in our educational system and develop more proactive solutions to globalization.

This course also introduced me to the power of self-directed learning. Noah Adam’s account on learning piano late in life was enlightening. It offered me something to connect to. Before the course, I had this sense of wanting to learn, to further myself in this “Learning Society”. Not so much in academic ways, but in societal ways. I had been feeling this overwhelming sense of wanting to learn how to sew. I had been exposed to it as a child through my grandmother, but since my mother despised it, it wasn’t that important in our home. I knew the basics of a sewing machine, but had no formal labels for stitches and techniques.
My grandmother passed away a little over a year ago, and since then, sewing has been an urge that just keeps stronger and stronger. I have been researching, experimenting, and attempting to sew various projects. I have been teaching myself as much as I can and exposing myself to things that will hopefully advance my learning. I have absolutely no real “need” for this learning, just a strong personal desire to accomplish this personally established goal.

This course has given me a new outlook on my motives. The whole concept of the “Learning Society” has given me a context in which this urge of mine exists. The readings on self-directed learning have given me reason why I pursue my desires. And Noah Adam’s book gives me a “community” to begin to identify with.

In conclusion, this course has given my views on education and learning a refreshed outlook. I have been able to explore the state of today’s economy and where it is heading. I am now more prepared for what my needs may be educationally, and more prepared to face the needs of my students. I have also been introduced to resources that have given reasons behind some of views and resources that explore how to continue my education successfully. Because of this course, I am more confident that I am functioning in this society how I should be, and that I am prepared for what it coming. It also offered me some views that allow me to question my current methods and consider a return to “traditional” ways to respond to “new” ways.