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From Student to Teacher: The Impacts of Digital Technology on an Academic and Professional Path

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I think I was born at the right time. As a child of the 1980s, I am a lucky member of a generation that lived through the digital revolution. Throughout my formative years, I was fortunate enough to experience the rise of important digital tools and platforms that seem to be taken for granted these days. I could easily recount my first experiences using YouTube, Wikipedia, Facebook (when it was only available to university students), my first email account, or the Napster/iTunes revolution. Having lived through this cultural redefinition, I developed a unique perspective regarding digital technology. I have the luxury of recalling a time before the ubiquity of digital technology: the vast majority of my schooling was done without regular access to the Internet or modern digital technology tools. This, in turn, has allowed me to appreciate their value in my everyday life.

I currently work as a CEGEP biology teacher and am also completing a Ph.D. in educational psychology. While undergoing my initial pedagogical training, I registered for an educational technology course that revealed a new potential for these exceptional tools. As I started teaching, despite all the options available and my enthusiasm, I did not succeed in incorporating educational technology into my practice. I used to think digital technology was some type of magic bullet or elixir, capable of remediating any classroom-related problems. With the benefit of hindsight, this initial perception of digital technology most likely came from my early experiences: I was so enamoured with the almost limitless possibilities of digital technology that I would use these tools whenever possible. This approach to teaching, however, did not alleviate any of the problems I had initially encountered, nor did it lead to an increase in student success.

With time, and my growth as a teacher, I was able to grasp what I believe to be a fundamental reality of teaching with digital technology: the success of the tool used is independent of the tool itself. Rather, goal attainment is entirely contingent on the intent and planning of technology use. This realization has transformed my practice and has allowed me to fully exploit digital technology in my classroom; I now employ such tools with an onus on student learning. The outcomes speak for themselves: I do not use as much digital technology as I once did, but when I do, there is a focus on student learning, and careful planning of how to best reach this goal. It is in these instances that I am able to observe rich meaningful learning experiences in my students.

My experiences throughout this professional process ultimately inspired me to start my graduate studies in educational psychology; I wanted to know more about the experiences I had gone through. Were they normal? What could and should I have done differently? How did other teachers experience such changes? What supports were available to me? These questions are at the heart of my interest in educational psychology and doctoral studies. My current research project investigates the resources given to college teachers in support of their digital technology use; an undertaking that has also impacted my teaching through learning about educational processes and the psychology of professional change in teachers.

The recent publication of the *Digital Action Plan* and the *Digital Competency Framework* by Quebec's Ministry of Education and Higher Education have been impactful for both my teaching practice and research endeavors. Within my classroom, both references guide my teaching practice by allowing me to specifically develop individual and meaningful student dimensions of the digital competency; access to such guidelines would have been very useful in the earlier stages of my teaching career. With regards to research, both documents can be used as analytical frameworks for, amongst other things, the analysis of teaching practices as they relate to the use of digital technology, important tools for an in-depth understanding of the province's teachers.

The impacts of digital technology on my personal and professional lives have been, and continue to be, extremely meaningful. Personally, having lived through the digital revolution, as opposed to the majority of my students, allows me to fully appreciate the power of digital technology and the innovations that continue to stem from this field. This dichotomy has led to meaningful discussions about digital technology in my classroom, some of which border on the absurd; I once had to explain to a group of students why the icon for "save" in Microsoft word was not television, but actually a floppy disk, and what a floppy disk actually is. Professionally, while my initial enthusiasm for digital technology led to struggles in my classroom, I continue to learn to harness the power and potential of its emergent tools to benefit student learning. My experiences have also prompted me to pursue fundamental research in educational psychology and digital technology, which still fuels my excitement about educational technology.