Jenni's Summary of Learning for Graduate Class EC&I 830 – Contemporary Issues in Educational Technology.

Week 1:

Feeling excited (which I didn't think I would taking a grad class during my summer holidays). I'm happy to see everyone else who is in this class and to see some familiar faces.

I had a discussion with a friend/colleague about summer classes, and she shared that when she did her Masters degree years ago, summer classes were 6-8 hours a day, 5 days a week for three weeks. She said that there was a lot of paper writing as well vs. the blogs that we do in this class. This led to a really good discussion about learning… more work, more lectures don't necessarily mean more learning and they sure don't lead to more engagement! I left the conversation with a very different perspective on Grad Level classes.

I had heard that this class involved debate topics, which seems daunting at first, but the more I'm diving into my topic, the more excited I am! I'm definitely thankful to have Leanne with me on this.

Week 2:

My debate is over! It was really nerve-racking but I am very glad that I had Leanne to work with… I think we make a great team! I have to hand it to Dustin, he brought up a lot of really great points that were difficult to argue with!

This debate got me thinking about boredom and it's role in creativity. I know that there is a fine line between keeping students engaged in class so that they can learn, and still allowing them to experience boredom in their lives so they don't NEED to be engaged at all times... the question is how to find the balance between the two.

Debate number two was about whether social media ruins childhood or not. Another polarizing topic! To be fair, I have done a lot of reading and discussion about this topic over the past year with our early learning facilitator, so I went in disagreeing with the notion that social media ruins childhood. I can see how people would agree... I've watched firsthand how much childhood has changed over my time as a teacher and I know it hasn't always been for the better. This debate got quite heated!

I brought up this debate topic with my 10-year-old niece and we ended up having a great discussion about social media. She talked about how it's frustrating because the rest of her friends communicate on snapchat and she doesn't have a phone… and even told me that she pretended to be sick once to get out of a sleepover because all of the other girls were on their phones. This really showed me just how important it is to have a consistent dialogue with our young ones about social media and screentime.

At the end of the day, though, I agree that it comes down to parenting with social media, and that we have a human nature to fear any sort of change. Just because childhood looks different, it doesn't mean it's worse than it was before social media!

Week 3:

The topic for debate number three was whether AI will revolutionize education for the better, which was a tough one for me to have an opinion on. I know that AI will revolutionize education – it already has – but I can't say if it will be for the better or not. I see a lot of positives when it comes to AI, especially in a condensed class like this one. I often find myself thinking over ideas and topics for 4 or 5 days before sorting something out in my head to write a blog post over, but that's just not feasible in this class. I've been playing with ChatGPT a little bit to give me an outline to take away some of that burden, and then I've been filling it in with my thoughts and information, which has made things move a lot more smoothly. Hopefully I can keep learning how to use AI to help myself.

At the end of this debate, I really think that we all just need to stop and take the time to learn about Artificial Intelligence and how it can help us before trying to teach it to our students… which is easier said than done. A ban on using AI usually never works, but hopefully teachers can find small places to use it and teach students how to still incorporate their own thoughts and ideas into their work, using AI to enhance their already valuable thoughts.

Debate four was whether cellphones should be banned from the classroom. Ugh, these debates are so challenging! I know that cellphones distract students and cause massive headaches for teachers, but having a hard ban that is mandated by the government (ironically not experts in the field of education) doesn't seem like the right answer. It leads me to ask the question, "what is my job vs. a parent's job?" I don't have kids at this point in time, but my husband and I would love to someday (funnily enough, we are using advances in technology and generative AI to make that happen)… so it's easy for me to pretend I am the parenting expert in the room. I really wonder why teachers are supposed to be policing cellphones and managing social issues that come with cellphones when these are things that should be taught at home; then I realize that us millennials didn't grow up with this kind of technology, so when it went into the hands of our children, we didn't really understand the long-term impact that they would have. I think that at the end of the day, parents should have the opportunity to educate themselves along with their children about best practice when it comes to cellphone use. One of the podcasts called School's In that was suggested for this week brings up the idea of teaching about technology and cellphone use from a psychological perspective… how that notification DING is a similar effect to that of Pavlov's dog, etc. This way we can continue to shape the technology before it shapes us.

Week 4:

Debate five was centered around the question if technology will create a more equitable society. I didn't realize this one would hit home so hard for me, but it really did. Technology has provided me with so many opportunities that I wouldn't otherwise have, and for that I am extremely grateful! People use technology to learn from anywhere, become more self sufficient, access healthcare, and connect with family and friends across the world. I know that there is a gap and a divide, but I don't think that's an issue with technology, I really think it's something that technology can begin to bridge. Technology gives us the opportunity to see more of the equity gap through social media and other sharing platforms, and it can also give us the opportunity to gain a more diverse worldview.

The final debate was one that I was so excited for! This topic was whether teachers should continue to teach skills that can easily be done by technology (multiplication tables, cursive writing, spelling.) In my last year in the classroom, I had more than one parent (on more than one occasion) phone me to question why we weren't doing more work on paper vs. on the computer. It really led me to wonder if I was doing too much on the Chromebooks, which was a habit I got into after someone (we won't name names) at a previous school used way too much paper and we had a shortage. It's such a fine balance of blending tradition with the future. At the end of this debate, I think for the most part everyone could agree that what needs to change is the way we teach these more traditional topics and not if we should teach them at all.

Closing Thoughts:

The best part about this class was that it helped me gain more insight into the thoughts of others when it comes to these hot-button topics within the world of educational technology. It led me to have meaningful conversations with friends, colleagues, and with family. I really enjoyed the conversation that it sparked with two of my nieces in particular who are going into grades 5 and 8 next year… while spending time with them at the lake, I know that they appreciate having their opinions valued and listened to; after all, they're the ones that have known technology their entire lives!

I also really loved the debate set-up. Perhaps the most important takeaway from the debates is that I've learned to appreciate disagreeing on certain topics, especially because it can give you the chance to hear a new perspective. In a world of echo chambers and polarizing politics, I think everyone can benefit from listening to people with opposing views with interest and with the intent of gaining more understanding.

At the end of the day, I think a few key themes really stood out to me. Those would be:

1. Our initial response to new technology is fear, which leads to bans, which isn't the answer

2. Parents need to be included in the conversation… but perhaps more importantly, so do our students. When they feel that they are heard and respected, it's a complete game-changer.
3. Teachers need more PD in the area of digital citizenship and implementing our continuum into their existing lessons! I'm going to be bringing this forward to my superintendent in the coming year. How great would it be if we built some basic themes into our health lessons when it comes to online safety and smartphones?

I'm leaving this class with lots of ideas and plans for the future, which is exactly what I hoped to get out of it. Blogs and collaboration beats paper writing ANY DAY!