Dr. Steve Gennaro is a cultural historian of media and youth whose work explores the intersections between media, youth culture, and civil society. Currently his work examines the changing role of “information” and “knowledge” in light of social media like Facebook and Twitter and uses critical theory to question the implications for democracy and civil society in an era of globalization and media spectacle.

Dr. Gennaro’s work places a particular emphasis on how digital spaces can be seen as political opportunities for citizenship and activism for marginalized groups who are often denied voice and access to channels of power in the decision making process when the decisions directly affect their lives. Dr. Gennaro teaches in the Department of Humanities and the Department of Communication Studies at York University in Toronto, Canada, in the areas of Digital Humanities, Cultural Studies of Media, Globalization Studies, and Science and Technology Studies, and Children’s Studies.
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Philosophy of Teaching: Dr. Stephen Gennaro

“One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion...The starting point for organizing the program content of education or political action must be the present, existential, concrete situation, reflecting the aspirations of the people.”

Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 95

I am constantly moved and challenged by the words of Paulo Freire in my own pedagogy and in my consistent struggle to engage and inspire my students to be both “more fully human” and “men and women of conscience” in their daily lives. For Freire, both of these goals are only attainable through dialogue between those with power and those who are oppressed by that power and such dialogue has five main characteristics: love, trust, faith, hope, and critical thinking. My goals as a professor, a teacher, a moderator of knowledge(s), and as a human being are to actively display these in all my actions with all of my students. I bring passion and compassion to my classroom each and every week; and in my evaluations I have been told by my students that “my passion is obvious” noting how “I am always smiling” and “always happy to see them.” Many students in their evaluations have commented on “how much I care” making mention of how “I begin every lecture with hello” and end every lecture wishing students a good week.”

Furthermore, I continually strive to make all my materials accessible to all of my students, especially those students with special needs (both identified and those who simply ask for help), allow for accommodations for ESL students above and beyond what’s provided by the Senate Guidelines, and while “not the best emailer in the world” as one student noted in an evaluation, she continued to remark that “he is always available in person for a conversation...and he listens!” I don’t believe in coddling my students, lying to them, or withholding information from them. Since each course is a unique experience, fundamentally shaped by the diversity of the student body in a constant dialogue with the Professor, the teaching team, and fellow students, I actively work to enter each term with an openness to where the students are (by asking them!) and then use this as a starting point or launching pad for our term long journey together. For example, in the fall of 2011, in the opening lecture of Stories in Diverse Media I posted an image of Lady Gaga on the screen (as an example of media marketing on Twitter, since Gaga is the most followed person on twitter with more than 17 million followers) and made a comment such as “of course we all know who this is...” to which I was greeted by complete silence. When I asked how many students knew who this was, less than a quarter of the 100 students in lecture raised their hands. I then asked, who do you think the most popular and powerful person in the music industry is and the resulting discussion across the lecture hall was that Jay-Z and Beyonce were more important and impactful. The next week, I gave a lecture on Jay-Z as an example of multiple media ownership (what we call synergy or convergence) instead of using the lecture
on Elvis Presley that I had used in years past. In being open to student ideas, I engage them in what Freire would call an “authentic dialogue” that is grounded in a deep and profound love and gratitude for their time, commitment, and dedication. I respect them for the knowledge(s) they have, for the sacrifices they are making to be there, and for the choice they made to take the course I’m teaching.

As an educator, I try to create a learning environment that is based on constructivist principles of education, which places the emphasis for learning on the student’s self exploration of knowledge rather than learning through the more traditional Socratic method of teacher-to-student discussion. However, this does not negate the importance of lecturing, instead it only reinforces it. I am facilitator of knowledge(s), not a dispenser of facts. I am a moderator of information, not a moulder of student minds. I am an ally to their exploration of the world around them and not an empowerer and liberator of the oppressed. It is their work and their critical thinking that leads them to learning. I am only an aid and an ally in their journey for truth and my role, be it through designing activities, delivering lectures, or evaluating student work, is simply to help them develop a faith and trust in their own ability, their own intelligence, and their own value, through consolidating what they already knew before they came to the course, with the new information and ideas that have been presented to them. Thus, the goal of my pedagogical approach is always to begin with having the students explore what they already know about the subject, before moving into a more critical and analytical approach to the subject that is then aided by the introduction of critical scholarly material, lectures from the course director, and interaction with popular media texts.

I believe that for students to learn there must be some level of discomfort - they must be challenged to move outside of their comfort zone. At the same time, I believe that the educator must also be challenged in the same way. This is why each course I teach is always in the process of being re-vamped and redesigned and students are encouraged to a part of this process. Consistently in my classes students are given an opportunity to participate in the design of the syllabus, select weekly readings, structure and organize their own assignments, and even contribute to the writing of the final exam. On more than one occasion, I have been fortunate enough to have students participate, not only in tutorial presentations or lecture hall discussions, but also as lecturers themselves! Perhaps most impressive was the first year student in Worlds of Childhood in Summer 2009, who gave the course’s closing lecture entitled “Bob Marley and the Pedagogy of the Oppressed” based on her own relationship with the Freire text we studied and her deep love for reggae music. Not only was I moved by her intense and insightful connections (I myself had never even thought of Freire and reggae), but her fellow students also appreciated her efforts and greeted her with a standing ovation. There was a mutual sense of pride throughout the lecture hall for what we had all accomplished together throughout the term as manifested in the expressions of this one student, in a fashion that could never had been achieved soley from a Professor’s “year in review” concluding talk. I am always
learning from my students and that is why students are encouraged to be active contributors of knowledge in the course instead of passive receptacles waiting to be filled with my expertise. This is especially true when attempting to engage students today within the realm of technology. As an instructor I continually try to take difficult and complex issues of critical theory and relate them to students in forms (such as blogs, youtube clips, podcasts, and websites) and texts (such as TV sitcoms and blockbuster films) with which they identify and in areas in which they are already experts. In my attempts to keep up with what matters to my students, my teaching is always a work in progress aided by their help and expertise.

The classroom or the lecture hall must always be a conduit for the sharing of knowledge(s) and never simply a circuit where as the Professor, I am the breaker that decides when to turn the power to think “on” and when to deny access to the flow of information. At times, this can be challenging to ensure equity, access, and opportunity for all students to be successful, to ensure that curriculum is explained, unpacked, and thoroughly explored, and in ensuring that the highest standards of academic quality are maintained. However, rather than see this as a road block to both my students and my own success, I prefer to view it (in the same way as I view the world) as a problem to solved, together, through an authentic dialogue based on the Freirian principles of love, faith, trust, hope, and critical thinking. This is the dialectic of teaching, where teachers and students replace the binary relationship that suggests they are opposing forces, with a synthesis of ideas, cultures, experiences, and knowledges and where everyone learns from each other.
Teaching Practices: Shaking the Snow Globe and Flipping the Map

Since joining the Department of Humanities at York University in 2004-2005, I have continued to stress the importance of media literacy in all of the courses I teach. I believe that every individual who comes to the University should take a course on critical media literacy. I see my primary task as a teacher and historian of youth and media to teach students key skills in media literacy, which will help arm them with the physical skills necessary to communicate in a high-speed, multi-mediated environment. Here media literacy takes on two definitions, dealing with what Stuart Hall would call “encoding” and “decoding.”

Encoding
This first definition of media literacy sees literacy as having the ability to produce or encode messages. Built into the grading component of my courses are practical projects, which ensure students learn basic media and technical skills such as how to design a simple web page, how to blog and wiki, and how to write copy for magazines, newspapers, or the internet (see Individual Research Projects Appendix B).

Decoding
The second definition of media literacy sees literacy as having the ability to decode the messages that we interact with on a daily basis. Here students are introduced to critical theorists from the realms of Political Economy and Cultural Studies and asked to question and problematize their current relationship with the media and the basis for their current understandings of that social relationship. This is particularly effective by asking students to analyze their favorite television shows, movies, and music videos.

As Louis Althusser indicated, ideologies work best and are most dangerous when they become invisible or naturalized. All communication is ideological and all ideologies are fundamentally about unequal power relations, especially at the interpersonal level. Therefore, whether teaching the first year general education course Concepts of Male and Female in the West or the fourth year seminar Contemporary Children’s Culture, my job as a teacher is to help students see how communication is always bound up in the most mundane and the most extreme aspects of human activity and how in all communication there are power relations. So whether it be in a large-scale lecture courses like the 230 student Worlds of Childhood, a small tutorial classrooms of 25 students like One World: Theoretical Perspectives on Globalization, or even in the 1 to 1 directed reading courses for upper level students like Democracy, Education, and Social Change, students learn the basics of cultural studies, political economy, and critical theory through “activity based learning” in combination with fundamental media literacy skills. If we can educate our students to a state of awareness
by making ideology visible, we can hopefully instil in them a sense of the value and importance of being “message makers” (that is, those who make the messages or those who communicate those messages to the public audience). This is of extreme importance since traditionally, those who make the messages also encode them with the values, morals, dreams, and ambitions of a particular class of society. Having the ability to teach students that will ultimately end up within the system of production as “message makers” in institutions, cultural spaces, politics, education, media, and family is a great responsibility and an exciting challenge!

Of course, not all challenges are equal in difficulty and one of the great obstacles in teaching courses with a Child and Youth Studies focus and a Cultural Studies approach is that all of your students have first-hand experience of what it means to be a child. So, therefore the starting point for all of the students is naturally their own recollections of childhood. As an instructor, I am continually designing new activities that allow students from the first class to seek out their own experiences as a form of knowledge to be explored, tested, and critically analysed. For example, on the first day of tutorial classes, students are always organized into teams. I prefer the word teams, as the idea of “group work” tends to make students feel uncomfortable, and yet while most are opposed or offended by being part of a group, there is a sense of community and inclusiveness in being part of a team. However, rather than number students off or simply select who gets to work together, the students must get up from their seats, walk around the class room, introduce themselves to all the other students and share a part of their childhood experience with their classmates through the Worlds of Childhood Scavenger Hunt (see Appendix A). Students are immediately unsettled because they are asked to stand, walk, and talk! And putting aside the fact that brain research has demonstrated that kinetic energy helps learning, by moving them slightly out of their comfort zone on the first day, we have started the process of shaking their snow globe. As the activity plays out, students identify themselves from the list of possible experiences and then team up with 5 to 6 other students who have a different set of experiences from their own. In participating in an activity like this one, students are introduced to a large number of their classmates on the first day and exchange contact information with them, giving them a lifeline and a sense of community in the course. Over and above that, the possibility for learning is enhanced by the great diversity of cultural, social, and political experiences to be found in each group because of the very fact that they select their teams based on their differences and NOT their similarities. In doing so, this activity taps into one of the most rich components of teaching at York University; the cultural diversity of its student body.

In my courses that explore the interconnections between youth, media, technology, the political, and the self, students enter as experienced experts in the subject matter! And while this can be a great asset to engaging students (in that they all have an emotional attachment to the material), it also presents an enormous
obstacle for that same reason, in that by applying a critical theory of age to the state of the world’s children today and to the student’s own nostalgia of their memory and childhood, students often feel threatened and offended, as if their own life and life choices are now being re-evaluated and even critiqued. This is what makes teaching about children and childhood so exciting, in that, for the course material to come alive and for the experience to be truly successful and impactful, the student must first be able to “flip the map” and see their own privilege and power as problematic. And so, in this almost suburban campus in a fairly well off global city of Toronto, my students read about Disney and Barbie, Justin Bieber and Facebook when exploring contemporary children’s culture on the local level, but there is also a global component to my courses that asks students to engage with memoirs written by child soldiers, watch films made by the children of prostitutes in Calcutta, read novels about child labour and exploitation, HIV/AIDS and epidemics, child sex trafficking, kidnapping, and poverty, and always while comparing it to their own experiences of childhood.

This is why I see my task as an educator, akin to the shaking of a snow globe. A snow globe can easily be found in most souvenir shops across Canada, where a popular Canadian image, be it Niagara Falls, the CN tower, or an igloo, sits inside of a glass sphere. When an individual picks up the snow globe and shakes it the picture becomes blurred by what appears to be a large amount of snow like confetti rolling around throughout the globe. And yet, when the shaking of the globe stops, only moments later the snow settles and the image UNMOVED and UNAFFECTED remains (the CN tower or Niagara Falls are still in their original shape). However, the individuals’ perspective of the globe and all its contents has forever been changed. In my work as an educator, my students all come to my course with their own experiences, contexts, ideologies, and understandings of the world they live in; this is their snow globe. I know I cannot change them or their world (I can only change myself!), however, this does not mean that I don’t actively try to shake their snow globe. Challenging my students to see the world they live in and their past childhood experiences through different eyes is both the most exigent and most rewarding aspects of teaching Children’s Culture and Youth Culture at the University level.

After all, everything is political and therefore must be explored. Every text and every action, from picture books to toothbrushes, diapers to happy meals, cartoons to candy canes is political; in that it either reinforces dominant norms about race, class, gender, age, ability, and sexuality OR it subverts and challenges them. So whether we are exploring the politics of how children play with Barbie dolls or the politics of Prime Minster Harper’s 2008 apology to First Nations, Inuit and Metis Canadians for a 150 years of residential schools, we are always actively engaging with a series of intersecting stories around social and cultural issues that is both complex and in need of constant analysis. Every text is written by somebody, for somebody, and with a particular bias. Just as every action is political. The choice to voice or be silent are
equally as potent and powerful, and therefore, in designing lectures and classroom activities, I work to bring the politics of the ordinary of students everyday life to the forefront of the motivation for action. And the response has been very positive. Based on the feedback I have received from student evaluations, some of the most popular class room activities I have designed have been the *Deconstructing Disney*, *Who’s Afraid of the Big Bad Wolf*, *Comic Strip Narratives*, or *Come on Barbie, Let’s Go Party Activity* (see Appendix A). In these activities, students begin by revisiting their own relationships with Disney animated films (like *Peter Pan* or *The Jungle Book*), common fairly tales (like “Little Red Riding Hood”), childhood texts (like comic books), or childhood toys (like Barbie) before reassessing those relationships through a cultural studies lens that highlights issues of race, class, gender and sexuality and then expresses their findings by creating an image collage, building a Barbie that Mattel would not produce for sale, creating a television talk show, writing a letter to their local newspaper editor, or making a comic strip.

My strategy for designing activities has not only met with popular approval by my students, but from my colleagues as well. In May of 2008, I was invited to teach a seminar for other Professors on pedagogy at the Sixth Annual Meeting of the Cultural Studies Association at New York University entitled “What is Childhood Studies- and how do we teach it in the classroom?” That same year, I was appointed the editor of teaching and pedagogy for the Society of the History of Childhood and Youth's quarterly newsletter, where in each newsletter, I would write small pieces (500 words) that talked about happenings in the field that dealt with teaching and a specific topic (such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child) and include 1-2 classroom and lecture activities (with suggested readings) that I had developed. Each of the activities listed above appeared in newsletters between 2008 and 2011 while I served as editor. My openness to collaboration extended beyond York University (where most of teaching was housed) not only through the SHCY but also in other academic and professional settings. At UCLA, during my Post Doctoral studies, many of my colleagues were introduced to my activities and rubrics for evaluation (see Appendix B) and as noted by Dr. Kellner in his 2010 letter of reference (see Appendix C) they have continued to use them after my returning to York. Furthermore, for close to a decade, I have been involved in consultations and discussions with NGOs such as Free the Children and local school boards like the York District Catholic School Board to offer ideas and suggestions for curriculum, policy implementation, and strategies for learning as can be seen in the letters of reference from FTC founders Craig and Marc Kielburger, Kiwi Seminars President Amy DeCorte, and York Catholic District School Board Superintendent Diane Murgaski (see Appendix C).

Over and above classroom activities, I have extended this pedagogical approach to assignments and evaluations. For example, after completing all of the work to clear University ethics guidelines for ethical research with human subjects, I introduced into *Worlds of Childhood* the *Kids with Cameras Assignment* (see
Appendix B) that asks to students to work with real children by engaging with the local community and giving kids cameras to take pictures of what is relevant in their lives. The same is true for the programs’ second year course *Introduction to Children’s Studies* where I designed and introduced the *Kids with Crayons Assignment* (see Appendix B) that asked students to work with children by asking them to draw their understanding of how government and politics works in Canada. My openness to collaboration with colleagues can be seen in the fact that even though I no longer teach either of these courses, the assignments have remained a cornerstone of the core courses for Children’s Studies majors and carry an evaluative mark between 20-25% depending on the term. Furthermore, all of my activities are available on my personal and course blogs for sharing with teachers and students. Members of my teaching teams receive all of the courses materials, including my lesson plans and activities at the beginning of the year in our first teaching team meetings and teaching team members are always encouraged to participate in the re-design of the course for the following term and to lecture in the current term on a topic of their choice if they so desire. Through dialogue with my colleagues and openness to sharing and co-creating pedagogy, I have developed not only a rapport with the more than 20 teaching team members I have worked with (see Appendix C for comments from some of these colleagues) but I have also developed friendships with them.

In the same fashion that I am dedicated to helping my colleagues succeed and enjoy being part of teaching teams together through an authentic dialogue grounded in love, faith, hope, trust and critical thinking, an equally strong dedication exists in my relationship to students. Sometimes this dedication can be witnessed in the hours of extra time I spend to ensure my students access to the course material in advance of lecture or tutorial. For example, creating guided reading questions, which includes the page numbers as to where to find the answers, (see Appendix A) to give to students inside their course kits, so that as they read difficult course texts, they have in advance of lecture and tutorial a sense of what is important, or in my decision to always post my lecture slides the day before each lecture, and then record and post my lectures online using Camtasia (and in working with Academic Innovation Fund) for all my students (visit [http://sgennaro.blog.yorku.ca](http://sgennaro.blog.yorku.ca) for links to my most recent lectures). Sometimes my dedication to students can be witnessed in the creation of an activity for each and every tutorial, so that learning is consolidated in a group environment that is fun! For example in creating a Jeopardy game to play in tutorial as a review at the end of each module, typically all of the courses I teach have 4 modules or units, (see Appendix A), or in developing activities like *Four Feet Up* (see Appendix A) when exploring child poverty in Canada where students play a game of “The Price is Right” and attempt to buy a month’s worth of groceries for a family of five, while following the *Canada Food Guide* with the average monthly income of a single mom on social assistance. However, my dedication to my students can best be seen in my desire to reciprocate their dedication to me and the course, in that I know many of my students make great sacrifices to attend classes at York University. Students are often dealing with personal, financial and/or familiar stress and almost all
of the students I teach have at least one part time or full time job and yet they continually come to class and work hard. I try to reciprocate this trust the students place in me and I am very proud of the fact that in the seven years I have taught at York, I have never missed a class. Rain or snow, sick or healthy, day or night, I make it a point to always arrive - on time, focused, positive, and with an energy that says “let’s do this!” Even after running the Toronto Marathon in October of 2011, the next morning, I hobbled into the lecture hall and gave a two hour lecture to the students of *Spreading the Word: Knowledge, Technology, and Culture*

And this is what it takes to be authentic with your students. A passion and dedication to not only the course and the material, but to them - as human beings! This is what it means to flip the map!! It suggests taking an object so well known and totalizing in our lives like the map of the world and turning it upside down to look at it in an alternative fashion. After all, if the world is a globe and rotating on multiple axis, there truly is no “right side up.” Certainly, in January of 2012, students in my *Stories in Diverse Media* experienced this sensation, when after chastising a group of students for continually talking and disrupting the lecture (while ignoring the sshhhhs of their class mates), I ended my lecture by apologizing in front of the lecture hall to those same students. My apology was not for their behaviour but for my own. As I told the students “regardless of your behaviour, if you are to trust me, I need to demonstrate a compassion and worthiness for your trust that can never come from aggressive statements.” After class ended, several other students approached me to tell me how shocked they were by my actions, in that the students had been quite rude and they felt deserving of some discipline - but at the same time, they had never seen a professor apologize to a student before and were deeply moved by this gesture. In my classes I seek not only to shake the snow globes of my students lives but also to flip their maps, so that not only is their perspective of the world around them changed, but their relationship to that world also changed, and hopefully in a more inspired and humanistic fashion.
Technology Enhanced Learning: From the Podium to the ipad

I must begin with full disclosure about my relationship with technology, in that I grew up in a world without the personal computer. I remember the typewriter. I remember the rotary phone, and I remember actually being the television converter in my parent’s house, in that when someone wanted the channel to be changed, I had to get up and walk across the floor to turn the knob or adjust the rabbit ears. I learned how to “send an email” as a graduate student, my children have had more experience on the computer before kindergarten that I had until my 30s, and I still don’t own a cell phone. This of course presents technology as an obstacle for my classroom, right? No, instead, it is precisely the opposite and largely due to the fact that I see my students as experts and value their knowledge and experiences.

I often joke that teachers today in the university are at an enormous disadvantage, in that we are asked to prepare our students for a technological world that we ourselves can hardly envision, and armed to do so with a technology that is outdated and out modelled. Even inside the most sophisticated classrooms on campus, like the Technology Enhanced Learning Building, teachers have access to systems with less technological capabilities than the average cell phone of today’s student. As teachers, we not only have to compete for the student’s attention, interest, and engagement in an uphill battle against the multi-media monsters than enter their lives constantly through those same cell phones, but we must do so, usually on a single screen projector, with limited internet access, and often using software and hardware that is several years old. But these challenges also present great moments for learning! For example, in trying to be new wave and connect with my students in the course One World: Globalization, I put a reading online, via Googlebooks. However, Googlebooks does not allow you to print and many students still prefer paper copies to read. I suggested that perhaps I could scan the article and posted this to the discussion forum of the moodle site for the course and asked students for suggestions. Before I could hit refresh on my screen, another student had produced a legal .pdf document on the moodle site for all who wished to print the article. Amazing.

It is this dialogical relationship between Professor and students that results in my email inbox continually being flooded with emails from students, who send me links to websites, or youtube clips that relate to the lecture topic from last night or last week. Equally as popular are the discussion forums on moodle where students continually make connections, via technology between their own life experiences and course material. It even goes so far at times that students will often raise their hands in my class and then when I address them, they rise (because again, stand, walk, and talk is encouraged in my courses) and walk to the
front of the lecture hall or seminar, type a url address into the computer, and say something akin to “Prof Gennaro, I thought that this youtube clip, or this website really goes along with what you are saying.”

Amazing.

This is what it is all about. As a parent of four children, I always wondered how I could possibly control the house, if all my children were given a voice, an opportunity to speak and make their own decisions, and the space to seek out experiences and fail without a safety net. What I learned was that even in trying to control the home, I couldn’t, and instead everyone felt upset, mistrusted, and unvalued. Only when I stepped back and saw my role as parent as mediator instead of gladiator did I learn how much my children fully understood about how the world worked and that I could learn from them too. My experience inside the classroom has been very similar, in that in letting go of my desire to control the outcomes of my students, I in fact have become a better teacher, a better leader, and a better educator. Now, when I give my students frank and honest advice, they appreciate it for its authenticity, and many still seek it out long after leaving York; such as the student who took my 2006 Introduction to Popular Culture course and three years later emailed me (for the first time since taking my course) to tell me he was getting married and asked me if we could get together so he could read me his speech for the wedding, saying “I would love your honest opinion, as I trust you.” Amazing.

Technology in the classroom is a fun and exciting space for students to demonstrate their knowledge and expertise. Instead of banning Wikipedia or texting or trying to get students to stop surfing the internet while I’m lecturing, I try to recognize that they are a generation who thinks in multiple spaces at the same time. To be frank, multi-tasking is an understatement to what they can do: take lecture notes, check their Facebook status, tweet their friends, search youtube for a relevant clip, chat on messenger with their sister about dinner plans, and fill out a form for a scholarship ALL while listening to my lecture, eating an orange, and drinking a cup of coffee. It doesn’t seem pedagogical right to fight against their knowledge(s), competencies, and skill set; especially when those skills are the very tools they will require in the work force upon leaving the University. Why not simply embrace it and harness that energy as a tool for learning? For example, in every course that I have course directed since 2005 my students have been given access to course resources like readings, assignments, lecture notes or recordings, handouts, links, and additional research via course websites or blogs (visit [http://sgennaro.blog.yorku.ca](http://sgennaro.blog.yorku.ca) for links to course websites and blogs). In consultation with my students (they taught me!) I learned how to design a simple webpage and then immediately began incorporating teaching that same simple web design to students as part of the curriculum of my courses. In 2006-2007, a course blog was designed for *Stories in Diverse Media* where students earned grade for blogging each and every week on the course readings. Not only was this an early example of what is now considered a blended format course, but the project was recognized as one of the
first successful teaching blogs at York University by the Centre for Teaching and Learning who used the blog as a resource and example in their seminars teaching Professors how to design course blogs and incorporate new strategies for using technology inside the classroom.

In 2009, a student asked me how come I don’t podcast lectures? When I responded “what’s a podcast?” he demonstrated how I could record my lectures and make them available for students to download to their mobile devices with very little technology or technical knowledge. Podcasts and vodcasts (that is a video recorded lecture posted on a website like youtube) are now regular components of my teaching. This was particularly beneficial in the summer of 2011 when the Department of Humanities asked me to design a completely online version of *Stories in Diverse Media*. In preparation for the course, I worked with the resources from the Centre for Teaching and Learning to teach myself how to use moodle. I then pre-recorded all the lectures, either as podcasts or vodcasts, and when the course went live on the first day of term, students logged into the moodle site to find all the readings, all the assignments, and a complete archive of lectures for all of the course material available to them.

Since 2005, I have continued to push myself to learn and explore the world of technology, and always with my students. Therefore, when the Dean of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies at York requested volunteers to work with Academic Innovation Fund’s project to increase technology in the classroom by moving courses from what is termed the traditional format to a blended format of learning, I was quite happy to volunteer. As a result of a great partnership with the Academic Innovation Fund, the 2012 students of *One World: Globalization* have a moodle course that provides access to materials and discussion forums as mentioned above, but also includes evaluative components online such as tests and quizzes, and assignment submission. Lectures are recorded with camtasia, which gives students both an audio recording of the lecture accompanied by the same visuals that appear on the blackboard or video-screen inside the lecture hall. Perhaps the most exciting part for the students was that the partnership with AIF and commitment to creating a blended format course allowed students in the condensed term version of *One World: Globalization* where students are supposed to meet two nights a week for 14 weeks, to now only be required to come on campus one night a week, with the second night being taught completely online through the moodle site!

When I first began teaching at the university level in 2004-05, I had very little technical abilities. However, in consultation with students, colleagues, and the Centre for Teaching and Learning or University wide projects like the Academic Innovation Fund, I have not only learned to build websites and make course materials more accessible so that students can download lectures to their phones and listen to them on the bus., but I have also learned to speak the language of my students and I am no longer afraid of technology.
Hall of Fame Basketball player Michael Jordan famously said when asked how he came to be so successful, “I have failed, over and over again and that is why I succeed.” My goals for success in teaching are largely grounded in my failures as a teacher. It is only through continually reflecting on my errors, shortcomings, and mistakes that I am able to seek solutions, strategies, and options to improve my teaching for the next class, the next term, the next course, and the next student issue that will arise. In fact, some of my greatest successes as a teacher have come directly from my failures, like my teaching of a fourth year seminar in 2010 at Brock University.

In the fall of 2010, I designed a new course to teach at Brock for their Child and Youth Studies Program, an adaptation of an existing course “Children, Youth, and Globalization.” At first, the students were taken aback by my teaching style and approach to learning. Having taught for several years at York University at this point, I had built up a reputation with students but also a series of strategies for dealing with student concerns. What I had not realized was that those strategies were in fact, very York specific. And while the term was successful, as can be seen by the student evaluations for the fall term (see Appendix C for a full breakdown) where the student engagement with the course received 4.33/5, the course challenged them to think in new ways received 4.44/5, and my knowledge of subject matter received 4.67/5 and my enthusiasm an equally high 4.67/5, something felt “awkward and off” about the course, as can be seen in the overall rating of the course and of the professor receiving separate evaluations of 3.44/5.

When I read the student comments from the evaluations, the same comment continually appeared “this was one of the best courses I ever took” however “the professor didn't do anything” or “I taught myself everything.” Now my initial reaction to this as a constructivist and humanistic educator was great! In that I was able to remove myself from the role of task master and guardian of knowledge and really create a learning space for the students to activate their own powers of leaning. As my Monday tutorial in Worlds of Childhood in 2009 often joked, my slogan as a educator should be “Steve's class: where learning happens without even knowing it!” But as I reflected on their comments, I realized that I had failed my students. After all, in this fourth year course, there were only 16 students. Yes, they learned and yes they were challenged, and yes their snow globes were shaken - but ultimately, they were left with a sense of discomfort and dehumanization about our relationship and therefore, my own experience could not have been grounded in the faith, trust, hope, and love that Freire regards as essential to dialogue.
The need to act was obvious and so I wrote an email to all the students of that course that thanked them for their open and honest critique of the course. I told them how I had learned a lot from my time with them over the term and how, moving forward, in teaching this course again in the winter, I was determined to incorporate their thoughts on the course to ensure that the next group of students I taught at Brock would feel a more authentic and humane relationship with their Professor. As a result, I made changes to the readings on the syllabus and to the evaluative structure of the course to be more in line with the organizational structure at Brock that the students were familiar with. I also changed my pedagogical approach to begin each class with a lecture before breaking into small groups, to ensure that the feelings of “the professor doing nothing” were removed. Furthermore, I made a conscious effort to meet on a weekly (or at worst bi-weekly) basis, one to one with each of the 17 students about how their major assignments were coming along and when returning assignments to discuss the evaluation and give feedback face to face. I even conversed with the new students on the first day of the winter term about the evaluations I had received, some of the suggestions made, and asked them for their input. As a result, we left the syllabus open for discussion throughout the course, so that at any point students could bring forward suggestions. And the results were astounding (see Appendix C for a term over term breakdown of final grades). All 17 students filled out confidential evaluations and the results were some of the highest grades given to a course or professor University wide! Student’s self diagnosed level of “course engagement” rose from 4.33 in the first term to 4.65 and student responses to statements like “challenged me to think in new ways” rose from 4.44 to 4.59. When asked to rate the quality of the professor, student responses to the statements “the professor was enthusiastic” and “the professor knew the material” each rose from 4.67 to an astounding 4.82 out of 5! But real gains were made in other key areas as a direct result of my reflection, the student’s honesty, and a mutual commitment to dialogue. For example, “course expectations were clearly communicated” rose from a dismal 2.44 to 4.18, course organization from a meagre 3.67 to 4.24, and professor’s availability from 3.0 to 4.19. In total, both the course’s overall grade and my grade as a professor rose each from 3.44 in the fall term to an astonishing 4.71 out of 5; well above departmental, faculty and university averages! Still, the most rewarding change in the student evaluations from this course came in the answer to statement 11 “student were encouraged to ask questions and were given meaningful answers” which jumped more than 2 full points on a five point scale, from 2.67 to 4.71! It is true, students can tell when dialogue is inauthentic, and only a dialogue forged in love, trust, faith, hope and critical thinking can produce a holistic and impactful environment for learning.

After leaving Brock in the spring of 2011, I have actively tried to incorporate all that I learned from the students there to my teaching at York. From one of my greatest failures as a teacher, I have learned, grown, and been re-inspired to be a more actively engaged with my students. The rewards of this desire to continually reflect on and actively improve upon my pedagogy have not gone unnoticed. In the spring of
2012 I was notified of my nomination (by a colleague) for York University’s 2011 Dean’s Award for Excellence in Teaching and of my multiple nominations (by anonymous students) for the Student’s Association Teaching Award. Several of the letters of nomination and support from students and colleagues have been included in Appendix C. It is most humbling and gratifying to be acknowledged by your peers and your students, and this type of recognition only inspires me to fail even more in the future!