I have been thinking for a couple of years about putting some of the courses I teach online and making them available to a wider audience. This was one of the main sources of impetus for enrolling in this programme. Thus I came into this course with the intention of learning about adult learning with a focus on distance/online education.

I feel that many of the things I learned and experienced in this course have really helped bring me closer to my goal of mounting an online course using sound educational principles. As such, I would classify them as successes. I have also experienced some unanticipated learning as well as some that is still incomplete.

The Successes

It was Nice to Formally Learn about the Philosophies of Adult Education

I really appreciated learning about the different teaching philosophies in the first unit. Before this course, I was aware that there were different approaches, but I appreciated the detailed delineation and description of each philosophy. The major written assignment (#2) has been very helpful in allowing me to explore some of the influential thinkers behind some of those theories and the research that has been done in the field.

This part of the course has been very illuminating and I feel has provided me with some ideas on the ways in which I could improve my current teaching practice (ie. incorporating more humanist approaches and tools), and things I could try to do in an online format in the future (ie. awareness of self-efficacy issues, use of Bloom's taxonomy and online discussion to promote more in-depth learning).

I Learned about the Challenges Faced by Online Students

My group project specifically focused on challenges of online learning. It allowed me to get more insight into some of my potential online students and will likely help me be a better online instructor. The research for the assignment has allowed me to learn a lot about this topic and I will

definitely be applying what I have learned to my personal projects in the future.

The practical aspects of the projects (ie. online group-work) have also directly exposed me to some of these challenges (ie. how do you juggle work and family responsibilities to schedule group meetings?) and will allow me to be more cognizant of them in my own teaching (ie. allowing extra time for group projects).

The Unanticipated

I Found out that I'm a Skinnerian...

... at least when it comes to marking student writing. As I was reading a book on the Psychology of Learning for Instruction as part of my research for the second assignment, I reflected back to the lab reports I had just marked earlier that day. The part of the book I was reading dealt with the Skinnerian concept of "shaping", where successive approximations of a goal behaviour are reinforced. I remember learning about BF Skinner in my 1st year Psychology class, but had never made the connection to my own teaching until I worked on that assignment.

It occurred to me that I have been using the idea of "shaping" in marking lab reports for many years. I am fairly lenient on the first couple of assignments and give lots of feedback, and become progressively more strict with the later reports as students improve their writing and gain a better understanding of my expectations. This realization was definitely unexpected and "neat" - I had never really thought about why I did what I did. This realization has also made me look more closely at how I evaluate lab reports, and I plan to investigate whether there are more effective methods that I can use to improve student writing.

The Incomplete (...maybe a little bit of success)

The Kolb LSI experiment

This course was my first exposure to the Kolb LSI, I had never heard of it until now. Although I

have my concerns about the way the questionnaire is structured, I was initially happy to see that my learning style was presented as a "kite" shape on a continuum. I liked the idea that I was not being simply labelled as being one thing but was instead represented by a shape that implied that there was more than one dimension to my learning style/abilities. This is why I was disappointed a few pages later when I was put into a neat little/confining category.

According to the Kolb LSI, I have an assimilating style so in my learning contract I set out to develop my accommodating learning style. As part of this effort, I committed myself to putting one of my courses online this Summer (I told some of my past students what I was planning, so they would be expecting to see it soon). I also started discussing my plans with one of my more experienced TAs to get her opinions on some of the ideas I have for the course and to get some help. I also started experimenting with several different LMS packages (instead of basing my decision on research) to get some hands-on experience and determine which one I would want to use on the website.

The group assignment in this course has also been helpful in this part of my learning experience. Here I relied upon and coordinated work with several individuals and also tried to learn to use a new software package by producing our presentation in the form of a SCORM learning package for Moodle. Unfortunately, this did not work – the presentation was viewable by anyone with "teaching privileges" on Moodle but not by students, no amount of fiddling with settings on Moodle would make the package work. Clearly, this was a case where more prior research into the packaging software would have been more useful.

In the end, I'm not sure how much any of this has affected my overall learning style. The Kolb LSI still has me classified as an assimilating learner. There may be some shift into the AE/CE quadrant, but I can't be certain how much of that is simply due to random variation in how I answered the (sometimes strangely worded) questions on the survey sheet the second time around.