

Hello everyone! My name is Kristin Sward, though I typically go by just Kris. I am a happily married mother of two - to a 16 year old son (just turned this past weekend) and a 13 year old daughter. Though I love to get away and spend time travelling with my family, I seem to spend most of my free time ferrying my kids back and forth to martial arts and dance and keeping our busy household running. My favourite place to be is on an ocean beach - a warm one preferably - and if I have a book and a glass of wine or my husband to enjoy it with - all the better!

Both of my parents were educators, my mom in an elementary school and my dad post-secondary. When I finished high school I wanted to do anything but teach. I spent a few years taking courses at the local college and worked at a number of jobs with the municipality where I lived - everything from being a lifeguard to working as a janitor to being an administrative assistant that worked closely with the Mayor and Council. As I worked my way up in the organization I started to feel like I wanted more and felt it was time to make a choice as to where my life was going to take me. I decided to volunteer in a grade one classroom and the first day I walked into the class I got this overwhelming feeling inside that it was where I was meant to be. I had found my calling (much to my mother's frustration as she had seen it all along!). My family and I shifted gears and I took a weekend job with the municipality in order to go back to school during the week to finish the degree that I had started before having kids. My husband was very patient and supportive and took the lead role at home so that the spare time I did have could be quality family time, not chores (gotta love him!).

A few short years later I became a teacher and a year after finishing my PDP I was lucky enough to fall into a permanent job at Cultus Lake Elementary where I remain to this day teaching grade 5/6. It's a lovely little school nestled in a lakeside community that we try to work into our curriculum with fitness runs by the lake and school hikes on the various local trails. I am now into my sixth year there and have a wonderful class to work with this year.

I like to use technology in my classroom and have worked hard to incorporate it into my lessons wherever possible. I have a Smartboard in my room which I absolutely love (as do my students) and last year I was able to participate in a pilot project in our district exploring the use of mobile devices in the classroom. From January to June we had a kit with 15 ipods in our class to use to enhance our learning and explore with. I found it to be an amazing experience and the engagement of my students was greatly increased. Information and research gathering was so easy and convenient and extra time was spent honing our math and language skills with the assistance of many awesome apps. I am thrilled that many of my students this year have come with their own devices to use in the classroom and that they have been pushing me to get organized and send the permission forms home so that they, too, can use this technology in the classroom. I am so excited to see where it can take us and to find out just how far our learning can go.

As for my experience in online learning - I've only ever been a student in one online course. Initially I found it hard to work through but once I got into the groove I found it easier. I have already found this course to be much easier and more thoughtfully laid out than the one ever was. I guess online learning has progressed a lot since that class I took many years ago. I am interested to see how the use of a program like Collaborate could help students who can't make it to school for some reason, but could follow along at home. Hmm...maybe that could make up a part of my Master's project, we'll have to see. I guess that leads to my question: has anyone successfully integrated a program like Collaborate into their face to face teaching to enable students travelling or away from school to be able to access the day's lessons and not fall behind in their work? And in the case of there being experience - which program have you used? I googled Collaborative programs and came up with a huge list: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_collaborative_software . Talk about too many choices!

Even though I am an online learning newbie I can see the potential for great benefit to my students and my classroom. One of the latest catchphrases is a 'flipped classroom' where students watch the lesson online before class and then spend class time working through exercises that will help to cement their understanding of a concept they have already reviewed. If this is indeed where we are headed in the education world I think that being on that 'cutting edge' that we've talked about in our online discussions is going to become a necessity for all educators....which is just another reason I'm glad to be here! As with every tool or technology there are some drawbacks. In the case of my students I think it would primarily be access to such technology when they are away from school. Many of our students don't have computers, internet or mobile devices at home - or the ability to effectively use technology - which could severely limit the benefits they might otherwise experience in online learning.

As a side note - I've printed off my wordle art to hang on my classroom wall - I've seen it used before but never tried it myself but I really like the final product that I got.

So, that's me, I guess. I am truly excited to be here and eager to begin – though admittedly a little bit nervous about where I will fit all of my extra learning and homework into my already busy schedule. I'm sure it will all work out just fine and before I know it I will be bemoaning the fact that our time together will soon be drawing to a close and we will be writing a reflection piece on how far we have come.....life just seems to be going by that quickly lately. So, are you ready? I hope so, because here we go.....