Living and Learning in a Wired World
By: Elizabeth Collins

When it comes to technology and learning, I am a huge proponent. Therefore, I struggled with categorizing any of Powers' strategies as feasible desirable resources for the learning society. Although the learning society is not just about technology, the ease that technology provides the learning society can't be ignored. Therefore strategies that diminish access to technology do not sound desirable to me. In spite of this, the strategies that are most desirable for a learning society are Inner Space and Positive Rituals. The strategies that are least desirable resources for the learning society are Distance and Lowering the Inner Thermostat.

William Powers' book Hamlet's Blackberry details seven strategies that he feels will help us build a good life in the digital age. One of the seven strategies is Inner space and is built around the concept of focusing on one person or thing at a time and tuning out the rest of the world. The example he uses is Seneca. However, in today's world Powers suggests that we minimize the crowd on the screen by only doing one thing online at a time. He recommends not having multiple webpages open and not having instant messages or e-mails open at all times. This focus would be desirable for the learning society because it would allow everyone to focus on one thing at a time. A recent study showed that multi-tasking actually hinders learning and therefore if we are becoming a learning society in which we are taking charge of our own learning it is important that we get the most out everything we study. This strategy further suggests that we need to learn to rely on other people versus a plethora of search engines. This would further the learning society because we would be able to draw on other people's experiences, that often times can be more in-depth than just a blog. Take for instance Fallows' experiences in China. The lessons she learned from being their first-hand have more meaning than just an article on the Chinese language. This concept is also very feasible as a resource for a learning society because we are not eliminating technology, but rather focuses our attentions on one person or thing at a time. I do this in my own life at work by simply closing my Outlook E-mail. I have found it very distracting at times to have the pop-up in the corner every time I receive a message. The amount of time it takes me to open and read an e-mail distracts me from what I want to focus on. I also hang a sign in my office, much like a Do Not Disturb sign when I am working on a task that requires my undivided attention. I will also put my phone directly to voicemail. When I need to speak with someone about something important, I will schedule a meeting in a conference room so that we are away from all of these distractions. These small things allow me to focus on specific people and tasks, yet do not truly move me too far away from the technology that I feel is central to a learning society.

The second of his strategies that would be a desirable resource for the learning society is Positive Rituals. Everyone would benefit from bringing order to their chaotic life with a ritual based on positive goals. Powers' references Benjamin Franklin and his ideas on moral perfection, but suggests that we should be satisfied with working towards clarity and calm. To do this he says you should vow to finish certain tasks at certain times and reward yourself when you've done it. Also, you should keep certain parts of your say 'screen-free'. This is feasible for a learning society because everyone should be able to set boundaries and goals in their life. One method that I try to use in my life is the Pomodoro Technique. With this technique you set a timer for yourself and limit yourself to one activity for the entire time. After the timer goes off, you reward yourself with a break. I actually get more done by doing this because I am focusing my attention on one thing. I am limiting myself to finishing certain tasks before I begin other

ones. The hardest challenge to achieving this is when others interrupt your work and want you to complete an urgent task for them. However, pairing the strategies of positive rituals paired and inner space would help prevent this from happening. You have to learn to find a way to escape these distractions and therefore I always prioritize my work by deadlines. This way I am always striving to achieve things in order of when they are due versus what order I would like to do them in (much like this class is designed where we can't move on without completing the unit).

The strategy that is least desirable for the learning society is distance. The idea that Powers suggests is based around Plato and instructs us that we should leave technology behind. The problem with this is that when we do this we are distancing ourselves from the ability to be in charge of our own learning. I agree that limiting screens, e-mails and social networking sites would be beneficial, but feel that completely unplugging would not be a beneficial resource for the learning society. It is also not feasible because technology is everywhere. When we talk in the context of our personal lives, this type of 'unplugging' may be nice. However, when we are talking about being a learning society it is not feasible. I can say that I have 'unplugged' to certain degrees. I do not have a Facebook page and just got a cellphone on March 5, 2012 after several years of not even having a prepaid cellphone. I do have a twitter account, however it is 'required' by my work and I do not use it socially. I have only 'tweeted' when required by school and the reason for having it was so that I could follow the Superintendent of Public Instruction, Michael Flanagan. For me these small ways of being unplugged are feasible, but not having internet at home or work would never be possible.

The second concept presented by Powers that is not desirable for the learning society is the notion of lowering the inner thermostat. He says, "Having your mind extended out into the world all day…takes its toll. Thinking globally is exhausting. One way of reining in the overextended mind is pay closer attention to local media." This is not feasible in a learning society. The whole concept of a learning society is built upon the foundation of the 'flat world'. To focus only on local media would do a great injustice to our learning society. Again, looking at every reading I did for this class including Esquith, Adams, Gawande, and Fallows, their learning experiences were deepened when they moved away from their locality and acquired first-hand experiences in situations that were unfamiliar to them. We would be doing the learning society a grave disservice to suggest that they do anything but think globally. I know for myself I lived in a 'bubble' for a long time. Like most people you start out life being very egocentric and then over time your eyes are opened to the fact that there is an entire world out there beyond what you see. The one thing I love about technology is how it allows me to see beyond what I can see. My family always teased me because my favorite television show as a child was Reading Rainbow. I loved how a book could transform you into another world. I think technology has done that for us in ways far beyond most of our imaginations. I do not believe technology is a replacement for first-hand knowledge, but for many, such as the students Esquith strived to teach, we may never get the opportunity to go to any of the places we study about in school. Seeing pictures in a textbook is nothing like watching videos online or being able to see news broadcasts from their country. This is all possible due to technology and is a major component of the learning society.

We are a learning society in which we play a larger role in our own learning than generations in the past. This comes with a lot of responsibility to teachers and also to citizens. I believe that technology is one of the single most important advances in creating a learning society and better aligning our flat world. The responsibility that comes with technology is the ability to still focus on the learning, on whom and what matters, and also on setting goals and

boundaries. If we do this we can not only be responsible citizens, but we can be responsible participants in the learning society.