Online classrooms are composed of teachers and students interacting within a virtual medium. This virtual “classroom” can seem like an artificial environment to students—one where reality simply does not exist. At least for some students, the experience of online learning amounts to sitting in front of a computer screen in solitude. In this classroom of one, individual students may never experience a sense of belonging to a larger community. Reduced to feeling invisible, unable to make the much-needed face-to-face connections with one another and with their instructors, students can easily feel isolated and disengaged from the learning experience. As instructors, how can we make
students’ online experiences seem more real and ultimately more pedagogically effective?

The quantum perspective on learning has recently emerged in the educational literature as a means of bridging the virtual and the real (Janzen, Perry & Edwards, 2011b). In what follows, I will explain how the assumptions and principles of quantum learning, along with supporting literature, can help online teachers to develop “living” environments within the online educational milieu. In addition, I will examine the way in which artistic pedagogical technologies (Perry & Edwards, 2010), as well as other online teaching practices, can be used to promote a sense of reality in the virtual classroom.

BACKGROUND THEORY

Simply put, quantum learning (QL) suggests that the process of learning mimics the behaviour of electrons. QL is based on the idea that, like electrons, everything that exists is connected, or entangled, and is superposed on itself (Bohm 1971, 1973). For example, a giant sheet of cotton fabric exists as a whole despite the individual properties of the cotton threads that bind the fabric together. When looking at the fabric, we are normally not cognizant of each individual thread; rather, we see it holistically, as indivisible. What we see are the patterns in the fabric: the colours, the shapes, the texture—those things that make the fabric real to us. If we saw the fabric merely as individual threads, we may doubt the reality of the existence of the fabric as a whole. The fabric would not be real to us. Likewise, students looking at the virtual environment may only see the individual threads. If they do not find ways to discover or connect the threads in their learning environment, they may never experience a feeling of reality and belonging.

If all that exists is conceptualized as a giant fabric where everything—from quarks to the cosmos—is part of that fabric (connected
and entangled) and is constantly communicating no matter where
the parts are positioned within that fabric (superposition), then learn-
ing is part of that time-space continuum. Students, instructors, and
educational institutions become key players within that fabric, which
interfaces with the learning environment (Janzen, Perry & Edwards,
2011a). Thus, in QL, learning and learning environments are deter-
mined to be holistic in nature, existing as holographic environments.

Assumptions and Principles of Quantum Learning

QL is based on five assumptions and seven principles. The assump-
tions are:

1. Learning is multidimensional.
2. Learning occurs in various planes simultaneously.
3. Learning consists of potentialities that exist infinitely.
4. Learning is both holistic and holographic and is
   patterned within holographic realities.
5. Learning environments are living systems. (Janzen et
   al., 2011a, p. 64)

The principles are:

1. Online learning needs to be multidimensionally
   constructed. If it is accepted that humans are holistic
   beings, then learning must be able to reach the learners’
   multiple dimensions.

2. Online learning must occur in various planes or
   dimensions in order to access holistic development.
   Reaching the learner simply in one quantum dimension
   (e.g., cognitive or social) is not sufficient to promote
learning that extends beyond the confines of the online classroom. Learning that reaches multiple dimensions becomes learning that is accessed for life.

3. Humans have infinite potential to learn and develop in all dimensions.

4. Human potential for learning is ubiquitous. Geographic separation and asynchronous learning are not limits in online learning.

5. Online instructional design should encourage learners to reach beyond temporality and virtuality into holographic realities. Holographic realities, which encourage interaction between and among learners, instructors, the learning environment, and technology, become the essence of holistic online education.

6. Online learning environments are living systems that grow, evolve, and develop through the passage of time and space. Online learning environments are dynamic spaces that support the needs of learners, instructors, and educational institutions.

7. Online learning can result in transformation for teachers, learners, and the educational environment. Ultimately, through this transformation, technology is potentially both directly and indirectly transformed. (Janzen et al., 2011a, pp. 64–65)

The principles of QL can give educators and course designers direction in making the virtual seem real for students in the online classroom. QL suggests that the virtual and the temporal are inextricably connected. These connections exist ubiquitously and form a primary construct in the educative environment (Janzen et al., 2011a). As learners discover connections that exist between entities, virtual
environments become more real. Going back to the metaphor of the fabric, as students are able to conceptualize these discovered connections, the fabric (or their experience as part of the totality of their existence) becomes strengthened and indivisible. Learner experiences become real in their interactions with each other and with the course content. Ultimately, it is through teaching strategies that connect the virtual and real-world environments that reality is infused into online learning environments.

These virtual learning environments, or quantum learning environments (QLEs), become living systems that grow, adapt, and evolve (Janzen et al., 2011a). All that exists within QLEs—students, instructors, and course content—can also grow, adapt, and evolve as online courses progress (Janzen, Perry, & Edwards, 2011c). In QLEs, as in life, growth is a part of the system. This sense of growth or change is one aspect that contributes to making the learning environment real. Artistic pedagogical technologies (Perry & Edwards, 2010) are examples of teaching strategies that help to develop QLEs in online courses.

**Artistic Pedagogical Technologies**

Artistic pedagogical technologies (APTs) are arts-based online teaching practices that utilize elements of the literary, visual, musical, or dramatic arts. APTs differ from traditional teaching techniques, such as the lecture, because of the emphasis on aesthetics and creativity. Since the concept of APTs was first described, several studies have demonstrated that these teaching strategies benefit online learning (Beth Perry, 2006; Perry, Dalton & Edwards, 2009; Perry, Menzies, Janzen & Edwards, 2011). More specifically, APTs contribute to the development of online learning communities by initiating, motivating, sustaining, and enhancing interactions among students and between students and instructors (Perry & Edwards, 2010). APTs and
QLEs are connected in that the use of APTs in the online classroom contributes to making online classrooms real. Janzen et al. (2011b) found that in classrooms where the APT of photovoice (PV) was used, PV supported students, engaged their interest, and helped to make their interactions more authentic. By examining aspects of APTs and discussing those aspects in light of the virtual learning environment, additional understandings regarding how virtual environments can become real are possible.

Humans are multidimensional. Persons explore their individual and collective worlds sensually, intellectually, socially, culturally, and spiritually. Over the last few decades, this exploration has increasingly included technology. For most people, technology has permeated all aspects of their lives including learning. The Web and social networking sites stand as a testament of this. To the digital native, technology is real. In the online environment, optimal learning embraces multidimensionality.

One of the goals of online learning and QL (as well as APTs) is to reach the students’ multiple dimensions. APTs help facilitate learning that can be relevant and meaningful to a wide variety of students and to instructors. In many ways, APTs create living environments that grow in depth and breadth as online courses progress. These learning environments are not flat, one-dimensional environments; rather, they exist as holograms.

Holographic learning environments, or QLEs, facilitate each student’s unique and personally meaningful connection to the broader educative world. We are usually most comfortable and most free to be ourselves in our homes surrounded by people who love us. The same comfort level, which promotes effective learning, can be created when students experience the personalization that arises from QLEs.

APTs help create QLEs. Elements of APT learning activities are often familiar to students. For example, they may include photographs of familiar images, poems, literature, and/or musical selections that are personally meaningful to individual students (Perry &
Edwards, 2010). Seeing the familiar embedded in the unfamiliar (new knowledge in an online course) helps make learners feel more comfortable in their personalized learning environment. Such a state supports meaningful learning.

In some ways, the arts-based nature of APT teaching activities touches the humanity of students and calls out to them first as human beings and then as learners. Art is a human creation and is infused with human emotion. Through the connections that students make to course content while participating in APT activities, personal memories are elicited, which may in turn engender new understandings. The APTs and subsequent learning can then be integrated into students’ lives. The learning environment and the learning become more tangible.

APTs help create positive, safe learning environments in which students can explore and share emotions appropriately. Janzen et al. (2011b) found that during APT activities, emotion was evoked and frequently shared. The sharing of emotion creates context for students as they navigate through online courses. The comfort and familiarity created by APTs, combined with the emotions they evoke, help members of the learning community (including the instructor) to see one another as real beings with hopes, fears, and dreams. This recognition acts as a springboard to connecting the personal with the educative.

APTs take the familiar and apply it to the educative realm, which may not be so familiar and which can be a bit frightening at times. Most people are apprehensive when beginning an educative endeavour. For example, looking at a course outline can evoke fear as students comprehend all that they will have to do in a few short weeks of instruction. APTs lessen apprehension by inviting the students to be “at home.” This can help create an invitational educational environment (Purkey & Novak, 2007) that makes learning more possible.

Thinking of this in another sense, hospitalized children often have a toy or a blanket from home that calms them and connects them to home. Likewise, the elderly in a hospital setting may cling to
a familiar object that brings them comfort. While hospitalization can be a scary experience, the stuffed animal or item from home becomes the conduit to a less traumatic experience. Similarly, APTs are a conduit to safety and a sense of comfort in the online educative classroom. APTs, given their familiarity, may create online environments where students feel they are at home in some sense. Gradually, the concept of “home” can be magnified in the learning environment as students interact with the instructor and other students and, in doing so, genuinely become known to one another. APTs can be the catalysts for these interactions.

Consider the idea of hanging pictures on a wall. People hang pictures because they feel a connection with them; they have meaning and purpose in our lives. APTs are like hanging pictures up on the walls of our minds. The pictures provide frames of reference. Similarly, APTs are, in many ways, like grade school “show and tell,” but these learning activities require deeper levels of critical thinking and analysis. The “show and tell” is yet another connecting experience. The responses of students to APTs are really explications of their own worlds and how their worlds connect with what they are learning. Carter and Click (2006) note that when virtual environments “mimic real life, [students] become more enmeshed with the content” (p. 2). Enmeshing with content could be likened to connecting.

The concept of play is important in QL. APTs encourage students to play. Children learn naturally through play. As people grow older, most lose that capacity to play, since life stressors often suppress playfulness. There is little time left over to play. APTs invite learners to play as a route to learning in part because play is another way of being at home within the educative milieu and playing provides a connection between the personal and the educative. In APTs, students are invited to play with the activity, play with the thoughts and feelings that the activity evokes, and, ultimately, engage in arts-based play with the other students. Playing together for the purpose of forming connections and learning helps create a sense of community in online
courses. This feeling of community is considered important to positive learning outcomes in online learning (Carter & Click, 2006).

TEACHING ACTIVITIES AND STRATEGIES CONGRUENT WITH QUANTUM LEARNING

This section describes selected APTs, along with other teaching techniques that can be easily used in the online classroom. These strategies can effectively contribute to making the virtual seem more real for students. Each activity draws upon a familiar construct and uses that construct in new ways that are conducive to online learning and to creating QLEs.

“Haiku It”

Many students were taught the technique of writing Japanese haiku poetry in elementary school (University of Missouri, 2009). The “Haiku It” APT (Perry, Janzen, & Edwards, 2011) asks students to summarize a course concept in a haiku in order to make the concept personally meaningful. The concept can be taken from an individual unit of the course, or it can be an overarching concept drawn from the entire course. A haiku consists of three lines, the first line having five syllables, the second line having seven syllables and the remaining line having five syllables. The lines of the poem do not rhyme.

“Haiku It” encourages students to be concise as they create their own haikus. In order to be concise, students need to have a very clear understanding of the key elements related to a given concept. Additional benefits of writing haiku are developing academic literacy and finding one’s inner voice (Iida, 2011). The following is an example of a haiku written by a student in an online course about research dissemination strategies. The poem summarizes the key ideas that
the student considered important at the conclusion of the course and demonstrates that the learner had grasped essential understandings related to the course learning outcomes:

We share our voices.
Our words extending farther
As the world listens.

It may be helpful at the beginning of a haiku activity for the instructor to model the activity by providing examples. Haikus written by students from a previous offering of the course or composed by the instructor may give students confidence in writing their own haikus while also providing a refresher on the format of a haiku. Because this APT may not appeal to all students, some of whom may have an aversion to writing poetry, this activity should be optional. However, even those who do not write a haiku may benefit from reading poems created by their classmates.

While some might argue that writing poetry is not appropriate in a course other than English literature, it should be noted that haiku writing is transferable to all subjects. There is precedence in the academic world regarding the value of haikus as an academic exercise. Specifically, searching the term “dissertation haiku” reveals an amazing collection of haikus created by scholars who have summarized their PhD dissertations in haikus.

**Conceptual Quilting**

The activity of quilting has been found to have individual as well as group benefits. Burt and Atkinson (2011) conducted a series of interviews with members of a Glasgow quilting group and summarized their results as follows:
Cognitive, emotional and social processes were uncovered, which participants identified as important for their wellbeing. Participants found quilting to be a productive use of time and an accessible means of engaging in free creativity. Colour was psychologically uplifting. Quilting was challenging, demanded concentration and participants maintained and learned new skills. Participants experienced “flow” while quilting. A strong social network fostered the formation of strong friendships. Affirmation from others boosted self-esteem and increased motivation for skill development. (p. 1)

Conceptual quilting in the virtual classroom may embody some of the same benefits as physical quilting (Beth Perry, 2006).

The APT of conceptual quilting is an online activity that can be done individually or with the entire class. All students are familiar with quilts that are constructed using a collection of individual “squares” or pieces. As an individual activity, conceptual quilting involves students creating an online virtual quilt with the e-squares in the quilt representing important concepts that students have learned or take-home messages they have heard. Students can use software such as Microsoft Word or PowerPoint to construct their quilts. The quilts are then shared with the instructor and other students on a forum set up for that purpose. Students can “walk through” this virtual quilt gallery and view their classmates’ quilts. This activity is an excellent summary learning activity for students since it causes them to reflect on what they have learned. Additionally, in viewing the quilts prepared by others, they may remember concepts other than those included in their own quilts.

A variation on conceptual quilting is collaborative quilting. When done as a collective activity, the class is divided into groups and each group member contributes a quilt square toward that group’s finished virtual quilt, which is then presented on an online forum. A short explanation of the quilt accompanies the virtual quilt.
This activity promotes socialization and group cohesion, much like physical quilting does. The finished collaborative quilt is a representation of the diverse viewpoints of those in the class community. Themes may emerge from the various quilt pieces provided, and the class as a whole may engage in a thematic analysis on a discussion forum as part of the collective quilting activity.

A second variation on conceptual quilting is the word quilt. Some learners may lack the necessary technical skills to use graphics and online images to create quilts. The option of creating a word quilt could be offered to these learners. Students compose their word quilt in a word-processing document and can add creativity by using different fonts and sizes. Although the word quilt requires less technical skill on the part of the learner, similar learning outcomes can be achieved.

*Progressive Poetry*

Humans having expressed themselves using poetry for millennia, and it is an important genre in the Hebrew scriptures (Bliss Perry, 2008). Hebrew poetry, like the APT of progressive poetry (Perry et al., 2011), uses a “structure … where one idea and phrase is balanced against another” (Bliss Perry, 2008, p. 92). In the online classroom, the APT of progressive poetry consists of the instructor either choosing an existing poem or writing a poem on a course theme or topic. This poem is then posted to an online forum. Students respond to the instructor’s poem by writing a poem themselves, adding another stanza to the opening poem, or sharing a poem that they have found. Regardless of which option they choose, their addition must expand on the ideas presented in the initial poem in some way. The teacher may than add a response to the student’s contribution by adding another poetic phrase or stanza to the collaborative piece. Complex
topics and ideas become more fully understood as the authors add to the initial stimulus poem.

As an example, the first poem given below is the instructor’s poem posting, “The Road Not Taken,” by Robert Frost, originally published in 1916 and now in the public domain. An example of a possible student contribution to the progressive poem follows. In order to respond to the instructor’s poem, the student must comprehend the key message in the poem, link course learning to this understanding, engage in personal reflection related to these ideas, and compose a succinct and relevant poetic contribution. These may all be course learning outcomes.

Poem Posted by the Instructor

*The Road Not Taken*

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Student Poem

*The Roads I Travel*

In my life I have travelled many roads.
Some well-trodden
Where others sing the praises of sights seen
And the view of the many becomes
Jumbled into communal experience.

On these roads
I conquer the required.

But I have travelled other roads
Barely visible to those who pass by.
These are the quiet paths
Where agony and ecstasy
Are my companions.
Quantum Learning Environments

Within these paths
I conquer myself.

Morning Coffee Forum

The ritual of drinking morning coffee is one of life’s simple pleasures. Sharing a cup of coffee with others not only gets us started in the morning but also provides “innumerable moments of good conversation and congeniality” (Ayers, 1995, February, para. 3). The morning coffee learning activity can be undertaken in several ways within an online course for a variety of educational purposes. For example, to open a course and encourage conversation and socialization, students may be invited to join a “morning coffee” introductory forum. On this forum, they post a brief profile describing themselves and their interests and explaining why they are taking that particular course. Class members are invited to comment on their classmates’ postings.

As a variation, the morning coffee forum can be used in online group work. Once the student groupings are determined, each group initially meets for “morning coffee,” where the members engage each other with their ideas and get to know one another on a more personal level than may be possible on the main online forum. This “morning coffee” meeting can take place on a closed private forum created specifically for the group, or students can meet for coffee using social meeting software such as Skype.

In another variation of this activity, students are invited to make the morning coffee experience more tangible by sharing a photo of their favourite coffee cup (with a sentence or two about “their” cup) as part of the e-coffee experience. In sharing these images, students often reveal details about themselves in a very natural way that facilitates students getting to know one another. For example, one student posted a photo of her Canadian Blood Services mug. In a conversation with another student in her group, she shared that she supported
this organization because her child had a blood disease and required
blood products. Another student’s coffee cup was made of English
bone china, which gave her the opportunity to talk about her English
heritage. All of these personal details might be easily disclosed in a
face-to-face coffee meeting but are hidden in the virtual world unless
images of personal coffee cups are shared.

Course Climate Checks

The climate is not only a topic of everyday conversation; it also tends
to guide our lives to a great extent. If we live in a cold climate, we
layer clothing appropriately. Those in rainy climates grab an umbrella
before heading outdoors. Likewise, online courses have learning cli-
mates that develop over time and are subject to change, depending
on the needs of individuals or groups of students. Affirmative course
climates have been found to “have a positive effect on student satisfac-
tion” and to influence learning in a positive way (Belfer, 2000, p. 1265).

A course climate check provides an opportunity for students to
offer feedback to their instructors about the climate of the course. The
student responses in this activity help instructors to create and main-
tain a positive learning environment, which may, in turn, aid learners
in achieving course outcomes.

In a course climate check, each student is invited to write a para-
graph relating a climate-related metaphor to their personal experi-
ence of the course. The instructor begins the activity by suggesting an
initial statement like, “The course is like being in a hurricane because
. . .” or “The course is warm and sunny because . . .” Students finish the
sentence and provide an additional explanation of the initial state-
ment. Student responses are shared privately with the instructor.

As a variation, students may come up with their own initial state-
ment and expand on it in the paragraph. The activity can be con-
ducted at strategic points during the course such as at the beginning,
during particularly stressful points, or at the end. The activity provides instructors with the opportunity to determine which students might be struggling with the course and allows them the chance to take preemptive action to assist particular learners. If the tone of most or all of the student responses is negative, this can prompt the instructor to modify his or her approach to try to improve the learning climate and the student learning experience.

In another variation, students are provided with a graphic of a thermometer and asked to give a temperature value related to how they are experiencing the course. Are they “cold,” signifying that they are unmotivated and uninspired? Are they “hot,” indicating that they are overwhelmed and stressed by the course activities and assignments? Or do the students report that they are “just right,” suggesting that the course has engaging learning activities, a favourable class climate, and effective instruction?

“Begin with Baroque”

Baroque music from composers such as Bach, Pachelbel, Vivaldi, and Handel has been found to stimulate the production of alpha waves in the brain, which has positive effects on human memorizing and learning (Gao, Ren, Chang, Liu, & Aickelin, 2010). Baroque music has 50 to 70 beats per minute, which mimics the human heart rate (Highland Council, 2006). When used in the educative environment, baroque music has been found to lower blood pressure, increase encoding and memory, amplify spatial awareness, potentiate concentration, enable inspiration, and further reading and language abilities (Amerson, 2006; Gao et al., 2010).

Instructors can use “Begin with Baroque” in several ways in the online environment. Students can be invited to play a selection of baroque music (via a link provided by the instructor) while engaging in required readings or assignments, or, in courses that require reflective
journalling (Amerson, 2006), while writing in their journal. One of the many websites that students can access for free baroque music is “A Baroque Banquet” at http://www.baroquecds.com/baroquebanquet.html, which offers many selections by various composers.

Gratitude Letters

The expression of gratitude has many benefits. Emmons (2010), a world leader in gratitude research, found that in addition to experiencing physical and psychological benefits, individuals who express or cultivate gratitude in their lives reap social benefits, including the reduction of feelings of being isolated. This finding has applicability in the online classroom, where students may feel educationally isolated due to geographic separation and the often asynchronous nature of online learning. Since “gratitude may in fact be a positive, universal characteristic that transcends historical and cultural periods” (Emmons & Shelton, 2002, p. 460), gratitude may also influence real-world and virtual environments positively, making students’ experiences and relationships with other members of the class more real and less distant.

In the gratitude letters activity, students are invited to compose gratitude letters to classmates of their own choosing. The gratitude letters could express appreciation for what another student taught them, comments on a particularly inspirational posting, or a remark on how learning with the chosen classmate benefited the writer personally and/or academically. The writer then emails the gratitude letters to the selected recipients. Gratitude letters work well as a closing activity in online classes. Instructors could also compose gratitude letters to each of the students expressing affirmation and an appreciation for the contributions of each student during the course. The instructor can personalize each letter by referring to individual students’ specific contributions to the course, thus making the communiqués more
meaningful. Instructor involvement in this learning activity ensures that all students receive at least one gratitude letter.

As a variation of the gratitude letters activity, students can be encouraged to share letters of gratitude with people outside the course: authors of journal articles or books that they have found useful in the course or friends, family members, or mentors who helped them succeed during the course.

_Virtual Talking Sticks_

Within the traditions of some Aboriginal communities of North America, the talking stick is a sacred symbol and provides an opportunity for members of a community to share their voices and wisdom (Thunderbird, n.d.). When one member of the “talking circle” holds the talking stick and speaks, all others engage in “active listening.” Using the talking stick reflects the participants’ respect for “harmony, balance and good manners among humans, the Great Mystery and Mother Earth. The Talking Stick is a symbol of respect for the thoughts, stories and individual histories of each member participating in the circle.” Individuals speak “their truth in a place of confidence and safety.” The stick is then passed to the next person, who, if he or she chooses to speak, has uninterrupted time to do so. All members of the talking circle have the opportunity to both speak and listen, and both of those actions are equally valued.

In online learning environments, virtual talking sticks provide opportunities for students to share their truths and perspectives in an uninterrupted way. The purpose of a virtual talking stick on an online forum is twofold. First, students have the opportunity to actively reflect as they prepare and share what they wish to “talk” about on the virtual talking stick forum; second, other students learn to listen actively and absorb what is virtually spoken without having to think about preparing a response, since the talking circle is not “a debating
society” or a place for dialogue (Thunderbird, n.d.). As each student “speaks,” the individual knows that what is shared will be received with respect and confidentiality.

Virtual talking sticks can be used in several ways within online courses. As described above, a “virtual talking stick” forum can be created where students are invited to create threads about what they are discovering on a certain course topic. When one student is finished “speaking,” he or she would virtually hand over the talking stick by naming the next “speaker,” who would then post on the forum. Since students never know when the stick might be handed to them, they might be motivated to log in to the discussion forum often to see whether the stick has been handed their way. This process of talking and handing over would continue until all students have had the opportunity to “speak.” In a variation on this activity, students can share YouTube videos and podcasts rather than, or in addition to, a piece of writing.

Another way of using the virtual talking stick is for the instructor to take the lead in presenting thoughts about a certain topic. To start this process, the instructor posts an image of a talking stick with a short description of its history, meaning, and use. The instructor then chooses a topic and posts his or her own thoughts and impressions, which constitute the first “speaking.” Then the instructor passes the talking stick to a named student. This modelling of the process gives class members an idea of how the virtual talking stick forum is to proceed. The named student either chooses to share his or her perspective on the designated topic or passes the stick to another chosen student. This process of speaking (or choosing not to speak) and passing the stick to another student proceeds until everyone in the class has had a chance to speak in the forum.

The virtual talking stick forum could be particularly effective in a final course offering before graduation. In this instance, students are invited to share how they envision their future as graduation nears. The virtual talking stick provides an opportunity for both
self-assessment and deep reflection. This type of forum could ultimately become a gift for students as they venture into the world of their chosen profession.

Classroom Eulogy

Eulogies create spaces where individuals meet for one last time. Sir Andrew Motion, former poet laureate of the United Kingdom, describes a eulogy as “at once a greeting and a letting go” (Motion, 2013, p. 4). For students and instructors, the ending of an online course can involve a grieving process as students say goodbye to fellow students and instructors. Due to geographical separation and the asynchronous nature of online courses, the paths of class members may never cross again after a course ends. If a sense of community has formed during the online course, class participants may experience a sense of loss at the end of the course, and deliberate closing activities may be useful. Furthermore, through such closing activities, students may be motivated to reflect on what they learned, which may help to consolidate learning.

Classroom eulogies create spaces where students can reflect on the course content and on the relationships they have formed. They allow students an opportunity to review and consolidate their online experiences, making them more real to themselves and to fellow students. By giving students one final chance to reflect, individually and collectively, on the course content and on the online relationships that have developed, a classroom eulogy may decrease the anxiety that comes with transitions and endings.

Classroom eulogies can take many forms. Students can post a photo of a piece of art that they have created, a photographic image, a poem, a motto, a favourite saying, a short story, a piece of music, or a quotation that summarizes their experiences and learning in a course, along with a paragraph explaining their choice.
Alternatively, students can follow an instructor-provided template for a classroom eulogy. Themes for such a template might include the following:

- Thinking big: the highlights of the course
- Thinking small: the little things that were most meaningful
- Thinking sad: the challenges and/or difficulties that arose during the course
- Thinking happy: moments of pleasure or accomplishment
- Thinking inside: what students will take away from the course, the key relationships that were formed and why these relationships were valuable
- Thinking outside: how the future may unfold (Cooperative Group Ltd., 2013, p. 6)

CONCLUSION

At times, online students are left feeling that their online experience is simply not “real.” Online learners can feel very alone and isolated from classmates and instructors. Interactions with the computer screen may become the sum of their online learning experience. To reduce this possibility, online instructors can use teaching techniques and activities that are designed to engage students and to help reduce this sense of remoteness. These approaches are founded on what is familiar to students; that familiarity is applied to course activities.

The quantum perspective on learning provides a theoretical foundation to support the need for developing quantum learning environments. Artistic pedagogical technologies, which are based on the five
principles of quantum learning, can help to create such environments. The benefits of using APTs include providing the opportunity to play, presenting an opportunity for authentic communication, making multiple connections between the real-world and the virtual, finding a personal and collective voice, feeling at home in the online milieu, and ultimately empowering students, who feel valued, respected, and needed as they contribute to the course.

The culmination of this chapter is found within the nine teaching activities presented. These activities offer instructors ways to make their online classrooms come alive—helping the virtual environment to become a “living,” dynamic learning space. Reality is infused into virtual environments by using familiar activities, constructs, or concepts that most students have experienced in their everyday lives. Through the recognition and use of these familiar activities, which have been adapted to the online classroom, students (health care professionals and others) may come to experience a virtual learning experience that feels like “home” and is a comfortable, welcoming space for each of them to grow, explore, and learn.

REFERENCES


