1. Introduction:

a) What Team Ruby learned from the reading:

As Adult Educators, this reading helped Team Ruby uncover the close relationship between Adult Education/Adult Learning Theory and Constructivist philosophy. As we explored Constructivist teaching methods, we realized that many of them are closely aligned with andragogy (i.e. teaching strategies for adults) and the general tenets of Adult Education and Adult learning. For example, Malcolm Knowles (1980) notes that some of the principles of Adult Education are that: Adults have a need to be self-directed in their learning, the role of the teacher should be positioned as a facilitator, collaboration with peers can be an important contributor to Adult Learning and that Adult learners already possess the life experience and maturity that should be incorporated into the new learning environment. It is obvious that many of these aspects are directly aligned with Constructivist philosophy which acknowledges that each individual: engages in their own meaning-making, relies on previous experience to acquire new knowledge and has the ability to self-regulate their own learning within a social context. Thus, we saw a natural fit between Adult Education and Constructivist philosophy.

b) How Team Ruby developed a blended "Introduction to Mindfulness Practice" course using the reading concepts:

We relied on a number of important concepts mentioned in the reading when designing the blended course. First, we wanted to ensure that the course would be participant-focused and there would be ample opportunity for them to **self-regulate/pace** their own learning of Mindfulness practices. This is why, we have provided the Mindfulness exercises in the course online so that participants can complete them in a location and time of their choice, can repeat the exercises if they want to gain more practice and be able to rewind, pause, stop, adjust the volume to suit their own learning style. Incorporating technology in this way was our effort to encourage participants to be active learners while doing the meditation exercises. We were also drawn to the concept of **situating the learning in the participant's real world context** which is why, we included self-reflective activities for the participants such as keeping a reflection journal and activities that would encourage learners to situate Mindfulness in their daily lives outside of the course requirements (e.g. asking the participants to apply a mindful technique in a situation outside of the course).

Secondly, we were also mindful of how to create an **authentic environment** in the course. Our understanding of an authentic learning environment was one where participants develop a level of cordiality, trust and are motivated to share resources and knowledge with each other. That is why, a weekly face-to-face meeting has been incorporated along with the online component so that participants have the opportunity to meet one another and put a face to the postings in the online discussion forum. We also felt this may be an important way to overcome a common

challenge often found in purely online courses where learners may feel as though they are conversing with "phantoms" who they have never met or interacted with.

2. Answers to questions in the reading:

a) What are the advantages and the drawbacks of implementing constructivist principles in a course? What are some foreseeable problems if you were to follow the same principles in your course?

Advantages: Some of the advantages of the Constructivist philosophy are that it shifts away from the "banking model of education" in which learners are considered empty accounts that need to be filled through knowledge given by an expert (Freire, 1970). Instead, the Constructivist philosophy attempts to remove some of the hierarchies of who possesses legitimate knowledge and places the learner at the centre of their learning as active agents. In addition, this philosophy promotes reflection, building a mutual community of other learners and acknowledging the past experiences of learners as a foundation to acquire new knowledge. As such, in many ways, we find Constructivist philosophies well-suited for Adult learners because it acknowledges that they already possess the life experience to refer to when acquiring new knowledge and can apply the knowledge to their personal and professional lives outside of the formal learning environment.

Drawbacks: Constructivist philosophy states there is no correct meaning since individuals construct their own meaning. However, a danger of assuming this is that this doesn't consider the power imbalances and inequality of whose voices are heard and given importance to in society. For example, some participants in a learning environment may feel more entitled to voice their opinion due to societal privileges such as socio-economic status, race, sex etc while some may not. Thus, even though Constructivist principles assume that there is no right or wrong interpretations, it is important for educators to consider that some voices may be silently deemed more "important" than others by the group.

Thus, some issues that we would need to consider in our own course are that some learners might feel frustrated by the lack of an authoritative expert or a teacher guiding them. In addition, an apparent lack of official standards or benchmarks under this philosophy may be a new environment for some learners. This would require the facilitator to dedicate the time and resources to acquaint learners to the principles of this philosophy.

b) What are the benefits and challenges in integrating technology into a conventional course in higher education? How can you ensure that students have a valuable learning experience?

Incorporating technology in a conventional course can have a number of benefits. For example, completing tasks through technology allows learners to pace their own learning to fit their schedules. Secondly, it allows mobility since learners do not need to be confined to the formal, classroom setting. In addition, technological tools can encourage learners to work with rich media such as audio, video, animations and graphics in their work. Fourthly, the openness and enormity of the Internet has allowed traditionally cumbersome tasks such as researching

information to be more accessible to the individual learner as articles, journals and knowledge can be found much faster and easier.

On the other hand, technology may bring some challenges. First, there are high costs associated with bringing appropriate technology into the conventional classroom. In addition, an over-reliance on technology for completing assignments or important tasks for a course may not be appropriate for all learners as some may not have easy access to technology nor a natural comfort with technological tools. Thirdly, given the fast-pace of technological innovation, it may difficult for educators to keep up with installing the latest and updated technological tools so that they work smoothly in the classroom. Fourthly, there is a danger in thinking that simply adopting technology translates into good pedagogy. However, educators must be aware that technology cannot replace bad teaching practices; the human element and caring approach of the educator must be a priority.

Educators can take several steps to ensure that learners have a valuable learning experience in an environment with technology. For example, lessons on Digital Ethics and etiquettes can be included in the curriculum. This can encourage learners to develop personal ethics and values for working online. Secondly, educators can facilitate in keeping the human element alive throughout any online communication (e.g. use of avatars, emoticons, storytelling, sharing resources, providing feedback with other learners). Finally, educators can also ensure that they constantly create connections between the "cyber" world and the real world by relating online conversations back to the social reality of the learners.

3. Conclusion:

Overall, Team Ruby enjoyed engaging in this course design activity. As both of us work in the fields of Adult Education, we were excited about developing a blended course on Holistic practices (Mindfulness) for Adult Learners in a community setting. At times, we found it hard to coordinate our activities online when face-to-face collaboration seemed much easier. But we took this as an interesting challenge. In order to make the online collaboration tools work for our working styles and the overall process, we relied slightly more on asynchronous communication (the Blackboard discussion board) as we found this to be a smoother way of working.

This experience was also helpful for us because we thought of ways to make our professional endeavours more holistic in the future. For example, even after completing the course design, we are still thinking of ways to make the course more holistic (e.g. at the moment, we have used sample Youtube videos for the guided meditation exercises in our course design due to the shortened nature of CTL1799. But in the future, we are looking forward to making our own guided meditation exercises to establish originality and a closer connection with the course content).

Works Cited List

Freire, P. (1970). Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Continuum.

Knowles, M. (1980). The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy (2nd ed.). New York, NY: Cambridge Books.