Introduction

This assignment asks us to think about and develop a personal philosophy on education and learning. I have been developing this paper for the last thirty years (or longer) as I have worked with students and adult learners. Current educational pedagogy, changes in my work environment and probably most significantly my own children and their education, have helped mold and shape my educational philosophy. The results of this educational odyssey are presented here.

I believe that all children can learn. This statement comprises the core of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990. All children can learn, although not all children learn the same information at the same time in the same way. All teachers in Kentucky are required to believe that all children can learn. It is the basic tenant of the state established goal which mandates that all children will reach proficiency by 2014 on the state mandated tests. I question whether every child in every classroom will achieve that goal. However, it is worth believing in a goal that will challenge teachers to offer methods of teaching which will change the lives of students. Will every special needs child, every child from poverty, every migrant farm worker’s child and every child for whom English is a Second Language meet this goal? If we believe it will happen, these student’s chances for a meaningful education are more promising.

I believe that all children can learn, but not all children learn in the same way at the same time. That statement bears repeating. Not all children learn from books because non-readers can learn. Not all children learn from the written word, because children who learn by doing, can learn. Children who play musical instruments learn about math, reasoning and thinking in a way that is not taught in math classrooms. I
believe in multiple intelligences and multiple modes of learning. Some of us have to feel it, see it, touch it and move with the information in order to learn it best. The “sit and get” approach to learning does not work for some of us. Let me discover what the knowledge is for, when I can use the knowledge, how to apply the knowledge and let me own the knowledge and I, the student, will learn more. As the teacher, I believe that designing instruction must also include designing activities which will facilitate the learning for students with various learning styles.

Some of my beliefs are included, although not prioritized, in this list:

1. I still believe in conventional learning activities. Students learn important skills by memorizing literature and by being able to recite and interpret what they have learned.
2. Teachers should endeavor to reach every student, but not all students learn at the same pace or in the same way.
3. Choices can help the students become more comfortable with their learning. Students who are comfortable will become more confident and will learn more. Choices can be as basic as whether to do work in class or as homework. Choices can include which vocabulary words to learn (selected from a list), which books to read (selected from a list) or which reports to select.
4. Recognizing and providing for individual differences is a key factor in my teaching philosophy. Fostering mutual respect is a key component of learning as well as classroom management.
5. Learning should be an active (not a passive) activity. The learner should be engaged and actively participating in his/her own learning. Setting goals with students creates a sense of shared ownership. Knowledge is power.
6. Real life skills are important for today’s students. Students need to know what career choices are available to them and how to prepare for their choices. Students need to know how to complete an application, write a letter requesting information and how to prepare a resume. Students need to be confident of their marketable skills and they need to be competent in competing for 21st century careers.
7. Learning can be fun and educational and is not limited to the classroom. Creative projects, field trips and fun experiences serve to involve the whole student. Connect learning to real world experiences
8. Utilizing Bloom’s Taxonomy; Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences and Sousa’s Brain Research enables professionals to teach the whole person and help each individual learn in his/her own mode (but not limit learners to one single learning style).

9. A teacher’s task is to facilitate and guide learning. I will not limit learning by my limitations. My challenge is to allow technology and student interests, world events and culture to guide and enrich content. I will provide a rationale for what we “must” learn and provide opportunities to expand learning.

10. I will retain my sense of humor in my teaching. I will laugh often and love much. I will remember to smile and to encourage my students to do so as well. I will find the humor in myself. I will remember that I am human and so are my students. I will strive to be flexible, sometimes unpredictable. I will offer security, acceptance, confidence and academic challenges.

11. I will continually be aware of my communication skills and will evaluation opportunities to stay current and connected with students. While it may not be possible to connect with every student, every student should feel empowered and capable.

My philosophy is to teach information to students in a variety of ways to accommodate a variety of needs. In many ways, I call upon the unsatisfactory experiences that I had in school to help formulate my philosophy. I ask myself these questions: Would I want to be in this class? Would I want to learn in this way? Would I want my child to be in this class learning information in this way?

Teaching is rewarding to me because of the interaction with the students. The rewards come in small bits. I am rewarded by knowing that I have made a difference to someone’s life. If I show a student a story they have never read before; if I see that “light bulb go on” where it had never been lit before; if I help a child recognize and appreciate his or her self worth, these are the rewards of teaching.

Epistemological beliefs

So how are these beliefs compatible with any one theory of educational learning? Where do Piaget, Skinner or Bruner fit in my personal philosophy on education and
learning? My educational philosophy is clearly the sum of all of my experiences.

Educational foundation and philosophy, practical experience and years of on-the-job “training” have combined to form a more analytical approach to a philosophical endeavor. Adult learners, adolescents, traditional classroom experiences and computer related professional development have each tested my concepts and theories.

My epistemological beliefs have changed with the group of learners I am teaching. To better understand this statement, one must realize that for over twenty-five years, I taught eighth grade students. On any given day in a typical eighth grade classroom, the teacher never knows which version of that adolescent will walk into a classroom. Will you see the “grown up version” or the “little child version” of the same student? Will the little girl with watermelon flavored Jolly Rangers blot her hot pink lip gloss on her literary analysis of Elie Weisel’s Holocaust personal memoir, *Night*. One learns to teach the student who shows up on any given day and prepare to teach the version of that same student who shows up for tomorrow’s class. During the last six years while I have been teaching adult learners in professional development sessions, I have learned that I am teaching the same students who sat in my eighth grade classes. Now those students are just older and in bigger bodies.

So does it matter if the epistemological concept is nativism, where knowledge is innate, or pragmatism, where knowledge is provisional and not absolute? The idealism and realism is that knowledge only consists of ideas which can be directly relative to those learners at that moment. The fortunate part about teaching adult learners about
technology integration is that their reality is focused on learning real skills that they can use to enhance and improve the education of their students.

**Beliefs about how people learn**

My philosophy has evolved so that I believe that people learn what they need to know. Constructivism has become a label with which I can be comfortable. A constructivist activity such as a Webquest provides an example of such learning. WebQuests are on line activities which present the challenge of learning for an authentic purpose to accomplish a real task. Scaffolding permits building on this learning by presenting mini lessons related to accomplishing the task. Students learn higher order thinking skills necessary to synthesize and evaluate information. Throughout the WebQuest process, students learn to look for information and to utilize the resources of the Internet, search engines and non-electronic sources. A real product in response to a real situation produces real learning for the student. Throughout the process, the teacher’s role is of a facilitator, not the dispenser of knowledge. The students own the learning. This model of a constructivist activity embodies what classroom learning should be like. Students are learning what they need to know to solve an authentic task.

**Beliefs about what educators should do to promote learning**

Educators should encourage learning, establish the structure for meaningful learning and provide opportunities for students to learn at the highest level possible. Educators should not stand in the way of learning, thwart student interest, nor control learning to meet the expectations of previous generations. Learning should not be limited to mastery of state sponsored programs-of-study for the purpose of scores on high stakes
or achievement tests. Learning should be offered in a variety of ways to meet styles of multiple intelligences. Parents, and/or guardians, should be included in the communication of information. Learning goals should be well established and available to all interested stakeholders. Wherever and whenever possible, a joy for learning should be communicated to students in both the philosophical beliefs and in the delivery of instruction.

**How my personal learning theory affects my teaching, instructional design and other educational activities**

The challenge will be to employ my personal learning theory as I design instruction and other educational activities. It will be an issue to, “put my money where my mouth is,” “put up or shut up,” “change the paradigm” and endeavor to think out of the box. The challenge will be to do things differently and to refrain from maintaining the status quo. For example, merely using a PowerPoint presentation does not change instruction and it does not represent a true integration of technology into a content area.

As I learn more and have new opportunities to make a difference, I can impact change to a greater degree. As I work with first year teachers, student teachers and teachers in college classes, I can model my beliefs and challenge others to make learning real for their students. By offering professional development activities where students are engaged and actually using the technology to learn, I can model a different way of knowing, learning and teaching. The challenge that I will endeavor to meet as I design instruction will be to include constructivism as I formulate learning goals, conditions for instruction and methods of instruction in the classes I teach.