

Andrews University

School of Education

CONSTRUCTING MY PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Leadership Program

LEAD 636

by

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March 2009

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## INTRODUCTION

The Leadership Program at Andrews University has challenged me again to reconsider my worldview, my philosophical foundations, and how they are evidenced in my learning and leadership. In this reflection I examine my own worldview and its development, my educational philosophical foundations, and finally how these concepts impact my leadership. I have focused particularly on postmodernism and constructivism, because I realize that these “isms” have influenced my life greatly without a careful critique in light of my faith. My work in this competency has given me an opportunity to consider, evaluate, and integrate my beliefs more thoughtfully.

### **Defining My Window and Window Frame**

As I have continued my learning journey, I have been challenged to reconsider my worldview on several occasions. In this section, I review my understanding of what a worldview means.

I have always thought of a worldview as a window. It is how we see the world. The words "view" and "world" in worldview are not by accident. Our worldview affects what we see and what we don't see. When you look out the bay window in your living room, you do not notice the glass. It just exists. You do not even think about it or talk about it, until you notice that it is dirty (inadequate) or that it is different than your neighbor's window. The frame around the window defines what you see. Some objects or concepts are “out of view because the frame blocks the view. Sire (2004) suggests that

the worldview assumption is so basic "that most of us don't even know we are assuming it" (p. 19). He quotes Walsh and Middleton that worldviews "are perceptual frameworks" (Sire, 2004). The window is a frame, a framework, which allows you to see certain things and not other things. The idea of a worldview/framework "of life" and "for life" is an intriguing distinction. It shows that we have a dream of what "ought to be" (Sartre), but also a framework to work towards that "ought". The only time we notice our window is when we interact with someone who has a different window or when an experience or smudge in our lives reveals an inconsistency in the window. Then the window must be examined, viewed from outside the comfort of home, and subsequently polished to work towards the "ought to be." In this reflection, I share this most recent polishing of my window.

### **My Metanarrative Foundation**

Sire (2004) suggests that our worldview comes from our heart and commitment:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true, or entirely false, which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being (Sire, 2004, p. 161).

As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, the story of the great war and the story of salvation provide the basis of my worldview. This story or narrative is the overarching explanation to my life and its meaning. Sire (2004) asks seven questions to define a worldview, and Stevenson and Haberman (2009) suggest that a theory of human nature should have both a diagnosis and a prescription.

1. What is prime reality – the really real?
2. What is the nature of external reality, that is, the world around us?
3. What is a human being?
4. What happens to persons at death?

5. Why is it possible to know anything at all?
6. How do we know what is right and wrong?
7. What is the meaning of human history? (Sire, 2004, p. 52)

These questions and requirements are useful in grasping an understanding of our own worldview. In addition, our understanding and beliefs affect how we treat those around us, in learning and leadership situations. This story or metanarrative has an important impact on my experience and relation to others and is worthy of examination. Therefore, to begin this reflection, I use the narrative format to answer Sire's seven questions. The narrative that explains reality for me is based on my belief in the Bible as God's revealed will to humankind, built on my childhood upbringing and on my repeated re-examination of my beliefs.

### **Telling the Story**

The story begins in heaven, before time on earth began (*Holy Bible, New King James Version*, 1988). God's creatures all obeyed and loved Him. Peace reigned supreme. But then one being, Lucifer, the highest ranking angel, became dissatisfied. He wanted an even higher position. The seed of selfishness was sown, and soon he and his followers were cast out of heaven (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28, and Revelation 12-14). This war between good and evil defines and explains the course of human history (Sire, Question 7). The overarching prime reality is this universe created by God, but now in a civil war conflict, which will end soon (Sire, Question 1). Human history is marching towards the end of the conflict and the resolution of the great war (Revelation 20-21).

Around this same time, God was creating the earth and all the inhabitants (Genesis 1-2; Sire, Question 2). He formed Adam from the dust, breathed into him, and Adam being a living human, made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). From Adam's rib, he created Eve to be a companion for him (Genesis 2). Adam and Eve were given the

garden to tend, the animals to name, and all of creation to enjoy and preserve. God walked with them in the garden, taught them, and encouraged them to create and learn. Made in His image, humans are intelligent and created with creativity and a curiosity to learn, know, and build (Sire, Question 5). When established in the garden, Adam and Eve were given a simple method to show their loyalty to God – not eating of the tree of good and evil. However Eve believed the lie of the serpent that she would not die, and she ate and persuaded Adam to do the same (Genesis 3). Thus the perfect environment where everyone lived to serve and bless others was changed to one of selfishness, decay, and destruction, as sin took hold in this world.

However, God would not let us be held under the sway of the imposter ruler of this world, Satan. In due time, He sent His Son to live among us, to teach us, heal us, and ultimately die for us (John 3:16). This fact shows me that each human being is loved and valued by God, and therefore directs how I should interact with others (Sire, Question 3).

When His children die, their breath goes back to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7, Job 27:3) and their body returns to the dust. The dead know nothing, and their hopes and dreams have died with them (Ecclesiastes 9:5, Sire Question 4). However, when Jesus returns, He will raise His people up to meet Him in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18). Therefore we have hope and comfort while living on a war-torn planet.

How then, shall we live? With an awareness of the war being fought in our own lives and the lives of those around us. We can know what is right and wrong by the commands of Jesus (i.e. Exodus 20, Proverbs, Matthew 5-7, John 14-17). His Word to us provides a conceptual framework for right and wrong, and continually convicts us towards better reflections of God's character of good. In addition, His Spirit teaches us and informs and guides our conscience (John 16:8-11). Our awareness of the war informs

our interactions with others, knowing that God wants the best for each of us, both in this world and the one to come (Sire, Question 6).

### **Postmodernism's Influence in My Life and Beliefs**

While this story provides the foundation of my life, and I am committed to it with head and heart, I live and work in a predominantly postmodern world. Postmodernism is a “reaction to modernism” (Knight, 2006, p. 89), and is not easily defined. Malphurs and Malphurs (2003) compare modern and postmodern beliefs to help Christians interested in using the Internet understand the beliefs of those online. I have found it helpful in this section to critique and evaluate the postmodern beliefs and experiences that have crept into my life as compared by Malphurs and Malphurs (2003, p. 77).

*Modernism* developed in the industrial revolution; *postmodernism* in the information revolution. As an instructional technology consultant, I live online in the information driven world. These experiences influence my beliefs, particularly in my belief on the construction of knowledge. Everyone around me is constructing and reconstructing knowledge, incessantly building and creating tools and experiences of greater understanding. The construction occurs at a phenomenal speed. “The world’s total yearly production of print, film, optical, and magnetic content would require roughly 1.5 billion gigabytes of storage. This is the equivalent of 250 megabytes per person for each man, woman, and child on earth” (Lyman & Varian, 2003).

*Modernism* stressed nationalism; *postmodernism* emphasizes globalism. As a missionaries’ kid and a third culture kid (Useem, 2008), I think more of the world than of a specific country. As a missionaries’ kid and then a student missionary, I have visited over 20 countries. I have seen that human needs are similar across the globe, but that our ways of meeting those needs differ across cultures. Ways of doing things aren’t

necessarily good or bad, just different. In other cases, I have seen more value in the way a culture approaches a situation than my first culture. For example, I see the value in the Muslim emphasis on modesty for women. Granted, I think they take it a little too far to the detriment of women's health, but I can certainly understand their perspective that women in Western countries aren't very respected as evidenced by dress. In addition, my extended stays in Pakistan, Singapore, and the Marshall Islands have increased my empathy, care and concern for people in Asia and the Middle East. Therefore I care more about the international news, the perspectives of those from other countries, and I am distressed by views that are based on interaction only with one's immediate community. Extreme patriotism for one country concerns me, when I believe that God wants us to care for, share the gospel with, and enjoy interactions with those from the whole world. This passion for the whole globe impacts all areas of my life. In my work I use videoconferencing to bring global experiences to the students I serve. In my leadership, I respect and value others' perspectives, being particularly sensitive to international worldviews. This includes hearing the other's stories without judgment, and even learning from the other. In my service to my church, I have a passion and burden for the gospel to go to all nations (Matthew 28:19). Congregationalism as a focus on the immediate needs and decisions of my faith community to the detriment of the world church finds no part in my belief system. In this respect, my beliefs fall far to the postmodernism side, with a burden and passion for the people and nature in the entire world.

*Modernism* prefers the autonomous self; *postmodernism* prefer authentic community. Having travelled and lived in other cultures, I deeply value and respect the diverse communities in the world. I also crave a collaborative community for work,

fellowship, and faith-building. God calls us to be in community and fellowship with believers, not alone in our faith (Hebrews 10:25, Ephesians 2:21). I am distressed by capitalism's selfish greed without care for the community and environment. Cultures that value and build community are attractive and desirable.

*Modernism* respects the authority of reason; *postmodernism* values the authority of experience. In this area, my faith defers to the authority of revelation through God's word; yet I accept reason because I believe God gave us brains to think and to choose (Acts 17:11). I also accept experience, because faith without works is dead (James 2:26). Jesus desires a living relationship with us as we trust more fully in Him (John 17:3).

*Modernism* is optimistic in the progressive development of humanity; *postmodernism* is pessimistic. My faith in Christ and my understanding of the great controversy provide hope in the future of humanity through salvation in Christ; but also revelation shows the grim reality of the end of the world and the wicked (Romans 6:23).

*Modernism* believes that man is good; *postmodernism* believes that man is bad. Revelation tells me that all have sinned (Romans 3:23) and that without Christ, none of us can change for the better (Jeremiah 13:23).

*Modernism* only believes in the natural world; *postmodernism* accepts the reality of the supernatural as well. As a Christian I believe in a specific supernatural story as told earlier.

*Modernism* is skeptical; *postmodernism* is spiritual. I too am open to the spiritual leading of Jesus and His Holy Spirit in my life.

*Modernism* leans to the didactic; *postmodernism* leans to the narrative. Jesus told stories to reach his audiences; and I see the power of story in my life and in my witness to my friends, colleagues and family. Jesus' stories didn't always include a didactic

straightforward repetition of the intended moral. He let the listeners think about it to understand the application (Matthew 13:34-35).

*Modernists* tend to be scientists and educators; *postmodernists* tend to be artists and poets. I see this as a false dichotomy and believe there is both a science and an art to being an educator and a leader.

*Modernism* favors noncontradiction; *postmodernism* is comfortable with contradiction. I do accept some seeming contradictions in my life. One example is from college when I was trying to resolve conflicting arguments on the different reasons why Jesus died for us. Some thought that the substitutionary aspect of His death (Hebrews 2:9) was most important; while others felt that the primary reason was to reveal God's love in order to reconcile us (Romans 5:8-10). I was able to resolve these seeming contradictions by thinking of God like a diamond. There are many sides to Him, and everyone sees different sides. All of it is truth, but some parts of God's truth speak more emphatically to some people than other people. This explains why we have four gospels from four different perspectives, and each adds to the richness of the story (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John).

*Modernism* discovers truth with the scientific method; *postmodernism* creates truth. As a Christian, neither of these approaches is satisfactory. Instead, truth is revealed in God's Word (2 Peter 1:19-21), and applied in my experience through the power and influence of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7-13).

*Modernism* believes in one overarching metanarrative; *postmodernism* sees overlapping and multiple metanarratives. While I realize that there are many metanarratives told by cultures and worldviews around the world, I believe in the one metanarrative described earlier that is revealed in God's Word.

As a researcher, I must also consider the philosophical ideas behind different methods of research. Knight (2006) notes philosophical underpinnings of qualitative research, especially the forms of qualitative research that address power and oppression. I enjoy both qualitative and quantitative research. I find satisfaction in "solid" numbers; but I also the value of thick personal descriptions of various perspectives in a given issue.

This analysis helped clarify for me that my worldview is influenced by several secular worldviews, including postmodernism. Yet as a Christian, I test and choose pieces of theories and philosophies as they fit within the ultimate metanarrative of God's work in our world and universe. As Knight (2006) suggests, postmodernism provides some helpful insights such as rejecting an optimism in reason, attention to social ethics, and understanding stories, language and power. However, as a Christian, I reject postmodernism's rejection of one metanarrative and absolute truth.

### **Interacting with the Great Thinkers**

Stevenson and Haberman (2009) review ten major theories of human nature found in the worldviews of Confucianism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Marx, Sartre, and Darwin.

Confucianism looks to the past to understand the future, and emphasizes the wisdom of the sages. The way of the sages is the proper way to follow. I find little connection with this worldview. The focus on superior men to the neglect and diminishing of small men and women is distasteful and against my Christian belief that we are all one in Christ with no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female (Galatians 3:28).

Hinduism, with its understanding of reincarnation, respects the life of all others including all animals and beings. Over time, through enlightened knowledge, one can

attain a higher level of existence. As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian who believes God created the earth, I share with Hinduism a respect for the earth and nature. However, the soul is not separate from the body (Genesis 2:7), and when we die, instead of being reincarnated to a new creation, we return to the earth and know nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

Buddhism, while sharing some beliefs with Hinduism, rejects the caste system, and extends the idea of renouncing to that of renouncing self and all desires. One can transcend suffering by renouncing selfish desire (J. Stevenson, 1998). As a Christian, I understand the concept of renouncing self and the struggles with the “old man of sin” (Romans 7). However I depend on salvation not through my own works and attempts at right living, but through the death and life of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:10).

Plato concentrated on the ideal idea that is separate from the physical world. He emphasized the dichotomy of soul and body that has influenced Christianity to non-Biblical beliefs on death and hell. While I agree with Plato that logic and reason is an important part of belief and knowledge about the world, I believe that God created that physical reality around us in addition to an actual physical heaven.

Aristotle believes that the form or idea exists in the physical world and isn't separate from it (J. Stevenson, 1998). He believed that change has a purpose and that we were meant to think and to reason about the world. His work on reason and democracy were certainly important, but I believe they should be balanced out with faith and compassion for others.

Kant found ways to integrate faith and science and developed the categorical imperative as a basis for ethics. He articulated the ontological, cosmological and physico-theological arguments for God (L. Stevenson & Haberman, 2009). Still, his focus on

adopting moral principles lacks the importance of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives to change us into a new creation (Ezekiel 36:26, 2 Corinthians 5:17).

Marx aimed to find a secular form of human salvation and emphasized human equality and freedom. His concerns were for the laborer in a capitalist economy. He believed that scientific method could be used to study society and find objective truths to guide work and development (L. Stevenson & Haberman, 2009). I sympathize with his concerns for the working poor. Even the Israelite economy was set up to care for the poor and oppressed, including the cities of refuge (Numbers 35), the year of jubilee (Leviticus 25), and the accommodations for the poor in sacrifices (Leviticus 14). In the New Testament, the early church sold possessions and shared among all (Acts 2:45). Still, the importance of individual labor (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12), hard work (Proverbs 6:6), and individual financial responsibility (Proverbs 21:5) are also emphasized in the Bible. A balance is needed so that the poor are cared for (Proverbs 19:17), yet each one works individually (Proverbs 19:15) without working to amass a large fortune at the expense of others (Proverbs 22:16, Luke 12, 1 Timothy 6:10).

Sartre emphasized the uniqueness of each individual, the importance of individual freedom, and the anguish of choice in a world with no meaning or direction. While I agree that freedom and choice is important, I believe both are God-given with a purpose. Choices may be hard, but they aren't the source of anguish due to a lack of guidance. God's Word gives us the commandments, framework and understanding to exercise our choice appropriately. There is more to this existence than just existence! A personal God gave us the choice to love Him and works towards helping us realize that choice and freedom.

Finally, Darwin's theory of evolution is based entirely in scientific reasoning and in a belief that change is random, and our existence on this planet is random. In contrast, I believe the account of creation in Genesis 1, and believe that God designed the earth that we can learn from and understand it. I believe God designed the creatures with the ability to adapt to their changing environment, but not with the ability to evolve into an entirely new species. Creation forms the foundation of my belief in a personal loving God, in His future aims to restore creation, and in His gift of the seventh-day Sabbath.

### **Constructing My Beliefs on Learning**

My beliefs about learning have been shaped by my own learning in formal instruction, in informal learning, in on-the-job learning, and as I have considered and selected teaching strategies and methods.

My early elementary education was fairly traditional, with a focus on order in the classroom, following the rules, and the teacher as the giver of knowledge. These experiences were mostly founded on *behaviorist* teaching methods with some *essentialism* focusing on the basics each influenced by uniquely Adventist education principles. Behaviorism focuses on objectives, efficiency and precision (Knight, 2006), and is often used in the development of rote knowledge such as the multiplication table and facts. Essentialism emphasizes basic knowledge and learning as hard work with the teacher as the authority (Knight, 2006). In elementary school, all of my teachers were the authority in the classroom, and encouraged me to work hard to learn basic knowledge.

In the middle school years, I did coursework from Home Study International, some of which was done under the instruction of my aunt with other missionary kids. I believe this was the beginning of my exposure to "project based learning"

(*progressivism*) with the real-world application of knowledge, and some *constructivism*

in doing projects that “create” and “organize” knowledge. Home study was a form of progressivism because there was very little competition, very little classroom discipline and definitely no harsh discipline, and no fear of failure (Knight, 2006). Glaser suggests that the “role of the school should be to provide a warm and nonthreatening environment” and that each student should have “individual responsibility” (Knight, 2006, p. 113). The home study environment, with individual goals and individual responsibility, along with the warm environment of home or a small school room with six other home study students allowed me to learn at my own pace and understanding.

During my academy years, I loved biology, chemistry, geometry and algebra. I soaked up the memorization of facts, with learning being hard work, discipline and drill (*essentialism*). I was hooked on the thrill of conquering knowledge.

In my senior year, I experienced a very unique religion class that was called Christian Nurture. The first semester was very project oriented and student directed. We put on a week of prayer, preached sermons, and wrote plays and skits to represent our beliefs. The second semester was an experiment in wide-open learning, and I soaked it up with a huge binder full of individualized learning experiences and investigations. I believe this class made a huge impact in my spirituality and faith, and also in my belief that *constructivism* can be safely applied to our study of the Bible, as long as it is Holy Spirit guided constructivism. I could not have articulated it in academy, but ever since, I have wanted to be able to teach Bible in a way that students could experience the same digging, discussing, and praying and learning that happened among mostly young people in the founding of the Adventist church. In this way, they could internalize their beliefs and really “own” them because they searched them out for themselves (see Acts 17:11). This final year of academy laid the foundation for soaking up learning in college. I never

saw myself as doing busy work for a grade. I just loved the learning. I think this was more an attitude on my end than the philosophy of education of my instructors. I did experience a lot of lecturing. Constructivism places the responsibility and action of learning with the student. The students' experience and social interactions are used to connect new knowledge to prior knowledge. Instead of just telling knowledge, a connection is made to how it is useful in our lives. The learner's prior experience and understanding must be used so that the students can reflect and integrate new knowledge (DeLay, 1996). With this understanding of constructivism, this particular Bible class impacted me because the new knowledge was connected to my prior knowledge and experience, and finally applied in my life and service.

My specific field is educational technology, but the wider field is K-12 teaching and learning. Learning in educational technology has taken a huge turn in the last 5 years. With the advent of Web 2.0, social networking, blogs, wikis, collaborative tools such as GoogleDocs, people are starting to use an intriguing term: personal learning network (PLN). A personal learning network is "a group of people who can guide your learning, point you to learning opportunities, answer your questions, and give you the benefit of their own knowledge and experience" (Tobin, 1998). A personal learning network in the Web 2.0 read-write participatory web age includes tools such as blogs, RSS readers, Twitter, and other social networking tools.

My PLN includes reading a collection of almost 100 blogs in my RSS reader, five or six educational technology blogs, subscribing to a small cadre of close videoconferencing colleagues on Twitter, communicating daily with videoconferencing buddies on Skype (about eight close colleagues), several email newsletters, and the people who comment on my blog. My PLN is at hand for learning, asking questions,

giving tips, responding to questions. This example of my own learning shows my connection to constructivism, particularly social constructivism. Social constructivism particularly emphasizes that the construction of knowledge happens within a social and cultural context. As learners interact and discuss knowledge with each other, each understanding is clarified and integrated into prior knowledge (DeLay, 1996). This process happens regularly through my personal learning network.

In addition, I have noticed in my work in educational technology, threads of reconstructionism in the keynote speeches of educational technology proponents. Reconstructionism sees the world in a state of crisis and that civilization as we know it will end unless we change our practices (Knight, 2006). It seems most of the keynote speakers tend to say the world is in crisis, jobs are going overseas, therefore you should use this technology or do more real-world learning that uses technology. Usually the speeches don't take it as far as education changing society. The speeches include overtones of futurism where we do not know what kind of jobs students will have when they get out of school; therefore we must teach students how to learn, how to respond to change, how to make choices (Knight, 2006, p. 129).

I have come to really detest behaviorism in its extreme forms; although I realize learning facts is important. The extreme idea of conditioning students, programming them, or behavioral engineering is really disturbing to me. As Nury Perez stated in our discussion online, "What is essential to keep in mind with behaviorism is the thinking and reasoning that needs to take place in between the stimulus and the response. God is the God of free will and I like to follow that model as much as possible, CHOICE makes all the difference" (Perez, 2009, February 24). The theory of behaviorism must be accepted with modification based on an understanding of human nature as created by

God (Genesis 1-3). Choice, freedom, and respect of the individual are extremely important to me. In my own instruction, mostly for teachers to learn to use educational technology, I design experiences where they can learn, and learn how to learn. I want teachers to connect their new learning with their prior experiences, their expertise on learning, and to construct their own understanding of the best way to use technology with their unique student needs and their own beliefs about teaching and learning.

Clearly, my constructivist / project-based learning experiences laid the foundation for my beliefs and practices about learning. However, it is important to carefully consider how constructivist fits with my faith.

My definition of constructivism is that knowledge is built in my head through experience, reflection, making connections to past knowledge, talking to colleagues and friends to process and create understandings and concepts. I believe students construct knowledge when creating a representation of their understanding. As a learner, I need to make charts, visuals and organizers to grasp knowledge. I believe that articulating my understanding clarifies it and solidifies my understanding. I believe it is important to make connections to previous knowledge, to past ways we have experienced the concept or idea.

Delay (1996) states that "pedagogically speaking, then, students learn not because teachers teach (the "open head, insert knowledge" assumption) but because they have taken prior knowledge and reworked it in light of new information and experience" (p. 77). In this scenario, the student should be working harder than the teacher. The role is to set up experiences, resources, and activities that create an environment conducive to the student constructing their own understanding.

However, I reject the notion of radical constructivism that there is no objective reality. The underlying skepticism of certain knowledge does not fit with my Christian worldview. I believe there is an independent reality out there that we know and understand through several sources of knowledge, including revelation, reason, and experience. While I realize that people have various views of the same concept, including that represented in the four gospels, I am not completely relativist. I do believe in certain knowledge, yet I believe the best way to really “know” that knowledge is through experience, reflection, and connection to our previous understandings and experiences.

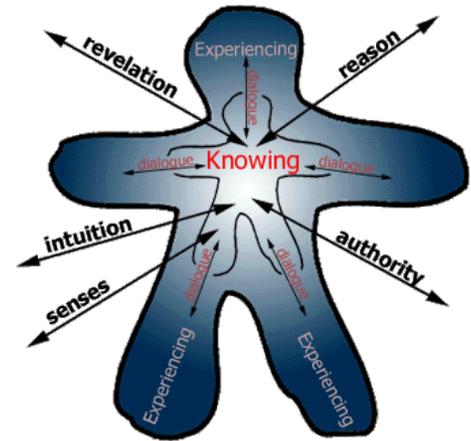
As an example of constructivism applied to faith, I note the Bereans (Acts 17:11) who did not just accept the revelation from Paul; they studied for themselves to see if these things were so. In Adventist history, William Miller studied the Bible from start to finish, comparing Scripture with Scripture, until he came to an understanding of the 2300 day prophecy. He did not receive the knowledge from authority, and he didn't just “receive” the knowledge from a simple reading of the Bible. He studied, cross-referenced, and the Holy Spirit guided him until he constructed a new understanding that others had not found. To me, this is Spirit-inspired constructivism. He made the truths his own, by studying and then by sharing with others. He actively engaged the Word instead of passively believing the person or pastor or group or denomination who gives "revealed" knowledge. It is vitally important that each person make their faith their own.

Experiential learning, project based learning, choice, a focus on process, and social constructivism are all important pieces of a good education in my view. Because I work in technology, which is constantly changing, change is not an issue at all for me. Pragmatists also are not afraid of change. My belief in God and the overarching metanarrative of the great controversy lay the foundation for my understanding of the

world. While I reject the concept of uncertainty of knowledge, I accept and prefer many of the methodologies that come from constructivist and pragmatist philosophies of learning.

### **Integrating Freed's Epistemological Model**

Freed's Epistemological Model (March 1, 2009) begins with the picture of a person and includes several different types of knowing: through revelation, reason, intuition, senses, and authority. I agree that each of these sources of knowledge is important. For example, my faith and belief in Christ is informed by all of these sources - revelation through studying God's word, reason by thinking through and comparing text with text, intuition and senses in my prayer life and personal relationship with Jesus, and authority by hearing the word preached, listening to other Christians I respect. All of these sources of knowing I receive through my experience and dialogue with others. The experience and dialogue balance each other because I'm not just alone in my own experience; I have other Christians to keep me accountable and to learn from their experience. As shown in the graphic, knowledge from revelation (the Bible), knowledge from reason/logic/proof texts, and knowledge from experience are like the checks and balances in government. Reason alone cannot bring a person to faith in Christ. Reason alone could turn one away from faith. However, experience alone can lead a person to be deceived and led astray. So each source of knowledge is important in understanding the world and in believing and trusting in God.





## **My Learning Converges with the Leadership Program**

My formal education has included a variety of lecture, small group, interaction, online, face to face, experience based, labs etc. This has influenced my ideas of how the instructor should design learning experiences for the student, and has created some expectations for formal learning experiences. However, my informal education has influenced me even more. Two major components include traveling to around 20 countries as a missionaries kid and experiencing different cultures and the constant change of educational technology change. In my work, I always learning new concepts and tools and determining how they appropriately apply to teaching & curriculum.

These experiences have influenced my choice for the leadership program. I'm no longer the auditory learner I was in college; I now learn by doing and also visually. The online format fits my learning, where I can reflect and consider, discuss and interact, and integrate new knowledge into my experience. The leadership program fits my belief that knowledge must be connected to experience. I appreciate the connections with my work , my studies and the interconnectedness within competencies.

Alaby (2002) details the connections between the Leadership program and social constructivism. I appreciate that the regional groups are a way to connect us to sustained social constructivist learning. The competency work demonstrates a strong belief in tying theory into practice through the way we demonstrate competency in job-embedded ways. Our instructors are facilitators and co-learners in the journey, reflecting the belief that knowledge is constructed socially, and not “contained” in one source. Traditional ways of knowledge acquisition are lectures and exams; instead in the leadership program we have community and application of knowledge to our experience. Instead of just acquiring mass amounts of facts, concepts, and theories, we apply the knowledge and theories in

our experience at work. My learning in the Leadership program is congruent with my beliefs and experiences with learning. I get bored with just lectures and knowledge without application. The Leadership Program engages me and pushes my knowledge in depth so that the knowledge actually changing my life and practice.

### **Public and Private Worldviews**

Sire's (2004) commentary on public and private worldviews was very intriguing. He suggests that some aspects of our worldview are common "to our immediate family, community, nation, century" and to the whole human race throughout time and space (Sire, 2004, p. 108). When I consider how my public world has influenced my private worldview, I think of postmodernism's effect on my thinking as examined in this paper. I have never experiences a where everyone around me, church, community, family all had the same worldview. Being a missionaries' kid and living and studying internationally means that for much of my life I have been around people with very much different views than my own. It continues today as I work as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian in a public school setting. I realize that I must continue strong contact with my fellow Christians so as to keep the plausibility structure that supports my faith intact. If I interact too much and too often with those whose plausibility structure discounts faith, my own faith will be affected. The benefit of interacting regularly with those who think differently is that I am constantly challenged to re-evaluate, to choose again to believe.

### **How My Philosophical Foundations Influence My Leadership**

My beliefs about the world, in particular about humanity and the course of human history influence my leadership. Because I believe in choice and respecting others' points of view, it affects how I treat them.

Sire (2004) suggests that we must have a clear understanding that others have different worldviews. I would add that we must respect those worldviews, even if we "know" they are "wrong". Without respect it is impossible to have a constructive dialogue with someone. This respect for other worldviews and a determination to know and understand another's perspective is an important value to me. Stevenson and Haberman (2009) warn against attacking the motives of those who question or critic our theory of human nature, and hint that it may be better to be comfortable with some "unanswerables" in our own worldview than being defensive about conflicting evidence or data. They challenge us to "mutual dialogue, mutual listening, and understanding" (p. 7). We should seek first to understand, then to be understood (Covey, 1990). This means listening, observing, asking questions. Having a basic knowledge of the various worldviews prepares us to ask intelligent and respectful questions of those who view the world differently than we do. As we come to understand where another person is coming from, we can find common ground to celebrate. As the relationship is built, then the moments will come to share our faith. The key is having that relationship built on seeking to understand the other. This understanding affects my leadership in how I relate to those around me. I find that listening to find common ground and to understand differences is critical to solving problems together (Glaser, 2005). I continue to improve in my own ability to listen and dialogue with those who believe differently than me.

My beliefs about education also affect my leadership. I never just "tell" my student worker what to do. I want her also to grasp the significance of the task in the bigger picture. I want her to understand the work well enough that she can notice challenges and bring her own solutions to the problems and tasks. I want her to see the results and success of her work. I give her choices whenever possible. I encourage her to

seek her own solutions to problems I present to her. When I treat her this way, I see a growth in learning and understanding, as well as skill and responsibility.

How am I an educator as a leader? I am leader because I am an educator. My leadership is not based on traditional power or position; instead it is because I have become an expert in my field. I became an expert by sharing knowledge in many different ways. I have shared knowledge by sharing resources, creating resources, creating tools, offering workshops, presentations, online courses, providing support, and blogging. I have provided others with the opportunity to construct knowledge from the resources shared or to adapt my own tools and resources to create new resources. In this way, I invited my fellow educators to construct knowledge with me.

As a final metaphor, consider my leadership in a shared collaborative workshop called 123VC: Jazzing Up Your Curriculum with Videoconferencing. “Jazz” as this workshop is called, is a unique environment to apply my beliefs about learning and leading. It is a grassroots loosely organized group and is not connected to any formal institutional or organizational rules. Thus it provides an environment for me to improvise and work with others to construct a learning experience that fits the group’s collective beliefs about learning and leadership. I chose this example because in this situation I have the greatest freedom to create an experience that best matches my philosophical and educational beliefs.

Jazz is co-facilitated over videoconferencing with eight to ten sites throughout the week. Participation has included Michigan, Missouri, New York, North Dakota, Ohio, Texas, and Wales in the United Kingdom, with British Columbia and California joining this summer. Five lead facilitators and a team of about 20 local facilitators lead the workshop at their site in collaboration each other. In a ten site scenario, three or four sites

connect together with a lead facilitator. Each lead facilitator has their own team of three or four sites. All the facilitators take turns leading different parts of the workshop. The participants benefit from hearing multiple perspectives and videoconferencing with teachers in their grade level subject area who live in different states, or even another country. The workshop collaboration began in 2005 with three facilitators, and has grown to five lead facilitators and 20 local facilitators. Each day is built with morning simulations where the participants play the role of students, guest speakers in the afternoon, and small group work developing a collaborative project with participants at two or more sites. It takes the improvisation and flexibility of a jazz musician to pull it together year after year.

In the Jazz workshop, the “really real” is our collaborative experience constructed together (pragmatism). Even though we are located distantly, we are together in our experience of learning and leading together. The external reality includes the need to educate students, the need to improve education, and the technology tools in front of us that connect us to each other. The participants in our workshops are educators, human beings, who have a will, choice, a desire to effectively serve students, previous experiences with learning, teaching, and technology. As facilitators (progressivism) we treat them with respect, give them choices, and encourage them to share and build their knowledge and skills in effectively teaching with videoconferencing. We are able to “know” each other through conversation and shared experiences. At the end of the workshop, we feel connected in community (progressivism), even though we are far from each other physically. We know through reading, experiences, and interaction with each other (social constructivism). Right and wrong in our Jazz workshop are defined

pragmatically by what is best for the students, what respects the others, and what creates the best learning experience for everyone involved (Knight, 2006).

The Jazz workshop is built on the concept of shared leadership and improvising. We, the lead facilitators, mentor the other facilitators, and lead them through a shared experience. We improvise during the training, just as jazz musicians improvise when playing together. We take turns between leadership roles and supportive roles. Our leadership is built on ideals of cooperation and problem solving (progressivism), the importance of choice and responsibility (existentialism), and building on the experiences and expertise of each other (pragmatism). Using social networking tools such as Skype and Twitter, we constantly build shared knowledge and adjust planned experiences as needed.

### **Conclusion**

Clearly, none of the boxes of philosophy that I have learned fit perfectly. I have found truth and useful concepts in several philosophies. Taking pieces from each philosophical box, I can improvise and create my own philosophy that stays true to my belief in God yet adapts and improvises to the changing nature of the world around me. My study of philosophy has expanded my ability to perceive the philosophical understanding of those around me, and to better dialogue and create shared experiences with my colleagues. In turn, my ability to listen and dialogue improves my ability to lead and improvise in many situations.

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