DEVELOPMENTAL PROFILE OF AN

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR

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# Introduction: Coloring Outside of the Lines

I believe we have each been given our own box of crayons. You may get the eight or the 16 crayon pack. You may even be fortunate enough to get the super deluxe set of 64 with the sharpener in the back of the box. But life isn’t about the number of crayons you’ve been allotted. It is what you do with them that make the scratch paper of your life more beautiful and more meaningful. Traditional teachers are infamous for teaching conformity. One must color inside the lines in order to get the grade. Translated: conform to society’s expectations and social norms. Do all things in the order in which they are intended. Color inside the lines. I say color outside the lines. Color all over the page! I’ve used my own set of crayons a bit more unconventionally than most. I’ve colored all over the page and even on the occasional wall.

Apt not to follow the normal sequence of things, after high school I became a wife and mother instead of going to college and becoming the teacher I’d always dreamed of being. This first set of scribbles outside of the lines was certainly beautiful as well as painful. I spent 17 years in a marriage that ended in divorce, and I continued raising two children as a single mother. I worked a minimum wage job because I had no real employable skill set. I had never been given the opportunity to pursue an education. However, desperate times call for desperate measures.

After my divorce, I threw convention to the curb and applied to college. With one daughter in high school and one son in college, I took a huge leap of faith and entered the world of academia as a non-traditional student. Talk about coloring off the page—what an unconventional step for a divorced woman at my age! “Although no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending,” and that is exactly what I did (author unknown). Since then, I have been an academic addict. I have been enrolled in some educational program continuously since obtaining my undergraduate degree. All of which has culminated in a most authentic, refrigerator worthy drawing of my life’s work. I have gained a great deal of wisdom along the way through my schooling and personal experiences, both good and bad. However, I have never hesitated to color outside of the lines to improve an already pretty picture.

When I found out about the Doctoral Cohort, it was the second semester into the program. A colleague and I hurried to take our MAT and apply for late admission. We were accepted into the program, and I chose Curriculum and Instruction as my focus because I wanted to be able to influence the way early childhood education was being addressed at the college level. Having spent many years as an early childhood teacher and serving as a mentor for student teachers, I believed that the knowledge I would gain from the doctoral program would enable me to give valuable insight into guiding novice teachers in the wonders of early childhood education. This was just one wish out of many that I desired to fulfill as part of the doctoral program. However, many critics felt that I was wasting my time taking more classes at my “advanced age,” stating “you’ll never recoup the money it will cost.” To these naysayers, I reply “I am not a has been. I am a will be!” (Lauren Bacall). Learning does not suddenly terminate at retirement age.

I hoped that in the process of this cohort experience, I could reinforce my previous learning and experience with the addition of even more practical knowledge and skills, making me a better teacher as I learned from other experts in my field. In reality, each step along the way has provided me with new perspectives, a deep understanding of those activities which were simply “required” or “routine,” and opportunities to gain insight into my own orientation to teaching, learning, and life. The experience has not only necessitated collecting a greater variety of crayons, but it has also required me to use them in ways that I had never previously considered.

Through this reflective paper, I will review experiences of my last three years in the doctoral program by presenting to you my own developmental profile—a grade card of sorts—using early childhood language and objectives to describe my progress and achievements through the doctoral cohort experience. My preschool students are evaluated across multiple domains—social-emotional, physical, language, cognitive, literacy, mathematics, science and technology. The primary goal at this level is to ready the student for the next level of education—Kindergarten. Moreover, we hope to enable each unique and developing personality to actively engage in a lifetime of learning. Applied loosely and figuratively to my doctoral program, the goals and objectives used to evaluate the progress of my young and eager learners can also be used to measure my own progression. I am confident that you will find that I am prepared to pull out my new set of crayons and begin yet another fridge worthy piece of artwork—my dissertation.

# Report Card: A Developmental Snapshot of an Early Childhood Educator

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Student: Peggy Sue Crowe | Committee Chair: Ronald Childress, Ed.D. |

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| key | KEYS = Secure SkillE = Emerging SkillN = Needs Attention | *The following skill areas are those in which a preschool student’s progress is continually measured. We believe that the listed behaviors contribute to student learning under each domain and are considered an integral part of our teaching. We do not expect that all students will demonstrate consistency at all times, but we do emphasize continual progress for the student in demonstrating the behavior on a regular basis. Your child's progress is indicated according to the KEY to the left.* |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Objectives for Development & Learning | Student Progress |
| **Related Cohort Experience** |
| Social-Emotional  | **S** |
| group 2 | * Regulates own emotions and behaviors
* Establishes and sustains positive relationships
* Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations
 | Doctoral Seminars,Collaborative Activities,Cohort Experience |
| Physical | **S** |
| direction sign | * Demonstrates traveling skills
* Demonstrates balancing skills
 | Regular AttendanceBalancing CommitmentsOf Family, Work & School |
| Language | **S** |
| talk 1 | * Listens to and understands increasingly complex language
* Uses language to express thoughts and needs
* Uses appropriate conversational and other communicative skills
 | Collaborative Activities, Presentations,All Coursework |
| Cognitive | **S** |
| brains | * Demonstrates positive approaches to learning
* Remembers and connects experiences
* Persists and solves problems
* Shows curiosity and motivation
* Shows flexibility and inventiveness in thinking
* Uses classification skills
 | All Coursework |
| Literacy | **S** |
| write | * Demonstrates knowledge of print and its uses
* Comprehends and responds to books and other texts
* Writes to convey meaning
 | All CourseworkWriting for PublicationWriting for Research  |
| Mathematics | **S** |
| calculator | * Uses number concepts and operations
* Compares and measures
* Demonstrates knowledge of patterns
 | Coursework in Curriculum & InstructionResearch Projects |
| Science & Technology | **S** |
| mouse | * Uses scientific inquiry skills
* Uses tools and other technology to perform tasks
 | Co-teaching, Presentations, Coursework in Curriculum & Instruction, Research Projects |

Jumping headlong into this advanced coursework was overwhelming for me as an early childhood educator. I was certainly learning outside of the sandbox! The first few classes gave me many a pause to reconsider whether or not I was up to this commitment. However, crayons in hand, I met each course with a positive attitude and drew my own masterpiece. I have clearly acquired many new skills (and new crayons) through the completion of my coursework and related activities.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Social-Emotional  | Secure Skills |
| group 2 | * Regulates own emotions and behaviors
* Establishes and sustains positive relationships
* Participates cooperatively and constructively in group situations
 | Doctoral Seminars,Collaborative Activities,Cohort Experience |

My skills in the *Social-Emotional* domain were clearly proven secure through my participation in Doctoral Seminars. Beginning in the fall of2008*,* along with Dr. Eagle and Melanie White, I served on the doctoral seminar committees and feel it was an experience worthy of note. After attending several committee meetings on the Charleston campus, I was able to familiarize myself with many students and faculty that otherwise I would not have met. I observed and learned firsthand how much deliberation and planning goes into the sessions.

My first assigned task was “gift collector.” With the help of my fellow cohort members we were able to get many nice gifts to hand out to lucky recipients. During the next seminar my responsibility was soliciting bids for the lunches and reporting back to the committee. I learned how very difficult it is to choose food and plan for a large diverse group, while working within limited time restraints. However all went well and the food was deemed a success. I have been involved in each subsequent seminar—aiding in collection and distribution of gifts and food, cleaning up, and acting as facilitator for sessions. I believe that my participatory style of leadership is evident here because only with collaboration among the members could the seminars continue to be a success. I also enjoyed being able to interact with my peers in an activity outside of the classroom and network with faculty and students not in the cohort.

Other collaborative activities such as co-teaching and presentations also improved my social-emotional quotient as a maturing doctoral candidate. I had a unique opportunity to work with Dr. Watts on a survey he was conducting on the success of the Early Childhood Collaborative (ECC) in Lincoln County. I had previously discussed collaborative issues with him when he was the Early Childhood Coordinator for Lincoln County Schools. Lincoln County was one of the first in our state to begin collaborating with Head Start and other agencies to combine resources to better serve the community. Because our county was fairly new to the ECC initiative, I was very curious as to how smooth the transition had been. When he asked me if I’d like to work on his upcoming project, I was delighted. Collaborating with Dr. Watts, Sarah Lee, and Tina Lou Edwards, we worked on the project from start to finish. I was very anxious to learn the outcome, since the topic held much interest for me. As we expected, there were glitches in the process, for example, there were areas where teachers left and replacements weren’t as knowledgeable about the process and guidelines. This lack of understanding led to rating lower satisfaction in the transition process. However, for the most part the transition in Lincoln County went very well. The subsequent manuscript detailing the study was submitted for publication to the Southern Regional Council for Educational Administrators (SRECA). After the submission came an invitation to present at the SRCEA conference. This conference allowed me to see a study to its completion. Later, our manuscript was submitted to the West Virginia Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (WVASCD) and again, we presented an overview of our study and summary report. Dr. Watts was a jewel to work with as well as members of my cohort Sarah Lee and Tina Lou Edwards. I feel that this experience gave me a realistic view of presenting for professional purposes. The keys to success in this forum, I found, are to know your study inside and out as well as to anticipate what kind of questions your audience might ask so you can be prepared for an informative answer. Here again, my participatory leadership style was beneficial in working with such a collaborative group of educators, all working together for a common goal.

 I believe that my experience in the cohort has been the most meaningful of my collaborative experiences. The support the members show to one another is phenomenal and eases the burden of facing a new batch of faces each semester. Every class brought new opportunities for us to work with other members of our group and to really appreciate the person within. It is very humbling to me when I think of the incredible collective talent of the cohort, and I am much honored to be a part of that group. As with every class each person finds their niche, so my role was that of food coordinator and social director. I organized food groups; sent reminders and kept track of occasions we needed to recognize or celebrate with cards and goodies. We have laughed much together, and sometimes we cried, but always we were there for each other. I cannot thank Marshall enough for allowing me to be a part of this wonderful, elite group.

 It is my firm belief that the only disadvantage to the cohort experience would be the limited “campus experience,” but I was very fortunate to have both the campus and off campus experiences. On campus you are able to interact with a different group of classmates every semester and with faculty members not associated with the cohort program. All of these could, and did for me, become valuable relationship and networking resources for dissertation and beyond.

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| --- | --- |
| Physical | Secure Skills |
| direction sign | * Demonstrates traveling skills
* Demonstrates balancing skills
 | Regular AttendanceBalancing Commitments of Family, Work & School |

In the *Physical* domain, metaphorically speaking, my achievement is surely secured. Traveling and balancing skills are certainly those that will be very well-honed as I complete my program. I entered the program later than most. In order to catch up with the rest of the cohort, I had to take extra classes, which required driving to Charleston sometimes twice a week. Since then, I have added extra certifications that have required extra classes most semesters. Here’s a fun fact to demonstrate just how skilled I am in traveling. Since my entrance into this program, I have traveled an estimated 26,000 miles for activities related directly to my requirements for the doctoral degree. It does not require the skills of a statistician to determine that I spend a multitude of hours on the road. Such chunks of travel time clearly require excellent time management skills. It is an artful balancing act to organize the usual duties of my home and family, my preschool classroom, and my community commitments while also managing the work of a doctoral student. The rewards have made these challenges worthwhile, however. The “on campus” experience made me feel more connected to a real school and program. It also enabled me to build new relationships that would serve as valuable resources throughout my program. For example, through my on campus course work, I was able to network with other early childhood teachers throughout the state and learn about the various programs in place in those areas.

Yet another verification of my balancing skills—while managing my doctoral program demands, I recently had to renew my National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBCT) Certification. Even though the renewal process is not as daunting as the first time, I knew the work would be time consuming. For renewal I had to prove my continuous growth professionally and personally since my achievement ten years ago. Instead of the six portfolio areas, there were four in which I had to demonstrate growth, integrating the evidence of growth into each dimension. I firmly believe that the doctoral process gave me the evidence I needed to prove that growth. Up until that time, I had not given much thought to my progression, as I was so busy in my day to day work of teaching and wrapped up in my doctoral class assignments. However, upon reviewing my coursework and subsequent reflection, I was quite astounded at how much I had grown personally and professionally. I truly believe that the doctoral program is wholly responsible for this development as I achieved renewal of my certification for another decade.

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| Language | Secure Skills |
| talk 1 | * Listens to and understands increasingly complex language
* Uses language to express thoughts and needs
* Uses appropriate conversational and other communicative skills
 | Collaborative Activities, Presentations,All Coursework |

 All of my courses requiring reading, writing, and speaking clearly addressed the skills of the *Language* domain. However, I believe Leadership coursework has further developed my communication skills as well. Being a leader involves being an effective language user—a good communicator.

My first leadership class was with Dr. Toth, Principles of Leadership. Here, I learned about the wide variety of leadership styles as well as the differences between leaders and managers. Most of my supervisors have been the latter, but I believe that anyone can acquire the ability to be a good leader. In this class, I further defined the qualities of my ideal leader. A great leader, I decided, would possess a strong personality and act as a catalyst, persuading others to work toward a common goal. Additionally, she would need to be a visionary, be able to inspire, to command respect, and to be a team player. All of these traits require excellent communicative abilities at their heart. However, I believe the biggest challenge for a leader is to acquire an understanding of all facets of his organization in order to bring out the best qualities in all the participants involved, which may involve asking the right questions in the appropriate way to facilitate further growth. Furthermore a leader is a not only a facilitator, but also a teacher, a decision-maker, and a cheerleader where power is shared within the group. These same attributes are all characteristics of my participatory style of leadership.

According to Kezar (2001) higher education institutions have begun moving away from traditional, hierarchical leadership toward participatory or collaborative leadership approaches in order to increase commitment and address organizational problems that have occurred with the hierarchical approaches. Kezar explains that participatory leadership is part of the servant leadership theory attributed to Robert Greenleaf who contended that it is all about the attitude that one brings to the group. Specific to Greenleaf are ten characteristics; listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment and building community. As I readily identified with the participatory ideal, also found that Kurt Lewin (1939) had led a group of researchers with the specific purpose of identifying different styles of leadership. This study has been very influential and established three major leadership styles which are used in the U.S. Army Handbook: Authoritarian, Participative and Delegative. It is through my studies as a doctoral student, my participation in coursework and subsequent scholarly activities that have aligned with this style of participatory leadership.

School District Leadership and Superintendency classes with Dr. Kolsun made for an activity filled summer. Her assignments were both challenging and interesting. For one assignment I worked closely with my county superintendent to review and revise the county’s current five-year plan as well as the drop out intervention plan. While working with him, I was able to familiarize myself with many department directors and their duties as well as learn about budgeting and the various and limited revenues the county has to build their budget. I also learned a great deal about the duties of a superintendent and the various entities to which he is accountable. I observed how he used different strategies to deal with various agencies, not hesitating to use his familiarity and connections to obtain the desired results. Consequently, during this apprenticeship I observed changes in leadership styles depending on what group is being led an example of situational leadership. Situational leadership, Lewin, Llippit & White (1939) define situational leadership as the ability to change leadership styles according to group. Situational leaders must possess the ability to perceive the overall need of the group and what strategies they need to use in order to influence the group. I attribute much of my mentor’s success with people to his coaching background, his good communication skills, and an understanding of human nature; therefore, he used different leadership styles to get his agenda accomplished.

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| --- | --- |
| Cognitive | Secure Skills |
| brains | * Demonstrates positive approaches to learning
* Remembers and connects experiences
* Persists and solves problems
* Shows curiosity and motivation
* Shows flexibility and inventiveness in thinking
* Uses classification skills
 | All Coursework |

 My *Cognitive* skills have been further developed and proven secure throughout all of my coursework and related requirements. Since Curriculum and Instruction is my area of major emphasis, I have had a total immersion into the foundations of theories of learning and curriculum. In Dr. Murphy’s class I reviewed the tenets of major theorists that had been part of my undergraduate study. However, this class went much deeper into the contributions of Jean Piaget and John Dewey (Hewitt, 2006) as well as many other contributors to the philosophy of education. Nowhere else in education are Piaget’s developmental stages more evident than in the early childhood classroom. This can be said also of Dewey’s philosophy that education must engage the learner with relevant experiences with reflection as an essential component. I feel that my knowledge base and my philosophy of education has become much broader and deeper, intertwined now with others like Ralph Tyler (Hewitt, 2006) who believed that something had to be relevant before learning was meaningful. His project approach is now being used in my classroom and it is amazing to see my preschoolers starting a project and seeing it to completion. I was quite amused last year when the project approach to teaching early childhood was introduced to my class as a “new” concept.

 Dr. Meyer introduced me to Pinar (2002). While Pinar was clearly not part of my original foundation in education, Dr. Meyer’s rigorous but meaningful assignments taught me to appreciate a wider variety of learning and curriculum theories. In his course, I felt I was truly being put through the proverbial paces. I read the most difficult text I had yet attempted. I wrote seemingly endless critiques—writing and rewriting my own critiques, then critiquing other students’. It was cognitively overwhelming and incredibly time consuming. However, to his credit, I have gained a much broader and deeper understanding of these theories because of the demanding nature of his assignments.

I also know that I am a constructivist teacher. I believe that learning takes place as an engaged learner builds on a knowledge base. The content need be relevant and combined with interaction with other learners. However, like Tyler, I believe that you need to know where a person comes from to be able to make that learning relevant (Hewitt, 2002). For example, understanding the nature of the adult learner reveals a need for a specialized group of instructors trained to educate these misunderstood and complex learners. Certainly, Adult and Continuing Education with Dr. Watts gave me a new perspective of the adult learner. Unfortunately, I could identify with many of the problems adult learners encounter, because I had started back to college after being out of the mainstream of education for many years. Having examined more closely my own philosophy of teaching, however, I believe that I can more easily adapt to and engage a diverse group of learners, including the adult learner.

It was through thoughtful reflection in Dr. Meyer’s class that I realized even though I adhere to the constructivist philosophy of Piaget and Vygotsky, mine is interwoven with the brain-based theory (Hewitt, 2006). The project approach for early childhood requires the complete immersion of students and the environment with the project. This method parallels the brain-based theory of learning, and I realize that my instruction has become a blend of both due to the research conducted for his course. I believe it is critical for teachers to connect learning to students' real lives and emotional experiences, as well as their personal histories and experiences. I attribute this change to my coursework and the vast amount of solid research encountered to support those changes.

Further developing my cognitive capacities as a doctoral student, I was able to explore the logic model in Dr. Childress’ Program Evaluation class (Freeman, Lipsey, & Rossi, 2004). In his class, I designed an evaluation using this model to evaluate the success of Nicholas County’s Early Childhood Collaborative. With a little tweaking, I would like to present this model to my central office with the possibility of implementing the plan for a successful evaluation of our current program. This evaluation could serve as a valuable tool in assessing problems with the current collaborative and hopefully guide administrators to viable solutions. With the skills I acquired in this class, I believe that as an administrator, I could easily evaluate a program to identify both strengths and weaknesses and therefore improve the program.

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| Literacy | Secure Skills |
| write | * Demonstrates knowledge of print and its uses
* Comprehends and responds to books and other texts
* Writes to convey meaning
 | All CourseworkWriting for PublicationWriting for Research |

In the area of *Literacy*, I have achieved secure skill levels, where at the start of my program they were only emerging. Writing for Publication with Dr. Simone gave me insight into the realities of getting published. Did I have enough knowledge of any subject to be considered an expert? She drove home the fundamentals of writing and rewriting, having important information to share, knowing your audience and being timely with that information. This writing experience gave me a new found confidence in my writing abilities that would positively influence my other coursework.

 Writing articles for publication was an assignment for several classes. Although none of my submissions were either accepted for publication or provided with any feedback, I discovered that revising and resubmitting are the basic foundations of the process. Dr. Simone related to us that “You have to develop very thick skin because feedback can be highly critical and rejection devastating.” Thus, when a cohort colleague is published, all are in awe and have cause to celebrate. Having attempted the same, we now know the great significance and work of that achievement.

Dr. Nicholson’s Administrative Theory and Ethical Theories classes further developed my literacy skills as a doctoral student. We were assigned to read several different excerpts and Dr. Nicholson seemed surprised when the majority of our class was unfamiliar with them. For example, a few were classics from Plato and Sophocles; others were whimsical stories such as those penned by Dr. Seuss. Still others were insightful and thought provoking readings concerning other political theories. She told the class that the only way to be informed was to read everything with a “critical eye.” I admit that since joining the cohort I have limited time to read for pleasure these days, and the only educational material I take time to read are those pertaining to my own area—early childhood. Dr. Nicholson made me realize how very narrow my vision had become. So thought provoking were her lectures and assignments that I began to see the importance of what she was advocating. Since then, I make a mindful effort to read widely and view various media and always with the critical eye that she helped to develop in me. Additionally, many of her required readings were children’s books that postulated subliminal political or environmental messages—a surprise to many in the class. The insight I gained from her classes has certainly helped me be a more conscious and critical reader, no matter what the genre.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Mathematics | Secure Skills |
| calculator | * Uses number concepts and operations
* Compares and measures
* Demonstrates knowledge of patterns
 | Coursework in Curriculum & InstructionResearch Projects |

In the *Mathematics* domain, my skills were developed through my coursework with Dr. Meisel and Dr. Seccuro. From these professors, I gained a wealth of knowledge about the complex analytical process that goes into creating a well-designed research study. Calculating the various formulas and analyzing those results reveal to the investigator valuable information about his study, which may also lead to additional avenues for inquiry. I am certainly not a natural mathematician and math has always been my weakest discipline. However, both instructors worked patiently with me to ensure that I learned the basic concepts of the process and understood the *why* behind those tasks.

When reading investigative literature, I can now easily understand the terminology. I can also judge for myself the process, the implications of the findings, as well as apply those findings to other areas. Galileo (n.a., Quotes for life) once proposed, “You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him find it within himself.” Their teaching methods allowed me to find the mathematical skill within myself and apply it with the skill required of a doctoral candidate and newly trained researcher. For instance, this new mathematical ability enabled me to successfully calculate data received as I was conducting my surveys for the various research projects I completed as part of my coursework as I conducted various qualitative and quantitative research projects throughout my journey.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Science & Technology | Secure Skills |
| mouse | * Uses scientific inquiry skills
* Uses tools and other technology to perform tasks
 | Co-teaching Online Course, Presentations, Course-related Assignments, Research Projects  |

 In the area of *Science*, my skills are secure, thanks to participation in the research courses. These required me to follow prescribed methods to obtain information in several ways. My growth here begins with Dr. Eagle in Research Design where I learned that a well developed research question was the basis for a successful study. I was able to put this knowledge to use in later in Dr. Childress’ Survey Research class when I conducted a study on the RTI progress in the elementary schools in Nicholas County as well as gathering and submitting information for the IRB process. Learning about the RTI intervention program gave me new insight into my own curriculum, as it closely aligns with the RTI framework. Being an active participant in the process of designing, distributing, collecting and analyzing the returns gave me a taste of how research is conducted and the confidence to successfully manage a research project to fruition.

Additionally, during Qualitative Research Methods with Dr. Debela, I was given the chance to apply both research and writing skills using an observational approach. In his class, I was given various assignments to gather information via the qualitative method and using my results wrote and presented my conclusion. Understanding the commonalities and differences in the various research methods demonstrated the value of each method. Furthermore, the ability to establish the method to obtain that information is another indispensible tool. It is through the method of scientific inquiry that I am able to review data, analyze the results and synthesize my findings in a proper research format. Based on my experiences with both survey methods, I would feel competent to conduct a study using either or a combination of both methods in addition to going through the IRB process.

My *Technology* skills are also secure, as tested by several aspects of cohort requirements. Dr. Heaton’s Technology and Curriculum class again challenged this digital immigrant, as I had very limited prior computer experience. She assigned projects in which I was exposed to many unfamiliar programs but was so supportive that eventually, I felt confident that I could experiment with any program without fear of failing. I have since had numerous occasions to use the technology she introduced. I am using a revised version of my presentation *Using Cameras to Enhance Learning in the Early Childhood Classroom,* for an orientation session for teachers I mentor*.* Consequently, my proficiency with the computer has grown by leaps and bounds per her patient instruction and I find that the computer no longer intimidates me as it once did.

A co-teaching experience has also proven the solidity of my *Technology* skills. Sarah Lee and I were afforded the opportunity to teach an online course *Trends and Issues in Education.*  Although the class had been set up according to the course content, we were each charged with designing a module and making sure that the module followed a specific chapter in the textbook. This task of setting up the interactive blackboard for students was a major learning experience for me. Nevertheless, under the supervision of Dr. Childress and Dr. Heaton, we facilitated the class, reading and responding to assignment posts as well as dealing with some problems students encountered. I enjoyed interacting with the students and learned that online courses do not have to be solitary classes as long as you have meaningful interaction between students and instructors. Online courses can be intimidating for many students who are accustomed to the face to face interaction with instructors.

My experience with online teaching gave me a higher degree of understanding of the obstacles as well as benefits of online classes. As the instructor, I had to change my way of thinking about students because of not being able to meet them I had no preconceived ideas of what type of student or learner they were. This made it difficult but justified the introduction question students were required to post about who they were, work background, major and educational goals. Additionally, the modules had to be very specific and adequate time given especially if other resources were needed.

Of course, one benefit of online classes is being able to remain in the comfort of your home. The disadvantage is not receiving immediate feedback, as well as the difficulty of developing relationships with instructors and peers. I believe the key to successful online education is support from and accessibility to instructors. If a class is well-designed and monitored with frequent feedback, I believe that online courses will become more popular. I do feel that there are some students who will not succeed with the online courses because of self-discipline and the need for more personal types of interaction. I was extremely pleased that we received very positive feedback on our evaluations.

# Conclusion

 The past few years have been both challenging and revealing. I have broadened my knowledge in so many different ways not only with my coursework but about human nature as well. My philosophies of curriculum, teaching and learning have been greatly influenced by theorists Piaget: who believed learning is developmental; Dewey who believed that education must match needs, wants and abilities of students; and Gardner, whose multiple intelligences proved that everyone does not learn the same way (Pinar, et.al. 2002). The autobiographical theory aligns closely with my beliefs as understanding oneself as well as knowing there is also an underlying personal factor of lived experiences that students bring to the classroom.

Finally, coursework that seemed so daunting three years ago now is coming to an end. Part of the knowledge that I always wished for has been granted to me. I am confident however, that the experiences and growth that I have encountered during my years in the cohort have prepared me to move on to the next phase of my journey. The relationships I have developed not only with my peers but with faculty members has afforded me many resources that I can look to for guidance should the need arise.

My next canvas awaits the touch of color and now, (you notice I don’t call it the final canvas) I would like to begin a study on early childhood readiness as perceived by kindergarten teachers in West Virginia. Specifically, do early childhood programs make a difference in readiness? I believe that my vast amount of experience in the early childhood classroom has given me a great deal of insight into rural early education. If I am allowed to move on to the next phase of my program, I sincerely believe that I can make a significant difference in early childhood education either through research or by teaching others what I have learned throughout my career. In other words, I do not want my dissertation to be “one and done” but another refrigerator worthy piece that will be an inspiration for more.

My box of 64 crayons still has colors I have yet to use. I believe that my color selections so far have empowered me to proceed to the dissertation phase and use the rest of the crayons in my box. *“She wasn’t where she had been, she wasn’t where she wanted to be, but she was on her way.”~Author Unknown.* Now the question remains, “Am I on my way?”

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