

## Southwestern CE FS Program Conceptual Framework

### ***“The Big Ideas”***

Our students’ confidence is built through their success with the rigor of the course via the assignments and activities requiring collaborating, creating, presenting, writing, and testing. We encourage individuals to engage in ongoing self-reflection and exploration of their strengths and challenges for delivering the critical, complex services needed by young children beginning during the pre-service phase of their career. We are a "Community of Learners" in which we all (including children, their families, staff, and college students) learn and grow together.

There are a variety of different program designs addressing the education and care of young children across a rather wide continuum of quality. The SWOCC CE FS program emphasizes developmental theories as the basis for practices and curriculum.

There is a professional organization (NAEYC) that provides guidelines, books, a journal, and professional development opportunities for individuals committed to offering the highest quality programs for young children. Our program aligns with, and is accredited by, and supports the principles, standards, ethics, and teachings of NAEYC.

The acknowledgement / recognition that the domains of development of the whole child are, or should be, addressed in their learning processes dates back many centuries and was central in the thinking of several well-known and respected educational philosophers.

Play is the natural vehicle through which young children learn and is at the heart of developmentally appropriate educational practice. The provision of ample time for child-directed free play in the daily schedule is critically important to the healthy development of the whole child. Teacher-directed, structured learning experiences are set-up using effective transitions, brief, carefully constructed and skillfully executed in order to facilitate learning for young children. The outcome for children is an equal time allotment for free play activities combined with an equal time for directed experiences within the day.

Theorists have identified and studied patterns in each domain of development that educators of young children understand and know how to support through rich, sensory curricular applications. Concrete, hands on experiences are engaged by children in order for them to construct an understanding of abstract, symbolic representations of their world (words, letters, numbers and the like). Children build their knowledge of the world around themselves through active and sensory experiences that are carefully planned through curriculum.

Children move through the stages of development individually at their own pace based on biological maturation and experience in their environments and do not receive external pressure to "hurry".

Readiness is a major concept and theme in the program. Addressing an individual child's special need may be an exception, as waiting for readiness may not provide the needed support.

Respect for children and the protection of childhood are central themes of the program and are demonstrated within each domain of development studied in the course. These are perhaps most clearly demonstrated as we refrain from hurrying children in the developmental domains. Again, intervention for special needs may be the exception.

We value childhood, and do not regard it as a time to prepare children for the future or next stage; but as a time to enjoy in and of itself. Children are not miniature adults, they are real people now.

**Cognitively** respect is shown as we support children's major developmental task of discovering the world around themselves through exploration, investigation, and problem solving; and we understand that each individual must construct conceptual understanding of the operations of the world for himself / herself.

We offer learning opportunities through which the child may experience both successes and challenges in an appropriately resourced, child-centered environment. We accomplish this through a rich, well considered and researched curriculum.

**Physically** respect is shown as we create child-sized environments, learning centers and a variety of experiences that allow large motor and small muscle movement and encourage children to actively engage the indoor and outdoor learning environments.

It is also shown through provision of healthy, nutritious foods and safe surroundings. Our habit of hunkering and conversing with children eye-to-eye is a physical manifestation of our deep respect for the child.

Based on the research regarding brain development in infants and young children, we recognize that movement and sensory interaction with the environment throughout the day is a critical need for young children and facilitates both physical and cognitive development. Therefore, curriculum ideas are strongly related to the processes of brain development and the consequent critical impact on the development of the whole person.

**Emotionally** respect is shown as we build trust with children by allowing them to choose and initiate action in and on the environment, and at the same time being present to provide opportunities to extend and challenge the child's interest and abilities.

We understand the need for children to feel lovable, capable, and worthwhile and use the skill of encouragement instead of praise to deliver those messages. We build children's security when they overtly see our partnership with, respect for, and inclusion of their parents or guardians in the

program.

**Socially** respect is shown through the use of positive guidance strategies, modeling of empathy/affirmation of feelings, and the provision of an environment that encourages social play and honors individual differences in the ability to socialize.

Learning centers and equipment are designed to encourage collaboration and cooperation as children work together; and adults practice patience with children who are just beginning to learn social skills and self-regulation. Adults carefully explain that we all play together at our school when children's words or actions indicate bias-based exclusion such as, "You can't play in the block area because you are a girl," or, "No boys allowed in the house."

Respect is also shown as multicultural and linguistic diversity are integrated across all disciplines within the curriculum and families are encouraged to share their culture and language within the classroom. Our program is an inclusive anti-bias program committed to promoting the acceptance and appreciation of human diversity. We welcome children and families of all racial, ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds and family compositions. We strive to reflect this respect for diversity in our educational programs and services, our policies and practices, and our interactions with families and the community.

**Mission:** Our Family Center provides young children with a nurturing, supportive environment that fosters their love of learning and their development as happy, healthy, responsible human beings who can achieve their fullest potential in society.

Guided by current research and sound educational practices from the fields of child development and family studies, we are committed to providing a resource for the people of Coos County that strengthens child, parent, and community well-being.

**Program Goals:**

1. To provide a model facility which promotes education, training, and support for children, families, staff, and students.
2. To view the family as the child's primary nurturer, educator and caretaker.
3. To work with families as a team and share expertise in the healthy development of the child.
4. To employ only qualified, trained educators knowledgeable in the field of child development, early childhood education and family studies.
5. To provide resources for children, families, staff, and the community.

6. To provide a model teacher training program which emphasizes excellence in education.
7. To work with partners and clients of the Newmark Center and Southwestern Oregon Community College to assist in providing needed support for parents to facilitate their self-sufficiency and independence.

### **Curriculum Philosophy**

Our goal is to create a relaxed and positive atmosphere that promotes a positive self-image, an opportunity for expression, and a feeling of responsibility and independence for each child. We provide opportunities for physical, emotional, social, and intellectual growth in planning our curriculum. Emphasis is on learning through play. Our center is set up with a variety of learning areas which stimulate curiosity, imagination, and exploration.

All children are individuals, and each child is unique. In planning our curriculum, we take these individual differences and needs into consideration. We also strive to provide an environment which fosters cooperation rather than competition among the children.

A significant characteristic of early childhood is the sensorial nature of children. This means that children learn best by experiencing through their senses. They are oriented to the here and now rather than to the past or to what lies ahead. Research has shown us that children learn best through direct, concrete experiences with people, objects and hands-on manipulation of materials. They also learn best from activities they have chosen themselves. It is important for children to choose their own activities because they:

1. Are more likely to be motivated;
2. Will most often choose activities which are stimulating and give them needed opportunities to practice; and
3. Can feel in control of their learning.

In planning our curriculum, much of the day is devoted to play, child-selected activities, hands-on experiences, and experiences involving the five senses (sensorial). Our curriculum is derived from the most current research in child development. "What works" for children, with consideration of long range goals, is our guiding foundation. Our program is a dynamic weaving of ideas from Montessori, Reggio Emilia, family centered, and "best practices" curriculum.

*A core value of our program related to professional and personal ethics is teacher credibility. Thus we represent the real world to children accurately and honestly; and we refrain from confusing children with our own adult fantasies, while encouraging them to imagine, create, control and dramatize their own. We define fantasy as that which cannot occur in the real world (i.e. people transforming into other things, animals being personified).*

## Application of Child Development Theory in Southwestern CE FS Program Practicum Courses

Early childhood educators apply theory from a variety of individuals studied in the Southwestern CE FS Program. In general, theorists agree that early childhood is a period of sensory exploration and discovery of the operations of the real world – physical and social. Below are summaries of some of the ideas presented by major theorists Piaget, Vygotsky, Montessori, and Erikson.

**Jean Piaget:** His core point is that children must construct concepts about the operations of the real world themselves through hands-on, personal experience (as opposed to being told about things). He believes:

- ✓ Curiosity drives learning and the adult role is to “make them wonder” and provide blocks of time and opportunity for repetition and symbolic play.
- ✓ Adults should present real problems to solve, nurture inquiry, and support the search for answers.

Piaget identifies ages 2 – 7 or 8 as the pre-operational stage of cognitive development and cites some limitations in children’s thinking as they progress through this state.

- ✓ Children are not yet capable of logic, so reasoning is based upon how things look to them (it is intuitive) and they are fooled by appearances (and think such things as the sun is following me).
- ✓ They have a maladjusted sense of cause and effect and have difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality. To the young child, everything they can see, whether in the room or in a dream or on a screen or other media, is *real*. They do not have the cognitive ability to view something as not real so they accept everything as real.
- ✓ They are unable to reverse thought, so their thinking is always moving in a forward direction. If, for instance, a story uses a flashback or dream sequence, the children’s thinking won’t usually follow and they will view the flashback as the next part of the story as it moves forward. This inability relates to the confusion between fantasy and reality. The ability to differentiate real from fantasy will come as they begin to reverse thought and attain logic, and the journey is progressive.
- ✓ They use and receive language literally so may not be able to follow metaphor such as, *the arms of the tree reached for me*.

Piaget’s answer to the limitations of children’s thought in the pre-operational stage of development is to give them plenty of hands-on exploration with the real world and to give them time to grow. He believed children’s cognitive development occurs through the natural timing of physical development (genetics) coupled with interactions within the environment (humans and physical environment). The Southwestern CE FS programs’s decision to present reality based curriculum to groups of children in educational settings is our own conclusion based on what we learn from Piaget – he did not suggest

this application in his writings. We believe ECE teachers should be credible individuals who “tell it like it is” and refrain from confusing reality when working with young children who are sorting out the operations of the real world. We don’t, however, ask families to apply this same practice since their story and media preferences are part of their own family culture.

**Lev Vygotsky:** Lev Vygotsky extends Piaget’s work and believes that social and cognitive development build on each other and work together; and that it takes interaction with teachers and peers for children to learn.

Zone of Proximal Development is one of his major concepts relating to children’s learning. The ZPD is the distance between the most difficult task a child can do alone and the most difficult task a child can do with help from an adult or a peer.

Scaffolding is the primary technique he suggests in order for adults to give the assistance needed for learning to move upward through the child’s ZPD. For a painter, a scaffold is used to help him reach what is out of reach as he paints. A teacher scaffolds for the same reason – to help children reach what is out of reach when they work alone. A teacher must carefully observe in order to prepare to scaffold (provide supporting questions or information) for a child. We must determine where he/she is in the learning process and where he/she is capable of going – a skill that takes experience, time, and commitment. Vygotsky suggested pairing children who can learn from each other, which is part of our intent in constructing small group experiences in the center. In fact, much of Vygotsky’s theory is applicable in our small group planning, although, it may also be applied as adults and peers interact with intent during free play.

**Maria Montessori:** Montessori’s theories are so ingrained in Early Childhood Education practice, that we frequently don’t give her credit for them, yet she deserves credit because they address the whole child and are critical for the learning and healthy development of young children. Her ideas include:

- ✓ Give children meaningful work.
- ✓ Create child centered (and child sized) environments.
- ✓ Provide real tools that work.
- ✓ Keep materials and equipment accessible to the children.
- ✓ Create beauty and order in the environment.
- ✓ Allow children to take responsibility and therefore to develop competence.
- ✓ Schedule large blocks of open-ended time for children to work.
- ✓ Observe the children and adjust the environment and curriculum, based on what you observe.

**Erik Erikson:** Erikson’s theory applies to the social and emotional development of children and identifies the critical tasks to be accomplished at each stage as children form personality strengths or weaknesses. While his theory extends through 8 stages of the human lifespan from birth to death, the first four stages apply to early childhood development. Strengths stated refer to the successful result of the developmental struggle concluded at that stage.

- ✓ Age 0 -1 year – Trust vs. Mistrust (strength developed is **hope**)
- ✓ Age 2 – 3 years – Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (strength developed is **willpower**)
- ✓ Age 4 - 5 years – Initiative vs. Guilt (strength developed is **purpose**)
- ✓ Age 6 – 12 years – Industry vs. Inferiority (strength developed is **competence**)

Early childhood educators support *trust* through attachment, credibility, and consistency. We support *autonomy* through giving simple choices (and not giving false choices), setting reasonable limits, and accepting children's swings between independence and dependence. We support *initiative* through encouraging independence, setting expectations that are in line with children's individual abilities, focusing curriculum on real things, providing active learning situations and focusing on process instead of product, and calling attention to children's capabilities as opposed to mistakes. We support *industry* as we allow children to choose projects they can achieve (or want to try to achieve) and use materials to create products they value.

#### Addressing Physical Development in Curriculum Planning

Identification of a developmental goal in any of the following would be sufficient to support curriculum planning: cephalo-caudal or proximal-distal patterns of development, large muscle, small muscle, gross motor, fine motor, perceptual motor, eye-hand coordination, sensory awareness, nutrition, health.

#### Reference used for summaries:

Mooney, Carol Garhart. 2000. *Theories of Childhood: An Introduction to Dewey, Montessori, Erikson, Piaget & Vygotsky*. St. Paul, MN: Merrill/Prentice Hall