

EDUCATION

Early Childhood Special Education: Learning Theories

Kathleen G. Winterman, Ph.D.

Mentor: Ginger McKenzie, Ph.D. (Education)

Course Description (EDSP 391/591)

Students will investigate and observe learning theory models as a foundation for early childhood intervention—understand development of infants and young children along with the ability to identify specific disabilities and describe implications for development and learning; using instructional practices based on knowledge of the child, family, community, and the curriculum; and support and facilitate family and child interactions as primary the context for learning and development.

Course Objectives

Knowledge and Skills	Assignment
Effects an exceptional condition(s) can have on an individual's life (CC3K1)	Observations, Course Lectures
Impact of learners' academic and social abilities, attitudes, interests, and values on instruction and career development (CC3K2)	Disability Presentation, Community Agency, IEP Meeting
Support and facilitate family and child interactions as primary contexts for learning and development (EC6S1)	Community Project, Parent Handbook, IEP Meeting
Recognize signs of child abuse and neglect in young children and follow reporting procedures (EC9S1)	Course Lectures, Observations
Organizations and publications relevant to the field of early childhood special education (EC9K1)	Journal Articles
Use instructional practices based on knowledge of the child, family, community and the curriculum (EC4S1)	Community Project, Parent Handbook
Variations in beliefs, traditions, and values across	

and within cultures and their effect on relationships among individuals with exceptional learning needs and their educational opportunities (CC3K3; CC3K4; CC3K5)	Parent Handbook, Community Project
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Course Assignments

1. **OBSERVATIONS** – You will observe 3 different settings/programs
 - a. one birth-2 early intervention center-based or home-based
 - b. one inclusionary 3-5 year old preschool program
 - c. one inclusionary 6-8 year old early childhood setting

You will submit a written report on each setting observation that evaluates and assesses the curriculum of each program. You must describe each setting, describe early childhood theory models employed, and how parents and/or other family members are involved. Describe one child with an identified disability – what are the outcomes/goals designed for that child and how are they being addressed? (Please see rubric describing specific for observations assignment.) Undergraduates observe in two settings.

2. **DISABILITY PRESENTATION AND HANDOUT**- Each student will choose and research a disability served in the public school system, i.e. Autism, Down Syndrome, Fragile X, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, etc. You will gather information on the characteristics and treatment of the disorder. You will present your findings to the class and provide each class member (and the instructor) with a handout. (Please presentation rubric.) Students will develop digital disability presentations. These presentations can be shared among students to develop a person portfolio of information about a variety of disabilities. Students can then keep this digital collection until they have a student they are supporting in the regular classroom. The videos can then be shared as a means of preplanning with the regular classroom teachers within the building for the inclusive student’s educational success.
3. **JOURNAL ARTICLE** - Please select a research or journal article describing the application of a theorist or learning theories in the early childhood classroom. This article must be chosen from original scholarly work in professional journals. The article must represent a research study. Write a 1-2 page paper summarizing the information in the article based upon the format provided. Please present your summary and reflections to the class. Please include a copy of the article with your paper to be turned in to the instructor. (Please reference the article format provided for more specific support.)
4. **COMMUNITY PROJECT** - You will develop an individualized project in which you can develop your skills and further examine one aspect of Early Childhood Services you would like to improve or gain more skills. You are encouraged to contact, visit and collect information from different community resources/agencies that serve families with young children with disabilities. This is your project --make it useful to you. An example of something you might be interested in is learning more about may be strategies to support children with Autism. You may attend some training offered by the Autism Society of Cincinnati and observe a teacher implementing those strategies. Think about what you know about best practices. Address what you have learned with respect to the theorist you most closely believe in. Bring information about the resource/agency (i.e., booklets,

flyers, pamphlets, etc.) to share with everyone in the class.

You will submit a written report about your visit. Include name of agency and contact person (include contact person's position/title). Tell what you learned and your reaction to this experience - not to exceed three typed pages for your report. You need to have the agency sign your time sheet for your portfolio file. (Please see rubric.)

5. **IEP/IFSP MEETING** - You are required to observe one I.E.P. meeting and one I.F.S.P. meeting. A written report describing the experience is required of each. This will include the where, what and how of the meeting itself and an interview with the teacher or person leading the meeting. Who are the people at the meeting and what role do they play and/or service do they provide? Include your reaction to your observation. Have your time sheet signed for your portfolio file. (Please see rubric defining exact details.)
6. **PARENT EDUCATION HANDBOOK** Please develop a section on learning of young children for your handbook. Please include the importance of the learning environment (discussing what is learned in each area: math games, writing development, literacy, science areas, etc.). Include a sample of a parent newsletter. Include how you will address parent education. Discuss how you will include parents in the classroom and how you will get parents to become actively involved with their child's education. Please remember to be sensitive to parents needs - consider working parents, guardians, and grandparents as caregivers. (Please see rubrics.)

This should be an interactive parent handbook that could be shared with students' parents to demonstrate best practice in Early Childhood Special Education. Students will develop power point presentations with video clips embedded within to demonstrate teaching strategies, what children learn in each center, and ways can become active members in their child's education. This would become a teaching tool that would be a useful for years with minor adjustments made to accommodate new theories and techniques.

Summary of results

As students of a Jesuit Institution, we discussed the meaning of living lives in service to others. The students in the course were able to provide examples of how they live the mission through their work as Early Childhood Intervention Specialists. Given the assignments listed above, students were asked to reflect on what social justice and advocacy for children with disabilities meant to them. Below are a few of their responses:

The writing probe:

- Address the various ways in which you provide social justice for students with disabilities. Reflect on the different types of advocacy you provide, instruction, and support to children, teachers, and parents.

Social Justice for Students with Disabilities

- What is "Social Justice"? Social Justice is generally thought of as a world which affords individuals and groups fair treatment and an impartial share of the benefits of society. Sometimes people don't think that they have a voice. So we have to speak for them as educators. We have to stand up for them when we know that they are right or when something needs to be changed. With the realization of a world where all members of a society regardless of background have basic human rights and equality (wikipedia,

2007). I know I chose the right field to Master in because I feel that everyone needs a chance to be successful in their lives.

- Providing social justice for all students is an important part of my responsibility as a teacher. When working with students with disabilities, I do this in a number of ways. I provide different types of advocacy, instruction and support to children, other teachers and parents. Social Justice helps us all. We need to put a focus on all students, but especially children with disabilities.
- Social justice is experienced by my students as they walk into the classroom environment which is inviting and is centered on the goal is to engage the students to learn. My students arrive each morning to an environment where the staff is familiar with each child's areas of concerns and their needs to assist them in becoming successful. Success can be viewed differently for each child depending on the child's needs and abilities. In the end, success is a word the children learn and apply as they experience learning. As most of the students' first teacher, it is my goal to begin laying the foundation for their education journey. The students create the classroom rules that promote success and safety to all of the students while receiving as little guidance from me as possible when creating these rules. The students obtain ownership to these rules as they become valuable to them to provide success to all of the learners in the environment. It is best to provide the guidance to the students and allow them to take ownership of the rules because they will be more meaningful to them. It is my belief that all children are capable of learning, and it is my responsibility to allow each student to experience knowledge as they participate in a variety of learning experiences. The expectations of each student are that they are active learners and together through experiences they will have opportunities to expand and apply their knowledge.
- A key component to provide social justice in my classroom is to allow the students to know what the expectations are for each child during each learning experience they encounter while in the classroom setting. These expectations must be communicated with all children at a level where they can process the information and apply it to the situation when they encounter it. These expectations are modeled by the preschool staff as the students are exposed to the specific situations. The children are also given ample exposure to these expectations and time to adjust to these expectations.
- Social justice is present in my classroom because it allows my students to become active learners in an environment that focuses on their needs, strengths and weaknesses. This practice of social justice allows all of my students including the children with disabilities opportunities to acquire, practice, and apply their knowledge in an environment that encourages success to all learners.
- Respect is one of the most important ways of social justice with children and their families. As educators we have to show and treat parents and their children with respect. I think sometimes parents are intimidated by the teacher and the education system, and teachers may get intimidated by the parents. We need to show respect to all children and parents. We don't know what the parent might be going through. A smile or a how are you doing will not hurt. We need to respect the family that has children with disabilities as well. When people know that they have someone to support them and confide in they know that they can trust and respect you.
- Communication is a very important part of providing social justice to students with disabilities. It is essential to have good communication between regular education

teachers, special education teachers, aides, related service personnel and other school staff when it comes to children but it is even more important when it comes to students with disabilities. It is also necessary to have good communication between school and home and school and private therapy. Knowing what is going on and communicating back and forth so everyone knows what is being worked on is very important toward the well being and educational needs of each child. It is also important to have at least monthly meetings with the special education team to discuss the children and other issues and topics dealing that surround the children and schooling environment.

- As a special education teacher there are many things that I can do to provide social justice for my and other students with disabilities. As a teacher my job is to make sure that the goals and objectives are being met on each child's IEP while they are learning in their educational setting. It is important to help the child in their learning process but also to help them feel successful as they are building their skills and working towards the goals on their IEP's and also goals that they are striving for themselves. I will communicate the progress on their goals and objectives to the parents at least four times a year but more often than that. I have an open communication policy and can always be contacted by email or phone if there are questions or concerns that the parents may have. If I have a question for the parent I may send a note home or call the parent. I believe it is very important to have a strong connection between home and school and to work as a whole team to help educated each child.

Advocacy

- I provide advocacy for students with disabilities by making necessary accommodations, adaptations, and providing appropriate intervention. I accommodate students with disabilities by adjusting my curriculum so that it meets the needs of the individual child. I use reading material that is at the reading level of the students I work with and is just challenging to them, not frustrating. I also adapt the environment so that I address the different learning styles of my students with disabilities. I model for students, specific directions and post examples and directions as I teach. Providing appropriate intervention advocates for students with disabilities by helping them to reach their fullest learning potential. To do this, I assess students' needs and tailor my lessons and activities accordingly. If a student is struggling with comprehension, we work on strategies to use during guided reading. If a student is having difficulty with fluency, we spend time working with words, study word parts, and practicing sight words. Students who have a hard time organizing their ideas are provided with graphic organizers to help them in that area.
- I also provide advocacy for students with disabilities in other areas. For students who have a hard time with social skills, I set clear goals and objectives to help them in that area. I also provide experiences that will encourage them socially. For students who have motor skill issues, I provide accommodations including scribing for them for assessments so that they are able to focus on doing their best work and showing what they know. I also provide students with extra time as needed, alternative assessments, one on one support, and help with reading as needed.
- I advocate for parents of students with disabilities as well. I do this by providing them with meaningful information to help them help their child. I meet with them in parent

teacher conferences to discuss where their child is and ways they could help their child to be successful in the classroom. I also let them know about valuable community resources and ways in which they can use them to best meet their child's needs. By advocating for students, accommodating my instruction and adapting the learning environment, and supporting parents, I am providing social justice for students with disabilities.

- As an advocate for my students and their parents it is important that I make sure that the children are being provided a free appropriate public education, designed to meet their unique needs, in their least restrictive environment. Parents should annually receive a copy of *Whose Idea Is It Anyway* but I can make sure that they know exactly what information is in the packet and understand the rights of their students with a disability and their rights as parents and what their child is entitled to in their education and placement. I can also help them to understand what the school district will provide as far as educational services to their child based on their needs and level of ability.
- Teaching parents and students to work and learn to find the best advice for their specific situations and become self-advocates is also important. With help and guidance they will learn what is legally mandated, what other resources are available, and they must successfully lobby for the services they need. There are hundreds of organizations, funds and laws that support services for students with disabilities. Sometimes for parents it seems that getting appropriate services almost never happens automatically but hopefully with the help of a teacher while also learning to be a good self-advocate they can get the resources, services and results that are the best for their child.
- As a teacher, and especially as a special education teacher, it will be my responsibility to be an advocate for social justice for my students, their parents and their teachers. I feel that learning more about the Jesuit and Ignatian traditions here at Xavier, particularly in this class, has better prepared me to be such an advocate.
- There are several ways I can be an advocate for my students. I believe that the primary way is to view my students as unique children first, and to focus on their specific disability second. My job is to make sure that my students are getting the best instruction that I can give them. I should challenge them and have high expectations for them, rather than try to make things too easy and have low or no expectations. I need to be an advocate for my students in IEP meetings and with administration and teachers to ensure that my students are provided with all of the services that they are entitled and that they are not just viewed as a test score or a member of a specific sub-group. I should focus not only on academics, but also on helping my students develop as individuals.
- The best way that I can be an advocate to my students' parents is to keep in constant communication with them. The parents should always be aware of their child's progress and any difficulties or problems that arise. They need to be provided with information about school and community resources that can help both them and their child. A very important way that I can be an advocate is to make sure that the parents are well aware of the rights that they and their child have. Before, during and after any IEP or other important meetings, I should make sure that the parents are well-informed about what will be taking place, and that they understand everything.
- To be an advocate for my students' teachers, I think that one of the most important things I can do is to help them better understand their students, their role with the students, and

my role with the students and special education in general. I should communicate with them every day about our students' progress, and about any areas that need assistance.

- In terms of advocacy, I feel that the primary focus should be on the student, followed by their parents and their teachers. However, it is important to remember that all three of these groups are important and should not be neglected. Being an advocate for parents and teachers is ultimately beneficial to the students themselves.
- The forms of advocacy which are exercised in the preschool environment are ones that will assist the students with reaching their goals as designated by their IEP. My first goal is to allow the IEP team to have a clear picture of the child's abilities and areas of deficits in the child's present level of performance in the IEP document. Without this, the IEP will develop unfocused on the child's needs and areas of concerns being addressed. It is my responsibility to 'speak' for the child and display their strengths and weaknesses in the child's present level of performance. At the preschool level, I always encourage my families to learn more about the laws and familiarize themselves with these laws to better assist their child in receiving services. We have offered several workshops for our families with the focus to expand the family's knowledge of the laws of the IEP process. These families work effectively with the school personnel understand that they are active participants in their child's learning process in the school setting