*Student Learning Objective I: Foundations of Child Development*

*Students will demonstrate knowledge of the theoretical and empirical foundations of the discipline.*

The study of Child Development is never complete. It is evolving with new discoveries and different studies daily. There is a strong foundation of theories and philosophies that have been read about and taught for decades that provide many basic principles concerning the development of a child. With knowledge of these theories a teacher or parent can use what they have learned with the children they work with or have. My understanding of Child Development has been off to a great start, but there is much more to learn and practice as I continue to grow in the field.

My study of Child Development began with learning about the different theories of child and human behavior. Jean Piaget constructed four stages of cognitive development which begin with sensory experience and continues the development to abstract ideas. Each stage explains how children play and think. I used to think that an infant was challenging the caregiver when she continually knocks over an object when the object is given back to her. I learned, instead, that she is simply interested in the push, fall, and difference of both each time it happens. This is an example of Piaget’s Sensorimotor Stage. Erik Erikson created a set of stages of the psychosocial development of people that occur throughout the lifespan. This theory provides a guideline of what a person is being challenged with at certain stages of her life. The way each basic personal conflict is resolved will have an underlying influence on the next part of life. Each person deals with his or her conflicts differently and knowing what stage they fit into will provide a good starting point to begin helping the individual through the experiences.

Observing children in classroom settings was another way I studied Child Development. I was told initially what different behaviors to look for, how to take notes of children, and how the behaviors reflect the emotions the children are feeling. Through that strong foundation of techniques I was able to pick out specific behaviors and use the Guides in Speech and Action to decide what was the best guidance method to use for each behavior. Before learning about the Guides in Speech and Action I would not have any high-quality ideas of performing discipline or direction for specific behaviors such as arguing, crying, or excitement. The guide that stood out to me that I could use daily with anyone I encounter is redirection. A child upset with a situation or misbehaving during an activity should be redirected to a new interest rather than being disciplined for his or her distress or behavior. I have observed that the child learns a lot of habits and words at home, and more often than not he or she will use these in the classroom. As a teacher it is his or her responsibility to notice the behavior, take the appropriate steps with it whether it is good or bad behavior, and talk to the parents about it. Parents seem to want to know how their child is doing and they will not know unless told at the end of each day or week.

I have learned about many different philosophies throughout my years studying Child Development. Children learn through doing, whether that be playing, talking, or discovering. Children should be provided an environment that is open and free to explore in order for the children to be in control at many points of the day rather than in full adult control. I have decided what to put out in a classroom during child free play as well as developed different curriculum to guide children in using their imagination with drawing and strengthening their skills with scissors. Educators and care givers are expected to provide children and their families with respect. Each decision a child makes should be treated with dignity and responded to in a way that fosters the child’s positive development. The respect I have seen shown and have shown myself in the classroom will be used in my future as I work with different families.

I want to continue to grow in learning about the Foundations of Child Development. I want to be more confident as a positive role model for the children I work with. In order to do so I need more time in settings with children. I also need to learn about different experiences and sharpen my knowledge of the theories of the stages that the children are working through. I also want to be a helpful team member to the group of caregivers that I work with. I want them to be able to rely on me undoubtedly. That too will take practice and more experiences in the Child Development field. I have a lot of room to grow and I plan to take the opportunities I am given and really try to make a difference for the people and children I work with.