*Students will demonstrate knowledge of the multiple environmental contexts in which children grow and develop, and will be able to analyze systems that support children’s well-being.*

Children come from many different backgrounds. This can include different cultures, social economic status (SES), or family status. With these many different backgrounds, children can be given an advantage or disadvantage at life that can help or hinder their development.

There are so many different cultures in California. I have worked with African American children, white, Mexican, and Asian children and they all desire the same things- love, appreciation, and attention. Many of these cultures differ in the collectivist or individualist cultures. For instance, many Asian cultures value collectivism. This results in the child being part of a group and supporting those around them. Many Caucasians are individualist cultures. This places value on getting ahead, competition, and having personalized attention. These different cultures deserve equal appreciation, even if they are different, from any care-takers. It is also extremely important for them to understand these differences because it may cause a child stress if they are forced to participate in the other cultures perspective. For instance, I have worked with a child with a collectivist family and he would cry whenever pushed to do something by himself in front of the class. It is not my place, or anyone else’s, to place judgment on another family’s culture.

SES is a huge determinant of how a child may develop. If a child is living at a low SES, he or she has risk factors such as low nutrition, having little contact with parents due to work, and being in school districts that have less support. These can have multiple effects on the children. Children can become sick due to lack of healthy foods, they can turn to drugs and alcohol because they are left home alone for most of their days, and their education can be poor. It is most important to support these children throughout their development because they do have so many risk factors. We can encourage programs such as the Boys and Girls club, or help the families by giving them resources for proper after-school programs to make sure children are not left home alone.

Working with children, it is sometimes difficult to see a different living situation from my own upbringing. For instance, I am a preschool aid and see four year olds in daycare from 7AM until 6PM daily. As a result, I see lack of attachment to family figures. There is no running towards the parent at the end of the day, it is as if they are just ready to be transferred to another place where they will be fed and put to sleep in order to return to school the next day. I also see children who have parents that are present most of the day, only sending their children to school for four or five hours. These children, similar to my own upbringing, have a secure attachment to their parents. This is characterized by being emotionally competent during the school day, not being “needy” or unresponsive, and greeting their parents with excitement. There are always different family dynamics, but through my experiences, I have been given the opportunity to see many different families in many different situations and the resulting behavior in their children.

The thing that I have learned most about different environmental contexts is that it does not define the resulting child. It does present risk factors that can contribute to a later behavioral problem; however, I have also noticed the resiliency in children. Some children I have watched over cry for hours once the parents have left.

I definitely want more experience with children that come from different backgrounds so I can be better prepared to work with different family backgrounds. I also want to experiment more with different programs so I can give these children the best outlets possible. Being born into different cultures, SES, and having different backgrounds should not define a child, and all educators and child care providers need to be supportive and understanding of these differences.

One document I chose was a final paper I wrote for a teaching prerequisite course. I learned so much about different backgrounds and how to be sensitive to each situation. I learned about the difference between treating them equally and to empower differences. This paper describes a history on the difficulty children go through trying to assimilate to the most powerful culture.

The next thing I chose was an evaluation on Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. I chose this piece of work because it shows the basic needs of children and the risk some children are at because of their SES or family status. If they are at a lower SES, they may be more concerned about shelter or food, which should only be a concern for adults because that would not be a developmentally appropriate concern for children.