Reflective Narrative I: Foundations of Child Development

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

Through my higher education experience, I have grown so much within the area of theoretical and empirical foundations. From the first time I took a child development class, until now I can say that my knowledge is greater than I would have ever imagined. In the beginning, I did not understand the importance of theoretical and empirical foundations. I assumed that child development was simple and straight to the point. From taking more classes in this discipline, I began to understand that it is more complex. I have displayed my knowledge through reflection papers, assignments, observations and internships. From this experience, several theories have shaped my understanding of human behavior.

The theories that have changed my understanding of human behavior are social learning theory, Erik Erikson’s psychosocial stages, and Jean Jacques’s philosophy of nature and learning. These theories combined have allowed me to better understand the development of the child as a whole. I have learned that human development is heavily embedded in social interactions which shape our behavior, actions, and our knowledge of the world. When comparing my knowledge of human development before my higher education, I would say I did not understand that so many factors in our lives shape who we are. Now that I have gained a better understanding of development, each interaction I have with someone improves significantly. I know for a fact that I am better able to assist the needs of others in a more constructive way. From learning these theories, it changed the way I view children and family behavior.

When I was granted the opportunity to observe in a preschool setting, I was able to document child and family behavior. Through observation and explanation, I have learned that there are other unforeseen circumstances that contribute to a child’s behavior in the classroom. For example, some children act out because they lack proper nutrition at home or the child has a cognitive disorder that makes it harder to learn and that can be frustrating. With my increased understanding gained from observation is an important aspect of my discipline and has influenced my future in this field.

My future goal is to work with at risk youth and adults. Erik Erikson’s theory of development will help guide my practice in Child Development because his theory details the eight essential psychological and social tasks that shape personality. For example, I noticed that my neighbor’s daughter was experiencing Identity vs. Role Confusion. At this point she had mixed feelings and ideas about what she wanted to do, she started dressing differently, and refusing to do things when her mother asked of her. Her mother wanted her go to college, and she told her mother she might not go. At this point, I had a conversation with her mother, explaining Erikson's stages of development. Once she had a better understanding of her daughter’s behavior, she began to understand her changes and accepted those changes. From this experience, I will continue my growth of Foundations of Child Development. I would like to continue to grow in this area of Foundations of Child Development by participating in research. I would like to participate in longitudinal research study that tracks the development of child development though the theory of Erik Erikson psychosocial stages. This would be a great experience to actually apply my knowledge and share it with other people in my field.

In a class called *Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum for Children: Theory to Practice*, I completed an assignment titled, “Theory, Practice, and Philosophy”. From this assignment, I am now able to reflect upon different theories and understand the importance using philosophies in different settings. I realized how important it was to practice different approaches in the classroom because each child is unique. Now when in a classroom, I am able to learn the philosophy of the classroom through my observational experiences, and have been able to identify issues, improvements, and learning styles that best suit the needs of the children.

My next class called *Children’s Gender and Sexuality Development*, involved learning about social learning theory through an activity titled, “Psychological and Cognitive Influences”. From this activity, I learned that Social learning theory is “the basis for gender-role socialization, according to Helgeson (p. 148). Gender socialization plays a significant role in a person’s everyday life. Although I identify myself as a female, I was able to do things that were rough and boyish while growing up. Although I am accepting of adapting both gender roles, all people are not because every family has different gender-role beliefs which impact our socialization. This activity really brings home the meaning of “Never judge a book by its cover” because often times we judge people based on what we see when we know little about them. These assignments have taught me how important it is to be inclusive and open-minded toward everyone.