Reflective Narrative SLO III: Developmental Context

*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.*

My knowledge of the multiple environmental contexts in which children grow and develop comes from the understanding of Urie Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory. This theory, which defines the complex layers of the environment, recognizes the effect each layer has on a child’s development. Through extensive teaching of this model in my higher education courses, and also from observations and hands-on experiences, I am able to recognize that changes or conflict in one system have a ripple effect on the other layers. Each layer is interconnected, so when studying a child’s development, it is important to look not only at the child and his/ her immediate environment, but also the interactions of the larger environments, such as school, the media, culture, and laws.

Through an Observation Techniques course I took at California State University, Chico, I learned that the way in which a child develops, responds, and behaves is multifaceted. There is a connection between his or her social class, parents, extended family, peers, the child care program he/she attends, culture, community, and society. All of these aspects influence the way in which the child develops and grows. There is not one criterion that will determine the way in which the child will develop, so when considering how children grow, it is important to understand that a child’s development is multifaceted. For an individual who does not have a background in child development or professional experience working with children, it is easy to be misinformed and think that children are only affected by the layers with which the child has direct contact, such as his/her parents. However, as I am a college-educated adult with a background in child development, I am able to recognize how the different environments, both directly and indirectly, affect a child. For example, as a result of my professional work with children in a childcare setting, I am able to recognize how the relationship between the child’s parents and teacher affects the child’s learning. This has an impact because if teachers are not supportive of the parent’s choices at home, and visa-versa, the child is getting mixed signals rather than appropriate and consistent support from both parties. I have personal experience of this from my work at a preschool. A parent once expressed her concern to me that her daughter was not sleeping at night because she thought she was taking too long of naps at school so she requested that her daughter be woken up from nap at a designated time. I professionally followed this request and as a result, the child was able to fall asleep at night. This experience assured me that the interconnective workings of the layers, in this case the parent and the teacher, influence and affect a child’s growth and development.

Of everything I have learned regarding the multiple environmental contexts of a child’s development, the most interesting thing to me is the interdependence of the layers. For example, someone uneducated in the development of children may not recognize the influence of a parent’s work on the child. The reality is that the parent’s work is the source of family income, and therefore resources, so the child will feel either the positive or negative forces involved with the interaction between the parent and his or her workplace.

Being a life-long learner, I will continue to observe, recognize, and evaluate the many layers that are involved in every child’s life and ultimately determines the way in which the child grows and develops. I will continue to ask appropriate questions about the child in order to get a better understanding of the layers that impact the child’s life. In doing so, I will be able to recognize the ways in which I can act to support the healthy development of the child.

Though I have a clear understanding of the environmental layers, I struggle to comprehend how aspects of the macrosystem, such as laws, fail to be recognized by those in power. For example, if there is not a law that prohibits the smoking of cigarettes in the presence of minors (e.g. in family homes), the child’s health will not only be affected, but in turn also the child’s learning and development will also be affected because of the interconnectedness of the environmental layers. It seems like an easy and obvious fix; amend laws and children’s development will improve. Unfortunately though, that is easier said than done. However, as I am an advocate for children, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of the relationships of all of the environmental layers in a child’s life.

I participated in a parent teacher conference as part of my Child Development Practicum course at a higher level institution. During this conference, I learned the background of a specific child. Additionally, I learned of the mother’s schedule and future plans that would in turn affect her child. This conference validated my knowledge of the connections between the environmental layers, which in turn affects the developmental growth of the child. I was able to take the given information and apply it to the environmental layers to determine how the alterations in this child’s life could have either a positive or negative outcome.

The Observation Techniques course I took at California State University, Chico allowed for me to observe a specific child and write a summary on the child’s development and growth. Although I made no direct contact with this child, I was able to learn the child’s background, home routines, family relationships, and peer relationships from observations and parent interactions with the child. Knowing and understanding all of these aspects of the child’s life helped me to identify the environmental contexts the child came from and in turn helped me to determine how a teacher would be able to support the child’s development and well-being.