SLO 3: 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.*

The environment a child grows up in has a tremendous influence on every aspect of the individual’s development. Environment plays a critical role during development when it comes to cognitive abilities, physical health, and social/emotional well-being, where each person may interpret the environment differently. What most people do not recognize when discussing the topic of a healthy environment for a child, is that an environment is more than just the child’s home or the child’s classroom; an environment is comprised of many other influential factors including: the people who are within it and the community surrounding it. People come from different backgrounds with diverse environments that help shape them in later adulthood.

Experiences I’ve had that facilitated my growth and understanding of the relevance of a child’s environment is my own childhood. When I was growing up with my younger brother who is diagnosed with autism, my environment at home with him was very different when compared to our individual environments at school. At home, my parent did their best to try and set up activities that the both of us could engage in; however, my brother struggled with interacting effectively in these activities. Also, my brother’s behavior was extremely negative and aggressive, while at home with my parents, which made it even more challenging. When comparing our home environment to our school environment, my brother and I were placed in different classrooms at the preschool. This is when it became clear that we both required specific individual resources, and finally, my brother was able to succeed within the classroom environment.

This shows how my brother’s school environment was very beneficial towards his individual development. My parents were able to learn a great deal of information and training from his teachers in order to replicate a similar environment at home; however, it was still very difficult for my parents and my brother in our home environment. I find this example exceptionally important because it presents evidence on how every child has their own unique learning styles and not every environment is appropriate for a healthy development, which is the one thing I learned the most growing up with a brother with special needs.

Of all the things I have learned in this area, what fascinates me the most are how specific changes to a child’s environment could greatly benefit them towards a healthy development or have the complete opposite effect and can influence their development negatively. For example, the impact of divorce on a child’s development could have a considerable effect because of the change in the environment. Depending on how the parents maintain their relationship there are many new changes that could arise during and after a divorce is taken place including: separate houses, unfamiliar people, financial situations, extended family. These are only a few examples that show a change in the environment toward a child experiencing divorce.

I thought that this example of divorce ties into Bronfenbrenner’ s Ecological Theory Model. Bronfenbrenner explains how there are five systems within an individual’s environment that have different but major impacts on development. The first system is the microsystem, which is the relationship between the child and the direct environment including family, friends, and school. The second system is the mesosystem, which is the relationship of the interconnections between the microsystems, for example, the relationship of the parent and teacher of the child. The third system is the exosystem, which involves links between social settings that the child does not have any active role. For example, if the parents experience a divorce, which then leads to a change in their work, this can influence the child’s interactions with the parent in their home environment. The fourth system is the macrosystem, which describes the child’s culture, values, or socioeconomic status that influence their environment. Lastly, the fifth system is the chronosystem, which patterns of environmental events or transitions. For example, after a divorce, the transition for the children and family might be harder within the first year, but by the second year, the family relationship may become more stable again.

I recognize that there are multiple factors that influence a child’s environment and sometimes the factors may not be positive impacts. As a life learner, I will do my best to provide, my own children or children I may work with in my future career, the appropriate resources necessary for a positive and constructive environment to reach a healthy development. What I have appreciated about being a Child Development major, is how we have been taught the distinction of every type of environment and how to work with such diverse situations. I think it is important to emphasize that every child comes from a different background and as professionals we need to be prepared to work successfully and applicably.

One assignment I completed in my Child Development Children in a Changing World course, was to take a “cultural plunge,” into a community that I am not familiar with and write about my experience. I chose to write my paper on the Chico homeless community and interviewed a local man who chooses to be homeless and expressed to me his perspective of his environment. I thought this assignment was a perfect example of the environment this man comes from, which are the streets of Chico. Typically, everyone who is not apart of the homeless community or environment stereotype those people. The man I interviewed explained how he enjoys the freedom of his environment and chooses this way of life because of his own personal views on the government. As an individual he views his environment as beneficial being a homeless man on the street, and that is all that matters.

Another assignment I completed in my Child Development Observational Techniques class, was the departure of my target child’s parent and how his behavior changed the second he walked into his classroom environment. His mother was discussing with one of the teachers about how at home he is very loud and talkative, but is very shy at school and takes him awhile to warm up to others. This shows how the environment can affect children differently because of who they are as an individual. It is important that the teachers know specific information like that from the parents in order to provide the appropriate resources and care to the child.