Student Learning Outcome I: Foundations of Child Development

*Students will demonstrate knowledge of the theoretical*

*and empirical foundations of the discipline.*

My understanding of the foundations of discipline grew profoundly through higher education. The field of child development is vast and much more valuable than people realize. Learning about children and understanding the importance of their continued development is an important aspect behind the foundations of child development. In fact, it was not until I learned the basic theories of child development, the process of making unbiased observations, and the importance of assessment, that I was able to begin developing as a professional in the field.

In my child development courses, I learned various important theories about children that have changed the way I understand and approach behavior. One of those theories was Erik Erikson’s theory on psychosocial development, which describes various stages of internal conflict children go through as they develop into adulthood. Erikson’s stages helped me understand that children’s behavior can be affected by the current internal struggle they happen to be going through at the moment and how I, as a childcare professional, could best support them during that process. For example, according to Erikson’s theory children ages 2 to 3 would most likely be going through a stage known as “autonomy versus shame and doubt”, in which they learn to develop independence over insecurity. My understanding of important theories such as this one helps to determine my own role in children’s development and provide them with the opportunities to make, and learn, from their own independent decisions in real world settings.

Along with learning about children’s behavior, the theories I learned in Child Development also provided me with insight into the family’s behavior. John Bowlby’s theory of attachment mentioned that some of the most important relationships a child can have are those developed early on in life. Furthermore, everything they learn from those relationships will influence and prepare them for all future social relationships. This theory helped me understand the importance of forming bonds with children to support their emotional development, as well as respect the role of the family in a child’s life as one of their first and most influential educators. I often apply this theory of attachment along with Albert Bandura’s social learning theory, which suggests that children learn behaviors by observing other people. Given the importance of family and the bonds children form with early childhood educators, it is likely that a child’s earliest lessons in behavior will come from what they observe at home and in the classroom. So I strive to reflect the kind of behavior I would like children to learn from me.

Everything I have learned in my child development courses thus far has helped me understand and value children and families. The theories I have learned helped me understand and predict their behavior in order to address it appropriately. I often draw upon them to guide my actions with children and families. For example, the theory of Behaviorism has taught me the benefits of using positive reinforcement, while the social learning theory makes me aware of the behavior I am portraying to others. My observational skills have significantly improved and I am now more aware of making them as objective as possible. Observations can be a valuable tool for attaining information, and I find myself doing it more often as children demonstrate their abilities during play. Learning the foundations of child development has also increased my confidence in the benefits of assessment. I realized that tests are only helpful as long as the information gathered from them is used to benefit the child’s development in the long run. There is so much to learn about the foundations of child development, and I would like to continue to grow in that area through practice and observing others in order to become a better childcare professional, an important resource for families, and a supporter of children’s development as individuals.

An example of my growth in understanding the Foundations and the importance of discipline is reflected in a journal I wrote on April 21, 2015 during my time as an intern at the Child Development Lab at Chico State. In the journal, I mentioned an issue I had concerning a student in the preschool classroom and how I handled it. This child, who I will refer to as Blue, was known for having behavioral problems in the classroom due to not knowing how to express his emotions appropriately. The situation I described in the journal occurred in the bathroom as Blue was washing his hands before snack time. I approached Blue when I heard another child making him upset, and Blue decided in that moment to scream right next to my ear. Without thinking, I raised my voice and said, “Blue that is not an inside voice!” Immediately after I said it, I realized that shaming Blue for his behavior did absolutely nothing to teach him why his response was incorrect. In fact, given his past history with expressing emotions I should have realized that his vocal reaction was actually an improvement from his usual physical reactions. That situation taught me that the correct response to a situation is not always “black and white”. There is only so much I can learn from books and theories, but the best place to learn about child development is by applying what I learn in various real world situations.

A second example of my progress is from an assignment I completed as part of a discussion prompt. In the response, I described my interpretation of the idea that children learn through observation, which is a main point in the social learning theory we learned as part of the foundations of child development. I mentioned that as an early care provider for children, my behavior was undoubtedly going to be reflected by them. Therefore, it is important to present children with a good role model they can follow and learn to regulate their behavior from.