

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.

From Bolwby's attachment theory to Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, there are vast ways of viewing children's development in relation to others. In my higher education experience I have been introduced to a variety of theories that have influenced the ideas and practices within the child development field. Before being a child development major, I only knew to treat children in the same way that I had been treated as a child. I used my parents model of parenting to influence my interactions with children. After taking courses and learning that theories on children's development add to how one works with children, I became aware of what is developmentally appropriate and not. I learned that theories guide our practices with children, in the field of child development, research and theories are almost all meant to better how we work with children. This is because theories on what is developmentally appropriate can be incorporated into how one works with a child in order to improve the child's development.

I have also learned that there are many environmental contexts in which a child grows, before I used to believe that they were learning either at home or at school, but there are now theories that show the child is developing through multiple systems that they may not even have direct contact with. Because I wish to teach at the elementary school level, understanding the influences on the children I will be working with is key to helping them learn and develop. I have the background knowledge to understand that more than just home and school influence children and that there are many ways in which I can be developmentally appropriate when working with children. I have learned about resilience and can be a social support system for a child who is struggling, this is not something I knew that I could do before taking child development courses.

Not only have I had experiences within the classroom listening to lectures about developmentally appropriate practices and influences on children that impact their development, but I have also had experiences in child care settings in which I can put these learned theories into practice. One of the most beneficial experiences that I have had is my supervised internship experience working in a kindergarden at Citrus Avenue Elementary classroom. This class had many disadvantaged students who were impacted in their learning and development because of their home lives. As I volunteered in the classroom, I noticed many of the students had difficulties focusing and would ask the teacher about the individual students I was concerned about. It would be revealed that some were homeless, had divorced parents, one or both parents were in jail, or were being raised by grandparents. Having the knowledge about resiliency theory, attachment, and developmental context, allowed me to understand the implications of the student's home lives on their work in school. I was able to understand that it was not that they were bad students but because they were experiencing traumas in their home environment.

I have also gained experiences through my other supervised practicums. In one, I was able to study children in a preschool and based off of my observations, I asked a question and implemented developmentally appropriate curriculum into the classroom. Part of my curriculum implementation involved asking families to help reinforce prosocial behaviors at home. I did this because I have learned in my courses that family involvement is important in helping a child develop in a positive way.

As I continued through the child development major, I learned many surprising facts. Something that I knew was important before this major is that a child needs a good support system. What I did not realize and found most surprising is that the interactions between mother and child are the most powerful predictors of developmental outcome. I did not realize how important attachment is to a developing child and that mothers are very important to infants because of this. I also found it surprising that how a mother treats her infant creates a certain

type of attachment that a child will carry into the rest of their lives for relationships. I was not aware of how large of an impact attachments between a caregiver and an infant are for a child's development.

What I have struggled most with understanding the developmental context of children's development is which area to focus on as a teacher who notices a child does not have a strong support system. I am not sure what to do as a future teacher to do if a child were to show signs of not developing and growing properly because something within their environment is not allowing them to develop properly. Because school is a factor within a child's development, I understand that I can be force to help the child in his or her development. However, I do not know if as a teacher I can cross over to other boundaries and impact a child's home life so that they can develop in a positive way. For example, knowing a child is homeless, I am not sure if I would be able to do more than offer the parents of the child resources such a community homes so that the child has a safe place to sleep at night. I wonder if there are other ways in which I could positively impact a child's development as a teacher. Resources for future educators to utilize if they notice children who are not receiving developmentally appropriate practices outside of the school were not covered in courses that I have taken.

My career goal is to become an elementary school teacher. Because of this, it is important for me to understand the ecological systems that affect my future students' development. Because I have already had experience working with children from diverse backgrounds and have seen how their environments outside of school impact their work within school, I am aware of how important it is to understand their home lives. Teachers I have worked with utilize parent teacher conferences to understand the environmental contexts in which the students come from so that they know how to best work with the children. I plan to do the same thing so that I can create the most positive learning environment for each child. I understand that school is part of the environmental context that influences a child, so if I can

make school a positive place where they want to learn, I can help children develop in a positive way.

I am going to be getting my master's in education next year. By doing this, I will focus deeper on the environmental contexts that impact a child's development; specifically the school system. I will have an even deeper knowledge of the systems that impact a child's development by gaining my master's and I will learn how to better apply the theories to the classroom. I also plan on applying these theories within my classroom because I understand that it is important not to just learn about these theories but to also apply them to real life. I understand the crucial role a teacher plays in a child's development, so I plan on using developmentally appropriate activities to best help the children grow and develop. I also believe that knowledge held by one person is not beneficial so I plan on have conversations with my coworkers and parents of my classroom about what is developmentally appropriate for students. Having these conversations will not only allow for me to share what I know about developmentally appropriate practices, but also they can share their knowledge with me. I can then learn from them and increase my knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices. I can also attend teacher development trainings in which the ecological systems of a child are discussed. By doing all of these things, I can continue in my growth in understanding children's development.

