*Student Learning Objective: Programs for Children and Families*

Students will understand features of model programs for children and families as well as implement developmentally appropriate curriculum activities. Students will evaluate the impact and efficacy of these programs for children, families and communities.

My first response to reading this statement is that since beginning my higher education I have experienced a few different structures of programs. My first experience was in my lower division class work, observing a preschool classroom on my Junior College campus. The program was from age zero to five with three different classrooms; however, I mainly observed the preschool classroom. This program ran in conjecture with the Child Development program at the college. My next experience was in my upper division class work, when I volunteered at Chico Community Center. I volunteered every Friday afternoon, so I got to participate with the after school program, which had a wide age range from three to seven. The structure of this program was very loose and free flowing. There was mainly free play, with a small circle time in the middle of the time following snack. The next program I experienced was the Associated Student Child Laboratory on Chico State campus. I worked at the program for eight hours every week in the toddler classroom. My next experience was at Parent Infant Programs facilitating play groups for children with Autism, which I am currently doing. The structure of this program is very different from anything else I have experienced before because it is not like school, and serves a very different function then any other program I have experienced.

I have learned that there are varieties of different programs for children and families, and there is not a one fits all program. My understanding in this area has grown because now I know there are several different types of programs, and I have learned about a few of the main ones. My early division course work focused a lot on the different philosophy’s of schools for example child centered programs like Montessori schools and the Reggio Emilia approach.

At my junior college I started developing theoretically curriculum for children based off my observations, and then in my upper division class work I started to actually implement curriculum. My practicum experience really helped to facilitate my growth in the area of implementing developmentally appropriate curriculum. I had made attempts to implement curriculum before; however they had failed mainly due to my lack of relationships with the children, knowing where they were at and what they liked, lack of experience, and lack of guidance. In my practicum experience I implemented using American Sign Language into the curriculum of the toddler classroom. I chose these signs, to help the children who did not have verbal language to communicate and to reinforce language with those children who did have verbal communication skills. I did this by teaching all the staff the three signs I chose, having them model the signs for the children, and then starting prompting the children in different ways. I supported this learning with pictures that were displayed in the classroom. I had support and guidance on how to do it best, and it happened over a period of about two months which was helpful because I was able to adjust along the way when different things worked and did not work.

I have learned most how to design and implement curriculum for the toddler age group. What has surprised me most learning about curriculum and implementing curriculum is that you never know the reaction you’re going to get out of the children, and how they can surprise you. Activities that you think the children will like could turn out to be a disaster and vise-verse; this was a big surprise to me and a good lesson to learn that that is okay.