**Theory-Based Problems in Early Childhood Education**

***The Development of Children’s Moral Judgment***

**CTEC 7270(6) – 3 credit hours**

**Auburn University – Fall 2016**

**Instructor:** Dr. Sean Durham, Assistant Professor, Curriculum and Teaching

**Office Location:** 5012 Haley Center  
**Office Hours:** Tuesdays, 1:30 pm – 3:30 and Wednesdays 3 pm – 5 pm; by appointment

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**Course Description:**

In-depth exploration of a problem related to the thought, writings, and research that form the theoretical foundations of constructivist approaches to early childhood education.

With each iteration of this course, a distinct “problem” in the field of early childhood education is explored from a theoretical basis with the goal being the generation of applications to practice that advances the field of teaching and the well being of human communities. Themes have included: mind and causality, gender and cognition, literacy development before schooling. This course will focus upon *the development of moral judgment.*

As we delve into the theoretical supports for the current understanding of how moral judgment comes to be, students are invited to identify problems related to this theme that they have encountered in their experience and propose strategies and identify resources, i.e. research and other literature that will allow them to analyze the problem from a theoretical perspective and generate strategies to support holistic development that addresses the problem in the educational realm.

**Course Objectives:**

1) Examine the contributions of theorists to understanding children’s moral thinking, the role of moral dilemmas, and moral development.

2) Compare and contrast theoretical perspectives, i.e., socio-historical theory of Vygotsky, constructivist theory of Piaget, and others such as Kolhberg. Identify implications of current critiques and hypotheses related to moral development.

3) Identify the tasks, observations, and questions used by theorists and researchers to examine social/historical constructivist theory of thought. How have humans come to define morality and quantify its existence within societies?

4) Explore relationships between thought, language, and interpersonal relationships suggested by theories and research by recording observations of children. How we understand the supports and barriers to moral development in young children?

5) Identify theoretical and research questions stemming from the works of researchers on

moral development, moral judgment, social choices that may yet be unanswered and are

appropriate problems for future research.

6) Draw on theoretical perspectives and research to discuss implications for instruction and educational practices in early childhood and throughout schooling.

**Texts:**

DeVries, R., & Zan, B. (2012). *Moral classrooms, moral children: Creating a constructivist atmosphere in early education*, 2nd ed. New York: Teachers College Press.

Gartrell, D. (2012). *Education for a civil society: How guidance teaches children democratic life skills*. Washington, DC: NAEYC

Piaget, J. (1965). *The moral judgment of the child*. New York: The Free Press.

Readings from:

Nucci, L. P., & Varvaez, D. (Eds.). (2008). Handbook of moral and character education.

New York: Routlege.

There will also be additional readings on Canvas. I recommend you make copies of these

supplementary readings for annotation, study, and reference.

Note: Check Canvas regularly for additional readings

**Course Content:** To be discussed in class and identified through collaboration among participants in the course. The instructor will provide a schedule of discussion and readings following discussion about students’ interests surrounding the general theme of moral development.

**Course Requirements/Evaluation:**

1. All class members are responsible for all readings and should be prepared to discuss the material on the day each chapter is due. Often, you will be asked to use a method of data collection modeled in the literature to explore dimensions of a child’s experience within the topic of study and provide 3-5 carefully thought out discussion questions to propose to the class. You will need to turn in possible answers or considerations for discussion questions that include bulleted notes of reflections, posited answers, and/or references to readings
2. Write an approximately 15-page paper (double-space, 12 point font, not including references) on a topic of your choice and approved by Dr. Durham. Example topics include: moral development and conflict resolution; juvenile delinquency and moral judgment; peer influence on moral judgment; gangs and early childhood education; rejection, bullying, childhood suicide; moral dilemmas, peer interaction & cognitive disequilibrium, school climate; etc.
3. A third artifact of your individual understanding and application of course content will be determined through interaction with the instructor and course colleagues. TBD

We will discuss your interests in topics for research. Your topic should be decided no later than September 15. References required: at least 20 – 10 articles (empirical articles from peer-reviewed journals), additional references may be review articles, or book chapters; only 2 may be conference presentations or proceedings). 3-5 popular press references may be included. Paper must be written in APA style, including a title page, headings, and references. Each reference listed in the references must also be cited in the paper.