**A Working Theory for the Constructivist Educator**

**CTEC 3200**

**Auburn University**

**Summer 2017**

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**Course Description:**

Constructivist theory and applications to practice for pre-service teachers preparing to teach at the early childhood level (birth – 8).

**Course Objectives:**

The student will:

1. Gain an initial understanding of the early childhood profession, its history, core dimensions, and standards
2. Examine the integrated nature of early childhood theory, content, and practice
3. Develop skills for observing young children from multiple perspectives
4. Begin to build a personal knowledge of constructivist theory as a means for understanding principles of learning and how learning takes place, especially during the early years
5. Articulate key components of high quality early childhood educational programs and demonstrate understanding of linkages between early childhood theory and practice
6. Demonstrate an initial understanding of the structure of natural learning as a basis for instruction and construct schemes for identifying primary realms of knowledge
7. Begin to apply realms of knowledge to specific content areas
8. Demonstrate an initial understanding of how autonomy and social interaction provides methods of motivating children to learn including interests and everyday experiences, setting realistic goals and fostering self-esteem
9. Demonstrate an initial understanding of techniques and instruments for observing, recording and assessing behavior, development and learning

**Texts:**

Branscombe, N. A., Burcham, J. G., Castle, K., Surbeck, E., Dorsey, A. G. & Taylor, J. B. (2014). *Early childhood curriculum: A constructivist perspective* (2nd Ed.). New York: Routledge.

Burns, M.S., Johnson, R.T., & Assaf, M.M. (2012). *Preschool education in today’s world: Teaching children with diverse backgrounds and abilities*. Baltimore: Brookes.

Copple, C., & Bredekamp, S. (Eds.). (2009). *Developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs serving children from birth through age 8*. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

Halpenny, A. M., & Pettersen, J. (2014). *Introducing Piaget: A guide for practitioners and students in early years education.* New York: Routledge.

Harms, T., Clifford, R.M., & Cryer, D. (2015). *Early childhood environment rating scale: Third edition*. New York: Teachers College Press.

*Additional readings will be supplied by the instructor.*

**Course Content:**

This course is designed for pre-service teachers preparing to teach at the preschool and primary school level. Students build knowledge of the field of early education, core components of early childhood education, and the relationships among constructivist and other theories and teaching practice.

The course content is designed to permit students to gain knowledge of principles of learning and how learning takes place during the critical early years; techniques and instruments for observing, recording, and assessing behavior, development, and learning; motivating children to learn, including interests and everyday experiences; and setting realistic goals. Because the program subscribes to the idea that the construction of knowledge is the construction of relationships, the “teaching” of academic content areas such as arithmetic, science, language arts, health, and social studies are discussed within the framework of “integrated curriculum.” Development is the focus and content learning is examined in the realm of the development of logico-mathematical, physical and social knowledge (the realms of knowledge). This is an initial course in the early childhood education licensure program. During this course, the learning experience is facilitated in two streams: First, students will encounter, consider, and remember vocabulary (terminology, jargon, principles, standards, etc.) relevant to professional work in early childhood education. Mastery of this vocabulary occurs as students read, re-read (as necessary), discuss, and prepare for examinations of the content learning offered in course readings and class lectures. Second, because we adhere to the theoretical understanding that the most meaningful learning takes place when individuals *construct* their own knowledge through experience, several course requirements involve projects outside of class in school and/or other situations with young children. Constructing one’s own understanding, especially if prior experiences doing so have been limited, can make one feel uneasy. Piaget and subsequent theorists describe a process of disequilibrium, or cognitive conflict that is a valuable process of joining our new experiences with old ways of thinking. This is expected and welcomed! The hands-on projects designed below are designed to help you understand early childhood education concepts in new, personalized, and exciting ways.

**Course Requirements:**

***Observations in early childhood settings*** – Students are required to complete observations 1 hour per week in early childhood settings that the program has arranged. These observations provide opportunities to observe developmental characteristics of young children and distinct features of early learning environments. Many of the required assignments for the course will be based upon the opportunity to observe in these settings. More details will be provided in class.

***Formal Observation*** (15 points) – The focus of this assignment is the development of active, objective observational skills and the ability to use these skills to get to know children and their learning potential. The observation will be of a child in an early education setting. The instructor will provide information about the sites that have been chosen for the observation. For about an hour, you will focus upon the physical description, activities, language, and interactions of the child and *objectively* record what you observe using hand-written notes. This ***data***will be used to complete the assignment. Additional instructions will be provided in class. Following the observation, you will type your hand written notes and fill in any missing information. Following this completed “running record,” you will write an interpretation of what you observed in light of child development knowledge gained from course readings. Correct, relevant, and meaningful citations of class readings are essential to an appropriate professional interpretation of your observations. Finally, you will provide a one- page reflection of the observation in which you synthesize what you saw, what you think about what you saw, and insights that you may have received from your professional study of young children, including class readings. You will receive instructor’s feedback for each observation cycle (observation, interpretation, reflection). Note: APA format required. Use Owl Purdue as a source for formatting. See rubric as listed on Canvas.

***ECERS Assignment*** (15 points) – You will evaluate a preschool classroom based upon the standards and instructions provided in the Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS-R). This will involve spending approximately 2-3 hours in an early education setting. Training on this tool will be provided in class. Following your assessment, you will be required to write up a description of how you used the ECERS-R, the findings of the strengths and weaknesses of the environment, and an individualized set of recommendations for improving the classroom environment’s ECERS-R score. Additional instructions will be reviewed in class. Note: APA format required. Use Owl Purdue as a source for formatting. See rubric as listed on Canvas.

***Documentation and Assessment Project*** (10 points) – Based upon observation and the collection of assessment information, known as “documentation”, you will use objectives from a commercially prepared early childhood assessment system to create a snapshot of a child’s development and learning. Training on the use of the system will be provided in class. Along with the documentation of the child’s work and the scoring of each selection, you will provide a written justification for your evaluation. In addition, you will write about the child’s development/progress within the appropriate developmental area and suggest how the given assessment would inform the teacher’s planning for additional curriculum. Additional instructions will be provided and discussed in class.

***Piaget Chapter Modules*** (10 points)

Students will develop a summary from one chapter of an assigned text - *Introducing Piaget*. These should be created in electronic presentation format (PowerPoint, Prezi, etc.) and include videos, and other interactive formats. Canvas will be the portal for these and will include a discussion board. Note: APA format required. Use Owl Purdue as a source for formatting. See rubric as listed on Canvas.

***Article Reviews*** (5 points)

Instructor will provide articles on Canvas that represent current issues or philosophical perspectives from the field of early childhood education. Students will choose an article and use provided guidelines to produce a 2 page summary. Note: APA format required. Use Owl Purdue as a source for formatting. See rubric as listed on Canvas.

***Exams*** (20 points)

There will be two exams: mid-term and the final. These will cover course readings, class discussion, etc. Questions may be in a variety of formats: matching, multiple choice, true or false, essay, etc.

***Observation journal*** (5 points) – As you complete weekly observations in approved early childhood settings, you will maintain a journal of what you notice within the program, among children, and within the interactions between children and adults. You may also make note of curriculum and classroom management decisions. Your observational notes should conclude each day with a brief paragraph reflection upon what you observed with references to relevant course content. Students are encouraged to bring questions or problems observed during the observation up in class for further discussion and reflection. Students should purchase a bound journal that will contain all observational notes and reflections to be submitted at the end of the course for evaluation.

***Discussion Boards*** (20 points)

There will be discussion board assignments throughout the term. These will be graded for the merit of the contribution and/or responses to peers. Checking Canvas weekly will be critical for success.

**Grading:**

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| **A** | **90-100** |
| **B** | **80-89** |
| **C** | **70-79** |
| **F** | **69 and Below** |

**Class Policy Statements:**

*Electronic Devices:* Turn off cellular phones and other electronic devices (laptops, tablets) in class unless otherwise given permission by the instructor. Please focus upon listening and contributing to class discussion. You are welcome to bring and take handwritten notes at any time. All PowerPoints will be provided on Canvas. If you feel that an emergency contact is pending in a given situation, please give the C & T office number to anyone who may need to reach you during class hours (334.844.4434).

*Participation*: Students are expected to participate in all class discussions and participate in all exercises including educational observations in the field.

Class discussion will provide a safe environment to ask questions, disagree and stretch your understanding of ECE. A consistent practice of reading and reflection is expected and will assist the learner in acquiring the pedagogy deemed necessary for this demanding and yet, rewarding field.

*Absences*: Students are granted excused absences from class for the following reasons:  Illness of the student or serious illness of a member of the student’s immediate family, the death of a member of the student’s immediate family, trips for student organizations sponsored by an academic unit, trips for University classes, trips for participation in intercollegiate athletic events, subpoena for a court appearance, and religious holidays.  When feasible, the student must notify the instructor prior to the occurrence of any excused absences. If prior notification is not feasible then post notification should occur as soon as possible. Appropriate documentation for all excused absences is required.  Please see the Student Policy eHandbook for more information on excused absences.

*Make-up policy:* It is the student’s responsibility to contact the instructor if assignment deadlines are not met. A 5 point penalty will be assigned for any assignment turned in late. If an assignment is noted as less than 5 pts in value, it will not be accepted and/or graded. Students are responsible for initiating arrangements for missed work.

Arrangements to make up missed major examinations (e.g. hour exams, mid-term exams) due to properly authorized excused absences must be initiated by the student within one week from the end of the period of the excused absences.  Except in unusual circumstances, such as continued absence of the student or the advent of University holidays, a make-up exam will take place within two weeks from the time that the student initiates arrangements for it. Except in extraordinary circumstances, no make-up exams will be arranged during the last three days before the final exam period begins.  The format of the make-up exam will be specified by the instructor.

*Accommodations*: Students who need accommodations are asked to electronically submit their approved accommodations through AU Access and to arrange a meeting during office hours the first week of classes, or as soon as possible if accommodations are needed immediately. If you have a conflict with my office hours, an alternate time can be arranged. To set up this meeting, please contact me by e-mail. If you have not established accommodations through the Office of Accessibility, but need accommodations, make an appointment with the Office of Accessibility, 1228 Haley Center, 844-2096 (V/TT).

*Honesty Code*: All portions of the Auburn University student academic honesty code (Title XII) found in the Student Policy eHandbookwill apply to this class.  All academic honesty violations or alleged violations of the SGA Code of Laws will be reported to the Office of the Provost, which will then refer the case to the Academic Honesty Committee. The URL for the eHandbook is www.auburn.edu/studentpolicies.

*Professionalism*: As faculty, staff, and students interact in professional settings, they are expected to demonstrate professional behaviors as defined in the College’s conceptual framework. These professional commitments or dispositions are listed below:

* Engage in responsible and ethical professional practices
* Contribute to collaborative learning communities
* Demonstrate a commitment to diversity
* Model and nurture intellectual vitality

**Statement of Course Impact:**

This course is built upon a social constructivist theory of learning. This means each person in this course is responsible for using the necessary personal learning strategies that enable him or her to construct knowledge, integrate theories and experiences, and build competence as an observer and teacher of young children. Further, this theory implies a belief that knowledge is generally deepened through social interaction and active reflection. Therefore, this course is structured to provide a framework or skeletal structure for the personal and social exploration of theory, beliefs, values, knowledge, and action.

The course is designed to integrate readings, in-class and outside group discussions, reflective writing assignments, research, and field experiences in ECE. It is expected that each student will assume (try out) a professional identity while attempting to master the content of readings, reflections and any teaching responsibilities, and that this identity will deepen and “fit” better as the semester evolves. What each student learns in this course and how this knowledge will influence each person’s professional development is dependent on how fully each person participates in the discussions, reflections, activities, and assignments provided to facilitate personal learning.

As we learn and reflect together, it may become necessary to alter the course of our discussion and dimensions of the course content. Therefore, students should realize that while we will attempt to keep with our course schedule, modifications of readings and topics of discussions might occur.

As we attempt to create a learning environment indicative of what we value for young children, please greet the perspectives of others, occasions of change, and constructive feedback with openness and a spirit of mutual respect.

**Instructor’s Note:**

Communication is vital in this atmosphere and should be employed in a pro-active manner. As a future professional educator, you will need to check emails daily, monitor changes on Canvas several times weekly, and email/call/text with questions, notifications of absences, etc. Texts to the instructor are allowed but, please use this tool in a professional manner (ex. observing business hours for contacts, refraining from text shorthand, etc.)

Remind101 will be employed as an optional tool for course communication. Details will be given at first class. Emails and group texts of this nature should be monitored in case of last minute announcements (ex. site change for the day, materials needed, etc.).

This is a short semester and we will cover a large amount of ECE foundational content. Every effort should be made to attend each class in a timely and prepared manner.