

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Early Childhood Education program prepares students' for roles in various early learning and childcare settings (as well as related contexts) serving primarily infants, toddlers, and preschoolers.

## TENETS

The following six tenets frame the program's identity, core values, and student learning outcomes – child development, play-based learning, responsive teaching, reflection, honoring children, and professionalism.

It is our belief that these tenets work in conjunction with one another. They represent individual but complementary, interconnected principles. The program embeds and emphasizes the six tenets through learning pathways to ensure graduates possess the core understandings essential to good practice – encompassed in the tenets – as effective teachers and early childhood professionals.



## CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Central to the preparation of an Early Childhood Education graduate is the deep knowledge of child development and progressions<sup>ii</sup> in development and learning – including the academic disciplines<sup>iii</sup> (**NAEYC Standard 5**) – and the connectedness of development and teaching (**NAEYC Standard 1**). We stress that an effective teacher's perspective is a developmental one. This knowledge includes an understanding of the influences on child development, such as the dynamic interplay between biology and environment, individual differences in child development ([Collaborative for Understanding the Pedagogy of Infant/Toddler Development, CUPID](#)), as well as a child's development in the context of family, community, culture, and society ([Alabama Standards for Early Learning and Development, ASELD](#)).

## PLAY-BASED LEARNING

Consistent with the view that “play is the central teaching practice that facilitates young children’s development and learning” ([National Association for](#)

[the Education of Young Children, NAEYC](#)), we emphasize the importance of play as the primary mechanism through which young children learn. We stress the role of playful learning, which integrates evidence-based practice,<sup>iv</sup> through formal learning opportunities, such as course activities, as well as informal opportunities that develop teacher candidates' dispositions and skills in using play as a core teaching practice (**NAEYC Standard 4**) throughout the program.

## **RESPONSIVE TEACHING**

Our perspective of teaching proficiency as an early childhood professional involves an understanding of and responsiveness to children's developmental stages as well as their individual needs, assets and funds of knowledge,<sup>v</sup> learning contexts, and learning goals (**NAEYC Standard 1**) through developmentally effective teaching practices, curriculum planning, interactions, and learning environments (**NAEYC Standard 4**). To be appropriately responsive, candidates draw upon their repertoire of skills cultivated through learning opportunities in the program, such as skills in building and supporting relationships with children and families (CUPID), skills in teaching methods and approaches (**NAEYC Standard 4**), pedagogical content knowledge and methods (**NAEYC Standard 5**), assessment knowledge (**NAEYC Standard 3**), and skills to differentiate and individualize learning. Emphasis on teacher responsiveness also includes sensitivity to and collaboration with families as partners in children's early learning and development (**NAEYC Standard 2**).

## **REFLECTION**

We value the ability to use reflection as a tool to understand and interpret child behavior and to deeply consider one's own teaching practices as well as one's ideas about and relationships with children. Reflective opportunities are embedded in meaningful ways throughout the program to develop teacher candidates' abilities to engage in reflective and intentional practice (**NAEYC Standard 6**). Graduates gain skills in reflection to thoughtfully consider and examine one's practice and embody a mindset that utilizes inquiry and continual reflection as important teaching tools in one's repertoire of knowledge and skills.

## **HONORING CHILDREN**

Our efforts to develop skilled professionals involves preparing teachers who embrace and uplift children's autonomy as competent, capable learners (ASELD) and individuals with rights. In our graduates, we work to instill the value of honoring children in the work of the profession. We strive to advance the belief that young children are current citizens of the world (rather than future ones) with ideas and ways of being and thinking that are valid, worthy, and deserving of respect.

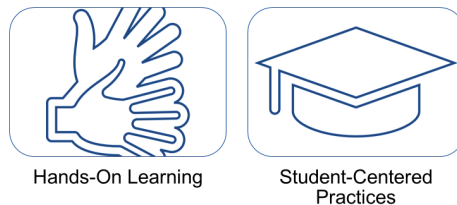
## **PROFESSIONALISM**

We work to prepare teachers who demonstrate professionalism as early childhood educators and are responsible stewards of children's learning and development. The professionalism tenet involves developing teachers who

recognize their important roles in children's lives – and ultimately human development – and make informed, ethical, and appropriate decisions as professionals (**NAEYC Standard 6**).

## INSTRUCTIONAL VALUES

Two foremost instructional values guide and direct teacher preparation in the Early Childhood Education program: hands-on learning and student-centered practices. The following values inform how students are prepared to be effective teachers and early childhood education professionals.



### HANDS-ON LEARNING

Our perspective on the teaching and learning process involves application of content through active learning opportunities, such as field experiences. The Early Childhood Education program educates students through rich and varied learning opportunities that connect principles of child development and learning with experiential learning and hands-on application. In the courses of the Early Childhood Education major, students move through a planned sequence of practicum experiences in early learning programs and classrooms that culminate in an internship experience. Some field experiences, such as those in HD 202 and HD 205, involve observation of children's development under the guidance of sensitive caregivers. Other courses, such as HD 321 and HD 322, involve practicing teaching skills. Courses and field experiences provide students with opportunities to apply knowledge and skills in each core tenet of the program, such as:

- understanding child development through focused observation;
- developing and implementing curriculum that promotes children's learning and development through play-based learning;
- practicing responsiveness in interactions with children to respond appropriately to infants, toddlers, and preschoolers as individuals and developing skills to partner with families;
- analyzing and reflecting on one's practice;
- exploring the ethos of honoring children in teaching philosophy and practice;
- and practicing professionalism.

### STUDENT-CENTERED PRACTICES

Aligned with our college's mission,<sup>vi</sup> we integrate the relevance of improving lives in how we support students through graduation. For example, we believe earning a degree affords meaningful improvements in the lives of our

students – eligibility for higher-earning positions in teaching and related fields, opportunities to advance one’s skillset through graduate study, upward movement toward accomplishing personal and professional goals, and others. The direct and tangible benefits of higher education to individuals and families behoove us to utilize student-centered practices to support teacher candidates through graduation.

Our goal is to prepare students to be effective teachers through learning opportunities and program structures that provide high-quality learning experiences as well as flexibility and opportunity for student autonomy. Because of this, the program prepares students through instructional strategies and supports which provide flexible models for delivering course content, maximize student learning, and respond to the unique characteristics and needs of the student population – distance learners, for example. We work to support students to accomplish their goals through excellent teaching and learning opportunities as well as advising and field experiences support, and connection to University resources.

Consistent with the University’s commitment to being a student-centered institution ([UA Strategic Plan, Vision](#)), we strive to prepare students for success by leveraging students’ assets and experiences, such as their professional and academic learning experiences in their *own* communities. We also work to build a community of learners that is not bound by place. By incorporating digital technologies and other innovative methods in teacher preparation – which enhance access, flexibility, and student-centeredness – we are able to reach more students with the goal of providing quality teachers in every community. We ultimately seek to improve the lives of our students who, in turn, are equipped to apply their knowledge to improve the lives of children, families, and communities as knowledgeable and effective early childhood professionals.

## **MISSION STATEMENT**

At the intersection of the six pillars, or tenets, of the program and the two guiding instructional values is the program mission.

*The mission of the Early Childhood Education Bachelor of Science (B.S.) program is to prepare competent, reflective, and caring early childhood education professionals with the knowledge and skills to impact a diverse population of young children and families using evidence-based, developmentally appropriate practices. The mission includes the philosophy that early childhood professionals are to create safe, nurturing, and culturally conscious learning environments that are affirmative and respectful of children’s and families’ identities, assets, and funds of knowledge, as well as children’s ability to co-construct knowledge.*

## GOALS FOR GRADUATES

The program mission informs goals for our students. More specifically, we aim to graduate teachers who:

- Demonstrate a deep knowledge of how children develop holistically across all dimensions of learning, recognize each child as a capable, competent person who wants to learn, and build on children's strengths.
- Understand that learning is a process that follows sequences of abilities and skills that build on each other and also varies from child-to-child.
- Demonstrate the skills to build consistent and responsive relationships with young children to help them learn to develop positive self-regulation and peer relations.
- Appreciate play as an optimal vehicle for helping young children mature in all of the domains of development.
- Facilitate young children's development and learning by challenging children through appropriate safe, nurturing, and enriching environments.
- Understand the factors that influence quality learning environments, programming, and teacher-child interactions.
- Use knowledge of child development to plan curriculum experiences that are developmentally appropriate and enriching.
- Plan curriculum experiences that integrate children's learning.
- Utilize teaching practices that foster development and learning for each child across all domains and subject areas and respond to children's individual developmental and learning needs.
- Understand the goals, benefits, and uses of assessment, including its use in development of appropriate goals, curriculum, and teaching strategies for young children.
- Know about and use observation, documentation, and other assessment tools and approaches, including the use of technology in documentation, assessment, and data collection.
- Understand the importance of building relationships with families and communities for children to succeed.
- Are respectful of all cultures and inclusive of and responsive to diversity.
- Demonstrate professionalism.
- Are able to understand and use research and evidence-based resources to inform practice.
- Are able to engage in intentional and reflective practice.
- Act with integrity and engage in ethical decision-making.
- Include evidence-based practice in decisions about early care and education and assessment.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>i</sup> *Students* and *teacher candidates* are used interchangeably throughout the framework.

<sup>ii</sup> *Developmental progression* refers to the typical sequences in which skills and concepts develop.

<sup>iii</sup> The *academic disciplines* include language and literacy; the arts; mathematics; social studies; science, technology, and engineering; and physical education.

<sup>iv</sup> *Evidence-based practice* in the field of early childhood is the process that pulls together the best available research, knowledge from professional experts, and data and input from children and their caregivers, to identify and provide services, evaluated and proven to achieve positive outcomes for children and families ([Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center](#)).

<sup>v</sup> *Funds of Knowledge* are the essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge that are embedded in the daily practices and routines of families (Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005, as cited in the [NAEYC DAP Position Statement](#)).

<sup>vi</sup> The [mission](#) of the College of Human Environmental Sciences is to provide strong undergraduate and graduate programs in the field of human environmental sciences. Further, the College strives to contribute to the generation of new knowledge in the field and to the application of this knowledge to improving the quality of life of individuals, families, and communities.