



Unit 1 – Current Issues in Early Childhood Education

Getting Ready for the Unit and Connecting to Experience

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Focus Statement

Students identify issues related to early childhood education that surface through everyday interactions and news and social media. They then reflect on how these issues influence them as current or future preschool teachers.

Curriculum Alignment Project (CAP) Student Learning Outcomes

The Curriculum Alignment Project's (CAP) lower division eight courses, CAP expansion courses, and student learning outcomes are mapped onto each instructional guide learning experience. See Appendix A for the specific student learning outcomes, objectives, and examples of course content and topics for the courses listed below.

- Child, Family, and Community
- Principles and Practices of Teaching Young Children
- Administration II: Personnel and Leadership in Early Childhood Education

Instructional Methodologies

- Brainstorming
- Categorizing
- Class discussion
- Lecture
- Personal reflection
- Reflective discussion

California Early Childhood Educator Competency Areas to Consider

These competency areas are from the California Department of Education, Early Education and Support Division's *California Early Childhood Educator Competencies*



(CDE 2011). The “Competency Areas to Consider” below are listed in this instructional guide as a preliminary exploration of how particular competency areas might be addressed through these learning experiences.

- Culture, Diversity, and Equity
- Relationships, Interactions, and Guidance
- Family and Community Engagement
- Leadership in Early Childhood Education
- Professionalism
- Administration and Supervision



Unit 1 – Current Issues in Early Childhood Education

Getting Ready for the Unit and Connecting to Experience

Getting Ready for the Unit

Chapter 1 of the *California Preschool Program Guidelines*, “Current Issues in Early Childhood Education,” presents information on issues related to quality early childhood and preschool education. The chapter is divided into two major sections. The first section includes issues and research relevant to early childhood education and settings throughout the United States; the second section focuses on the California perspective of these issues and some of the state’s current early childhood education initiatives.

Four general issues are addressed in the first section: “. . . benefits of high-quality **preschool programs**, societal benefits of investing in early childhood education (ECE) programs, research on brain development and its implications for supporting young children’s learning and development, and key features of preschool that have been shown to be important to young children’s school readiness and long-term achievement” (*California Preschool Program Guidelines*, p. 3).

The first section includes the following specific topics or subsections:

- Evidence from Research
 - *How is quality in preschool measured?*
- The Need for High-Quality Preschool Programs
- Early Childhood Investments and Societal Impacts
- Recent Research on Brain Development
 - *How are the brain and its related functions studied?*
- School Readiness

The second section’s focus on California includes these topics:

- The California Context
 - *Demographics*
 - *Dual Language Learners*
 - *Socioeconomic Status*



- *Children with Disabilities or Other Special Needs*
- Readiness Gap
- Desired Results for Children and Families
 - *Background of Desired Results for Children and Families*
- Overview of Preschool Learning Foundations

A list of references is at the end of the chapter.

Unit 1 of this instructional guide is designed to provide both an overview of the issues and research presented in the chapter and opportunities to explore each issue in more depth. There are six learning experiences in Unit 1 of this instructional guide—the first two introduce the key content of the chapter and the last four key topics provide more in-depth exploration of the chapter’s main topics. This first learning experience, “Getting Ready for the Unit and Connecting to Experience,” provides an opportunity for students to identify and think about how early childhood education issues, events, research, and initiatives at national, state, and local levels impact them in their everyday lives. Key Topic 1 has students doing a jigsaw reading of the chapter and identifying the main messages and research for each issue.

In Key Topic 2, students take a closer look at the benefits and elements of high-quality preschool programs by reviewing some of the research references for the chapter. Key Topic 3 focuses on the brain development research and its implications for practice and policy. Key Topic 4 asks students to consider what school readiness means for children, schools, families, and communities and how they would explain school readiness to families. Key Topic 5 concludes the unit with students finding data for their counties to compare with some of the demographic data presented in the chapter. Students then reflect on how they would use this information to ensure that their preschool programs can meet specific needs of children in their communities.

Motivator and Connection to Experience

Before You Start

This learning experience is intended to raise students’ awareness of how issues related to early childhood education and preschool programs impact their lives and roles as current or future preschool teachers. Students consider the kinds of information and messages they receive through different media and reflect on what may be important for them to do to increase their knowledge of key issues.

Depending on the students’ background, they may not be aware of the history of preschool programs in the United States and the universal preschool movement. It may be helpful for students if the instructor introduces this learning experience by discussing



the increased public awareness about early childhood education at the national, state, and local levels. Faculty may also choose to deliver a short lecture summarizing the general issues discussed in Chapter 1. Providing a few examples of current legislation, initiatives, research, or news items may also provide some context for students.

The “Keeping it going” segment references Urie Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems framework and suggests an adaptation of his model as a way for students to consider the varying influences of current issues on their lives. If students are not familiar with Bronfenbrenner’s framework, faculty may need to prepare a brief overview for them.

Students are asked to brainstorm and share lists of issues by writing each item on a sticky note and then posting it in an appropriate circle or column on a wall. If this method is used, materials needed include sticky notes approximately 3” x 3” in size, string or yarn to make the circles or columns, tape, and paper and marking pens to create the labels for the circles or columns.

Handout 1, “Circles of Influence,” is provided for students to individually list and categorize the issues that come to their attention and potentially impact their lives. An electronic version of this handout will be available when this instructional guide is online at <http://facultyinitiative.wested.org/> (accessed January 20, 2016).

In the “Another approach” segment of the active learning, students report on an issue related to early childhood education and preschool programs. Again depending on the students’ experience, faculty may provide a list of resources that students could review to locate an issue. For example, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has a newsletter that addresses a variety of topics and a listserv in which subscribers receive updates and alerts on national legislative and administrative issues related to early childhood education. NAEYC also hosts a blog for family members to share stories. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) provides several ways for subscribers to receive updates on different topics through various social media. Students can also go to the NIEER Web site’s page titled “Early Education in the News.” Web sites for these resources are listed in the “Information Delivery” section. Handout 2, “Early Childhood Education Resources,” is provided for students’ easy access to these resources.

Information Delivery

If students are not familiar with some of the history and national interest around early childhood education and Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems framework, faculty may provide brief lectures on both topics.

If the “Another approach” segment is used, the instructor may wish to provide some resources where students can locate issues. The following Web sites are for the resources mentioned in the “Before



You Start” box of this learning experience. Handout 2, “Early Childhood Education Resources,” is provided for students’ easy access to these resources.



Slide 2

- National Association for the Education of Young Children—newsletters and other updates about the organization
<http://www.naeyc.org/content/stay-connected> (accessed January 20, 2016)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children—legislative and administrative policy information
<http://www.naeyc.org/policy/action> (accessed January 20, 2016)
- National Association for the Education of Young Children—blog for families
<http://families.naeyc.org/blog> (accessed January 20, 2016)



Slide 3

- National Institute for Early Education Research—updates through different social media
<http://nieer.org/about-nieer/subscribe-nieer-content> (accessed January 20, 2016)
- National Institute for Early Education Research—Early Education in the News
<http://nieer.org/news-events/early-education-news> (accessed January 20, 2016)

Active Learning

Getting it started

Introduce this learning experience by briefly discussing the increased public awareness about early childhood education at the national, state, and local levels. Then ask students to think of any recent news articles; blog postings; listserv communications; conversations with family, friends, or colleagues; television or radio public service announcements; advertisements in any media; or class or community of practice group discussions about anything related to preschool programs and early childhood education. These could range from national policy or legislation to what a friend’s child did in preschool. Ask students to summarize each item or issue in a few words on a small sticky note.

Keeping it going

Next introduce or remind students of Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems framework with its circles of influence or impact on the child. Explain that the students will be adapting this model to consider how



Slides 4-5



issues related to early childhood education could be seen in their lives.

Review Handout 1, “Circles of Influence,” with students and point out the four circles that represent the student and student’s family in the center and the student’s community, state, and nation in the other three rings. Students are to then review the items from their sticky notes and write them into one of the four circles. For example, if a student received a listserv request to write to a state lawmaker or the governor to support legislation related to funding preschool programs, that item would be in the state level circle. If a friend asked for advice about choosing a child care program, that could be in the community circle. A class assignment to interview a preschool teacher about how the teacher creates a positive emotional climate could be in the center circle. As students work on their handouts, ask them to sort their sticky notes into the four categories if they have not already done so.

Taking it further

If possible, create four concentric circles on a wall using string or yarn and label each circle or ring the way it is done on the handout. Or create four columns on the wall or a whiteboard with the four category labels. Ask students to then place their sticky notes in the appropriate circle or under the appropriate column.

Putting it together

Because the print on the sticky notes will probably be difficult for students to read from a distance, ask for a volunteer to read each item in one circle or column. Have other volunteers read the items in the other three circles or columns

The following questions could then be used to discuss the content of the circles or columns:



Slides 6-7

- What do you notice about the circles or columns? What catches your attention?
- What is the most interesting circle or column? How does it compare with your own?

Online Options

Students could develop a list of issues out of class and post a completed handout for their classmates to review. If there is online-discussion capability for the course, the instructor could then facilitate a discussion of the students’ responses for each level or circle. The discussion could be based on modifications of the questions in the Putting it together section.



- Why is it important to be aware of community, state, and national early childhood education and preschool program issues and how they impact you as a student and/or preschool teacher?
- What is one thing you can do to increase your awareness of early childhood education and preschool program issues?

Another approach

Instead of students recalling events or issues through different media or interactions with others, students identify a local, state, or national level issue by reviewing different sources such as email listservs, blogs, discussion forums, Web sites, or other social media. They then share a brief summary of the issue that includes these points:



Slide 8

- Source
- Description of the issue
- Why it was selected
- How the issue impacts the student

Students then share their issues in a class discussion, grouping them by either topic or level. It may be interesting to group the issues both ways and note any similarities and differences. The discussion could also focus on these questions:



Slides 9-10

- Which issue resonates the most strongly with you?
- How easy or difficult was it for you to find an issue to report on?
- What did you learn from doing this search?
- Why is it important to be aware of community, state, and national early childhood education and preschool program issues and how they impact you as a student and/or preschool teacher?

Online Options

Students could post online their summaries and then review their classmates' summaries prior to an in-class discussion. Or if there is online-discussion capability, the instructor could facilitate a discussion of the similarities and differences in the summaries. The online discussion could also include the questions in the "Another approach" section.



- What is one thing you can do to increase your awareness of early childhood education and preschool program issues?

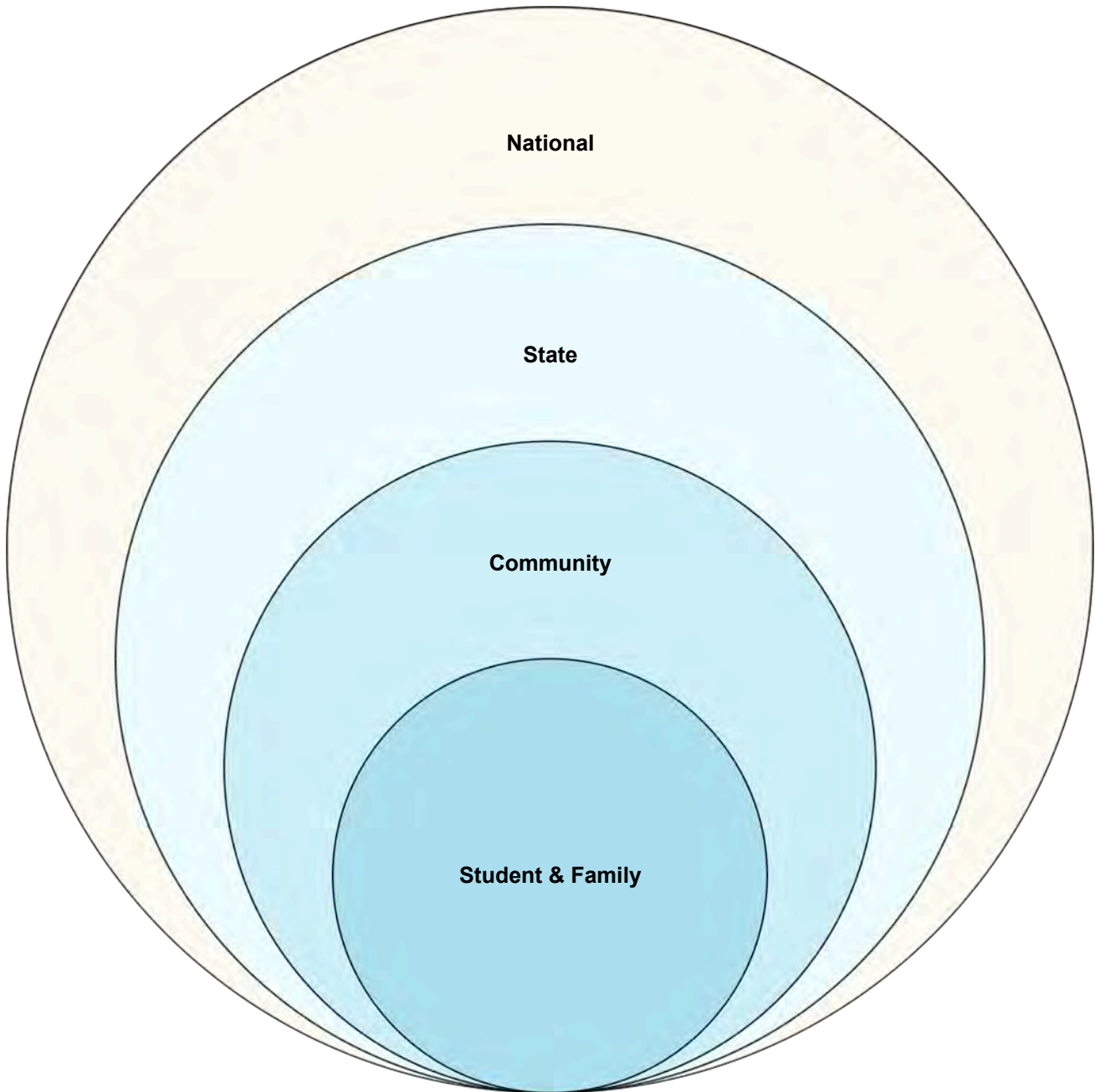
Reflection

The discussion questions in the “Putting it together” or “Another approach” section can be used for reflecting on this learning experience.



Circles of Influence

Fill in each circle with items related to early childhood education and preschool programs. These items can be from news articles, blog postings, conversations with others, public service announcements, advertisements, class assignments, and so forth.



Unit 1 : Current Issues in Early Childhood Education
Key Topic 1 – Overview and Rationale of the Chapter
Handout 1: Circles of Influence



Early Childhood Education Resources

National Association for the Education of Young Children

Newsletters and other updates about the organization

<http://www.naeyc.org/content/stay-connected> (accessed January 20, 2016)

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National Association for the Education of Young Children

Legislative and administrative policy information

<http://www.naeyc.org/policy/action> (accessed January 20, 2016)



National Association for the Education of Young Children

Blog for families

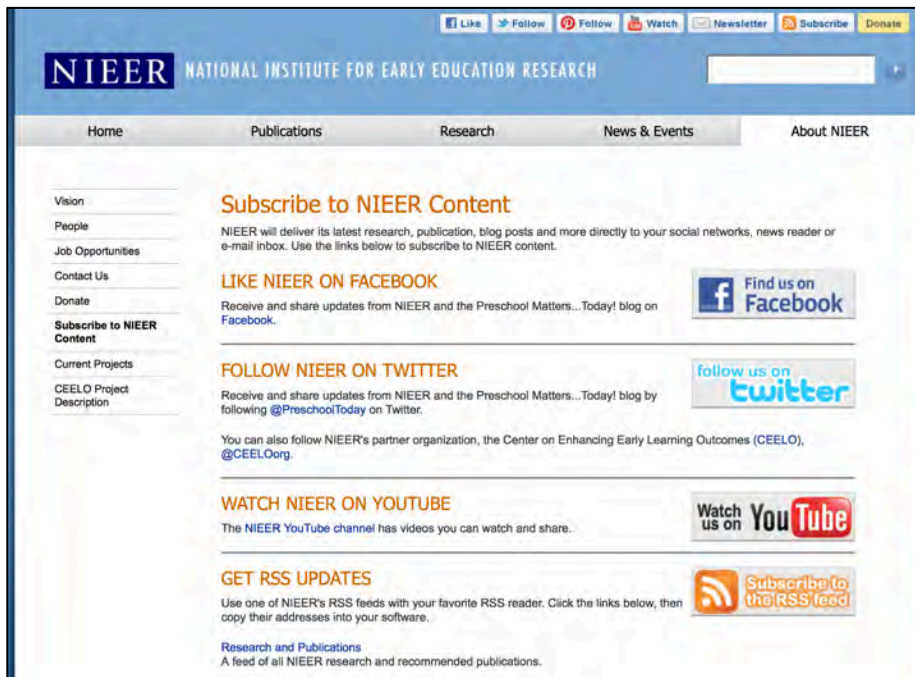
<http://families.naeyc.org/blog> (accessed January 20, 2016)



National Institute for Early Education Research

Updates through different social media

<http://nieer.org/about-nieer/subscribe-nieer-content> (accessed January 20, 2016)





National Institute for Early Education Research Early Education in the News

<http://nieer.org/news-events/early-education-news> (accessed January 20, 2016)

The screenshot shows the NIEER website interface. At the top, there are social media icons for Like, Follow, Watch, Newsletter, Subscribe, and Donate. The main header includes the NIEER logo and the text 'NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR EARLY EDUCATION RESEARCH'. Below the header is a navigation menu with 'Home', 'Publications', 'Research', 'News & Events', and 'About NIEER'. The 'News & Events' section is active, displaying a list of news releases under the heading 'Early Education in the News'. The featured article is titled 'Can taking pre-K classrooms outdoors end education inequity for our youngest learners?' by 'The Hechinger Report', dated January 19, 2016. The article text discusses the high cost of preschool and its impact on low-income families, as well as the benefits of outdoor classrooms. A 'WELCOME' sidebar on the right provides contact information for journalists and a note about website updates.