

Sabbatical Leave Proposal

Cynthia Sheaks, Child Development Professor

Integrating Global Perspectives on Early Childhood Education

Proposal Date: November 1, 2022

Proposed Leave: Fall 2023

Previous Sabbaticals: 0*

Full-Time Hire Date: August, 2007

Part-Time Hire Date: January, 1996

*Note: There have been no sabbaticals awarded to a Child Development faculty member at Moorpark College since well before I arrived in 2007 (if ever).

Overview of Sabbatical Project/Sabbatical Objectives

I am proposing a semester-long sabbatical to both deepen my knowledge of and develop course materials about the systems and curricular approaches developed by high-performing international early education systems. The project will include the following activities:

1. Research and carry out two self-funded educational study tours in countries recognized internationally for exemplary schooling and early education systems. Visit individual early education programs in these regions to gather images, first-hand experience, and practitioner perspectives. Options include Finland, Italy, the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. [Note: The options were identified based upon international quality rankings for early childhood education. Final selection of sites will take into consideration geographic proximity and tour availability, so that both areas can be visited within one journey.]
2. Create multimedia course modules to update and expand upon the limited open education resources (OER) currently available for the Child, Family, and Community (CD M03/M03H) and Introduction to Curriculum (CD M14) courses. These materials will give students a broader look at educational programs from a global perspective. By examining the cultural, political, and economic contexts of international programs, students will better understand these early education systems and our own U.S. approaches. They will be able to consider:
 - a. How do high-performing countries approach early childhood education;
 - b. How were the systems developed;
 - c. Why do these approaches work so well in their contexts;
 - d. What are commonalities and differences among these systems, and
 - e. How these practices could be implemented in the United States.
3. Investigate the possibility of developing a study abroad program proposal connected to the CD M03/M03H course, identify resources and contacts, and interview faculty from 2- and 4-year programs who have successfully developed study abroad experiences in early childhood studies.

Background

An aspiration frequently expressed by our Child Development and Education students is the desire to make our communities better places by positively impacting the next generation. They soon discover, however, mounting empirical evidence that the early education system in the United States is broken (Kagan, 2020). In fact, from the outside, our early childhood system is considered to be underdeveloped, fragmented, and disorganized. In essence, we know what to do, but this knowledge is not acted upon consistently. The consequences of this problem ripple throughout our P - 20 educational system in the form of opportunity gaps and inequitable outcomes for students.

Because of this, an understanding of early education approaches developed beyond our borders is critical for our students to develop (Georgeson, Payler, & Campbell-Barr, 2013; Kagan, 2020). Without this perspective, it is easy to get caught up in doing things the way they have always been done. Our course objectives and content encourage students to take a broader perspective and look beyond the limitations of our current model. To this end, we support our students in becoming reflexive educators who will question current educational methodologies and envision new possibilities for their teaching practice.

Student Learning Objectives

Child Development courses require students to apply a variety of theoretical and interpretive lenses in order to understand early childhood development and the various institutions that influence it. Moreover, a substantial portion of the knowledge base in early childhood studies concerns understanding the role of ethnicity, race, culture, and language in human development. Theories, research, and case studies that shed light on the cultural nature of learning and development are examined, including, for example, the recent works of Barbara Rogoff and Gloria Ladson-Billings that emphasize cultural assets, and the historical contributions of John Dewey, Urie Bronfenbrenner, and Lev Vygotsky, who examine the critical role of culture and interaction in learning.

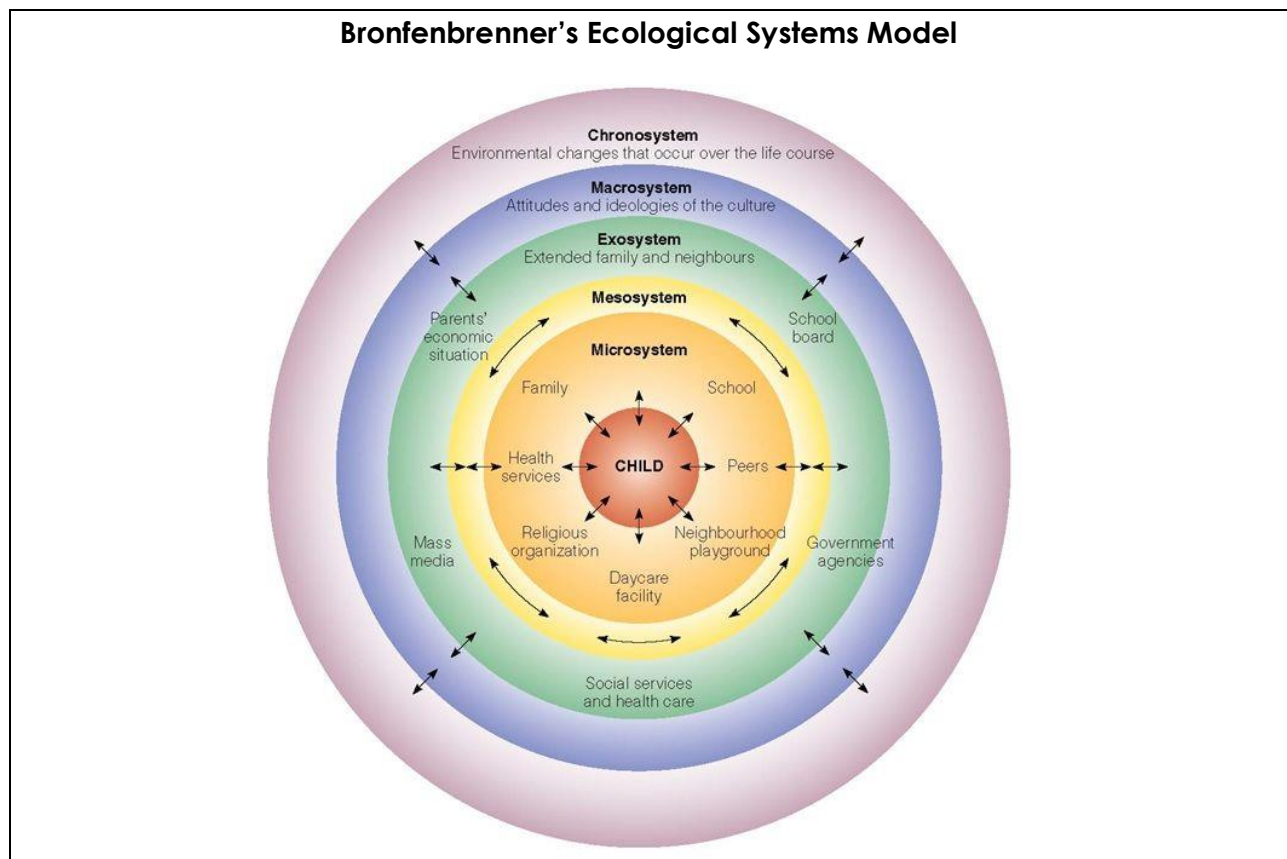
Child, Family, and Community

CD M03/M03H studies the processes of socialization for children from birth through adolescence, focusing on the interrelationship of family, school, and community. It examines the influence of multiple societal contexts and explores the role of collaboration between family, community, and schools in supporting children's development. This is a required course in the CD/ECE major and a GE course in Area B, Social & Behavioral Science.

CD M03's course learning objectives indicate that the student will be able to:

- compare and contrast educational systems and practices, including strategies for family engagement and building partnerships between early learning settings, schools, and community organizations and agencies.
- identify how the child develops within a system and is influenced by multiple factors of socialization including the educational, political, and socioeconomic impacts on children and families.
- describe contemporary social issues and their effects on families and children.

Accordingly, educational institutions and practices are examined with a focus on socioeconomic variations and school-family interactions. A central message of CD M03 is that "context matters." Children's developmental outcomes cannot be understood in isolation, but rather, in relationship to their environment. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, illustrated below, provides a lens used in this course for viewing systems and understanding their impact. The child is viewed as the center of multiple and interrelated systems, from the immediate settings of family and school to the broad cultural values, laws, and customs.



The Finnish education system is of particular interest due to its relatively recent transformation into one of the best education systems in the world (OECD, 2018). Notably, Finland's success came from studying the impact of other international approaches and enacting evidence-based reforms focused on providing equitable learning opportunities that support the well-being of the whole child. Early childhood education in Finland follows a national curriculum framework that is child-centered and play-based, a feature shared by other high-performing early education systems. Furthermore, these programs aim to promote social inclusion and support children's joy of learning. More recently, rising immigration has fueled new investments in practices that support equity, diversity, and multilingualism (Kagan, 2018).

Introduction to Curriculum

CD M14 examines developmentally appropriate curriculum and learning environments for children from birth through age eight. In the course, students investigate various

models of effective practice in order to plan learning environments and curriculum that support development.

CD M14's course learning objectives indicate that the student will be able to:

- apply elements of various curriculum models, approaches, theories, and standards for early learning including indicators of quality to plan and individualize curriculum for children ages birth through eight.
- explain how the principles of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are applied in various situations and how specific learning experiences could be adapted to address individual children's learning and development needs.

To achieve these objectives, a number of models of developmentally appropriate play-based curricula are studied. Several of the approaches examined have international origins. The chart below highlights a few of these approaches, their geographic origins, and a summary of their noted contributions.

Curricular Approach	Origin	Noted for
Anji Play	China	Commitment to the right of every child to experience extended periods of self-directed, uninterrupted, and unguided play. Focus on love, risk, joy, engagement, and reflection.
Montessori	Italy	Child-centered, focus on individualism, self-motivated learning through play with specialized materials
Nature Pedagogy	Germany, United Kingdom, & Scandinavia	Settings that embrace nature. Outdoor classrooms with purposeful learning objectives. Focus on resilience, persistence, motivation, and creativity.
Reggio Emilia	Italy	Sociocultural approach to teaching & learning; focus on intellectual development, relationships, collectivism, and creative expression.
Te Whāriki	New Zealand	Bicultural approach, recognizing Maori culture, language, & heritage; focus on wellbeing, contribution, belonging, communication, and exploration.
Waldorf	Germany	Focus on relationships, the arts, the imagination, and nature; educates the whole child: "the head, the heart and the hands."

Project Proposal/Timeline

Preparation: Prior to Fall 2023

- Research and select locations to participate in study tours. Register for study tours. Tour examples are provided in Appendix A.
- Identify contacts, reach out, and make arrangements to visit additional schools.
- Review MC's Study Abroad guidelines; connect with Study Abroad Work Group and Coordinator.

August – September 2023

- Review literature on comparative early education systems, focusing on:
 - Educational outcomes
 - Philosophical images of the child, curriculum and assessment approaches
 - Family involvement
 - Transition to formal schooling
 - Inclusive practices, multilingualism, cultural responsiveness
 - Service to immigrant populations
 - Nature Pedagogy/Forest Schools
 - Teacher preparation requirements and approaches
- Investigate the political and economic dynamics surrounding these innovative models.
- Investigate methodologies for effective ways to present comparative educational approaches in online coursework.
- Interview ECE colleagues at 2- and 4- year institutions about their study abroad planning experiences.
- Research study abroad options potentially appropriate for MC students.

September – November 2023

- Carry out study tours and school visits in identified locations.
- Record in a journal my experiences and reactions within the educational sites and the broader communities/countries in which they are located.
- Collect images and video of these experiences.

November – December 2023

- Complete project: Develop materials – text, photographic, and video within Canvas modules for use in CD M03/M03H and CD M14.
- Prepare a presentation for CD/EDU faculty and CDC staff on the lessons learned.
- Make recommendations how lessons learned abroad can be implemented in the U.S. to improve early childhood education.

Dissemination, Implementation, and Next Steps (Spring 2024)

- Utilize these materials in my CD M03 and CD M14 courses.
- Share materials with CD/EDU colleagues at MC, VC, and OC for their use.
- Post module materials in the OER Commons.
- Should the feasibility of a study abroad program be determined, develop a study abroad proposal to meet the designated deadline.

Benefit to the Students

A desired outcome of this project is to expose students to global early childhood education approaches so that they can envision ways to create change within the broken U.S. system. California's *Early Childhood Education Teacher Competencies* require that child development professionals must have the ability to create equitable circumstances for children and families. A look at examples from around the world will demonstrate to students how much more we could be doing in this regard to nurture *all* children.

Furthermore, the *Competencies* prescribe that professional preparation programs are responsible to support students' development of knowledge and dispositions that help them to employ culturally responsive and inclusive teaching approaches. The resources developed through this project are intended to help students better understand the ways that:

1. culture shapes our values, beliefs, worldview, experiences, and behavior, which, in turn, influences our perceptions of others,
2. values and beliefs influence child-rearing practices, teaching practices, and family-school interactions for children,
3. equitable practices provide meaningful learning experiences in culturally-relevant ways.

Enhanced Global Perspectives

Many of my students articulate the desire to expand their worldview when it comes to understanding curricular approaches and educational systems. With regard to curriculum, a recent discussion exchange between two students in CD M14 shared below exemplifies the value of a global perspective.

Heather:

Growing up in California all my life has been both a blessing and a curse. It has been a blessing because of how safe and beautiful it is, and it is a curse because I have gotten accustomed to my "California bubble" that has kept me sheltered from expanding my experiences to understand and learn about other cultures. As I was growing up, I never thought about other cultures because unfortunately where I went to school, we were around predominantly white children that spoke English... I am a young adult now and I still have not traveled out of the United States, not because I have not wanted to, but because I cannot afford to travel, and I have a young child. I am aware that I am sheltered and un-educated when it comes to other cultures, and I hope that I can change that for my six-year-old son.

Jennifer:

Hi Heather! I love your use of the "California bubble." It's so easy to look at the world when we were children and just see ourselves. I see more diversity today than I think I grew up with, but I also grew up in the "Moorpark bubble" which is a "whew" in and of itself... In today's day and age, technology connects the world and there is no reason education cannot support the teaching of the beauty of diversity despite the bubbles we live in.

Heather:

Hi Jennifer. Thank you for your response to my post!! I regret not seeing more of the world before I became a mom and I will encourage my son to travel as much as possible when he gets older...

In CD M03: Child, Family, and Community, the primary focus is societal influences upon human development. In one class discussion, students are assigned to share their reactions to a documentary titled *Are We Crazy About Our Kids*, which examines the economic and societal benefits of early education. The film compares early education approaches and outcomes in the U.S. to those of other countries. Below are a few comments from my students Bryan, Emily, and Noa in fall of 2021.

Bryan:

It was frustrating to hear how U.S. state and local governments approach their spending and budgets. They court businesses with tax breaks and land while cutting social services. It is a shame because the data support the return on investment for quality early childhood education... It was even more frustrating to hear that China and Canada have implemented policies based on the findings of U.S. studies. Meanwhile, the U.S. continues to be an outlier in child policy and educational achievement.

Emily:

Yes! After learning how Quebec utilized American research on the matter and lowered governmental spending, it would make much more sense for the US to invest.

Noa:

I was also surprised by how behind the United States is on child and family policies compared to other countries. The film discloses that every other wealthy nation guarantees paid maternal (and some paternal) leave, but the US does not. Additionally, these other nations provide affordable childcare and/or free preschool for all children... While it is costly, the returns are paid once the children grow. In Quebec, when mothers are able to participate in the labor force, more taxes are generated and they are less reliant on government subsidies. There was a lot of frustrating information that was new to me in this video. One being that, in California, cemeteries are inspected more often than childcare facilities. This was a huge shock to me because of the utter lack of effort being put into the early development of our children.

Conversations such as these set the stage for further investigation of innovative and evidence-based educational strategies. Students can identify actionable steps to use in their future teaching and leadership roles. This is a timely goal, as the negative impact of COVID-19 on children's development has created an "educational emergency" on a global scale (World Economic Forum, 2022). UNICEF estimates the pandemic has affected over 1.6 billion learners. Global education recovery presents a unique opportunity to rebuild better education systems, if we apply the lessons learned from high-performing countries.

Improved ZTC/OER Resources

Finally, by enhancing and updating the OER materials available to students in CD M14 and CD M03/M03H, this project supports the sustainability of the zero-cost degree pathway in Child Development. While we have whole-heartedly adopted open textbooks in the CD department, these materials require regular updating and further development. Since CD M03/M03H is a general education course, students in other degree pathways are also able to reduce the total cost of their degrees. At an average price of \$100 for textbooks, with 40 students enrolling in each class, and the 14 sections offered each year of these courses, the estimated savings to students in one year alone is \$56,000. Beyond the cost savings, ZTC courses also increase the likelihood of student success in a course by 1.45 times (Moorpark College Office of Institutional Effectiveness, 2022).

Benefit to the College and District

Strategic Directions:

The objectives and outcomes of this project described throughout this proposal are consistent with the following campus Strategic Directions:

Strategic Direction 1, Student-Centered Curriculum: Moorpark College will develop and teach inspiring and challenging curriculum that is focused on the academic and career goals of all its students.

- 1.B Improve and expand career education programs ensuring alignment with changing labor market needs (Sabbatical Objectives 1, 2, & 3)
- 1.C Create curriculum that supports online student success (Objective 2)
- 1.D Create curriculum that supports professional improvement (Objectives 2 & 3)
- 1.F Continue to develop a body of faculty committed to the development of culturally-responsive course content and teaching (Objectives 1, 2, & 3)

Strategic Direction 3, Student Success: Moorpark College will provide the resources and opportunities needed to support the academic and career success of all students

- 3.A Provide financial support for low-income students through ZTC sections (Objectives 1 & 2)
- 3.D Promote civic engagement, advocacy, and a global perspective (Objectives 1, 2, & 3)

College and District Mission

This project is consistent with the “students first” mission of both the campus and the district, as well as the goal of “promoting access to educational opportunities for students across Ventura County.” As Moorpark’s Zero Textbook Cost Coordinator, I believe that this project will create a lasting impact upon our students. Numerous studies and our own Institutional Research findings demonstrate that high textbook costs interfere with timely degree attainment and course success for students. Furthermore, connecting our students with the broader world of early childhood education will strengthen students’ academic and professional preparation.

This project promotes the VCCCD's stated value of "promoting inclusiveness and openness to differing viewpoints." Our regional four-year universities emphasize cultural and global competency in their Early Childhood Studies and Education programs, so it is important for our students to develop a foundational understanding of, and interest in, global education trends. In this way, the transfer success of Child Development and Education students is also enhanced, meeting the VCCCD's goal of "supporting online services to support access and completion."

High Quality Innovative Instruction/Celebrating Diversity

As our ZTC programs continue to grow across the district, we need to ensure and maintain the quality of our zero-cost and open education instructional materials. Just as publisher textbooks are regularly updated, open education resources are subject to the same revisions to sustain their relevance. The integration of cross-cultural perspectives on early childhood education will enhance the quality of learning materials we currently provide to our students and bolster the program's focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The openly licensed learning materials created through this project will be shared directly with department chairs and faculty at our sister colleges to support student access, diversified course content, and quality instruction. This information will be shared at a CD/EDU Department meeting and at one of the regularly scheduled cross-district CD/EDU meetings. Furthermore, the openly licensed module materials will be shared on the OER Commons to benefit the broader CD/EDU community. Finally, I plan to share my experiences and research in a campus Multicultural Day presentation.

Benefit to the Faculty Member

This sabbatical project will enable me to deepen and expand my knowledge of innovative international early education programs so that I can more effectively communicate how these programs might look if implemented in our community. As our course offerings in Child Development are increasingly offered in online asynchronous formats, learning has become, by necessity, a more solitary pursuit. I am keenly aware of my responsibility to help students connect to experiences beyond their computer screens in order to understand the complexity of the early childhood experience. The materials and experiences I provide in my online courses need to bridge the gap between what is and what is possible. This requires the infusion of thoughtful, compelling multimedia learning materials throughout a course of study. The materials I would assemble during this sabbatical will go a long way toward furthering this goal.

I strive to expose my students to educational models that might be beyond their realm of experience. When it comes to teaching about differing cultural perspectives, I have seen many students experience cognitive disequilibrium and automatically reject unfamiliar ideas. This is more challenging to address in an online course. For example, Finnish education breaks quite a few cannon rules in U.S. education. "It is common for children to enter school at seven years old, and children will have more recess and less hours in school than U.S. children—approximately 300 less hours. Their homework load is light when compared to all other industrialized nations... There are no gifted programs,

almost no private schools, and no high-stakes national standardized tests" (DeJohnette et al., 2022, Section 5.2.1, para. 5).

Feasibility of Implementation

If this sabbatical project is approved, no additional funding will be required. I am prepared to self-sponsor the international travel, lodging, and registrations using my own savings and airline award miles. As mentioned previously, the sites ultimately selected to tour will allow for visitation within one extended trip in order to minimize travel costs. For example, the Finnish and Italian Study Tours shared in Appendix A allow for this timing, as they take place within a month of each other. Also, despite their geographic proximity, the tours will yield substantially different discoveries, as these countries vary considerably in their approaches to ECE.

The size and scale of my proposed project require a sabbatical leave. The project itself requires time not available during my regular professional assignment for research and development of learning materials. Furthermore, educational tours of this type need to be taken within an academic year so that visitors can experience programs in action, observe children, and engage with teachers. While not anticipated at this point in the COVID-19 pandemic, I will plan contingencies for travel to alternative locations or virtual learning exchanges with the identified programs and contacts.

Conclusion

High quality early childhood education is increasingly recognized on the global stage as an essential ingredient for social and economic success (Melvin, Landsberg, & Kagan, 2020). Accordingly, it is important for early childhood educators to look beyond our immediate context for models of exceptional practice that could be adapted in the U.S. Students across the VCCCD will benefit from the rich multimedia examples I intend to collect and develop for use in our CD courses. I have discussed this proposal with my CD/EDU colleagues and they are in full support of this application.

While books are available on comparative education, we have committed ourselves to promoting student success through the provision of OER and zero-cost materials. The curricular materials to be created will be developed with the goal of engaging students through Universal Design for Learning and effective online pedagogy. The time required for this project is beyond what would be available to me during a typical semester with a full teaching load. I am grateful for your time and consideration of my proposal.

Supporting Materials

- Appendix A: International Study Tour Information
- Appendix B: Letter(s) of Support

References

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Appendix A: International Study Tour Information

The study tour options identified for this project were selected in consideration of their international quality rankings for early childhood education (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2012), systemic analyses (Kagan, 2018), and international assessments of student performance (OECD, 2018). Below are two examples of currently available study tours in Finland and Italy.

Finland

Finland has often been described as one of the happiest countries in the world. The education system, and how it embodies the country's deep-rooted values, is seen as key to the success Finland has seen in recent decades.

Finnish Study Tour: Sept 18-22, 2023, Tampere, Finland

Link to Tour information: <https://learningscoop.fi/education-in-finland/ece-study-tour/>

Program Description: The program gives visitors an overview of the Finnish education system and early childhood education as an integral part of it. The study tour introduces the founding principles in Finnish Early Childhood Education and how it is implemented in action. The program also offers an up-close and personal view of daily life in a Finnish child care center.

Italy

The Reggio Emilia Approach is an educational philosophy based upon the image of a child with infinite developmental potential. A key principle of the Reggio Approach is the "Hundred Languages of Children." The term refers to communication and emphasizes the importance of providing children with multiple ways to express their ideas. Teaching approaches are collectivist and recognize that children grow in relationship with others. This system began to be of interest to early childhood educators in the mid-1990's when *Time* magazine included it an article on the ten best schools in the world.

Italian Study Tour: October 2023 (scheduled annually), Reggio Emilia, Italy

Link to Tour information: <https://www.internationalstudytours.org/re-in-depth-study>

Program Description: A week of study in dialogue with teachers, pedagogistas, and atelieristas whose daily work is in Reggio Emilia's municipal Infant-toddler Centers and Preschools. Throughout the week participants will visit schools, listen to presentations, participate in small group discussion, and exchange ideas as they delve deeper into the fundamental underpinnings of the Reggio Emilia Approach in relation to their own contexts.