

Patricia Mendez

### Sabbatical Proposal Project Description:

I am proposing a semester-long sabbatical to both deepen my knowledge of and develop course materials about infants' and toddlers' mental health. I will improve the curricular approaches developed by high-performing early education systems. My BA degree focus is Child Development; Option Mental Health Specialist, and my MA in Special Education; Option Early Childhood Special Education. I am very intrigued in researching new studies and novel approaches on this area. During my leave, I will execute and synthesize research on the topic of Infants and Toddlers Mental Health. The Department of Education in Early Childhood Education (ECE) has implemented many changes and the need to offer the infant and toddler classes is now a requirement for the working force in our field. Currently, District wide (i.e., O.C., V.C., and M.C.), there are mental health services for the students and are highly supported. However, with the latest information and strategies in how to identify mental health issues I have been fortunate to learn that these issues can be discovered at a very early stage. To be able to dive deeper in understanding and eventually implementing these findings in our college courses will aid in sharing awareness, the significance of it, and finding ways to support the younger population.

Children and adolescents suffer from mental health disorders, and it has been reflected more, especially since Covid. Any condition with mental health can have a severe, negative impact on children's development. Mental health disorders have a profound impact on all aspects of well-being, happiness, attachment, and productivity. This research will discuss mental health and adverse childhood experiences during infancy/toddlerhood and the role of caregivers in supporting the development of optimal mental health. I will investigate methods that will serve as intervention to support parents/teachers/caregivers in promoting a healthy long-term capacity to live healthy, constructive, and fulfilling lives.

#### Relative importance of an individual's innate qualities

- The nature vs. nurture debate in psychology concerns the relative importance of an individual's innate qualities (nature) versus personal experiences (nurture) in determining or causing individual differences in physical and behavioral traits.

- While it is widely accepted that we are during a mental health crisis for young people, what is often missed is that the precursors of mental health challenges can begin as early as the perinatal period a crucial window for intervention, with the goal of promoting good mental health for infants and young children.

Your background as it relates to the project and to your role at Oxnard College: I was hired by Oxnard College full-time in Fall of 2000-2002 as Director of the Child Development Center-Lab. In 2003 I became a full-time faculty. In all these years I have participated in:

#### 1. Department Discipline

- I have been working as full-time professor, teaching seven, eight classes per semester, and every summer offering two courses since the year 2002
- I have taught on evenings since 2002 and Saturdays (when needed), to serve our work force students
- I have updated/deactivated and re-activated courses in ECE since 2002-present
- Once I accomplished the Alignment with the CAP Project I updated the name of our program from Child Development to Early Childhood Education with an AS-T., to better serve our discipline
- I brought back the AS degree, along with 3 levels of Certification (Associate Teacher, Teacher, and Site Supervisor)
- I have served as the one mentor/advisor for ECE students (since the year 2004), and help-them obtain their Preschool Teacher Permit with the Department of Education
- Granted students the Consortium Scholarship for 4 years
- I utilize the Direct-Studies course to teach and implement courses required by students to keep their jobs, i.e., Infant/Toddler Theory and Practice
- Organize and implement the Advisory Committee

#### 2. College

- Department chair for eight consecutive years (2009-2017)
- Curriculum Committee member from 2004- Spring 2017

- Curriculum development since 2004 (only faculty updating the courses and developed SLO's)- present
- Created a new course for our program; course correlated to Psychology: The Exceptional Child (ECE R111/Psychology 111)
- Formed the Advisory Community and updated the Committee Handbook
- Collaborate with High-School Program for Articulation of classes since 2008-present
- Develop the ECE program review since 2006-present
- Accreditation 2012-2016 Evaluation Standards I and II

### 3. District

- Serve as Child Development Center Director-Lab from 2000-2002
- Participate in Hiring Committees since 2001-continues as needed for OC, VC and MC
- Representation and Participation as Faculty of OC with the California Community College Early Care and Education Alignment Curriculum since 2005-present
- Representation with the Department of Higher Education Ventura County since 2009-present
- Participation with the Early Care and Education Colloquium Higher Education Faculty since 2008-present

### 4. Community

- Invite professional from the community to be part of the ECE Advisory Community Committee, hold meetings once-twice per year
- I participated with Port Hueneme/South Oxnard Neighborhood for Learning First5 Ventura County Combined Collaborative advisory group
- I provide workshops preschools teachers at different programs, (i.e., Community Action Head Start, Mexican American Opportunity Foundation (MAOF), Migrant and Seasonal Head Start, and Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo (CAPSLO)
- Provide parent workshop at different community programs and religious organizations, (i.e., El Sembrador a Christian church; Methodist church that

serves an Egypt community, and CAPSLO, and programs for Childcare providers)

- Participate with the Oxnard Multicultural Festival, the first Saturday in October, (holding 1-2 booths since 2010-present
- In the past I also had one class participating in the Tamal Festival with the city of Oxnard as well
- I have participated with the outreach High Schools, middle schools, and alignment of courses with HS's

#### Project Objectives:

The ECE courses offered at OC require students to apply a variety of theoretical and interpretive lenses to understand and implement developmentally appropriate practices. In a new finding, researchers have identified that newborn and infants/toddlers suffer from depression, anxiety, more sensory integration problems, besides the already identified neurodivergent conditions.

1. I want to uncover the latest research on mental health, to validate on how mental health impacts the life and trajectory of infants/toddlers for courses that are being re-instated and other courses where this information applies, for example The Exceptional Child and Child, Growth, & Development. Therefore, it is essential to build a firm foundation regarding mental health understanding.
2. I will collect roundtable discussion data and interview data with Early Intervention Programs (i.e., Zero-to-Three, Early Intervention Programs/Early Start), and faculty from colleges in the state and local region. Including but not limited to a new philosophy known as Elevating Conscious Discipline and attending conventions related to the topic.
3. This granted time off will allow me to immerse myself in empathetic studies and eventually implement these findings into our college courses. This will foster shared recognition, the consequence of it, and finding ways to reinforce support for the younger population.

#### Project Methodology:

- Attending national and regional discipline conventions (As available during my sabbatical months).

- Conduct research and documentation with organizations such as: Early Intervention Programs Early Start (dds.ca.gov); Department of Children Youth & Families; Birth to 3 Program CA Department of Health Services; Zero-to-three; Child Developmental Services.
- Conduct in-person and zoom interviews and observations with mental-health programs, intervention programs, and behavior programs for Infants and Toddlers.
- Research and select locations, programs/schools to participate in study tours. Register for study tours (i.e., Chime, Cal-State Northridge; Behavior Programs with ABA teaching techniques; Foster Care Programs).

Product of the sabbatical (a paper, a film, an exhibit, etc.):

Develop resources/approaches to improve all the courses in ECE and Education, in particular the two Infant and Toddler courses. The intent is to utilize/implement the findings in the SLO's adding a better understanding of mental health in young children. I will continue to work with community agencies that invite me to give presentations to daycare providers and parents. I will be conducting training and informative meetings about the significance and findings of my research. I will also be recording my findings followed by evidence to support my investigation in a paper format to share with the community.

How do you plan to share your sabbatical results at Oxnard College? Do you have plans for sharing your results more broadly?

I will present the findings in research paper format to the ECE and Education faculty, at OC, VC, and MC for their use. I plan to discuss my findings in program meetings, PowerPoints, and if applicable develop an informative video.

**Work plan and schedule** (Show the committee the steps in your plan and approximately when you will complete each one, including the product or method of sharing your work).

FALL 2025

August-September

- Identify programs to visits
- Identify conferences, workshops, lectures
- Research programs/websites such as Zero to Three, Early Start, Birth to 3
- Review literature on mental health concerns and conditions

- Investigate methodologies for effective educational approaches/practices of intervention with mental health challenges

September-November

- Carry out study tours, school visits, programs in identified locations
- Attend conferences upon availability
- Record in a journal my experiences and reactions within the educational sites and collect materials from the conferences
- Interview ECE colleges at 2- and 4-year institutions about their programs with emphasis on mental health

November-December

- Complete project: Develop materials- text, include journals collected, and videos.
- Create a presentation for ECE/EDU faculty and the Child Development Center staff on the lessons learned.
- Make recommendations on how lessons learned on mental health can be implemented in the programs to improve early childhood education.

Value of Project (here, given an overall statement of how this project will benefit you, personally and professionally, as well as how it will benefit others).

Now more than ever Mental Health has been seen and/or considered in the category of special education. This sabbatical project will enable me to deepen and expand my knowledge of mental health intervention in early education. I have seen many preschool teachers, infant/toddler teachers and parents in the community concerned with their children acting out, falling into depression, expressing themselves with challenging behaviors, anxiety, sadness, and tantrums. I hope to identify how to better teach and care for young children that have been labeled with mental challenges and/or learned these behaviors from their environment, (i.e., Nature Vs. Nurture). This is very meaningful for our program, but also for our students working with Infants and Toddlers. To be able to expand my knowledge in this area and eventually carry out these results in our college curriculums will benefit in the contribution of awareness, the magnitude of it, and regaining methods to better the younger people.