Early Childhood Policy In Institutions of Higher Education

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and the Buffett Early Childhood Fund*

Created originally as a prototypical module by the Early Childhood Policy in Institutions of Higher Education (ECPIHE) initiative, this document has been modified for use by *(insert university name)* for use in its *(insert program name)*. This document supports ECPIHE's foundational intent to create and support a cadre of scholars who address early childhood policy. Moreover, it acknowledges ECPIHE's purposeful creation of comprehensive and adaptive materials that are designed to be modified to reflect the instructional goals and needs of diverse contexts and users. For more information about ECPIHE and/or to learn about additional coursework related to the initiative, please visit http://policyforchildren.org/ecpihe/

This module is Module 7 of 12 90-minute modules that have been developed as part of the Early Childhood Policy in Institutions of Higher Education (ECPIHE) effort funded by the Heising-Simons Foundation and Buffett Early Childhood Fund. The work herein represents the collective effort of the project's Content Work Group, which includes Linda Espinosa, Sharon Lynn Kagan, Kristie Kauerz, Helen Raikes, Aisha Ray, Adele Robinson, Catherine Scott-Little, Linda Smith, and Albert Wat. Eva Landsberg and Samantha Melvin contributed to the work, as well. Each module contains distinct content so that it may be used individually or in combination with other modules. Taken together, the 12 modules could form a course.

Title	*Module 7 – Theoretical Perspectives on Early Childhood Policy*
Learning Outcomes	*By the end of the session, students will:* • Understand that early childhood policy is influenced/shaped by different theoretical frames; • Recognize some of the major theoretical perspectives; • Understand that theory can/should be used to inform the design, implementation, and evaluation of policy.
Content	*PART I – What Is Theory and Why Study Multiple Theories? (~10 minutes)* • Systematic development and organization of ideas to explain phenomena; can be empirically tested • Informs conceptualization, design, implementation, and evaluation of policy • Relevant to research and practice • Helps to predict why things happen the way they do – and how to alter outcomes in the future • Guides thinking on both structures and relationships

- Links education to broader social science disciplines

PART II – Major Theories Part I (~20 minutes)

- Economics and Human Capital Theory (the understanding that early childhood has economic value)
    - Production function and the idea that ECE has long-term payoffs (increased productivity and economic growth – for both individuals and society)
    - Cost-benefit analyses
    - Rationale choice/market-based decision-making
- Political Science Theory (interests, conflict, power)
    - Coalition-building/policy regimes
    - Agenda-setting and policy change
    - Punctuated equilibrium
- Institutional Theory (role of broader institutional arrangements and cultural norms in establishing legitimacy)
    - Isomorphism – organizations adopt the practices they do in order to establish legitimacy (e.g., school readiness)
    - Stability of bureaucracies
    - Interactions between public and private sectors mediate design and delivery of services
- Organizational Theory
    - Structure and governance/bureaucracy – formal and informal organization of ECE (loosely coupled system)
    - Public management/human resources

PART III – Class Exercise: Compare/Contrast (~15 minutes)

PART IV – Major Theories Part II (~25 minutes)

- Sociological Theory (how well ECE meets society's various needs)
    - Conflict theory and determinants of inequality
    - Social processes and the examination of race, class, gender in day-to-day interactions
- Social Capital Theory (through interactions, individuals and organizations can transform policy)
    - Relationships/coalitions
    - Who holds influence and who listens to who
- Cognitive Theory (policy as not just a problem of will and organizational structure, but also of social learning and cognitive capacity)
    - Sense-making and the importance of shared understanding
    - Discourse
- Systems Theory
    - Prevalence of complexity
    - Understanding that pieces/parts cannot be considered in isolation, but must look at the interconnections
    - Calls for increased interdisciplinary understanding

	• Anthropology and Post-modern/Critical Theories (how individuals/groups affect and are affected by policy)
	    ○ Equity
	    ○ Culturally responsive/preserving
	    ○ Cross-cultural comparisons
	
	PART V – Class Exercise: Compare/Contrast (~15 minutes)
	
	PART VI – Summary/Wrap-up (~5 minutes)
	
	• Theories intersect and are not always mutually exclusive
	• Theory brings focused analysis and understanding to complex issues

Delivery Method	• 70 minutes: PowerPoint and lecture, interspersed with student responses and commentary. • 20 minutes: Exercise (in groups of 3-4 students) and wrap up
Application Activity/ies	• In-class activity: Create a simple table that provides ease of compare/contrast across the different theories. Populate the table as a small group exercise. • Out-of-class activity: Choose one theoretical perspective and write a 2- to 3-page essay that explores how that theory can be used to examine ECE.
Suggested Readings	Birkland, T. A. (2016). Science and theory in the study of public policy. In *An introduction to the policy process: Theories, concepts, and models of public policy making* (4th ed., pp. 361-389). New York, NY: Routledge. McLaughlin, M. W. (1990). The RAND Change Agent Study revisited: Macro perspectives and micro realities. *Educational Researcher, 19*(9), 11-16. Weimer, D. L. (2009). Making education research more policy-analytic. In G. Sykes, B. Schneider, D. N. Plank, & T. G. Ford (Eds.), *Handbook of education policy research* (pp. 93-100). New York, NY: American Educational Research Association and Routledge.