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**Portfolio #3**  
**SpEd 860: Issues in Early Childhood Special Education (3 cr.)**

It was my hope that by continuing my evaluation of format and methods for this combined distance-and-on campus graduate course I would identify some of the variables that could make this course successful for me and for students. For two years now, this course, offered each Fall term, has been modified in response to the data collected in 2001, 2002 and 2003 as part of my Year #1 and Year #2 participation in the Peer Review of Teaching Program at UNL. My Benchmark Portfolio #1 (2001-02) <http://www.unl.edu/peerrev/examples/marvin/marvin1.html> described the course in detail and resulted in identification of aspects to the course that could be the focus of adjustment and study. My Inquiry Portfolio #2 (2002-03) ) <http://www.unl.edu/peerrev/examples/marvin/marvin2.html> described selected adjustments and the outcomes relative to changes in student learning and student satisfaction. In 2003, I sent the Portfolio #2 out for external review by colleagues in my profession at the University of Illinois (JM), University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (AH) and Wichita State University (LM). Their feedback was insightful and highly valued as they concurred on the strengths of the course and suggested possible areas for future adjustment and study (available upon request). Specifically, the reviewers suggested:

- Consider reinstating the observation requirement (LM, JM))
- Consider giving points for Philosophy Statements (AH)
- Further analyze the format/delivery systems influence on learning (AH)
- Consider using national Recommended Practices as a module to efficiently cover a cluster of topics/issues (JM).
- Consider examining students' comfort/confusion with variety of online activities (JM)
- Reconsider the text chosen (JM) and reading load (LM)
- Consider having students review professional websites with reference to Recommended Practices (JM).

In the Fall term 2004, I again taught the class with the latest adjustments in assignments and readings and classroom/course assessment techniques. This latest Portfolio (#3) will build on the content and data of the first two and describe the data analyses for student outcomes and satisfaction as a result of the latest changes I made in the course.

***History:***

Despite 12 offerings, I never felt comfortable with this course. From the beginning in 1990, I felt that there was a mismatch between what I had laid out in the syllabus and the students' expectations for the course. With my first effort to offer this course to distance students outside of Lincoln in 2001, I was challenged further on how to blend the two groups of students: on-campus and distance. There were too few distance students to justify a separate section (n = 4); I worried that web-based discussions would be unproductive with so few students. The Lincoln students (n =10) expected a traditional 3 hr/week lecture class on campus. My decision to blend the two groups and make the course web-based for everyone seemed

logical at the time. Some Lincoln students were upset to learn that the course would not meet weekly. Others from the Lincoln and Omaha area were thrilled not to have to come to campus. Distance students were accepting of the format and thrilled to have access to so many classmates but often confused or hesitant about assignments and ways to participate in the class.

[NOTE: *This course was one of five ECSE graduate courses now being offered via distance technology to students across the state. As the only graduate ECSE program in the state, and limited graduates each year from the three state undergraduate programs, we felt an obligation to make our ECSE courses available statewide. It is estimated that nearly one-half of teachers working in birth to five special education programs across the state have no pre-professional coursework in ECSE; many have early childhood and/or special education K-6 credentials. A need for proper credentials and renewal of teaching certificates prompts most students to pursue our distance-delivered courses. Other ECSE-focused courses are interdisciplinary in their enrollment (family-centered services and medically-fragile infants) and draw 25-45 students each year from speech pathology, psychology, physical and occupational therapy, social work, and school administration. This SpEd 860 course is always smaller (n =10-15) and less interdisciplinary; most students who enroll are early childhood teachers (birth to age 8 yrs) who are required to take this class as part of their masters degree program in ECSE or as an elective for a degree program outside special education.*]

**Through the first two years of Peer Review and self-reflection,** my analyses revealed a number of factors that could be considered responsible for the dissonance I felt over the years. These included the nine factors listed in Table 1.:

***Table 1. Possible factors contributing to Instructor/Student dissatisfaction with SpEd 860 (2001)***

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1. Lack of clarity and specificity in some course objectives compared to what was taught. Some not taught, some not evaluated; some not listed.
  2. Teaching at one level but sometimes evaluating student knowledge at higher cognitive levels (Bloom's Taxonomy (1956 or revised Marvin & Patterson 2004)
  3. The points assigned for assignments were not equitably distributed; some assignments were intended for evaluation (and should be higher points?) and some were for learning/exposure to new material/topics (should be lower points?).
  4. Inappropriate "Issues Paper" Assignment; student unable to identify an "issue" given their novice status in the field and unable to independently access and evaluate available literature for a scholarly paper.
  5. Lack of feedback to students on weekly study questions for each topic.
  6. Range of student types and abilities; course attracted first term graduate students to doctoral level students and non-educators or non-special educators or non-child development professionals to skilled early childhood special education teachers.
  7. Ineffective use of expensive TV broadcasts.
  8. The majority of students successfully learned only half the course objectives.
  9. Low student satisfaction with course
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Revisions to the course since 2001 include clustering course content and assignments into four modules, reduction in the number of assigned readings per module, requirement for students to write four, 1500-word essays in response to revised module questions that challenged high-level thinking, introduction of online quizzes for low-level factual information, and use of weekly phone conferencing to complement online discussions.

**Table 2. Revisions made in course over the three-four years:**

	<b>Yr 1 (2001) → Yr 2 (2002) → Yr 3 (2004)</b>		
	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2004</b>
<b>Syllabus</b>	Lengthy and overwhelming	Reorganized and abbreviated with links to the details	
<b>Course Objectives</b>	N = 8 Not linked to assignments	N = 11 Tied to modules and readings and papers	N = 11 but rewrote Module Essay Questions to reflect objectives
<b>Web-based Classnotes</b>	16 weeks' classnotes made available one per week	Clustered notes into four modules; four sets of classnotes per module. Complete module available at start of each four week period	Kept four modules but clustered much more into #3 and left #4 module short so students had time to work on selected issue essay.
<b>Readings</b>	4 texts 28 articles	3 texts 29 articles	Reduced: 2 texts; 1 Recommended Practices 26 articles
<b>Reading Assignment</b>	One review of a research article	Eleven reviews of research articles; required posting for class review/discussion	Assigned two students to "take the lead" in reacting to 1-2 articles each week. Assigned two students to "react to first 2 students' postings about the readings. Anyone could post beyond these four students.
<b>Writing Projects</b>	One major Issues paper	Two+1500-word papers posted for anonymous critique. Papers were answers to one of nine course questions/issues posted at start of course.	Edited Essay Questions per module to assure higher-order thinking for essays  Four 1500-word essays Three essays assigned by instructor from posted Module Questions.  4 <sup>th</sup> essay was student's own "ECSE Issue" identified from interviews with ECSE professionals over the term.
	Two Critiques of Assessments	Two critiques of classmates' papers (anonymous)  Required posting of philosophy statement (no points assigned)	Four critiques of a classmates essay (anonymous)  Required three postings of a ECSE Philosophy Statement (revised twice)
	One Observation Report	Dropped Observation	Required interview with professional

<b>Study Questions</b>	Posted each week with classnotes	Posted per module and reflected in 10 online, repeatable quizzes.	Ten online quizzes; kept quizzes to just ten questions each.
<b>TV Broadcasts (3 hours each)</b>	four	Two invited guests	Dropped TV portion
<b>Shared Classtime (distance + on-campus)</b>	Minimal interaction during TV broadcasts	Twice monthly phone conferences (90 min.) and 2 TV sessions with planned activities	Weekly phone conferences Q/A 60-90 minutes each
<b>Shared online Discussions</b>	Instructor-posted Questions/case studies	Instructor-posted questions/case studies	retained
	No points assigned for participation	Critiques of classmates papers (per module)	retained
		Posted reading reviews (weekly)	retained
		Twice monthly "virtual chats"	Dropped online virtual chats
		Twice monthly discussion questions/activities	Weekly
		Points assigned for weekly discussions	retained
<b>Exams</b>	Two	None	None

These efforts to upgrade the class in targeted areas resulted in outcomes over two years that made me more satisfied with what the students were learning. These included increased student time commitments to class activities, improved factual knowledge and documentation of higher critical thinking skills as well as improved student course evaluations reflecting student satisfaction.

### ***Portfolio #3 Goals***

Despite the positive advances in the teaching and learning outcomes reported for SpEd 860 in 2002, 2003, I was still not satisfied that I had systematically organized the class to teach and challenge higher-level thinking that I was demanding in the students' products (essays and philosophy statements). I wanted to assess the cognitive complexity of my efforts throughout the class, as well as students' work and see if there was sufficient linkage between weekly class discussions, essay questions and student essays. Specifically, I set out to:

1. Evaluate the cognitive complexity of 2004 student essays and compare levels to those for students enrolled in 2002.
2. Evaluate the cognitive complexity of online discussions for 2004 students and compare to mean levels evidenced in 2004 student essay papers.
3. Evaluate the completeness of 2004 student's final Philosophy Statements in response to instituting a point system and requirement of three revisions.

4. Compare 2004 student evaluation ratings to those for students in 2002 and 2003. with special attention given to:
  - a. Value of textbooks assigned
  - b. Use of phone conference sessions to augment web-based instruction
  - c. Ratings for “increased knowledge/understanding of topic” and “instructor’s explanation of assignments”

***Methods and Data Collection.***

I solicited student permissions from registrants in the 2004 offering of Sped 860 (n =15) and secured seven consents to use student work as examples in my portfolio. However, I used the data from all 15 students for analyzing the course discussions, assignments and course evaluations.

I used a four-level coding system, to code essay questions and student essay answers. (see Table 3). This adaptation of Bloom’s six levels of critical thinking had been found reliable in my previous research (Marvin & Patterson, 2004). The Module Questions posted for the course in 2004 were coded individually for cognitive complexity and compared (range and mean levels) to those posted for the course in 2002. Furthermore, the mean level of cognitive complexity of the students’ essays for one module (Module #3) in 2004 was compared to the level of cognitive complexity of the Essay Questions for that Module to asses students’ ability to demonstrate that particular targeted-level of thinking/integration of knowledge. Finally, the instructor’s questions/prompts and the instructor’s responses to student online discussions were analyzed independently for their level of cognitive complexity across all online postings during two modules (four weeks of class discussion per module) The students’ contributions to those discussions were similarly coded for their cognitive complexity in order to assess the match between instructor and student.

The hypotheses were that:

1. Module Questions for 2004 would be cognitively higher than or equal to levels of questions used in 2002.
2. Essay papers for 2004 would be reflect high levels of cognitive complexity and appropriately match the level of the Module Questions in 80% of five randomly selected essays in Module #3 near the end of the course.
3. Student essays in 2004 would be cognitively higher in quality than those from 2002 for 5 randomly selected students in two modules (#2 and #3).
4. Online discussions between students and students-instructor, in each of two modules, would be at cognitive levels equal to or greater than levels for the Essay Questions assigned for each module. Furthermore, instructor mean levels of cognitive complexity for the instructor online contributions would equal or surpass mean levels computed for student contributions in online discussions of class material.
5. Philosophy Statements in 2004 from at least 80% of the students would have complete, robust statements compared to those posted by students in the 2002 course, relative elements of theory, research and national recommended practices.

6. Student Course Evaluations in the 2004 would show students' increased satisfaction over 2002 course with course-related textbooks, use of phone conferencing to complement online instruction/discussion, their own increased knowledge, and the instructor's explanation of assignments.

**Table 3. Four Levels of Cognitive Complexity (Marvin & Patterson, 2004)**

Level	Definition
<b>Level 1: Knowledge and Comprehension</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Retrieve, recall, remember, describe</i> past information or experience</li> <li>• <i>Define</i> the meaning of a concept or term (paraphrase)</li> <li>• <i>Compare/contrast</i> given factors</li> <li>• <i>Find or identify</i> example from a set of facts</li> <li>• HERE, NOW, RECENT</li> </ul>
<b>Level 2: Application</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Using specific knowledge</i> put in <i>new</i> situation/circumstance/context</li> <li>• <i>Describe/demonstrate particular concept or step</i> of a <i>novel</i> application/example</li> <li>• <i>Compare/contrast/choose</i> possible/not possible applications/scenarios to apply to a new context</li> </ul>
<b>Level 3: Analyze/Evaluate/Deduce</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Explain/justify</i> relationship/rationale</li> <li>• <i>Discuss</i> the parts of a whole/process/scenario (relationships/identify parts)</li> <li>• <i>Judge</i> the merit of the parts or process</li> <li>• Make a <i>judgment</i> based on facts/set criteria or opinion, values</li> <li>• <i>Problem solve</i></li> <li>• <i>Identify</i> cause/effect</li> <li>• <i>Detect</i> pros or cons, good or bad</li> <li>• <i>Decide</i></li> <li>•</li> </ul>
<b>Level 4: Creation/Synthesis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Construct/compose/design/outline</i> a plan</li> <li>• <i>Put together</i> to form a whole; collate, collect</li> <li>• <i>Anticipate/predict/hypothesis</i> about origins or outcomes.</li> <li>• <i>Form</i> new ideas/concepts/perceptions.</li> <li>• <i>Create; repack, reorganize</i> parts in to a new whole or pattern.</li> <li>• <i>Provide</i> an alternative solution, plan (multi-step) or procedure</li> </ul>

\*adapted from *Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001; Bloom, et al 1956)*

### **Outcomes:**

#### **1. Cognitive complexity.**

**Module Essay Questions.** The revision of essay questions used to guide discussion of topics in each module in 2004 resulted in an overall increase in the level of cognitive complexity prompted by the questions over questions used in 2002. Although the content of the questions did not generally change topically, the mean level of eight questions used in 2004 was 3.25 compared to 2.87 in 2002. Six of the eight questions remained at the same level from 2002 to 2004; two questions however moved up a level, (with one question changing in topic). Table 4

shows the questions adjusted from 2002 to 2004. See Appendices A and B for a copy of all the questions used in 2002 and 2004.

**Table 4. Revised Essay questions**

<b>Module #1 2002</b>	<b>Module #1 2004</b>
<i>Should public schools be involved in the delivery of early intervention to infants and toddlers? Preschool children? Explain how IDEA part C and B differ and how they are the same in their philosophy for design and delivery of quality services for children birth to age three and ages three to five years.</i>	<i>Why should Nebraska public schools be involved in the delivery of early intervention services for infants, toddlers and preschool children? Use research and theory to justify Nebraska’s efforts to implement Rule 51 and IDEA’s Part C and Part B services regarding young children with developmental delays/disabilities.</i>
<b>Module #3 2002</b>	<b>Module #3 2004</b>
<i>Explain the similarities and differences between “continuous services” for infant and toddlers and “extended year services” for children 3-21 years of age.</i>	<i>Explain how the triadic model of service for children with disabilities birth to age 5 would most appropriately and effectively address their needs in preparing for school and social success</i>

**2-3. Student Essays.** Five student essays were randomly selected from the pool of 8 in the 2002 course and pool of 15 in the 2004 Module #3. Three of the five essay in 2002 and four of the five essays in 2004 matched the level of cognitive complexity of the questions they were addressing. In both years, the questions and matching essays were level 3 (3) and 4 (2). Here are two samples from essays that were considered as having elements of Level 4 (synthesis) cognitive complexity:

**Essay Example 1**

*(Following two pages of detailed descriptions of DAP and DEC Recommended Practices and then HighScope and ABI, including a comparison of similarities and differences for each, the student closes her paper as follows....)*

Activity-based Intervention (Bricker,1998) is a model for curriculum with young children with disabilities that incorporates the advantages of NAEYC’s DAP and the principles of CEC/DC’s Recommended Best Practices. It includes the benefits of specific teaching strategies found to be effective with young children with special needs through research and program replication and the naturalistic supports and facilitators for child-initiated learning promoted by DAP. Using ABI within an effective curriculum such as High Scope will provide children with special needs the opportunity to learn new skills within natural and interesting activities.

Creating an appropriate curriculum for children with special needs is not simple but framing our expectation through the best practices of professional organizations, such as NAEYC and CEC/DEC, will ensure that our children with and without special needs are gaining the skills necessary to be independent and contributing members of society.

## Essay Example 2

Another benefit to natural environments is the role of the family and the potential support that can be provided to children and families alike (Marvin, 2004). Specifically, using environments that are immediate to the child and family provide more opportunities for family involvement in the development of their child, which research suggests is critical for positive outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 1975 as cited in Marvin, 2004). The use of natural environments also helps children to learn throughout the day in a context that is real life and meaningful for both children and families. Specifically, natural environments promote the concept of generalization since children are more likely to use the same skills across similar settings when the key adults in the child's life help to promote the skills. In fact, research indicates that generalization of skills is more stable for children taught in inclusive settings v. isolated settings (Stain, 1999, as cited in Marvin, 2004). Finally, when children are educated in natural environments the family has the opportunity to build positive relationships for themselves and their child within the community (Marvin, 2004). The use of environments natural to the child and family provides the family with an opportunity to connect to social supports within their community (e.g., friends, neighbors, congregations, parents in classrooms) and to develop relationships that promote the healthy development of the family and the child, thus providing opportunities for successful integration into the community.

Congress and professional organizations have identified natural environments as best practices in early intervention. Using natural environments to educate children has the potential to promote the development of healthy families and children and reduce the sense of isolation from the community that many individuals with disabilities experience. However, research also indicates that positive outcomes in inclusive settings/natural environments are achieved when educators and families directly address and facilitate skill development and when progress is monitored frequently and strategies are adjusted as needed (Dunst, Bruder, Trivette, 2001; Marvin, 2004). Therefore, it is critical that more research is conducted that explores programming for children with disabilities in natural environments and how parents and educators can best facilitate children's development.

**4. *Online Discussions.*** In 2004, the online discussions for Modules #2 and #3 were analyzed for their cognitive complexity and match to the level of complexity reflected in the Essay Questions in Modules #2 and #3. Table 5 shows the mean level of cognitive complexity computed for each set of instructor and student contributions in each Module's four-week set of online discussions.

The online discussions for Module #2 were a good match and preparation for the level 2 & 3 Essay Questions posted for students to answer. Mean-level student contributions of 2.3 and instructor contributions at mean level of 3.0 would appear responsible for the success that most students had in answering one of the two Essay Questions successfully in this Module. Here are some examples of those Level 2 and 3 contributions:

### Student contribution Level 2 (application)

I am aware of a situation dealing with home cleanliness where children were removed from the home for a short period of time until the home was cleaned up. One of the children is in our preschool and has needs that are quite involved. Though I have not been in the home, (I have dealt with diapers that had visably not been changed for quite some time) I understood it is an ongoing issue ....Has any one dealt with a situation like this?

### Student contribution Level 3 (analyses/justification)

I think B provided an excellent model for what new RULE 51 criteria should look like. I agree that the team should determine eligibility. I would like to add that what is ideal about this model of determining eligibility is that it provides a framework to serve all children. Assessment is linked directly to intervention. Therefore, when the team gathers information during assessment they are also gathering information to use for intervention and programming. Ideally, all children would receive the intervention they need to be successful and those children that have needs too intensive to be implemented by the classroom teacher would be eligible for additional support.

In Module #3 however, the students success in answering Essay Questions of level 3 or 4 complexity (four of five students' essays matched the question level) may not have been as influenced by the online discussions for that module. The instructor's use of lower-level questions to prompt discussion (mostly levels 2-3) may have kept some students thinking only as high as description or deduction. The instructor's efforts in response to students' contributions online, however, were cognitively higher, with some level 4 efforts to get students to think about the synthesis of information and creation of new ideas.

### Instructor Questions Level 2 (applications)

What would list as YOUR "natural" environments?

Now list what you think would be natural environments for this child. Next to each provide a contrast that would exemplify what is NOT/would NOT be a natural environment for this child.

### Instructor Response Level 4 (synthesis/creativity)

A comment about portable space. I have visited many portables and many classrooms. I can say that although many portables are small, they are sometimes no smaller than and sometimes bigger than building classrooms. So I do not think adding one more adult would be crowding and could justify exclusion of parents. Perhaps the number of adults already in the room could be staggered in a schedule that makes room for parents on certain days/hours. Where there is value there is a way!

Secondly the working parent dilemma is real. But no one is expecting, nor are many parents asking to visit the classroom daily or even weekly. If each parent used one personal day from work a year or twice a year, there might be compromise with a win-win solution. If parents do not earn personal days at work they often DO earn vacation days.

Again educating parents to the benefit, to themselves and their children, in volunteering is important. Setting a climate that values parents in the classroom is the key. And I agree with R, a letter at the start of school year is not sufficient.

The lack of any statistical analyses of these data, however, prevents me from making any conclusions about the specific role the instructor played in advancing or hindering the students' critical thinking on these Module #3 topics. Overall, I am pleased with the relative match that existed between the level of critical thinking evidenced in student-instructor online discussions and the expected level of critical thinking for the module essays. At least I have evidence that my online discussions were not predominantly low-level regurgitation of opinion and facts.

**Table 5. Mean levels of cognitive complexity for Module #2 and #3 essays, and the online discussions between students and instructor.**

	Module #2 Mean Levels	Module #3 Mean Levels
Module Essay Questions	2.5 (range: 2 to 3)	3.25 (range: 3 to 4)
Instructor Contributions to Discussions	(n =48)	(n = 48)
Questions/Prompts (n =17, 18)	3.0	2.6
Responses (n = 31, 30)	3.0	3.4
Student Contributions to Discussions (n = 108, 114)*	2.3	2.6

Level 1= knowledge, 2 = application, 3 = analysis/evaluation, 4 = creation/synthesis

\* only 20% of the student contributions were coded (randomly selected postings)

## 5. Philosophy Statements.

Only one-third of the students who posted more than one version of their Philosophy Statement in the 2004 class (n = 11) demonstrated understanding and integration of theory, research and recommended practices. Although not the 80% I had hoped for, the remaining students had evidence of two of these three elements in their final statements. All students included reference to two or more recommended practices with mention of family centered services, natural environments, and team-work being most common. One or more theories on child development were mentioned by 73% of the students while only 36% mentioned research studies to support their philosophy. Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory and Sameroff & Chandler's Transactional model were the most frequently mentioned theories while the Perry Preschool Project and Abecedarian Project outcomes were the most frequently mentioned research studies.

Here is an example of a robust philosophy statement that reflects all three elements.

Final Philosophy Statement (strong example)

Theory and research have established that early childhood characteristics, as well as early experiences are influential in the course of development. Longitudinal research has also demonstrated that early intervention has long-term benefits for the child and society that far outweigh the short-term costs. For these reasons, I believe early intervention efforts are necessary in order to help children reach their full potential. In order for early intervention programs to be most effective, there are several key components that I feel must be present.

First, early intervention services must use a family-centered approach that addresses the needs and concerns of the family, rather than the professional. Families must be integral in the decision-making process for their child. The goals and desires that the family holds should be at the forefront of all intervention efforts in order to help their child successfully function as a member of his/her family. Match with family culture and values must be evaluated for all services provided.

Second, intervention efforts must expand across all influential systems within a child's life, rather than focusing solely on the child. All significant systems that impact the life of the child should be considered as points of interest for intervention efforts in order to achieve the greatest opportunity for positive change. This systemic approach calls for the collaboration of all service providers using a transdisciplinary team model of service delivery to provide comprehensive and coordinated early intervention.

Third, early intervention services must be provided in natural and inclusive environments to the greatest extent possible. Every attempt to include young children with disabilities in their natural environments and communities provides these children with the opportunity to find their place within the greater society. It also enables other children and adults within the general community to see the benefit of diversity and to be more readily accepting of and prepared to assist children with disabilities.

Fourth, services must be individualized and strength based. Assessment and plan development should attempt to identify and build upon the unique strengths of each child and family. Intervention efforts should be provided in such a way that attempts to build competencies based on these strengths, rather than eliminating deficits.

And here is an example of one that was considered inferior and lacking in the critical components despite its similar length:

Final Philosophy Statement (weak example)

I believe in a family centered approach to early childhood intervention. The child and the family are central to the child's environment. In order to meet the goals of early intervention it is necessary to have full family involvement in the entire process. Families should be taught the skills and provided with all information necessary in order to assist the child in developing the skills necessary to function as near to their appropriate level of development. School districts and community agencies should make information and materials readily available and easily accessible to families to provide families the opportunity to connect with early intervention services as soon as possible.

Additionally, I believe in early intervention services being conducted in the child's natural environment or the least restrictive environment based on the child's age and the families needs. The transdisciplinary approach to early intervention services is key to assisting families bridge the skills the child is learning through early intervention services with the child's day to day activities. Through the transdisciplinary approach, families will learn how to connect and generalize skills and activities the child will encounter in the future. The use of the transdisciplinary approach in family-centered intervention is beneficial because it allows for more contact between the family and the service provider, it provides the service provider with expanded knowledge outside of her general area of expertise, and it provides the service provider with a network of support to generate possible interventions and to answer questions in areas the service provider is struggling. When the family has the opportunity to participate in a transdisciplinary approach, their intervention services are being maximized to the greatest extent possible because they are working with a service provider who is knowledgeable and is being supported by her team. Another benefit to the transdisciplinary model is that the family has the opportunity to work and establish a relationship with usually just one service provider. This allows the family to establish trust and rapport and provides the child with consistency in areas of services, expectations in how the services will be provided and trust in the primary service provider. The major benefit to the family in using a transdisciplinary approach involves the family's opportunity to become active participants in the designing the child's goals and program development. This allows the family and child to meet their priorities and to become responsible with the services which are being provided.

The family is the key to the success of the child's future. The service team should be available to the family both directly and indirectly, provide support through materials, resources, and access to community agencies so that the family will feel competent and confident to independently assist and promote a successful future for their child.

## 6. Course Evaluations.

The course evaluations for 2004 were a bit disappointing when compared to those from students enrolled in 2002 course. Although the sample size may have influences the mean rating per item to some degree (n =14 and n = 10 for 2004, 2002 respectively), other factors may have contributed to the final mean ratings. Overall, the 2002 course was rated higher at 4.5 on a 5 point scale with 1 = extremely poor/unsatisfied and 5 = excellent/totally satisfied; the mean over all rating for the course in 2003 was only 4.1. Furthermore, ratings for the value of the textbooks (same texts), phone conferencing (increased frequency), knowledge gained and instructor's explanations of assignments all dropped in 2004. Table 6 shows the mean ratings for all items in the two courses.

The greatest concern was for the notable drop in ratings for the use of phone conferencing and selected textbooks. In 2004, the ratings below 4.0 suggest some students were clearly unhappy with both of these aspects of the course. A review of the student comments did not reveal reasons for any dissatisfaction. The only comfort I could take from the 2004 student ratings was that the reported value of the course overall remained relatively high (over 4.0) and the web-based class discussions remained quite high and was rated slightly higher in 2004 at a mean 4.7. Again a review of student comments showed no indication as to why the students rated these items as they did. But one evaluation item may lend a hint to the students' rationale; when asked if the presentation of the course material was at an appropriate level the students in 2004 rated this item 3.5 compared to 3.0 in 2002 and 2003. This suggests more students in 2004 thought the material was in fact presented at too high a level thus causing possible challenges. However I do not know if this rating reflected their feelings about the textbook, the phone conference discussions, or other aspects of the course.

**Table 6. Course Evaluation ratings from students in 2002, 2003, 2004**

	F '02	F '03	F'04
<b>Enrollment:</b>	10	11	14
<b>Items</b>			
1. effective use of class time	4.8	3.7	3.7
2. instructor's interest in students	4.8	4.4	4.4
3. fairness of grading	4.5	3.7	4.0
4. instructor's knowledge on topic	5.0	4.7	4.9
5. use of text/readings	4.4	3.8	3.8
6. presentation at appropriate level	3.0	3.0	3.5
7. instructor's effect on your interest	4.8	3.9	4.2
8. increased knowledge/understanding	4.8	4.7	4.6
9. response to student's questions	4.8	4.7	4.3
10. presentation of class material	4.8	4.2	4.5
11. explaining requirements	4.5	3.8	4.0
12. overall evaluation of instructor	4.6	4.2	4.5
13. overall evaluation of course	4.5	3.9	4.0
14. nondiscriminatory treatment of students	4.6	3.9	4.0
15. course pertinent to diversity issues	4.0	4.1	3.4
<b>Mean Rating:</b>	4.5	4.0	4.1

Ratings are reported from a five-point scale with 5 = high/excellent and 1 = low/poor.

## Reflection and Future Plans

This third portfolio has permitted me to humbly take pride in my efforts to resolve the instructor and student dissatisfaction with this important foundation graduate course. Over three years I have systematically documented my teaching and evaluation methods and the learning outcomes of students. The input from colleagues at other universities who have experience with the course content and this type of student and/or course delivery at a distance made me aware of the course strengths and key elements that could be adjusted for improved benefit to students (i.e, philosophy statements, reading load, field-work). With minor adjustments to the course requirements and delivery format I have witnessed improved integration of course content in student products and exams (quizzes).

What remains is for me to monitor the long term impact this course has on students' advancement through the ECSE graduate program. The first cohort of students that have written at least two module essays have begun to register for comprehensive exams in the degree program. It is my hope that the quality of the written 2-hour exam will show evidence of the integration and high level critical thinking that was modeled and challenged in this early foundation course.

I am pleased to see that the module questions that I have posted for both student essays and student guidance through reading material are appropriately supported in the level of critical thinking students are asked to consider during online discussions. In the four to five weeks preceding the submission of their essay papers. What I would like to do now is evaluate the cognitive complexity of the classnotes I post online for each topic within each module and see how the mean level of critical thinking challenged in these notes compares to the a) essay questions and b) online discussions for those topics and modules. Again, it is possible that the online classnotes are better at preparing the students for the successful passing of online quizzes (lower level of knowledge) than the higher-order 1500-word essay. If that is true, I would need to consider adjustments in how the content information of those classnotes is presented.

I will likely select new texts for the course in the near future; reading packets will also continually need updating. My system for coding the cognitive complexity of essay questions and online discussions may be useful in reviewing the complexity of the texts I consider. I also need to reflect on how I have students critique each other's essays and the guidance I give in modeling that process and grading that assignment.

Finally, I think what I have learned in this series of reflections/portfolios regarding SpEd 860 can benefit me in reflecting on my other courses. It already has. I have completed an analysis of on-campus and online class discussions for cognitive complexity and discourse patterns in an advanced methods course addressing the topics of infants with disabilities and home visiting principles. I am pleased to report that the online discussions were found to be of higher order than on campus discussions in the same course/same topics and reflected a better match in cognitive complexity between students and instructor (Marvin & Patterson, 2004). Furthermore, I found that the role of the instructor appeared to be more influential when the instructor spoke less often and permitted more student-student discussion; this has been achieved now in two online courses.

I have also duplicated the use of online quizzes in other courses to save class time in reviewing low-level cognitive material (knowledge/facts). Finally, I have instituted online discussions between students for my on-campus undergraduate class as a way to advance their level of understanding and integration of reading material and practicum experiences in direct response to the positive outcomes I achieved in this graduate course. Systematic evaluation, like that which was done here in SpEd 860, is still needed in these courses to determine if benefits are similar to those achieved in this graduate course.

### ***Professional Implications***

Because of my participation in this Peer Review of Teaching Project for three years, I am now presenting nationally on the process and its benefits for colleagues in ECSE at other institutions. We are by the nature of our low-incidence population-of-interest, a small number of faculty members with this expertise/specialization. (Young children under age 5 with disabilities generally comprise less than 5% of the population for this age group). Consequently, many of my colleagues are, like me, the only person on their campus with this teaching responsibility. Establishing an inter-campus, ECSE Peer Review of Teaching network would be my hope over the next five years. A 50-minute session in Kansas City in November 2004 and poster session in Portland OR in October may be the first steps in getting colleagues' reactions to the peer review process and volunteers for an initial study group in 2005-06. Given my continued effort to support and advance the quality of distance education courses on my campus, I hope to continue my own scholarship of teaching activities and to engage my colleagues in distance education to pursue similar self-reflections of student learning-outcomes for the broadcast or online courses they teach.

### References:

- Anderson, L. & Krathwohl, D. (Eds.) (2001). *A taxonomy for learning, teaching and assessing: A revision of Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives*. New York: Addison, Wesley, Longman, Inc.
- Marvin, C. & Patterson, N. (2004, November). *A preliminary study of online class discussions: Cognitive complexity and instructor/student roles*. Tenth Annual Sloan-C International Conference on Asynchronous Learning Networks. Orlando, FL.

## APPENDIX A

### 2002 Module Essay Questions

#### **Module #1 (Legislative)**

A. Should public schools be involved in the delivery of early intervention services to infants and toddlers? Preschool children? Explain how IDEA's Part C and Part B differ and how they are the same in their philosophy for the design and delivery of quality services for children birth to three and three to five years of age (and five to eight years of age if you choose to pursue this latter age group too). Discuss how State Rule distinguishes between these two (three) age groups and how they treat them the same.

B. Part C of IDEA was added in 1986 and amended again in 1997. Explain the theoretical and research basis for the design of this part of the law. (address at least four different components of the law)

#### **Module #2**

A. Why should services for young children with disabilities be Family-Centered Services. Discuss the theoretical, research and legal rationale for this philosophy of practice. Be sure to address how each of the following assist in supporting/promoting the philosophy/definition of Family-Centered Services for children birth to age 5 years who have disabilities.

1. systems theory, 2. transactional theory, 3. research on parent involvement and early experiences in early childhood development, 4. Part C components of IDEA

B. You have recently accepted a teaching position with a rural school district that for years has contracted for its ECSE services until this year. In the past, all children under 5 years of age were referred to the ESU for evaluation and programming. However, this district has experienced an increased number of residents recently and anticipates an enrollment of 8-10 children birth to age 5 this year needing special education services. You are seen as instrumental in those evaluation and treatment services in both home and center-based programs. The district is willing to invest in supplies and equipment to set you up properly for your position.

The first thing the administrator asks you to do is to prepare a list of needed tests and assessment materials, since he does not believe the district owns any applicable to very young children. (Assume you have no opportunity to scan the other team members' lists (psychologist's or SLP's); your list should be all encompassing even if they already have some of the instruments you mention).

Along with your list, the administrator asks you to prepare a two page report justifying the need for each listed supply. In addition, he requests a description and justification of your plans for how referrals, screenings, assessments for eligibility and ongoing assessments should take place for children under 5 years in their community. He is curious to know how you would like to spend your time for any assessment, what parents need to be told/asked, and how the other staff might be influenced by this commitment to service children birth to age 5 years. Give rationale for others you suggest.

**Module #3**

A. Natural Environments are hot words these days in ECSE circles. Explain the issues associated with this national call for inclusionary practices. Discuss the evolution of this concept. Describe procedures/processes for how early interventionists can be successful in achieving this best practice.

B. What makes for a good curriculum in ECSE? Define and then compare and contrast the philosophies of DEC's Recommended Best Practices and NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practice for use with young children who have developmental delays. Explain how Activity-Based Instruction and HighScope fit into this shared philosophy. Justify the use of each for children birth to age 5 years who have disabilities by explaining how each reflects and incorporates the research on effective teaching/intervention with young children in home and classroom settings.

C. Is location so important? Discuss the pros and cons associated with home-based and community, center-based services for children birth to age 5 years with disabilities. Be sure to provide rationale for each citing research, theories and legislation and the advantages /disadvantages from both the administrative and child/family perspectives.

**Module #4**

A. Why can't children, birth to age 5, have just one team? One teacher? Describe what is necessary to assure a quality, effective transition of services between providers, agencies, locales. Explain the theoretical and research-based rationale for the federal laws (IDEA PART C) inclusion of Transition Plans in all IFSPs.

B. Who should have administrative responsibility for ECSE programs? Discuss what knowledge/skills must be present and what adjustments public school administrators and ECSE teachers must make when assuming responsibility for ECSE programs birth to age 5 in their community/neighborhood.

C. Explain the similarities and differences between "continuous services" for infants & toddlers and "extended year services" for children 3-21 yrs of age. Discuss what theories and research support the continuous year model for infants in Part C of IDEA.

What options can birth-mandated states consider for meeting this legal requirement in their public-school-sponsored early intervention programs?

**APPENDIX B**  
**2004 Module Essay Questions**

**Module #1**

A. **Why** should Nebraska public schools be involved in the delivery of early intervention services to infants, toddlers and preschool children? Use research and theory to justify Nebraska's efforts to implement Rule 51 and IDEA's Part C and Part B (as it applies to 3-5 year olds) regarding quality services to young children with developmental delays/disabilities.

B. **Why** did Part C requirements include "continuous (year-round) services" for children birth to three years of age with disabilities. Should a similar requirement be made for children 3-5 years of age in lieu of "extended year services"? why or why not?

**Module #2**

**Who** gets served?

A. Why should services for young children with disabilities be Family-Centered Services? Justify its use by citing specific theoretical, research, legal and practical rationale for this philosophy of practice.

B. You have recently accepted a teaching position with a rural school district that for years has contracted for its ECSE services until this year. In the past, all children under 5 years of age were referred to the ESU for evaluation and programming. However, this district has experienced an increased number of residents recently and anticipates an enrollment of 8-10 children birth to age 5 this year needing special education services. You are seen as instrumental in those evaluation and treatment services in both home and center-based programs. The district is willing to invest in supplies and equipment to set you up properly for your position.

The administrator asks you to prepare a three page report describing and justifying an efficient and cost effective system for referral and intake, evaluation (eligibility), program planning and ongoing assessment (monitoring).

**Module #3**

**What, Where & How** to serve?

A. Natural Environments is a hot phrase these days in ECSE circles. Explain the rationale for the legal and professional call for this practice with children birth to age 5 years.

B. Consider what makes for a good curriculum in ECSE. Justify the blending of the philosophies of DEC's Recommended Practices and NAEYC's Developmentally Appropriate Practices for use with young children who have developmental delays. Explain how each along with Activity-Based Intervention and HighScope reflect research on effective teaching/intervention with young children in home and classroom settings.

C. Explain the theoretical and research-based rationale for the federal law requirements for inclusion of Transition Plans in all IFSPs. Argue the merit of such plans for IEPs as well with children 3-5 years of age.

**Module #4**

A. Explain how a triadic model of service for children with disabilities, birth to age 5, would most appropriately and effectively address their needs in preparing for school and social success.