

**George Mason University
College of Education and Human Development
Early Childhood Education Program**

EDSE 665: Collaboration with Families of Children with Special Needs

SYLLABUS

**Fall 2009
3 credit hours**

**Robinson A, Room 101
Tuesday 4:30-7:10**

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Course Description

This course is offered as a part of the special education and early childhood education programs and is open to enrolled graduate students. It is a required course for students seeking licensure in Early Childhood Special Education.

This course focuses on strategies for developing culturally-appropriate family-professional partnerships to benefit children with special needs. Theories and research that support family-centered practices are explored. The course also provides a focus on family and professional rights and responsibilities in the special education process. This course takes a family-centered perspective and emphasizes the role of collaborative planning with families and caregivers in preparing developmentally supportive environments. Students are expected to become familiar with the cultural context of the families with whom they are working and to consider ways in which their own socio-cultural context influences their work with families of children with disabilities. To increase understanding of family perspectives, the impact of exceptionality on the family is studied in the framework of family systems theory, functions, and the life cycle of the family. The course requires students to examine their values and beliefs about working with families, to challenge their assumptions, and to critically analyze their professional roles in working with families.

Student Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Discuss theories and research supporting a family-centered approach to special education.

2. Discuss the role of cultural context in attitudes, beliefs, values, and child rearing practices.
3. Analyze personal values, beliefs and cultural biases that influence their work with families.
4. Describe underlying principles and ways to work with families that are both effective and enabling.
5. Identify strategies that support and assist families to identify their priorities, resources, and concerns for their children with special needs.
6. Create tailored opportunities for collaborating with families in the ongoing education of children with special needs.
7. Utilize family systems theory to describe and understand family perspectives.
8. Identify specific components of IDEA that support family voices in the special education process.
9. Adopt a strengths-based problem solving perspective when analyzing dilemmas related to partnering with families.

Relationship of Course to Program Goals and Professional Standards

This course is a required course in GMU's Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) master's degree and licensure program. The ECSE program is an approved program of the Commonwealth of Virginia and accredited by the NCATE national teacher education accreditation system. Thus, the course content has been developed with reference to the licensure and accreditation standards for teachers of young children with disabilities identified by the Commonwealth of Virginia, the Council for Exceptional Children, and the National Association for the Education of Young Children. These standards include:

1. The ability to demonstrate an understanding of the role of the family in supporting learning.
2. The ability to understand children in the context of family, culture, and community.
3. The ability to establish positive and collaborative relationships with families as partners in teaching and learning.
4. The ability to provide family-centered intervention.

In addition, the course has been developed to be congruent with the mission of the College of Education and Human Development as a unit. Specifically, the course addresses the College's commitment to families and communities, to research-based practices, and to social justice.

Nature of Course Delivery

This is an interactive course that requires active participation of students. In-class and out-of-class readings play a critical part in preparing students for discussion. Small and large group activities will enable students to practice using what they have been learning. In-class and at-home activities will be structured to encourage individuals to reflect on their own families and on the families with whom they come in contact.

Required Texts:

Turnbull, A., Turnbull, R., Erwin, E., & Soodak, L. (2006) Families, professionals, and exceptionality. Columbus, OH: Prentice Hall.

GMU EDSE 665 Course Packet Fall 2009

www.universityreaders.com

Novel of your choice that focuses on a family of a child with disability

Required Articles:

Thorp, E.K. (1997). Increasing opportunities for partnership with culturally and linguistically diverse families. Intervention in School and Clinic, *32*, 261-269.

Additional Course Resources:

Beck, M. (1999). Expecting Adam. New York: Berkley Books.

Edwards, K. (2005). The memory keeper's daughter. New York: Penguin.

Fadiman, A. (1997). The spirit catches you, and you fall down: A Hmong child, her American doctors, and the collision of two cultures. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Housden, M. (2003). Hannah's gift. Bantam.

Reston, J. (2006). Fragile innocence. New York: Harmony Books.

Gonzalez, N., Moll, L., & Amanti, C. (2005). Funds of knowledge. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Chen, D., Brekken, L. & Chan, S. (1995). Culturally responsive and family focused training. Northridge, CA: California State University Northridge, Project CRAFT.

Flynn, N., Thorp, E., Evans, K. & Takemoto, C. (2001 ed.) Multicultural early childhood team training. Fairfax, VA: Helen A. Kellar Institute for Human disAbilities, Fairfax, VA.

Harry, B., Kalyanpur, M. & Day, M. (1999). Building cultural reciprocity with families: Case studies in special education. Baltimore: Paul Brookes.

Lynch, E. & Hanson, M.J. (1998). Developing cross-cultural competence: A guide for working with children and their families. Baltimore: Paul Brookes.

Plous, S. (ed.). (2003). Understanding prejudice and discrimination. Boston: McGraw Hill.

Staton, J. (1995). Listening to families. Washington, DC: Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. (15-part video series)

Useful Websites:

National Coalition for Parents in Education <http://www.ncpie.org/>

Course Requirements:

1. Attend all class sessions and participate actively in small and large group activities.
2. Prepare for class by completing assigned readings prior to class.
3. Complete written assignments, using APA format. It is expected that assignments be turned in on the due date. A pattern of late papers will affect grading. No papers can be accepted after December 15.
4. Maintain an ongoing reflective journal. The journal will provide the basis for the personal applications and reflection portions of papers.
5. Record meaningful dilemmas that occur in your interactions with families. These will contribute to your personal application papers.
6. Maintain a file of current articles found in the popular press to contribute to a broadened perspective about the experience of families. This will contribute to your final family application paper.

Course Grading

1. Participation and preparation for class 20%

Participation is graded according to the following criteria:

- a) Attending all classes on time, unless prior arrangements have been made with the instructor;
- b) Completing all assignments on time;
- c) Participating in large group discussion and activities on a regular basis, assuming a balance of leadership and participant roles;
- d) Participating in small group discussions and activities on a regular basis, assuming a balance of leadership and participant roles;
- e) Working as a collaborative group member, supporting the participation of classmates and recognizing the unique contribution of each.

2. Personal Journal/ Reading Reflections 20%

3. Collaboration Opportunities 20%

4. Family Project 40%

NOTE: If you require any instructional adaptations, please speak with the instructor prior to proceeding with the assignments. The university is committed to ensuring that all students receive the resources required for their successful participation as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Additional resources are available at the university's Disabilities Resource Center.

NOTE on APA style: It is the policy of the graduate school that all papers be completed using APA format. Copies of the APA style guide are available online. Please attend to the correct use of references and be sure to credit authors when you use or summarize their words. The university writing center is available to students as a resource if you feel you need further support for your writing.

Assignments of Grades

94-100 = A 90-93 = A- 87-89 = B+ 83-86 = B
80-82 = B- 70-80 = C Below 70 = F

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT STATEMENT OF EXPECTATIONS:

The College of Education and Human Development expects that all students abide by the following:

Students are expected to exhibit professional behavior and dispositions. See gse.gmu.edu for a listing of these dispositions.

Students must follow the guidelines of the University Honor Code. See http://www.gmu.edu/catalog/apolicies/#TOC_H12 for the full honor code.

Students must agree to abide by the university policy for Responsible Use of Computing. See <http://mail.gmu.edu> and click on Responsible Use of Computing at the bottom of the screen.

Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course are encouraged to register with the GMU Disability Resource Center (DRC) and inform the instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. See www.gmu.edu/student/drc or call 703-993-2474 to access the DRC.

Description of Assignments

1. Personal Journal/ Reading Reflections (Individual work)

These assignments require that you reflect on the course content and discussions as they relate to your own family experience and how that may impact your work with families of children with disabilities. This should take the form of a journal. You may write entries in a notebook or maintain an electronic journal. If you choose to hand write your reflections, make sure they are easily readable. If you choose to do an electronic journal, you must print a hard copy of your entries that are due and turn them in during the assigned class meeting. (Journal entries will not be accepted via e-mail.) You will benefit more from this course when you use class meetings and assignments as a jumping off point for further thought and reflection and maintain a weekly reflective journal.

Consider the following questions and issues when writing your journal. What are your thoughts about the readings? In what way do the readings relate to your family experience? In what ways do your cultural experiences influence your work with families? Take this opportunity to interview your own family members, to identify early memories that may influence your practice. Consider differences in your family growing up and your current family.

Your ability to do this assignment is enhanced when you journal on a regular basis. This is very informal. I will respond as if it were a dialogue. You are not graded on

what you say or how you say it but that you say something that reveals your ability to engage in critical thinking. Your journal must include a minimum of 6 reflective entries, that is 2 entries each month (September, October, and November). *You need to respond to your assigned readings in at least 3 of the memos.*

Assignment due: Sept. 22, Oct. 20, Nov. 17

(Total points 20)

2. Collaboration Opportunities (Partner work)

This assignment asks you to look critically at current practices and opportunities for partnerships with families in your setting. In class, we will choose partners for this project. In your paper, 1) describe the physical and social setting of the school/program, what opportunities there are for family collaboration, in what ways families receive messages that are welcoming, how families from varied cultures might experience the environment; Look at the entire school environment, the secretary, the PTA, the pictures on the walls etc. Then, look very closely at this particular classroom/setting and analyze it as well. 2) analyze the practices of the program from the perspective of the readings; 3) analyze these practices from the perspective of the families in this setting based upon your understanding of the individual and cultural perspectives of the families. Then, 4) provide a proposal for how current practices in this program can be improved to promote family-centered practices. You will have November 24 (regular class time) to work with your partner and will, then, turn in your paper the following week. In the paper you submit jointly, you must provide specific references to the readings used in class from Turnbull, your novel and the Course Packet and any other resources you used in your analysis.

Assignment Due: December 1

(Total points 20)

4. Family Story Project (Individual work)

Over the first month of the class you are to identify a family whose socio-cultural context is different from your own, whose lens is likely to be different from your own. Get to know that family and use this as an opportunity to see the experience of parenting a child with a disability through a different lens. Consider this as a way to learn someone's story – how did this family come to be in this place where you have met them? What do you need to understand about their culture in order to understand them? What is their perspective about their child or children? Find at least two opportunities to interact with them in a way other than you would otherwise typically interact with them – e.g., informally away from school if possible.

Memo # 1. Initial Contact. Write a (2-3 page) memo about your initial contact with the family. It should include: 1) a rationale for why you chose this family; 2) an explanation of the ways you think their culture is different from yours; 3) what you have observed about how society views the disability of their child and the culture of

their family (from Step 2); and 4) make an honest attempt to identify and describe any assumptions you have about this family. **Memo #1 is due October 6.**

As you move into the next phase of the project, think about how to interact respectfully as you cross cultures. In other words, challenge yourself to hear the voices/values of others on their own terms. This will be difficult and, may be, uncomfortable. How can you get to know another person and his or her culture on his or her own terms? Ask, ask, ask. If there is something that you are seeing or hearing that seems strange, wrong, or weird to you, ask what it means to the person you are engaging with. Think about why this may be a part of their way of seeing or being in the world.

Memo 2: Interactions and reflections. By the end of October you must meet with the family and interview the parents or guardians. Try to learn as much as you can through *meaningful* exchanges. Challenge yourself to understand the family's view of disability, and how they makes sense of the world – how the person's reality of the world is different from yours.

Consider the amount of time you have and the ease with which you'll be able to engage persons of another culture. First, arrange to spend time with the family member (remember, you're not an anthropologist trying to "interview the Other"...you're trying to engage respectfully with the person on his or her own terms). Do this in a relaxed framework. In other words, try not to be terribly formal. Write a memo of 5-7 pages describing your describing experience and examining your previous assumptions given new information and experience. **Memo #2 is due November 3.**

Memo # 3. Child Observation at a family event. By the end of November, conduct an observation of the child in a family event. It can be a routine event or a special event. You must spend at least an hour with the family. Write a 5-7 page memo describing what you saw/heard and the key events. Engage the family in an informal conversation to find out about the meanings of their actions, describing and making meaning of your learning experience with this person. You should include: 1) what you learned about the family in this second interaction 2)what you learned about yourself through coming to know this person, and 3) what this experience might mean for you as a special educator. **Memo #3 will be due December 8. (Submit Memos #1 and #2 also at this time.)**

In-Class Presentation: On the date assigned to you, you will present what you have learned as a story. Each student presentation will be a total of 15 minutes – 10 minutes student presentation and 5 minutes and peer/instructor questions and discussion. *This should not sound like a clinical case presentation. Be creative. Consider how you would like your story to be told.*

December 1, December 8 or December 15. (Instructor will assign each student a presentation date.)

(Total points 40)

Class Session Topics and Assignment Due Dates

Date	Class Topics	Assignments Due
Sept. 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overview of the Class ▪ Review of syllabus ▪ Beginning with our stories ▪ Understanding our multiple identities and how they affect your work with families 	
Sept. 8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family System's Perspective ▪ Consider your own family, how would you describe it from a systems perspective? Consider a family with whom you have worked, how does systems theory help you understand them? ▪ Identify partner for Collaboration Opportunities assignment 	Read: Turnbull, Chapters 1 and 2
Sept. 15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Developmental Process of Parenting ▪ Reflect on the stories you have heard about your birth. What messages did you get? If you are a parent, think about what it was like for you during pregnancy, later stages? 	Read: Turnbull, Chapters 3 and 4
Sept. 22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Historical View on Family Role Education Programs ▪ Consider your own school experience. What roles did your family play? What barriers did they confront? What messages were they given? If you are a parent, how is it different for you? 	Read: Turnbull, Chapter 5 Assignment due: 1st Journal Reflection (2 entries)
Sept. 29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Socio-cultural Perspective on Disability ▪ IDEA and NCLB – vision, goals and implementation 	Read: Turnbull, Chapter 6
Oct. 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collaboration with Families of Children with Special Needs 	Read: Turnbull, Chapter 7 Course Packet – 1. Building Cultural

		Reciprocity with Families: Case Studies in Special Education <i>Assignment Due: Family Story Memo #1</i>
Oct. 13	NO GMU Tuesday classes meet this week	
Oct. 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Historical Perspective on Role of Professionals 	Read: Turnbull, Chapter 8 Course Packet – 2. Carissa: A Family with a Vision – On a Mission <i>Assignment Due: 2nd Journal Reflection (4 entries total)</i>
Oct. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resources for Families 	Read: Turnbull, Chapter 9 Course Packet – 4. Skilled Dialogue: Strategies for Responding to Cultural Diversity in Early Childhood
Nov. 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Special Issues: Homelessness & Poverty 	Read: Turnbull, Chapter 10 <i>Assignment Due: Family Story Memo #2</i>
Nov. 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family Strengths and Coping 	Course Packet – 3. Rafael: ‘La Alegria de la Casa’ [Our Family Happiness] Read: Novel of your choice about a family with a child with disability
Nov. 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Family Partnership in Assessment and Intervention 	Read: Turnbull, Chapter 12 <i>Assignment Due :</i> 3rd Journal Reflection (6 entries total)
Nov. 24	In Place of Class: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Work with Partner on Collaboration Opportunities Assignment/Paper 	Read: Turnbull, Chapter 11

Dec. 1	▪ Family Story Sharing	<i>Assignment Due:</i> Collaboration Opportunities Paper
Dec. 8	▪ Family Story Sharing	<i>Assignment Due:</i> Final Project Paper – Submit Family Story Memos 1, 2 and 3
Dec. 15 (final exam period)	▪ Family Story Sharing	