



Early Childhood Education Philosophy Statement and Program Overview

Philosophy Statement

The M.Ed. and MAT programs follow the School of Education's (SOE) philosophy. SOE's logo is an arch that lists the goals and outcomes desired for candidates who complete their respective programs. Each of these nine goals and areas of emphasis builds toward preparation of informed, reflective and responsive early childhood professionals.

- **Philosophy** and practice – Early childhood professionals articulate, maintain and develop a philosophy of education that they also demonstrate in practice.
- Human **development** and learning – Early childhood professionals understand how human development affects learning and apply that knowledge to practice.
- **Diversity** and differentiation – Early childhood professionals differentiate instruction with respect for individual and cultural characteristics.
- **Content** knowledge – Early childhood professionals possess current academic content knowledge.
- Facilitating **student learning** – Early childhood professionals facilitate student learning by using assessment to guide planning, instruction and modification of teaching practice.
- Learning **environment** – Early childhood professionals create and manage a stimulating, inclusive and safe learning environment in which students take intellectual risks and work independently and collaboratively.
- Parent and community **partnerships** – Early childhood professionals work as partners with parents, families and the community.
- **Professionalism** – Early childhood professionals develop and maintain professional, moral and ethical attitudes, behaviors, relationships and habits of mind.
- Educational **technology** – Early childhood professionals use technology effectively, creatively and wisely.

Through SOE's Conceptual Framework, knowledge, performances and dispositions expected of any program graduate is clearly defined.

- **Informed** early childhood professionals know about human development, learning theory, deep content knowledge and pedagogy.
- **Reflective** early childhood professionals develop an understanding based on their professional knowledge and broad content knowledge. Candidates are reflective about connected ethical, legal and policy issues.
- **Responsive** early childhood professionals identify relevant content, learn about diverse students and bridge content to students' needs to promote each child's learning and well-being.

Theoretical Framework

The M. Ed. And MAT programs maintain that to work effectively with young children, the professional must establish mutually respectful and caring relationships between and among students, parents, and colleagues. Therefore, we create caring communities in each course and in the program. Such relationships free learners to share their ideas and questions freely thus enhancing their learning process.

The theoretical framework for the Master in Education- Early Childhood is supported by Constructivist Theory and Human Ecology.

Constructivism is a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that, by reflecting on our experiences, we construct our own understanding of the world we live in.

Human Ecology deals with the relationships between humans and their natural environment. Human ecology investigates how individuals and the societies, and global issues that interact and have an affect on overall growth, development, and actions.

The M.Ed. program works hard to establish a close, collegial environment for students. We do our best to walk-our-talk and model the beliefs and practices supported by our program.

Coursework as Teaching Models

Coursework in the early childhood graduate programs here at UAS do not rely on traditional teaching methods of direct instruction. We believe in order for early childhood professionals to modify their beliefs and practices regarding how to assist children's construction of knowledge, teachers, potential teachers, and other individuals who work with young children must themselves be assisted in constructing their own understandings. In other words, as early childhood professionals experience their own construction of knowledge, they come to understand the process and its value for their young students. In your coursework here at UAS, you will experience: classes that pose questions for discussion rather than total lectures; conducting observations and exploration children's learning in various settings in order to validate educational research; and respect as an adult learner, which includes validation of questions as valuable parts of the learning process as they are for young children's learning. In other words, the early childhood graduate programs courses have an obligation to model the learning theories we teach. All learning, as with children, is real, relevant, and meaningful.

Program Overview

The UAS School of Education (SOE) offers three advanced Early Childhood Education (ECE) programs: Early Childhood Certificate, Master of Education (M.Ed.), and Master of Art in Teaching (MAT). Early Childhood Teacher/Leader is our area of specialization.

Our programs are mainly distance-delivered. Students are encouraged to be self-directed learners, have access to high speed internet, and be able to complete weekly field experience assignments. The program consists of 2- two-week on-campus summer sessions where students interact with distinguished professors, create peer relationships, and establish a network of early childhood professional contacts. Our distance-delivered courses coupled with our summer workshops create a learning environment that is real, relevant, and meaningful to our students.

All courses are offered on a 2-year cycle with the assumption that students will attend school part-time while teaching.

Program Content

Understanding children's intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development is the basis for all coursework. Various course contents regarding working with children are based on carefully documented research about how children learn and the factors involved in that learning. Since intellect does not exist in isolation, teaching practices must consider each child's physical and emotional well-being as well. Therefore, health and safety issues are integrated into each course. Our theoretical foundation in Human Ecology supports course content surrounding the nature and nurture aspects of development, helping children make friends, honoring the family, and cultures of each child.

Curriculum, guidance, and discipline are critical understandings necessary to the field of early childhood education. Developing an understanding of the nature of development and learning from birth through age 8 is essential when planning and leading in early childhood environments. Knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices is critical. Early childhood professionals must know about child development and the implications of this knowledge as they adjust their beliefs and practices around how and what to teach, the content of the curriculum, how to assess what children have learned, and how to adapt curriculum and instruction to children's individual strengths, needs, and interests.

The early childhood graduate programs work to provide high quality, cultural responsive educational opportunities supported by current theoretically based research and sound early childhood pedagogy that will encourage early childhood professionals to reflect, modify, and adjust their current set of beliefs and practices as they work with young children in a rapidly changing global society.

Program Course Delivery: Modified Distance Delivery

The early childhood graduate programs are delivered using a modified distance delivery method. Courses are delivered through a variety of technology such as web-based courses, audio-conferences, Eluminate (use of instant messages, voice, and video together), video conferencing, and UAS Online (a Blackboard format). However, we recognize the importance of face-to-face dialogue in building a community of learners. To provide for this dialogue and to gain a sense of collegiality, a Summer Institute has been incorporated into the program. Students must attend two summer institutes for 2-weeks each. There are a total of four courses offered, scheduled over two summers. During these institutes students take two courses in their program. These courses are taught by distinguished guest professors from around the United States. Housing is arranged at the University for minimal costs.

Field Experience and Group Reflection

Course reading assignments are assigned as pre-class and during class assignments. These are designed to provide guidance for conducting and analyzing any field experiences. Reading responses are submitted online before the field experience so the professor can provide feedback and to clarify interpretations about the reading. The field experience reports emphasize the analysis of the student's experiences; what the student observed about children's learning and how it relates to current and previous weeks' readings.

With the extensive use of computer conferencing, such as discussion boards, students read and reflect on field experience reports submitted online by their classmates to get ideas and practice analytical thinking about what they agree or disagree with. As students submit their work online, the professor provides immediate feedback with an emphasis on stimulating thought rather than merely providing information.

Standards Papers and Exit Portfolio

Standards Papers: Each of the ECE courses requires proficiency with a set of SOE goals and the corresponding ECE Performance Indicators. Students' progress toward these goals is demonstrated through successful submission of standards papers for each ECE class. The standards papers demonstrate understanding of concepts, document competency with related skills, and reveal related dispositions. Standards papers are assessed by the faculty using a rubric designed for each of the standards related to a specific course. Standards papers are collected by the student and saved for later analysis in the Portfolio Capstone Course. Portfolio Capstone (not required for endorsement program) is a collection of previously written standards papers that include detailed reflections and analysis on all evidence of teaching competency documented throughout a candidate's program. Detailed portfolio instructions and assessment rubrics are shared throughout the ECE Master programs.

Master's Research or Project: Advanced Candidates for the Masters in Early Childhood will prepare a research paper or project. The completed research project will be combined with the Capstone Portfolio creating a final exit portfolio.

Dispositions

Candidates in the advanced ECE program must maintain professional and personal dispositions both in university classes and in the field.

Petitions, Waivers, Exceptions, Substitutions

Any deviation from the program must be petitioned in writing to the Dean of Education. Your advisor will help you prepare the appropriate paperwork needed.

Policies and Requirements

1. This program must be completed within 7 years of the starting semester of the first program class taken.
2. Transfer credits into these programs are evaluated on a case-by-case basis. No course older than 7 years at the time of program completion will be eligible to transfer in.

3. Candidates must maintain a 3.0 grade point average. A grade of B or better must be received in all foundation courses. A grade of C or lower in any program course is unacceptable and must be repeated for the credit to apply.
4. Candidates must abide by the Alaska Teaching Profession Code of Ethics at all times.
5. Each methods course requires a minimum of 3 hours of practicum in an early childhood classroom per week.

Advisor Responsibilities

Your academic advisor is your mentor throughout the program. She/he oversees your courses and performances and is available for academic counseling when you need it.

Specifically, the advisor responsibilities are:

1. Conducts initial interview;
2. Reviews your undergraduate transcripts and recommends any prerequisites;
3. Oversees your program through the various program gates;
4. Provides information about the program; and
5. Serves as your graduate committee chair.