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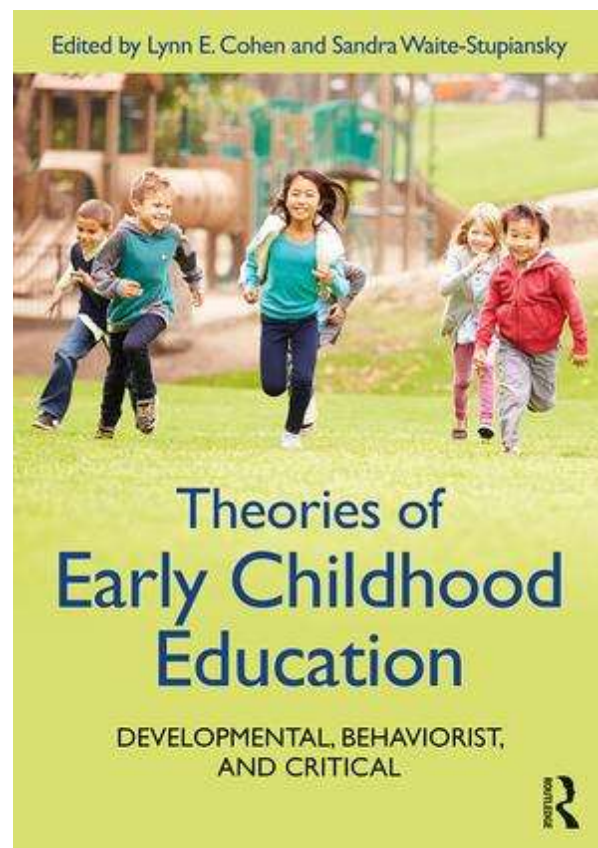
Cohen, L. E., & Waite-Stupiansky, S. (2017). *Theories of early childhood education: Developmental, behaviorist, and critical*. New York: Routledge.

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Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) has been a hot topic not only in the US, but also in other countries, as more women seek employment opportunities outside the home. As ECCE has become a robust public issue, a large body of evidence also suggests that public provision of quality preschool education is an effective way to promote the well-being of children in disadvantaged communities and to reduce educational, economic, and social inequalities (Barnett & Frede, 2017). As the number of jobs grow in the early childhood education field, so do training programs in community colleges and universities that address the need to prepare ECCE practitioners with strong skills in child development policy and advocacy, the capability to understand various ECCE approaches serving young children and families, and most importantly, deep understanding of child development theories and research to define good ECCE practices (NAEYC, 2011).



Lynn E. Cohen and Sandra Waite-Stupiansky's (2017) *Theories of Early Childhood Education* is an edited collection of various developmental theories and their application to ECCE practices by early childhood scholars. The book aims to provide pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and graduate students with key concepts and insightful practical applications of classical and critical theories on how young children develop and learn in and beyond the classrooms.

The book is divided into four sections: Developmental Theories (Part I), Infant/Toddler Theories (Part II), Behaviorist Theories (Part III), and Critical Theories (Part IV). In the first part of the book, the contributing authors survey some of the major theories that are frequently taught in ECCE courses: Piaget, Montessori, Erikson, Bronfenbrenner, and Vygotsky. The authors provide in-depth descriptions of the theorists' lives and theories along with important implications that these theories have for ECCE practices. In addition to exploring developmental theories, the authors also survey two theories that address the development of infants and toddlers in Part II (Gerber and Brazelton), two Behaviorist theories (Skinner and Lovaas) in Part III, then four Critical theories in Part IV (Bakhtin, Dewey, Freire, then Deleuze and Guattari). The inclusion of the theories on infants and toddlers sets *Theories of Early Childhood Education* apart from similar books, as the field has seen a dramatic surge in the visibility of the theories and empirical work focused on infant and toddler development and care, reflecting the increasing needs for high-quality care centers and skilled practitioners.

Although each of these theories is highly regarded and utilized in various educational research and teacher education programs, the ideas are rarely taught and applied to research and practices in ECCE. *Theories of Early Childhood Education* is an exemplary and inspiring resource, expanding our perspectives on how these underutilized,

progressive ideas could be realized to design innovative, learner-centered pedagogy and strategies to enhance democratic, mutually respectful dialogue with their children's families.

Among other features that distinguish *Theories of Early Childhood Education* from similar books on developmental theories, the most striking is its consistent commitment to achieving social justice and educational equity through ensuring young children's best possible development and growth. According to a recent review on social justice in ECCE, the central principle highlights that each child needs to be "valued for their unique complement of strengths, capacities and vulnerabilities, and early childhood programs are responsible for designing environments to include them" (Nicholson, Kuhl, Maniates, Lin, & Bonetti, 2018). Similarly, *Theories of Early Childhood Education* highlights social justice and equity. The authors touch on progressive perspectives that various theorists endorse on how ECCE practitioners should view child development, such as Piaget's notion of children as active agents, Vygotsky's emphasis on a child's own active participation in social interactions, and Bakhtin's view of the child as much more than merely a receiver or transmitter of language. Readers would also appreciate that these relatively contemporary ideas of child development shed new light on the teacher's role, as eloquently stated by Freire: "the progressive educator must always be moving out on his or her own, continually reinventing me and reinventing what it means to be democratic" (p. 178). We see a similar theme highlighted by Lovaas, who stated "challenging behaviors are communicative and learning more appropriate ways of getting one's wants and needs met results in decreases in problem behavior" (p.116).

One of the most practical conceptual contributions made by *Theories of Early Childhood Education* is the clarity of the presentation of each theory and its key concepts. Each chapter starts with short

biographical information on a theorist, followed by very rich and specific description of each theory and its key principles, and then concludes with a vivid account of how the theory can be translated into ECCE practices. The implication part in each chapter is concrete and insightful, ranging from applications such as classroom environment design, curriculum design, and communication with parents, to teacher-training courses in the higher education setting. Readers with a breadth of familiarity with ECCE theories would benefit from the highly organized, parallel structure that all the chapters consistently follow.

Secondly, the short biographical sketch of each theorist is not only highly enjoyable to read but also helpful for readers to position each theory in various layers of contexts within which each theorist was situated. It is striking to realize that we do not know very much about which theory was influenced by which academic discipline and whose theoretical work. The contributing authors' concerted effort to link a specific theory to other theories that have been influential provides many promising channels for in-service and pre-service student teachers to deepen their understanding of each developmental theory.

Moreover, the bio sketch section gives ECCE instructors in higher education a powerful tool to give "life" to instruction on theories, which are often too abstract or dry for young undergraduate students. It makes instructors and students appreciate that each theorist has powerful life stories behind the curtain, such as Montessori's life-long advocacy for impoverished families and the rights of women, the early influences that thought-provoking conversations with his neuropathologist father had on young Bronfenbrenner, and the obstacles that Vygotsky faced as a result of the Soviet's ban on his ideas. Exemplifying Bronfenbrenner's ideas about powerful influences on human development imposed by various layers of

surrounding contexts (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), the bio section tells us an inspiring and profound story of each theorist's challenges, resiliencies, and glories in their individual lives, clustered within unique sociohistorical contexts.

Thirdly, each contributing author exercises a notable effort to describe key concepts in accessible language and to demonstrate the application of these abstract ideas into an array of inspiring implications that offer promising uses in various ECCE settings. It is profound to see the slightly different perspectives on classroom design between Montessori's and Erikson's theories. On one hand, Montessori's theory endorses the idea of an organized physical environment with elective activities, multi-age grouping, and careful design to support young children's interests with a special attention to the differences that each child brings. On the other hand, Erikson's vision of classroom environment design stems from his theory of developmental progression from infancy, toddlerhood, preschool, to school age with much attention to the subtle, yet complicated, differences that children in each developmental stage manifest. This is one of the many examples of the parallel contrasts between theories, and it helps us visualize creative ways to integrate divergent perspectives in the optimal ECCE practice.

Across the various chapters, there are a number of other practical classroom implications that are insightful and exemplary, such as Dewey's notion of "educative experiences," Lovaas's invention of "Discrete Trial Teaching" as an approach for early intervention in the classroom, and the power of observation and assessment in our daily practices, addressed by Montessori and Skinner. The impressive list ideas for implication exemplifies nothing but highly specialized and seasoned knowledge and experiences of each contributing author.

The explicit focus of this book is primarily about the application of theories into effective practices that support young children's learning and development in the classroom settings. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that some of the implications discussed can be applied outside of classroom settings — “non-traditional” ECCE fields such as child life specialists, school psychologists, occupational therapists, and counselors. The chapter on Skinner covers speech and language instruction with the treatment intensity customized to the individual child's needs. Also, as implied in this quote “trusting children means giving them time and attention laced with large quantities of curiosity to find out what they are interested in, what they are seeking, and how they related to the world” (p. 75), Garber’s notion of “educaring” would open our discussion on interdisciplinary ways to support infants, toddlers, and their families in a pluralistic society. This feature is one of the many strengths that are relevant to the dramatic change that surrounds ECCE workforce training programs provided at higher education institutions across the country, due to the increase in the number of the ECCE students who are seeking diverse career paths, including “non-education” occupations, after graduation.

Overall, *Theories of Early Childhood Education* could be a great learning tool for future practitioners. Nevertheless, I believe that the book could have been more accessible to the targeted audience and a wider audience, including parents who are interested in learning developmental theories. One suggestion would be to end each chapter with a set of discussion questions. These could be questions to reiterate key ideas and practical implications, and to introduce critiques and contradictions to enhance readers’ deeper

understanding and conversation with their peers. These questions would be useful when the book is used in child development classes and workshops.

Secondly, I would suggest that each chapter should also bring in more updated ECCE research topics in conjunction with the discussed theories, as the ECCE training programs emphasize evidence-based practices (NAEYC, 2011). For instance, readers would benefit by seeing how these classic and alternative theories could say something about supporting children of racial, cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic minorities. This perspective would help realize the editors’ concerted effort to bring about social justice and equity in ECCE. *Theories of Early Childhood Education* would also gain more power as an instructional resource for pre-service teachers by addressing practical and research implications to more contemporary topics including diversified family structure (e.g., single-parent families, same-sex parenting, fathering) as well as the young children's use of technology in the classroom and home.

In conclusion, *Theories of Early Childhood Education* is an excellent textbook for in-service and pre-service teacher students as well as all those concerned with the well-being of young children and their families in their intellectual journey to facilitate social justice and equity in ECCE. Cohen and Waite-Stupiansky have contributed a highly readable, persuasively argued account of the prominent ECCE theories. Each chapter effectively contributes unique, distinctive ideas and ECCE approaches to paint a balanced, integrated picture of various theories and their implication to practice. The book is certainly an exemplary tool for us to understand, critique, and synthesize important theories in the field as a critical part of our lifelong professional development in the ECCE field.


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About the Reviewer

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