

Interpretivist-Experiential Proposed CPP Program for Inclusivity of Students with Disabilities

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EDCI 7334-01 IV Language of Curricular-Pedagogical Praxis

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February 25, 2024

Abstract

The proposed CPP program will primarily incorporate Interpretivist-Experiential (IE) methodology, that inspired today's Problem-Based Learning (PBL) and student-centered learning (SCL) practices in education, to meet the needs of students with disabilities and engage surrounding members of the community. The proposed CPP program will also allude to elements found in the Critical Praxeology (CP) methodology that furthered the IE ideals of social integration through education. By fostering community involvement, it aims to facilitate the acquisition of skills relevant to real-world scenarios for students, applicable in their post-secondary livelihood. IE methodology emphasizes active learner engagement through firsthand experiences that encourage reflection and the construction of knowledge within social contexts. The purpose of the proposed CPP program is to extend a continuous standing open invitation to all stakeholders interested in learning about advocacy skills, promoting independence, and fostering collaboration through community awareness for students with disabilities. The goals, objectives, and metrics are designed to address the needs of students with disabilities and all interested parties. Participating in the proposed CPP program is significant for students with disabilities who are facing challenges, as well as their parents, and community members dedicated to making a positive impact in the lives of these unique learners.

Background

“Man without human society and human culture is not man.”

—George S. Counts, “Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive?” (1932)

According to the Texas governor's office disability report, 9.8% of the Hispanic population in Texas is reported to have a disability (2019). This statistic emphasizes the significance of understanding and addressing the unique challenges faced by individuals with

disabilities within this demographic. For Texas educators, this means recognizing the learning process is a culmination of multi-content social interactions designed to foster every students' individuality and potential as lifelong critical-thinkers and problem-solvers prepared to actively join and improve society. With this said, the learning community is composed of all identified middle school students with disabilities receiving support services in the special education program in the Pharr-San Juan-Alamo Independent School district (PSJAISD) enrolled at Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) Middle School in Pharr, Texas. The proposed CPP program outlined in this white paper is modeled after the IE method of teaching, popularized by John Dewey, and CP method promoted by George S. Counts, and Paulo Freire during the last century, which emphasizes actively engaging learners in educational alliances to gain content knowledge by experiencing real-world application.

While students with disabilities are still enrolled in the public school system, the school is responsible for providing assistance through special education services documented in the students' Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). This means support services must be delivered by certified educators knowledgeable in academics and in teaching students with special needs. Atypical learners who require assistance to gain functional skills are also guaranteed regularly scheduled access to related services, such as counseling, speech therapy (SP), physical therapy (PT) and occupational therapy (OT) for rehabilitative school-related instructional purposes. Additionally, daily integration into the public school setting allows students with disabilities to socialize, interact, and come into contact with both special education and general education peers. Attending school daily not only enhances academic growth, but aids in the much needed development and improvement of intrapersonal and communication skills in a social context, so for students with disabilities, the simple act of going to school is a valuable opportunity to

experience what may be the only non-family member friendships they will experience. However, the question remains, what happens to these atypical learners once the public school system stops being held accountable for proposing, implementing, and adhering to an IEP?

These issues arise with the pending approach of high school graduation, and the realization that in the near future the public school system will no longer be legally responsible for providing the support, related services, and opportunities students require and rely on to gain independence. In the state of Texas, students age out of high school at the age of twenty-two, and as that day draws nearer, parents begin to express a growing interest with their child's involvement in academic and social opportunities before, during, and after high school. Of the 84.1% of Hispanic students with disabilities who graduate from high school, only 5% are employed (2023). This information from the Texas Education Agency (TEA) indicates parents have a right to be concerned.

As a result, community need for a specialized program tied to future planning resources is justified due to the concerns, issues, and needs specific to all targeted students with disabilities, their parents, and their family support systems. For many parents of atypical learners, options to successfully maintain involvement into the community after high school graduation are limited, involve joining long waiting lists that may last years, or are simply underutilized due to lack of information. As parents of general education students are preparing their seventeen-year-old and eighteen-year-old children to receive a post-secondary education, join the military, or enter the workforce, parents of atypical learners must continue to focus on developing independent living skills, including self-care, accessing public transportation, and finding suitable employment, well into adulthood. Parents of students with disabilities need information, access, and contacts for local and government services and resources available to

them and their children, so students with disabilities can continue to be involved as active community members when they complete their high school education. Indeed, research concludes that while current special education post-secondary transition research, regulations, and practice recognizes the “importance of resources of knowledge and skills that are established, in part, via social networks and relationships” not enough is being done to ensure atypical learners “achieve postsecondary outcomes” (Trainor, 2008, p. 148). Early implementation of the IE methodology can significantly aid in addressing the social contextual needs of atypical learners, by encouraging them to participate in an inclusive PBL and SCL environment where they can continue to develop authentic life skills. The intentional focus on secondary students calls for intervention through transferable skills that can be introduced in middle school, enhanced during high school, and utilized beyond the parameters of the public school system for real-world application. The proposed CPP program will work to generate parent, student, and community awareness through education, training, and networking.

Theoretical Background

“But unless the Progressive Education Movement wishes to change its name to the Contemplative Education movement, the Goodwill Education movement, or the Hopeful Education movement, it should go further.”

—George S. Counts, “Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive?” (1932)

The significance of implementing the IE methodology to the proposed CCP program lies in fostering opportunities for non-traditional learners to engage in dynamic, PBL and SCL activities that lead to the acquisition of skills relevant to real-world scenarios. Ideally, these skills will be obtained through middle school and high school education and ultimately transferred to post-secondary living, thereby resulting in a lower drop-out percentage and contributing to a higher employment rate.

The IE methodology advocates for the use of an interdisciplinary curriculum and social interactions based on the learners' development for a SCL setting that mimics authentic situations, and for students with disabilities, this best translates to practical application opportunities designed to prepare them for the realities of daily living they will encounter as active community members. A pioneer in the field of IE methodology, John Dewey challenged traditional educational ideas and practices, and his concepts outlined in his 1902 *The Child and the Curriculum* are recognized today as the cornerstone for Progressive Education. Throughout his work, he consistently endorsed the IE methodology which emphasizes the interconnected relationship between student experiences and the curriculum and called for educators to “abandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child’s experience; cease thinking of the child’s experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluent, embryonic, vital; and we realize that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process” (Dewey, 1902, p. 16). This statement not only highlights the importance of customizing instruction to the unique needs of every and all children and describes the learning process as collaborative, ongoing, and fluid in order to accommodate the learner’s perspective and circumstances, but it lies at the heart of the proposed CPP vision. With the belief that empowerment through education is a right every student enrolled in the public school system is entitled to, the proposed CPP program envisions a cultivation of educational alliances among all stakeholders that facilitates the experiences of students with disabilities resulting in the acquisition of diverse life skills and the creation of a pathway to independent living.

The CP methodology emphasis on collective social classes who recognize societal inequalities before undergoing conscientization, or “the deepening of the attitude of awareness

characteristic of all emergence” toward humanization, aligns with the ideals that social reform starts with education. (Freire, 1970, p. 109). Educator and social reformer George S. Counts refined the principles of the CP methodology through his advocacy for a curriculum centered on real-life experiences based on social context inclusive of more than just the children of middle-class and upper-class families. In his 1932 speech “Dare Progressive Education Be Progressive?”, he espouses the significance of education built on social interactions reflective of contemporary trends so that “[education] must always be a function of time and circumstances” (Counts, 1932, para. 5). Noting that learning is an active process of constructing knowledge through social interaction and student collaboration, the proposed CPP program takes these ideals a step further to foster social partnerships inclusive of atypical learners to target the enhancement and improvement of communication skills, problem-solving abilities, peer support strategies, diverse perspectives acceptance, and motivation to learn, be productive, and be independent. The proposed CPP program aims to involve all stakeholders as influential and necessary contributors to the PBL and SCL processes that affect the well-being of students with disabilities.

The CP methodology also finds it necessary to assume an oppositional position against the current mainstream social and political conditions that cloud the educational atmosphere of the public school system. Paulo Freire’s 1970 *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, challenged traditional educational methods by advocating for a progressive approach to education through a pedagogy of critical consciousness. As a staunch practitioner of CP, Freire was resolute that the teacher-student relationship required a shift in dynamics to reflect a learning process in which both the teacher and the student could cooperate to learn from each other through scaffolded conversations about meaningful content drawn from the learner’s life situations. He was

determined that dialogue, critical thinking, and empowerment to dismantle oppression of the lower classes and marginalized demographics was possible through CP methodology and PBL centered on the learner's concerns, needs, and situations. The proposed CPP program's commitment to coordinating community alliances among all stakeholders ensures inclusivity thereby reducing the pattern of disenfranchisement often associated with students with disabilities upon high school graduation. Moreover, students will encounter PBL and SCL opportunities to shape their own worldly perception, as encouraged by Freire's assertion based on the CP methodology that "the more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of the world" (Freire, 1970, p. 72).

The proposed CPP program is an extension of the IE methodology as it promotes collaboration among all members of the community, ensuring that every stakeholder involved acquires knowledge or skills through PBL and SCL. Focused on the needs and concerns of students with disabilities, with secondary involvement from parents, friends, family members and community organizations, the proposed CPP raises awareness in the general population that atypical learners deserve a place in society, and that with community support and services, they can be active and productive community members. In fact, data suggests that "the application of project-based learning improves critical thinking skills of children with special needs through syntax, which is an action step that helps children to play an active role in a problem or material" (Elvida & Azizah, 2019, p. 354). Therefore, students with disabilities will develop transferable life skills applicable beyond high school graduation, while community organizations and members receive education on disabilities and training with assisting individuals with needs, so future real life encounters will result in nurturing and empathetic experiences. The end goal is the

incorporation of the IE methodology, PBL, and SCL to emphasize steady progress towards the education of all community stakeholders and provide ongoing support services to all interested parties.

Project Description and Aims

“Personality, character, is more than subject-matter. Not knowledge or information, but self-realization, is the goal.”

—John Dewey, *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902)

By adopting more modern teaching methods, such as the IE and CP methodologies, that propose educators create educational pathways to the successful integration of students, both typical and atypical, into their communities, the proposed CPP program is designed to promote SCL for students with disabilities through personalized academic, social, and functional experiences beyond the public school system setting with the purpose of further enhancing these vital life skills through practical application of PBL situations. With this in mind, the concept behind the proposed CPP program focuses on the successful transfer of parent-made decisions to student-made decisions by facilitating student accountability through authentic PBL and SCL activities in a real-life social context.

The proposed CPP program will address targeted needs and concerns of students with disabilities in order to assist them in developing advocacy skills, fostering independent living to the maximum extent possible, and reinforcing collaboration through community awareness and integration. Advocacy skills empower atypical learners to exercise their rights by introducing them to and informing them of the processes involved in obtaining available services and resources and to the procedures in appropriately conveying their needs in both social and professional environments. The expected outcomes of bi-monthly educational workshops providing hands-on SCL and PBL experiences include building self-esteem and encouraging

confidence through the mastery of life skills in order for atypical learners to achieve independent living to the highest degree of their abilities. A study examined the motivation of students with disabilities in learning English through PBL compared to traditional methods. Results indicated that students exhibited higher motivation levels with PBL, demonstrating increased self-efficacy and enthusiasm for learning. Researchers added “the students’ self-efficacy gives them the confidence to make informed decisions and participate successfully in the learning tasks” (Council, 2018, p. 3). The study highlighted that students' enhanced self-efficacy empowered them to make informed decisions and actively engage in learning tasks, contributing to their successful participation.

In conjunction with learning opportunities associated with PBL, the proposed CPP program endorses inclusivity and will establish cooperative opportunities advancing the participation of students with disabilities within their community, so that members of the targeted demographic no longer represent the marginalized population but are assimilated into mainstream society. Therefore, through PBL opportunities aimed to improve communication skills, coping skills, and the utilization of conflict-resolution strategies, students with disabilities will gain social skills needed to fully integrate into and function in society and the workplace. In addition, the proposed CPP program will work to guide atypical learners in the successful acquisition of interviewing skills, the how-to's of composing formal emails and completing paperwork, and understanding and complying with appropriate interactions and attire requirements in a professional setting. When equipped with the necessary knowledge of contemporary soft skills, students with disabilities will develop the confidence to participate and employability skills to maintain their positions in the competitive workforce.

For students with disabilities who would prefer to continue their learning into the post-secondary educational setting, the proposed CPP will work with local government agencies, such as Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation Program, to assist atypical learners obtain certifications, degrees, or vocational training. The proposed CPP will advise students with disabilities about accommodations and services available through the Student Accessibility Services (SAS) at local institutions, including the University of Texas-Rio Grande Valley (UTRGV) and South Texas College (STC), so they can continue to receive IEP support at the post-secondary level. Atypical learners and their parents will receive support in progressing through the post-secondary planning process, so students with disabilities have the equal opportunity to enroll in and complete courses and programs geared toward the acquisition of higher learning.

Project Goals, Objectives, and Assessment Metrics

“Knowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other.”

—Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970)

Proposed CPP Program Aim, Goals, and Objectives

<p>Aim: The proposed CPP program moves away from traditional teaching methods by maintaining a standing open invitation for all stakeholders interested in learning about advocacy skills, promoting independence, encouraging collaboration through community awareness for students with disabilities.</p>	
<p>Goal #1: The purpose is to facilitate a progressive education with interdisciplinary curriculum aimed at collaboration for real world application based on and conducive to the interests and development of students with disabilities.</p>	<p>Goal #2: The purpose is to facilitate the emphasis on the efforts of community networking to connect families of students with disabilities with agencies and resources and to familiarize all stakeholders with the characteristics and management of disabilities.</p>
<p>Academics objective: 100% of students will take ownership of learning by expressing their curiosities and exploring inquiries about academic content.</p>	<p>Community integration objective: 100% of all participants will gain knowledge of disabilities and how to assist community members with disabilities.</p>
<p>Social objective: 100% of students will engage in cross-curricular experiences to investigate their purpose in the community.</p>	<p>Employability objective: 100% of students will transfer skills gained in the educational workshop to practical life scenarios beyond high school graduation.</p>

The integration of metrics will allow educational workshop organizers to assess the degree of involvement of all stakeholders effectively. These metrics will encompass both quantitative and qualitative methods to evaluate the intended outcomes aligned with the proposed CPP program's goals and objectives focused on the successful inclusion of atypical learners into the community through academic, social, and employability means. Quantitative data will be obtained through attendance tracking gathered by on-site sign-in sheets and online sign-in forms during educational workshops to gauge and document the ongoing need for services provided by the educational workshops. Additionally, quantitative data, via surveys, will be derived from participation and completion rates at each of the bi-monthly educational workshops to measure stakeholder satisfaction and adjust educational workshop topics, trainings, and activities to meet the needs of all in attendance.






In alignment with the employability objective “100% of students will transfer skills gained in the educational workshop to practical life scenarios beyond high school graduation”, the proposed CPP program will conduct annual follow-ups with postgraduate student participants to measure their success in securing long-term employment. Qualitative data will also be gathered through interviews and annotations obtained from focus groups members composed of students with disabilities, parents, and community members. In alignment with the objective that “100% of all participants will gain knowledge of disabilities and how to assist community members with disabilities”, these focus groups will answer a range of questions designed to explore their perspectives and experiences related to their engagement in the educational workshop topics, trainings, and activities. Students with disabilities, in particular, will complete both pre-assessments and post-assessments to articulate their opinions regarding their opinions, concerns, and suggestions on the transition planning SCL activities. Qualitative data collected from the focus groups aligns with the community integration objectives that “100% of students take ownership of their learning by expressing their curiosities and exploring inquiries about academic content” and that “100% of students will engage in cross-curricular experiences to investigate their purpose in the community.”

What are the logistics for the proposed CPP program? Educational workshops will be scheduled bi-weekly on the first and third Saturday from 8 am to 12 pm at one of PSJA ISD high schools. Because the proposed CPP program practices inclusivity to promote inclusivity, Spanish and American Sign Language (ASL) interpreters will be available to translate on-site at all educational workshops. Outreach efforts will include a Facebook social media campaign to advertise educational workshops and disseminate proposed CPP program information. A monthly calendar of events with hyperlinks to registration forms

(<https://forms.gle/W5C8NtGacyNukN8FA>, <https://forms.gle/oRrUEQyxB4GnsxN47>), online resources, such as government agencies and nonprofits, will also be available on Facebook.

Additional outreach efforts will also include the creation of a monthly newsletter, in both digital and print versions, spotlighting resources, events, and participants during educational workshops. Brochures, infographics, and surveys will be printed in both English and Spanish. Brochures and infographics will be distributed during educational workshops as well as posted online to share information about resources, government agencies, and disabilities. Surveys will be accessible through both digital means and traditional paper and pencil methods to gather input and feedback from all participating stakeholders. Furthermore, the proposed CPP program maintains a standing open invitation in the hopes of recruiting future and potential participants from the community.

Example of Facebook calendar post:

February 2024						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3 How do I dress the part?  8am-12pm
4	5	6	7 5pm-7pm 	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17 How can I provide excellent customer service?  8am-12pm
18	19 5pm-7pm 	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29 		

Examples of Facebook posts advertising proposed CPP program educational workshops:

Topic: How can I provide excellent customer service?			
Who:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students ○ Parents ○ Community members ○ Local businesses ○ State agencies 	Where:	PSJA North Early College High School (North Pharr) 500 East Nolana Loop Pharr, TX 78577
What:	Educational Workshop: Employability Skills	When:	Saturday, February 17, 2024 8 am to 12 pm
Why:	In partnership with Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation Program and PSJA ISD, students will participate in authentic employment scenarios to learn the top ten tips to provide excellent customer service by practicing listening, communication, and problem-solving skills.		

Register here:

<https://forms.gle/W5C8NtGacyNukN8FA>



Topic: How do I dress the part?			
Who:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students ○ Parents ○ Community members ○ Local businesses ○ State agencies 	Where:	PSJA North Early College High School (North Pharr) 500 East Nolana Loop Pharr, TX 78577
What:	Educational Workshop: Employability Skills	When:	Saturday, February 3, 2024 8 am to 12 pm
Why:	In partnership with Texas Workforce Commission Vocational Rehabilitation Program and PSJA ISD, students will participate in authentic employment scenarios to gain confidence by making appropriate dress choices for the interview process and the professional work environment by practicing communication and problem-solving skills.		

Register here:

<https://forms.gle/oRrUEQyxB4GnsxN47>



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