List of Topics Covered in M.Ed. – Early Childhood Comprehensive Exam

The exam consists of multiple-choice questions.

Comprehensive Exam Key Concepts

M.Ed. – Early Childhood

Child Development, Learning Theories, and Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Study Topic	What to Know / Review
Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)	Age-related development; individual variation; social and cultural context; integrated developmental domains; responsive teaching.
Principles of Child Development	Common developmental patterns and individual differences; the interaction of heredity, experience, and environment.
Piaget's Cognitive Development	Active construction of knowledge; schemas, assimilation, accommodation, and equilibration; developmental thinking.
Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory	Learning through social interaction, language, cultural tools, scaffolding, and the zone of proximal development.
Bandura's Social Learning Theory	Observational learning, modeling, imitation, and the influence of social environments.
Behaviorism and Reinforcement	Environmental influences on learning; reinforcement versus punishment; negative reinforcement as removal of an aversive condition.
Gardner's Multiple Intelligences	Different proposed forms of intelligence; distinguishing the theory from learning-style labels.
Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs	Basic physiological and safety needs; belonging, esteem, and self-actualization; implications for classroom readiness.
Attachment and Social-Emotional Development	Secure relationships, trust, responsive caregiving, and their relationship to exploration and learning.
Play and Mixed-Age Learning	Play as a context for language, thinking, relationships, and self-regulation; peer learning across ages.
Emergent Writing and Literacy	Drawing, scribbling, invented spelling, and growing understanding that writing communicates meaning.
Print Awareness and Early Reading	Print-rich experiences; book handling, environmental print, oral language, and emerging understanding of written language.

Study Topic	What to Know / Review
Historical Foundations of Early Childhood Education	Froebel and kindergarten; Rousseau and child-centered education; Comenius and illustrated learning materials.

Positive Guidance, Classroom Environments, and Inclusion

Study Topic	What to Know / Review
Guidance Versus Punishment	Teaching skills and self-regulation rather than relying on punitive responses; constructive language and respectful correction.
Positive Guidance Language	Specific, positively phrased directions; alternatives to threats, labels, and vague commands.
Redirection and Offering Choices	Redirecting to appropriate activities; offering limited, genuine, developmentally appropriate choices.
Setting Limits and Classroom Routines	Clear, consistent, reasonable boundaries; supportive routines and expectations.
Environmental Influences on Behavior	Effects of classroom arrangement, schedules, transitions, materials, social interactions, and adult responses.
Modeling Social-Emotional Skills	Demonstrating anger-management strategies, coping responses, and constructive problem-solving.
Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)	Attention, activity, and impulse-control differences; classroom support and individualized accommodations.
Disability and Inclusive Instruction	Access to general education; adapting materials and instruction; participation rather than passive observation.
IDEA and Public Law 94-142	Foundations of special education rights, appropriate services, and educational access.
Co-Occurring Conditions	Recognizing that a learner may have more than one diagnosis or condition; distinguishing co-occurrence from disability categories.
Skill Retention and Review	Periodic practice, review, and reinforcement to support maintenance of learned skills.

Observation, Assessment, and Responsive Instruction

Study Topic	What to Know / Review
Purposes of Early Childhood Assessment	Understanding development, documenting progress, identifying support needs, and planning instruction.
Observation and Documentation	Objective observation; anecdotal records; avoiding assumptions and recording behavior in context.
Time and Event Sampling	Time sampling across intervals versus event sampling for particular behaviors or occurrences.
Practical Observation Techniques	Selecting methods that are manageable, accurate, and aligned with the observation purpose.
Preassessment and Prior Knowledge	Using pretests and initial observations to identify what learners already understand.
Formative Assessment and Feedback	Using evidence during instruction to identify misconceptions, reteach concepts, and adjust learning experiences.
Performance and Authentic Assessment	Evaluating what learners can demonstrate through meaningful tasks and applied activities.
Reflective Teaching and Action Research	Reviewing lessons, using teaching journals, investigating practice, and making evidence-based improvements.

Science Teaching, Inquiry, and Technology

Study Topic	What to Know / Review
Nature of Science	Science as evidence-based inquiry and explanation; scientific knowledge and practices.
Scientific Inquiry Practices	Asking questions, planning investigations, gathering evidence, constructing explanations, and communicating findings.
Constructivist Science Learning	Building understanding through direct experiences, prior knowledge, and reflection rather than passive reception.
The 5E Learning Cycle	Engage, Explore, Explain, Elaborate, and Evaluate as an instructional sequence.
Effective Hands-On Science	Combining active investigations with purposeful thinking, discussion, evidence, and reflection.
Science Learning Environment	Student curiosity, questioning, collaboration, equitable participation, and safe exploration.

Study Topic	What to Know / Review
Science Content Domains	Major science strands and how science practices connect to content.
Probing Questions and Evidence	Asking learners to justify claims, test ideas, and explain how they know.
Science Writing and Digital Journals	Using written explanations and interactive online journals to communicate and respond to scientific ideas.
Simulations and Educational Technology	Digital representations of real-world processes; distinguishing simulations from blogs and wikis.
Professional Science Teaching	Professional organizations, networking, collegial learning, and continuous improvement.

Families, Communities, Culture, and Equity

Study Topic	What to Know / Review
Family–Teacher Partnerships	Trust, respect, shared decision-making, reciprocal communication, and family expertise.
Family-Centered Practice	Building on family strengths, priorities, and circumstances; families as partners in educational decisions.
Parent–Teacher Conferences	Private, respectful, purposeful meetings with two-way dialogue and attention to family accessibility.
Family Communication Methods	Conferences, notes, digital messages, newsletters, and ongoing communication about progress and concerns.
Parent-Friendly Programs	Welcoming environments, flexible participation, family feedback, and inclusive outreach.
Cultural and Linguistic Diversity	Respect for diverse languages, identities, experiences, and cultural practices.
Multicultural and Anti-Bias Education	Representative classroom resources; reducing prejudice and exclusion; fair opportunities and belonging.
Demographic Change and Poverty	Changing population patterns and economic conditions; interpreting historical statistics cautiously.
Head Start and Early Childhood Access	Historical federal efforts to expand educational opportunity for children from low-income families.
Child Welfare and Family Support	Recognizing risk and protective factors; professional responsibility to protect children and support families.

Professionalism, Ethics, and Educational Foundations

Study Topic	What to Know / Review
Professional Codes of Ethics	Ethical obligations to children, families, colleagues, and communities; applying professional judgment.
Ethics Versus Law	Differences between legal requirements and professional moral responsibilities.
Due Process and Employment Rights	Procedural fairness, notice, and opportunities to respond; understanding context-specific employment protections.
Tenure and Teacher Licensure	Differences among state certification, licensure requirements, and employment protections.
Effective School Characteristics	High expectations, engaged learning time, shared goals, and collaborative professional practice.
Reflective Professional Practice	Analyzing lessons, documenting reflections, seeking feedback, and improving instruction.
Professional Dispositions	Attitudes toward children, families, colleagues, and curriculum; professionalism in daily interactions.
Equitable and Inclusive Professional Practice	Responsiveness to learner differences, equitable opportunities, and collaborative support.