Psychology 480
Seminar in Child Development
Spring 2014 ~ Mondays 2:30 – 4:20 pm (Severance 301)

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Office hours: Tuesday 2:30-4:00 pm, Thursday 2:30-4:00 pm, or by appointment


COURSE OVERVIEW

In this seminar course, we will examine continuity and change in relationships, emotion, and mind from early childhood to middle childhood. Through an investigation of research and theory from the fields of developmental psychology, neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, and educational psychology, this course explores psychological processes that illuminate some of the life stressors children face and the competencies they develop in navigating them. At times throughout the semester, you will engage with children and their primary caregivers in the “real world” and reflect on these experiences vis-à-vis course readings. The course is organized into four modules:

*Module 1: Foundations for thinking about child development*

*Module 2: Adaptation in the preschool period*

*Module 3: Adaptation in middle childhood*

*Module 4: Implications for policy, practice, and the future*

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. *Attendance and regular participation* are expected of everyone. Read all assignments prior to class each week and be prepared with comments and questions for discussion. Included in your participation grade will be in-class writing assignments, usually the last thing we do each week.

2. *Weekly response papers.* Each week I will provide a writing prompt to serve as a tool for you to synthesize course readings. You may respond to the prompt or write some other kind of response to the readings. These are due to me by email at 3:00 pm every Sunday in advance of class. You should also bring a hard copy of your paper to class. The purpose of response
papers is for you to make connections between readings, to discuss implications for policy and practice, or to share questions you have about developmental science as a field. Response papers are graded on a 4-point scale: a score of 4 is uncommon and designates a truly excellent response; a score of 3 is more typical and is given when you show that you have done the readings and have been thoughtful about them; scores of 2 and 1 are reserved for papers that fall short (or very short) of the standard.

3. **Childcare center participation and observation.** You will observe and participate in activities at the Oberlin Early Childhood Center 1 hour per week for four weeks. You will interact with children ages 3 to 5 years in their natural preschool environment as they participate in reading activities, small play groups, or large-group learning activities. For these four weeks, you will document briefly what you did/observed at OECC and then write a brief reflection on these experiences. **These are in addition to your weekly response papers to course readings.** More on this later. [Note. If for some reason you are unable or unwilling to observe at OECC, we can make appropriate accommodations to substitute something else for this course requirement.]

4. **Course paper.** You will write a 15 – 18 page paper analyzing and discussing a key issue relating to emotional self-regulation, the importance of children’s play, the transition to kindergarten, or another topic of your choosing (approved by me). This paper will be written and submitted in three phases (a) a description of the issue/phenomenon you wish to study and its developmental significance, (b) a rough draft that includes thoughtful analysis and integration of course readings as they relate to your topic, and (c) a final draft that extends upon your first draft and that integrates an interview conducted with a parent or childcare professional. More on this later.

**Final course grades will be determined as follows:**

- Class participation & in-class writing.................................10%
- Weekly responses............................................................25%
- Childcare center observations...........................................15%
- Paper proposal...............................................................5%
- Draft of course paper (including peer review of another paper)........15%
- Caregiver interview and presentation.................................10%
- Final course paper.........................................................20%

**Course policies**

- **Late work.** Late weekly response papers will not be accepted. All other work will be graded down 10% for each day late. You may have one 48-hour extension for an assignment other than a weekly response paper and the caregiver interview presentation.

- I am happy to meet with you during office hours to discuss your writing—reflection papers, child observations, or the course paper. Sometimes receiving feedback in person is more meaningful because we can go back and forth about a number of concerns you may have.

- Besides the one required text, all course readings can be accessed electronically via Blackboard or the College library. Please try to access readings early in the week so that you have plenty of time to read.
Module 1: Foundations for thinking about child development

Week 1: Introduction


Week 2: Conceptual foundations


Module 2: Adaptation in the preschool period

Week 3: Language, play, and imagination

Background on U.S. parents’ perspectives on play-based preschool programs:


Week 4: Social-emotional competence in early childhood


Week 5: Supporting emergent literacy


Week 6: Sesame Street by the Numbers: The Science Behind a Cultural Icon

Explore the Sesame Workshop website: <http://www.sesameworkshop.org/>

Watch this full-length episode online: Sesame Street: Sesame Street gets through a storm.


Module 3: Adaptation in middle childhood

Week 7: The 5-to-7 shift and the transition to schooling


Empirical study TBD.
Week 8: Thinking about things, thinking about people, and thinking about our own thoughts


Empirical study TBD.

Week 9: On the importance of having a chum.


Week 10: Children diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder


Module 4: Implications for policy and practice

Week 11: School-based interventions


Other readings TBD.

Week 12: Future directions


Recommended Readings

Transition to early childhood


Transition to middle childhood

