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OBSERVATION ASSIGNMENTS – Psychology 336L (Fall, 2005)

The observation assignments are an important part of this class, as you get to observe children and use what you observe to reflect on and write about the course material. There are two options, participating in the Joint Educational Project (JEP) or conducting four Observation Exercises taken from the “See For Yourself” exercises at the end of each chapter of Kail’s *Children*, or similar exercises written by Kail for another book, or by me. You must pick one of these two options (JEP or observation exercises) by the beginning of the second week of classes, as JEP typically fills up by the end of the second week of the semester.

If you choose JEP, you will be a mentor to a child in the community. JEP involves going 1-2 hours per week to a local school to work with a small number of children, assisting them with reading and homework activities. It is relatively easy to get to the school sites even if you don’t have a car. The JEP program requires you to turn in a weekly journal entry to the JEP program assistant for the 9 weeks of the program (approximately weeks 4-12 of the semester). We require that you turn in four of these journal entries for this class. A JEP representative will come to class to provide more information about the program.

The Observation Exercises are listed at the end of each chapter (section called: “See for Yourself!”). Supplemental instructions for these exercises are provided in this handout, and additional exercises are described. You must choose exercises that fall within each of the four sections of the course, for a total of four journal entries. This usually involves observing, interviewing or testing a child or interviewing parents and writing up a description and analysis of what you observed (2 pages per journal entry). JEP and Observation Exercise journal entries are due on the same dates (see the class schedule in the syllabus).

The JEP option involves more work than the Observation Exercise option, because of the need to go out to the school twice a week for one hour at a specified time (generally the late morning or early afternoon), so you should consider whether your schedule would permit this. There is somewhat more writing for JEP, as you need to turn in nine 1-2 page journal entries, as compared to four 2-page journal entries for the Observation Exercises. We estimate that you would spend about 20 hours more on JEP over the semester than on the Observation Exercises. To compensate for the higher work load, JEP participation has benefits beyond learning the course material on child development, such as gaining an understanding of urban communities, the educational system, and social issues confronting children and families. It has relevance to many classes here at USC and looks good on a résumé. In addition, JEP provides guaranteed access to a child, whereas for the Observation Exercises, you need to find your own children in daycares, preschools, playgrounds, and public places where families hang out. We don’t anticipate that it will be a problem finding children, but you need to plan ahead to find them and make your observations in time to turn in the assignments. For those who cannot find any children to observe, there are a few other options (such as reading a journal article, watching TV).

If for some reason you have to terminate your JEP assignment early, you may turn in Observation Exercises for the remainder of the semester.

You must turn in a hard copy (not e-mail) of your JEP journal entry or Observation Exercise.

More detailed instructions are provided below. Peruse these in order to make your choice.
INSTRUCTIONS FOR JEP OBSERVATION JOURNAL

INTRODUCTION
As a JEP participant, your work in the community is similar to that of a developmental psychologist asked to consult with teachers, school psychologists or social work professionals. Throughout the course of the semester, you will observe and participate in the daily activities of those you meet at your JEP site. In the pages that follow, you will find suggestions for activities to do with the children and “reflective questions” designed to help you relate these and other activities to what you are learning about developmental psychology. Use the Reflective Questions as prompts to guide you, but go beyond the prompts, writing about whatever seems important to you about your experience – especially that which is related to the psychological development of children. Likewise, use the listed activities as suggestions for what you can do with your mentee; please do not feel limited by these suggestions or compelled to do each and every activity with your mentee. Remember that your primary goals are to develop a supportive, mentoring relationship with the child and to reflect on your experiences in light of what you are learning in class. As soon as possible after leaving your JEP site, write down as much as you can recall about your experiences.

Please read through all of the Reflective Questions prior to beginning your assignment. Doing so will help to focus your observations and improve the quality of your journal responses. It will also help you to prepare ahead, such as making a visit to the Readers Plus library at the JEP House to select resources to help you with particular activities.

Every week, you will turn into the JEP Program Assistant a 1-2 page, double-spaced JEP journal entry that addresses the issues raised in the Reflective Questions assigned for that week.

At four points during the semester, you will be asked to turn in a 1-2 page journal entry in class (weeks 5, 9, 12 and 15 – see class schedule). This should generally be chosen from your most recent JEP journal entries, but you can choose from any prior journals turned in to JEP that have not already been turned in as a class assignment.

PLEASE NOTE: Your experiences in the community will provide you with a valuable opportunity to apply the knowledge and critical thinking skills you are acquiring in the course. Please be respectful of the community – and the limits of your experience and knowledge. It is very important that you do not attempt to diagnose disorders – such as ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), dyslexia, attachment disorder, etc. – about which you are only beginning to learn. Please try to balance your enthusiasm for testing out developmental theories with your responsibility as a mentor and tutor for children. Do not spend all of your volunteer time conducting psychological experiments with the children. Remember: your goal is to serve the child(ren), while learning about developmental psychology in the process.

If you have any questions about these guidelines, contact Dr. Frank Manis (213-740-6567, manis@usc.edu). These questions were developed in conjunction with Dr. Susan Harris, JEP Academic Director (213-740-1830, scharris@usc.edu).
WEEK ONE (4th week of class)—FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Suggested Activity: In your first week, you might read a book with or to your mentee, or help out with a classroom assignment. Ask the teacher if you can spend some special time in future sessions where you choose the reading activities with the child.

Reflective Question: Describe your initial experiences, including a detailed description of the activities you participated in with your mentee. What are your most vivid first impressions of the site and the child(ren) with whom you are working? Briefly describe Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems view of the environment and try to apply some of these concepts to your analysis of the child’s environment. Describe what the classroom environment is like from the child’s point of view. What were some of your expectations prior to beginning your assignment? How do your experiences during Week One compare to your expectations?

WEEK TWO (5th week of class)—ESTABLISHING RAPPORT

Suggested Activity: Ask the child to pick one of your mentee’s favorite books and read it out loud to the child. If s/he wants to read, then take turns. Help out where needed but mainly focus on having fun and getting comfortable with each other. Ask the child easy and friendly questions that lead to open-ended answers (e.g., “This is a cool book. What do you like about this book?” “What part of the book is the funniest? Saddest? Most interesting?”). Try to get the child to talk a little about her/himself. For example, if a dog is mentioned in the book, ask if s/he has a dog or wants one and to tell you about it. If there are brothers and sisters in the book, ask about the child’s own siblings, etc.

Reflective Question: Describe the child(ren) with whom you are working at your JEP site. Try to be as specific as possible about the age, sex, race, ethnicity, and any other significant characteristics of the children. How fluent does the child seem to be in English? What other language, if any, does the child speak, and how fluent is the child in that language? How might various aspects of the child’s background knowledge affect his or her reading ability, language comprehension or study skills (positively or negatively)? What else have you learned about your mentee so far?

WEEK THREE (6th week of class) – EMOTIONS AND TEMPERAMENT

Suggested Activity: Try to find a book the child is comfortable reading and coax her/him into reading out loud. If your child can’t yet read stories aloud, go over the alphabet to see if the child can name the letters, the sound the letter makes in printed words, and if the child can think of a word that begins with the sound of that letter. You can also go through an alphabet book, to see if the child can read any of the most common words of English. At this point, you should help the child only in a general way, such as being encouraging and helping them read stories (by pronouncing words for the child, and by asking little questions to get the child thinking about what is happening in the story). With somewhat older children, you might choose to help with homework or some other activity.

Reflective Question: As you work with your mentee, consider the temperamental

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1 These dates are approximate and may not correspond exactly with your JEP assignment. Depending on the school’s schedule for Thanksgiving, “pupil-free” days, etc., your JEP assignment might extend beyond the 12th week of classes. (Please see your JEP assignment slip for more information about start/stop dates.)
differences that are described in Chapter 7 of the Kail textbook. Is the child with whom you are working an “emotional” child, an “active” child, or a “sociable” child? Does the child fit the easy, slow to warm up or difficult categorizations of Thomas and Chess? What specific characteristics, behaviors, comments, etc., lead you to this assessment? For example, what dimensions of temperament does the task of reading a new book aloud appear to elicit in the child? If you have the opportunity to observe your mentee interacting with other adults, note how adults respond them. Do the same behaviors lead to different responses from adults, depending on the children’s temperaments?

WEEK FOUR (7th week of class) – DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES:

Suggested Activity: Continue to read, work on math problems or work on other homework with your mentee, depending on the child’s developmental level, interests and needs. Try to learn more about your mentee and share things about yourself with him/her as well. Encourage your mentee to talk about things s/he enjoys doing and try to identify areas of mutual interest.

Reflective Question: Select one of the theories of development discussed in class or the text (Piaget or Vygotsky). Use this theory as an analytical tool for understanding the child(ren) with whom you are working. At what Piagetian developmental stage does the child seem to be? Do you see examples of assimilation, accommodation and equilibration (see chapter 6)? What about limitations in thinking such as centration or egocentrism (chapter 9)? Do you see any real-life demonstrations of the zone of proximal development or scaffolding (Vygotsky)? Be sure to provide examples from your interaction with the child(ren) to support your conclusions.

WEEK FIVE (8th week of classes) – LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT:

Suggested Activity: This week focus on the child’s verbal and written products (stories written, workbook activities, conversation with you and with others. Try some activities that will get the child talking a great deal, such as telling you a story about something funny or interesting that happened to the child. You can also show the child an interesting picture that has a lot of elements to it and ask the child to tell a story about it or describe what is in the picture.

Reflective Question: Pay attention to the grammatical and syntax errors made by the child(ren) with whom you are working, as these are very indicative of the process of language development as well as the child’s approximate stage or level of development. Are there any patterns to these errors? For example, does the child leave out particular grammatical morphemes, such as the plural or past tense? Does s/he engage in “overregularization?” Are there any errors in sentence structure, such as the failure to use correct “helping verbs” (“is,” “have,” etc.) or the incorrect use of prepositions (e.g., saying “to” where the word should be “from”). You can also write down other types of language errors. Does the child experience problems with word retrieval (pulling the exact word out of memory to label something or describe something)? Are there any errors of pronunciation that might be an indication that the child does not hear or produce English phonemes correctly? Are the errors characteristic of someone whose native language is not English, or are they more like typical developmental speech errors such as problems pronouncing r, l, s, th, etc? Provide some examples of these grammatical, word retrieval or pronunciation errors and, drawing from theories of
language development, consider some possible explanations for them.

**WEEK SIX (9th week of classes) – GENDER STEREOTYPES AND GENDER IDENTITY:**

**Suggested Activity:** Make up two stories about fictitious people with gender-neutral names and give them either a set of male and female characteristics as discussed in gender-schema theory (see Kail, p. 286-87). Read each story to the child(ren) with whom you are working. Then ask if s/he can tell whether the individual in the story is a boy or a girl (or if it's impossible to tell). Ask the child to explain his/her response, using follow-up questions to elicit a more detailed explanation, if necessary.

**Reflective Question:** If you did the suggested activity above, did your mentee’s responses reflect an awareness of gender stereotypes and/or the perception that gender roles are flexible? Is his/her response what you might expect, based on the child’s age and theories of child development? In general, what evidence have you seen of the child(ren)’s sense of his or her own and other’s gender identity? Be sure to refer to specific examples of comments, behaviors, etc., that reflect an awareness of sex and gender.

**WEEK SEVEN (10th week of classes) – READING DEVELOPMENT**

**WEEK EIGHT (11th week of classes) – MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCES:**

**Suggested Activity:** Spend some time with the child doing activities other than reading, math or homework this week. For example (and depending on how free you are to design your own activities), you might work on a puzzle or other spatial skill such as drawing, play an active game together, or discuss the child’s interest in and or ability in musical areas such as singing, playing an instrument, remembering the names, tunes and words of songs, etc. If you have access to a variety of these resources, let the child decide upon the activity. Pay attention to the child’s skill and comfort levels in these other activities, comparing and contrasting them to the child’s skill and comfort level with reading. Please note: Be sure to let your student know that your time with him or her is coming to a close; prepare him/her for the end of your JEP assignment.

**Reflective Question:** Briefly summarize the seven types of intelligence in Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences (see Chapter 12 in Kail). Do(es) the child(ren) with whom you are working display any special talents in one or more of these intelligences? Provide some examples of students’ comments or behaviors that display a particular type of intelligence. Do the school and/or teacher encourage students to develop abilities in each of these areas? Do some forms of “intelligence” seem to be more valued than others – by the teacher, the students’ peers, and/or by the student him/herself?

**WEEK NINE (12th week of classes) – SELF CONCEPT:**

**Suggested Activity:** In your last week with your mentee, spend some time identifying and praising the child’s strengths, noting specific improvements the child has made in reading and other activities you’ve worked on together. Do something special with or for your mentee today – maybe something the child has mentioned in passing that s/he especially enjoys doing? – to celebrate his or her achievements and to bring closure to
your time together.

**Here is a short activity you can do as well.** For younger children, as well as adolescents, you can ask questions derived from the categories of self-esteem described in Chapter 13 of Kail with the goal of determining whether the child has begun to develop different categories of the self concept. If your child’s self esteem appears to be low in some areas, you might ask further open-ended questions designed to elicit possible reasons for low self esteem (e.g., peer rejection based on athletic ability, clothing, etc.).

If you are working with a group of children, try to make observations about the children’s degree of confidence and interest in improving themselves in different domains such as scholastic, athletic, and social competence. Finally, if working with a group, you could try to determine if the children have negative or prejudicial stereotypes of each other, and how these are manifested in their behavior toward other students.

**Reflective Question:** How would you describe your child’s identity/self concept and self-esteem in different domains (school work, social skills, athletic skill), as identified in the book? If your child is low or high in particular areas, analyze whether the child’s self perception is accurate or off-base. If it is off-base, try to determine possible reasons for the deviant self esteem.

**ALTERNATE QUESTIONS**

When your experience at your JEP site doesn’t allow you to adequately answer a Reflective Question, you may substitute one of the questions listed below:

**GRAMMATICAL MORPHEMES:**

**Suggested Activity:** Berko’s (1958) ‘wugs’ task is fun to try with 5 year old children or children learning English as a second language who are somewhat older (e.g., 6-9 years of age) (see p. 260 of the Kail textbook). Photocopy the drawing on page 260 and show it to a young child, repeating the instructions that appear on that page. You should find that the child quite predictably says, ‘two wugs.’ Create some pictures of your own to examine other grammatical morphemes, such as adding -ing to denote ongoing activity or adding -ed to indicate past tense. You can even create pictures to test for future tense and noun-verb agreement.

**Reflective Question:** Describe the results of your “experiment” and, drawing from theories of language development, offer some possible explanations for your “findings.” (If you use additional pictures or grammatical exercises, please include these in your journal response.) This exercise can be used with English language learners up through the age of 8 or 9, but would not be very informative for native English speakers after the age of 5 years.

**COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT:** If you are working with children of different ages, and one is between 4 and 6 and the other is older than 6, consider repeating Piaget’s experiment using conservation tasks (which are described in the text) and try to determine whether the children you are studying vary in their level of accomplishment on
two of these tasks (e.g., number conservation, mass conservation, liquid quantity conservation). Pay attention to the children’s explanations as to why or why not the original stimulus and the transformed stimulus still have the same quantity. Do you see examples of centration or reversible mental operations? Is your child(ren) typical of the age range for this task, or somewhat low? Can you think of any hypotheses as to why the child might be low? (see also Observation Exercise #10 in the second section of these guidelines).

MORAL DEVELOPMENT: This activity would be applicable with children age 8 and up. It is most interesting at ages 10-12, as you may see a wider range of moral levels starting to emerge. The purpose of the activity is to attempt to determine the level of moral thinking exhibited by your child or the group of children you are working with. Focus particularly on Kohlberg’s theory in ch. 15 of Kail. You should construct three moral dilemmas in addition to the Heinz dilemma that is printed on p. 463. Make sure they are genuine dilemmas (there is really no “right” answer, and be sure to avoid dilemmas that might be upsetting to children or that might get them talking about subjects that are considered taboo by many parents (such as abortion, religious views, etc.). Try to come up with dilemmas that are closer to their everyday experiences than the Heinz dilemma to see if they can think at a higher level about something that is less abstract. You might also try to come up with a dilemma that evokes an “ethic of caring” (rather than a more abstract law and order dilemma) as described in Dixon’s chapter on Gilligan’s theory. Have the children explain and justify their answers (individual child) or write them down (this would be handy if you are able to work with a group of children). Have them write their name and age on the paper. What level do you think each particular child falls in? Was it difficult to classify children? Do you see any evidence for a stronger “ethic of caring” among girls than among boys?

OTHER ACTIVITIES. If you are still looking for an appropriate activity to plug in during a given week, you might also try Observation Exercise #13 (observing physical activity on the playground for groups of children) or # 14 (observing teaching in the classroom).
INSTRUCTIONS FOR OBSERVATION EXERCISES

You will be turning in four different journal entries on scheduled due dates. You must choose one activity from the set of exercises falling under each observation journal number below. The write-up should not exceed 2 pages, double-spaced, typewritten.

Observation Exercise Journal 1: due date: September 19

Choose one “See for Yourself” activity from chapters 1-5 (see the list below). Note that the activity at the end of chapter 3 is NOT included. There is a replacement activity (# 3). Pay close attention to the additional instructions and tips provided for each activity.

1. Chapter 1: Interviewing parents – Follow the instructions on p. 26. Supplemental instructions: in addition to the activities described in your textbook, also ask the parents why they think they may have treated their children similarly or differently. Options include genetic differences among the children, changes in the family circumstances, changes in parenting knowledge or strategies. Ask the parents to give examples supporting anything they say. Note it is generally not wise to use your own parents as subjects! If you want to do that, see activity no. 3.

2. Chapter 2: Read and summarize a journal article – Follow the instructions on p. 48. Supplemental instructions: This exercise is of particular value for Psychology majors. But anyone who has never read a journal article should try it. This is where most of the information we work with in the field is obtained. Your best bets are Child Development and Developmental Psychology. Additional journals to look at include Journal of Experimental Child Psychology, Developmental Neuropsychology, Journal of Educational Psychology, Journal of Clinical Child Psychology, Developmental Psychopathology, and Journal of Child Psychology and Child Psychiatry. The latter three will tend to have more articles about developmental disorders such as autism, ADHD, depression, etc. I know you can get the article online in PDF form and print it out to save time. However, I highly recommend that you visit the Current Periodicals room in Doheny. It’s a pleasant place with a nice view of the campus. You can leaf through the above-listed journals to find an article of interest. For the write-up: In addition to describing the design of the study, also describe the main purposes and hypotheses investigated, and summarize the results. You can go to the Discussion section to help you make sense of the results rather than wading through statistics. However, pay particular attention to tables and graphs, as they often make the results more concrete.

3. Chapter 3 – Genes and Environment – Do not do the suggested activity in your book (p. 72). Instead, try the following activity. Think about a trait that you have (such as an aspect of your personality, a special talent or ability, or a subject in which you have always done well in school). Think about how this trait developed. Talk to your parent(s) and possibly older siblings or other relatives or childhood friends about it. Act like a scientist, testing your hypothesis by collecting data. Try to ask them neutral, concrete questions rather than leading questions that make your
biases clear. For example, to get at sociability (see pp. 60-61 and 201-203), you might ask “how did I act when I was introduced to new people? Did this change with age?” instead of asking, “Was I shy when I was a kid?” Once you have collected your information, analyze the extent to which your trait involved passive, evocative or active gene-environment relations, or environmental influences. Try to break environmental influences into shared environmental influences (something all children in your family would have shared, such as a language other than English spoken by your parents), and nonshared environmental influences (something you did not share with your siblings, such as more lenient parenting). For information on gene-environment relations, see Kail’s textbook, pp. 68-70 and Course Reader Reading # 2, pp. 40-44. CRR # 2 is more accurate and complete than your textbook. We will make corrections to the diagram on p. 70 of Kail’s book in the August 31 lecture.

4. Chapter 4 – Observing a Newborn – This is a unique and unforgettable experience (p. 106) and I highly recommend it! Otherwise, you are not likely to see a newborn until you have one yourself. Supplemental instructions: It is getting harder to see newborns, as most hospitals send newborn babies home after the first day or have them room in with the mother. However, there may be a small number of babies who are being kept temporarily in sterile isolettes for various reasons (e.g., mother is recovering from surgery, baby has jaundice or another mild and treatable newborn condition). Call ahead to a convenient local hospital to find out if they have a newborn nursery and if you will be allowed to look through the glass at the babies. If you have a relative or friend with a relatively new baby (no older than 3 months), this would provide the most satisfying experience. You will look at newborn babies with different eyes after reading the first 4 chapters of this book. Your write-up should focus on typical newborn behavior; label and give examples of reflexes, changes in states, such as alert inactivity, waking activity, etc., patterns of crying, and behavior during sleep (see pp. 101-103 and 128). Look at another baby. What kinds of differences in physical appearance and behavior can you observe? If you get a chance to talk to the parent(s) you can ask them a few questions. Get ready to listen awhile as most new parents LOVE to talk about their baby.

5. Chapter 5 – Do toddlers show a hand preference? Follow the instructions on p. 147. Supplemental instructions: This is your opportunity to interact directly with a child. Write up your observations and conclusions for at least two toddlers. Note that the term “toddler” refers to babies who have learned to walk, and typically runs from age 12 to 30 months. However, this activity will work best with toddlers between 18 and 30 months of age. If you don’t have access to a child of this age, you can gain access by contacting a child care center and setting up an appointment to interact with a child. This requires advance planning, as often day care centers have requirements such as proof that you are negative for TB. In addition, you have to go when the children will be available to interact with you, and screen what you are going to do with the teacher or center director before you arrive. You can try USC’s Child Care Center at 2716 Severance Street (just north of The Row), phone number: 743-2446. You must call in advance and you must have TB documentation. If you are ever on the Health Sciences Campus, you can try their day-care center (phone: 224-5540). Otherwise, you can try local day-care centers, churches or synagogues, Head Start preschools or Montessori preschools.
Observation Exercise Journal 2: due October 17

Choose one “See for Yourself” activity from chapters 6-9 or one of the other activities listed in the following section. Note that the activity at the end of chapter 9 is NOT included. There are replacement activities for chapter 9 (#’s 10 and 11). Pay close attention to the additional instructions and tips provided for each activity.

   Supplemental instructions: If you have access to an infant, this exercise should be a lot of fun and very informative. These activities work best with infants 3-12 months of age. You only need one infant unless your subject falls asleep or becomes uncooperative. Maximize your chances of success by working with a well-rested, well-fed baby who has not been sick. Try to observe both habituation and operant conditioning. Describe your little experiment and the results. In addition, try one of the following additional activities, either imitation or Let’s Play Piaget. To observe imitation, watch the baby during a “baseline” period of about 1 minute. Make sure the infant is watching you and do something repetitively, such as open and close your mouth (like the nutty guy on p. 166), open and close your hand, wave bye-bye or some other simple action. Observe the infant for another minute to see if the rate of enacting the imitated behavior increases. The infant’s “version” of your action may not be exactly like your action. Describe how it is different. After a minute of demonstrating the action for the infant, stop the action and observe for another minute to see if imitative behavior decreases in frequency. In your write-up describe what you did and provide data (# of times the behavior occurred in each one-minute period). You can repeat the same activity for another 3-minute cycle if you want to get more reliable data. To play Piaget, stick a pipe in your mouth and put on a French beret (see p. 15). Then write down everything the baby does for about 10 minutes. You will get more interesting observations if you give the baby new objects to manipulate and explore. Find some things around the house/apartment or the day-care center that are safe and that the baby hasn't played with for a few days at least. With cooperative babies, you can try some of Piaget’s little experiments, such as putting an obstruction between the baby and an interesting object, covering up an interesting object, etc. Try to be objective and descriptive. Then analyze your little narrative to see if you can find examples of primary, secondary and tertiary circular reactions, or the coordination of secondary circular reactions. Note that the operant conditioning behavior you observed before is an example of one type of circular reaction. Which type? Describe any Piagetian things you observe in your write-up and try to determine if the infant’s behavior is consistent with one of Piaget’s sensorimotor stages. So you will have three little experiments (habituation, operant conditioning, and either imitation or Piaget observation). Evaluate all three of your experiments in relation to the textbook and lecture material. Did the baby behave appropriately for his/her age? If not, why do you think this happened?

7. Chapter 7 – Observing at a Day-Care Center. Follow the instructions on p. 208, except that it is not necessary to observe for several days! One 30-minute observation should suffice. Supplemental instructions: You can observe children between 12 and 36 months of age for this activity. This activity will work best if the children are engaged in free play or choosing their own activities, rather than under the teacher’s direction (e.g., circle or rug time). Meal or snack times are also good times to observe. See observation 5 above for advice on observing at a day-
8. **Chapter 8 – Observing at a Preschool.** Follow the instructions on p. 238. 

**Supplemental instructions:** The rules for working at preschools are generally the same as those in exercise # 5 for day-care centers. In fact, many day-care centers have preschool programs that are either half-day or full-day. In addition to what the book says, you can make this activity a little more interesting by giving children of different ages (age 2-5 years) crayons and sheets of paper and then collecting their drawings for analysis. Don’t take the child’s drawing if s/he wants to keep it. You should ask the child if you can keep it or let the child do one for you and one for her/himself. Be sure to get the teacher’s approval for anything you do. This write-up would benefit from including miniaturized examples to illustrate different types of drawings. You can either draw these yourself from the model or if you want to exercise your graphics talents, you can digitally photograph, photocopy or scan the drawings and reduce them in size so that they fit on a page.

9. **Chapter 8 – Observing Children on a Playground.** This exercise was taken from Kail, *Children and Their Development* (2005). “Children love playgrounds. Unfortunately, hundreds of thousands of American children are injured on playgrounds annually. Some of these accidents could have been prevented had parents (or other adults) been present, or, if present, had they been paying closer attention to the children at play. Go to a local playground or park and watch children as they play. Notice how many unknowingly put themselves at risk as they play. Also notice how well the children’s play is monitored by adults. See for yourself!”

**Supplemental instructions:** be sure to look like a student so none of the parents get paranoid about you hanging around the playground (look clean-cut, carry a clipboard and a pen). If anyone asks what you are doing, or you get into a conversation with a parent, tell them you are observing for Developmental Psychology class at USC, and ask if it is OK. Don’t interact with any of the children. Don’t even smile when they look at you. Just try to fade into the background. For the write-up, note down the behavior of boys vs. girls. Do you see differences in the amount of risk-taking, the type of gross motor activity, or the social interaction of the children? Also note down the behavior of children of different ages (e.g., 2-3 vs. 4-6). Try to break down their activity on the basis of skills, analyzing what skills the older or more nimble children have that the younger and less skilled ones do not.

10. **Chapter 9 - Piaget Tasks.** Do not do the activity on p. 275. The following is amended slightly from an activity described in Kail’s *Children and Their Development*: “The best way to see some of the developmental changes that Piaget described in early and middle childhood is to test some children with the same tasks that Piaget used. The conservation tasks discussed on pp. 243-244 are good because they’re simple to set up and children usually enjoy them. For each task, ask a 4-5-year old and a 7-8-year-old to confirm that the two amounts are the same when they are in their untransformed state (e.g., two identical balls of clay, two rows of objects). Then transform one quantity as illustrated in the diagram on p. 244 and ask the children if the quantities are still the same, or if one is more than the other. Ask them to explain their answers. The differences between 4-5 year olds and 7-8 year olds are truly remarkable. See for yourself!”

**Supplementary instructions:** if the child does not show conservation (i.e., does not say that the quantities remain the same after the transformation), try to train the child by repeating the transformation several times, showing the child that the quantity is the same. Children who are
about to acquire this concept can often be convinced that the quantities stay the same. For Piaget, the child must get the answer correct AND explain it adequately. In your write-up, describe your procedure and the child’s responses. Try to classify the children’s explanations. Were there examples of centration in the younger children? Were there examples of mental operations in the older children (see pp. 344-345)? If your subjects did not behave typically for their age (e.g., a four-year old showed concrete operational thinking) speculate why.

11. Chapter 9 - Sesame Street. For this activity, you get to watch TV instead of children! The text points out that Sesame Street is one television show that may help children increase their vocabularies and school readiness skills such as learning about numbers, letters and basic phonics. How does the show accomplish this? Watch two episodes on PBS and write down descriptions of several techniques the show uses to teach vocabulary, number concepts and pre-reading skills. Do you think the particular activities you observed would work with children? Why or why not? Think about what you have learned about cognitive and language development, and try to carry out your analysis of the program as a developmental psychologist would. Turn in this analysis as your report. We highly recommend watching with a child if you can, so that you can ask the child open-ended questions to see how much the child understands, and observe how the child responds to activities that are designed to promote language learning and school readiness skills (letter and number skills). You might supply crayons and paper to provide an opportunity for the child to copy down letters or numbers.

Observation Journal 3: due November 9

Choose one “See for Yourself” activity from chapters 10-12, or one of the other activities listed in the following section. Pay close attention to the additional instructions and tips provided for each activity.

12. Chapter 10 – Observing Parenting Styles and Techniques. Follow the instructions on p. 316. Supplemental instructions: This is a lot of fun and highly recommended. Be sure to read through the list of four questions below, so you will make the kinds of observations that will be useful to you in the write-up. Try to pick situations where the family might be staying in one place and interacting with their children for several minutes, not just in passing. For example, you might try to find something palatable to eat at MacDonald’s as your "cover" and sit near a family with small children (ages 2-7). Make sure you are close enough to hear what is being said. As you eat, pretend to be studying a textbook and taking notes. What you are actually doing is taking notes on the family interactions. In this way, you can observe without seeming to observe. Do not look up or stare at the family. Try to use what you hear and look up only as often as might be the case in a natural setting. In your write-up, address the following questions: 1) Did the parents you observed vary along the dimensions of warmth (responsive vs. uninterested) and degree of control (controlling vs. uncontrolling)? I.e., did they fall under the authoritative, authoritarian, indulgent-permissive or indifferent-uninvolved parenting style? Be mindful of the limitations of your observations. Give some supporting examples of behavior that you think fits under particular parenting styles. 2) Did you see any examples of positive reinforcement, negative reinforcement, or punishment (such as scolding, yelling, time out, hitting or spankings?) Describe. 3) How did the child respond to the parent’s effort at discipline? 4) Did the age, gender or behavior of the child appear to influence the type of discipline or parent behavior s/he received? Explain and refer to examples.

Supplemental instructions: As it is fall, you might have better luck observing children’s basketball, football or soccer games than softball games. You’ll have to adapt the instructions to the sport you observe. You can find soccer games almost anywhere there is a field, and they typically occur on Saturdays. In your write-up answer the questions about describing age differences in physical growth and motor skill. In addition, you should also look for sex differences in physical growth and motor skill. If you can’t find a place where kids are engaged in sports, you can always observe children’s school playground games, which are generally child-organized rather than adult-organized, as in most after-school sports. A good place to do this is the 32nd Street School, just across Hoover from University Village. In addition to noting physical growth and motor skill as described in the “See for Yourself” instructions, one thing you might look for in the playground games are sex differences. Is there segregation of the sexes in the playground games? Are there sex differences in the size of the group playing the game? What about sex differences in the types of games? Give examples.


Supplemental instructions: You will have to get the principal’s permission to carry out this observation. You should observe in two or three classes, but there is no need to observe in more than one school. Your best choice for schools are one of the family of five schools affiliated with USC (call the JEP house for the names and locations and to find out if they can arrange for you to observe just the one time). The 32nd Street School is another possibility.

15. Chapter 12 – Defining Intelligence. Here is another “See for Yourself” from Kail, Children and their Development: “We’ve seen that the definition of intelligence differs across cultural settings. See how parents define intelligence by asking some parents to rate the importance of four common aspects of intelligence: 1) problem solving skill (thinking before acting, seeing different sides to a problem, having good strategies for solving problems), 2) verbal skill (speaking clearly, having a large vocabulary, writing well), 3) creative skill (asking many questions, trying new things, coming up with innovative solutions to problems, and 4) social skill (playing and working well with other people, respecting and caring for others). Ask parents to rate the importance of each element on a 6-point scale, where 1 means extremely unimportant to intelligence, and 6 means extremely important. Try to ask parents from different ethnic groups; then compare your results with other students’ results to see if parents’ views of intelligence are similar or different and if cultural background affects parents’ definitions. See for yourself!” Supplemental instructions: you should also ask parents whether their children differ on these dimensions and what this might mean for their everyday behavior and their school achievement.

16. Chapter 12 - Cultural Differences in Math and Science Achievement. The studies by Stevenson and Stigler comparing schooling in Asia and the U.S. are fascinating. You can explore some of these same issues by interviewing USC students (undergraduate or graduate) from different countries. Try to interview several students from at least two countries altogether, selected from the following list of countries that clearly are beating the U.S. in science and math education in grades K-12: China, Taiwan, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and India (others are possible – the list is quite long!). Ask them if they think students come into college with better preparation in science and math in these countries as compared to the U.S. Ask them to describe specific teaching techniques or other school practices, peer group or parental influences that might contribute to the cultural differences.
If you have time, you could also interview second generation students, who were born in the U.S., but whose parents immigrated from an Asian country on our list. Ask them whether there are any cultural attitudes or parental practices that tend to preserve the cultural difference in math and science skills. You could also try to determine from your limited sample whether there is much of a difference between second-generation Asian students and U.S. born non-Asian students in terms of math and science.

**Observation Journal 4: due November 28**

Choose one “See for Yourself” activity from chapters 13-16, or one of the other activities listed in the following section. Pay close attention to the additional instructions and tips provided for each activity.

17. Chapter 13 - Televised aggression. Follow the instructions on p. 423.
   **Supplemental instructions:** It is not necessary to watch 2 hours of weekday evening drama shows and 2 hours of Saturday morning cartoons. You can watch one hour of each or 2 hours of only one type of program. Try to classify the type of aggression (e.g., physical, verbal, relational). Another interesting thing to do is to determine whether the aggression is ever punished, or if the characters ever reflect on the morality of the aggression. For the write-up, report your observations, and speculate on the psychological mechanisms by which viewing television violence might affect the child. Remember that the child plays a role in this process and is not just a passive recipient.

18. Chapter 14 – Sexual assault. Follow the instructions on p. 452. **Supplemental instructions:** It would be very interesting if you could also interview a small sample of male and female students at USC about some of the issues regarding sexual assault. Be sure to let them know that you will keep their names confidential.

19. Chapter 15 – Moral Development. The purpose of the activity is to observe the progression of moral thinking that was identified by Kohlberg. This activity is most interesting at ages 10-20, as you can generally see the full range of moral levels (or at least stages 1-5). Ideally, you would interview two people under age 12, two between 12 and 15 and two older than 15 (these could be classmates at USC). But if you are unable to get anyone younger than 15 it should still work. You should construct three moral dilemmas in addition to the Heinz dilemma that is printed on p. 463. Make sure they are genuine dilemmas (there is really no “right” answer, and be sure to avoid dilemmas that might be upsetting to children or that might get them talking about subjects that are considered touchy subjects by many parents (such as abortion, religious views, etc.). Try to come up with dilemmas that are closer to their everyday experiences than the Heinz dilemma to see if they can think at a higher level about something that is less abstract. You might also try to come up with a dilemma that evokes an “ethic of caring” (rather than a more abstract law and order dilemma) as described in Dixon's chapter on Gilligan's theory. Have the children explain and justify their answers (individual child) or write them down (this would be handy if you are able to work with a group of children). What level do you think each particular child falls in? Was it difficult to classify children? Do you see any evidence for a stronger “ethic of caring” among girls than among boys?

20. Chapter 15 – Vocational Choice. Follow the instructions on p. 476. **Supplemental instructions:** A good place to find interviewees is the various offices
at USC. You may know some staff members already, and can ask them to network you with other people around the campus. Alternatively, there may be 20-somethings at your place of work outside USC, or at your parent’s, a relative’s or a friend’s place of work.

21. Chapter 16 – Interview on Cliques and Crowds. Follow the instructions on p. 503. **Supplemental instructions:** It would be OK to interview people from your old high school, or at the high school of a younger sibling. If you really want to do this, and your high school is not within driving distance of USC, you might be able to go to the high school of a friend who originates from Southern California.