

## **Child Psychology: Service Learning Log (Weekly Prompts)**

### **WEEK 1. INTRODUCTION**

- \* Consider this a "pre-test" of your own observational skills. Choose a child to observe at your site this week, and comment on what you found most interesting/important about their behavior. How would you explain why they behaved as they did? Justify your claims by explaining you arrived at each conclusion (personal experience, past psychology courses, etc.).
- \* What are you hoping to learn this semester? Observe the children at your site: what behaviors do you find difficult to explain? What do you wish you understood better about them? What skills do you wish you had for interaction? Give specific examples from your work this week. Then, look through the syllabus and readings. What topics do you anticipate being helpful for understanding and working with the children at your particular site?

### **WEEK 2. ATTACHMENT & EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- \* Look for instances of children's emotional regulation. In what circumstances did a child display intense emotion? How did you or the caregivers/peers around the child react? What did the child do to cope and return to a calm state? Link to Perry's discussion of emotional development.
- \* Look for instances of self-regulation that involve resisting temptation. What coping strategies did children use and how successful were they? How is the environment designed to help children with temptation? (Do adults remove all temptation? Do children have opportunity to practice will-power? How does the physical layout create or reduce temptation?) If you are able, you might want to try teaching a child the self-regulatory strategies endorsed by Mischel.
- \* Try using one of the "tools" in Diamond's Tools of the Mind curriculum (as described in the supplement. (If you do not work with young children, this may require some tweaking to be age-appropriate.) How do the children in your setting react? How easy or difficult do you find it to guide these activities? (Note: do not be surprised if children are unaccustomed to this and have difficulty adapting.)
- \* What are the methodological pitfalls to guard for at your site: what are the "easy answers" that may actually be incorrect? Can you identify assumptions that you yourself had made about the children (their potential, their background, etc.), or assumptions that staff may be making? Have you made assumptions about the staff and what they can or do do for children there? Try challenging your assumptions by looking for a surprise: if appropriate, you may want to ask a child or staff member about a child or about the site itself.

### **WEEK 3. DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT**

- \* Interview your supervisor or another adult at your service site about a specific child whose behaviors concern them (either with or without a formal diagnosis). Use the questions from the Thai study (Parke & Gauvain, 2007), along with any other questions that may help you understand how this adult perceives the child's problem behavior.
- \* Look for examples of behavior that indicate issues with over-control and under-control (of course, you are not actually diagnosing any disorders - just looking for behaviors that fit those two broad categories). Which is more common in your setting? Why might that be?
- \* How do the DSM-IV introduction's caveats apply to your setting? Imagine that a person who had not read this document might misinterpret either a child's behavior or diagnosis (if informed of one). What should adults in your setting be careful *\*not\** to assume?

### **WEEK 4. NATURE VS. NURTURE**

- \* In what ways are the children you observe shaping their own environment? Describe any instances you see of evocative or active gene-environment correlations (Scarr, 1992). Include passive if you have the opportunity to observe parents with children (or have enough information to speculate on the possibility).
- \* If you have access to siblings in your setting, consider the shared and nonshared environments they experience (Turkheimer, 2000).

- \* Discuss the nature/nurture debate with an adult caregiver at your service site. To what extent do they believe genetics influences how children develop? If possible, ask them to comment on specific children and environmental influences they believe are at play. Can you think of alternative genetic explanations?
- \* If you are working with adolescents or preteens, try discussing nature v. nurture with them directly. To what extent do they believe genes determine theirs (and others') developmental outcomes? To what extent family? Other influences? Free will?

### **WEEK 5. FAMILY: PARENTING & CHILD CARE**

- \* Look for instances of peer socialization (any of the many types described by Harris). What did peers do to exert their influence, and how much effect did they seem to have on the child/children you are observing?
- \* If children are old enough to speak, ask them age-appropriate questions about their family (nothing too invasive). You might ask them to draw a picture of their family and describe it, etc. How do children see their family and their role within the family?
- \* If you have the opportunity to talk with other caregivers, ask them if they have ever reported or suspected child abuse. If not, do they know what signs to look for? Under what circumstances would they be willing to report, and what might make them not report a concern?

### **WEEK 6. OPEN WEEK (SPRING BREAK)**

- \* Since you only choose one prompt per week to respond, you may wish to revisit an unused prompt from a previous week.
- \* Report on the after-effects of any interventions you attempted in earlier weeks. (For example, if you lead a book-reading session, did you continue to lead other sessions? Did you see change over time in children's response to these, or evidence of learning from the sessions?)
- \* Or create your own prompt: Plan an observation or interaction at your site based on a topic that interested you in the readings and/or class.

### **WEEK 7. COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**

- \* If you are able, recreate a few Piagetian tasks for a child (see handout). Describe how he/she completes the tasks, how this compares to expected performance at this age, and what the task reveals about cognition (i.e., what underlying capacities must be present/absent to account for the child's performance?).
- \* Look for instances of learning through guided participation (Rogoff). Describe the scene you observed, how the adults modified the activity for the children, and what the children seem to be learning. (If you are able to lead the activity yourself, discuss how you decided which modifications to make.)
- \* If you have the opportunity, design and lead an activity for a child/children that includes identifying their zone of proximal development, scaffolding their experience, and (if possible) allowing the child to repeat the activity on their own to assess learning. (The activity can be as simple as building a block tower, or more complex, depending on the child's age.)

### **WEEK 8. OPEN WEEK (SPRING BREAK)**

- \* Since you only choose one prompt per week to respond, you may wish to revisit an unused prompt from a previous week.
- \* Report on the after-effects of any interventions you attempted in earlier weeks. (For example, if you lead a book-reading session, did you continue to lead other sessions? Did you see change over time in children's response to these, or evidence of learning from the sessions?)
- \* Or create your own prompt based on a topic that interested you in the readings and/or class.

### **WEEK 9. LANGUAGE & AUTISM SPECTRUM**

- \* If you have the opportunity, lead a book-reading session. Try using dialogic reading, or some of the techniques described in class (and Whitehurst & Lonigan) to enhance language development. How do the children react? Do you see an early evidence that they may be benefitting from the reading?

- \* In what ways does your service site support language development (including emerging literacy). Are any of Whitehurst & Lonigan's recommended practices currently in place? Can you suggest feasible modifications to the site that would better support language development?
- \* If you have the opportunity to observe any children with autism/Asperger's, discuss where they are on the spectrum, which deficits you observe, and how their caretakers (and you, if applicable) are helping them develop.

### **WEEK 10. EDUCATION**

- \* How well does the environment where you work encourage learning through a match with children's cognitive development? Do you see instances of mismatch? If you are able, try implementing some of the characteristics of Montessori classrooms. How do the children react? What difficulties/barriers do you encounter?
- \* Catch a child doing something creative! Describe the activity and explain why you think this is a good example of creativity (how does it fit Kim (2011)'s description?). Why do you think this child displayed creativity? Is there anything in the environment that encourages creativity?
- \* If you're able, try creating an activity for the children to stimulate creativity. Describe the activity and what makes it creative. How do children respond? Do you have to use scaffolding to help children stretch and become more creative?
- \* If you work with a child who has ADHD, or think that any of the children you work with show some symptoms of the disorder, describe the behaviors you have observed. Compare these to the diagnostic criteria: which does the child meet and which do they not meet (or can you not observe)?

### **WEEK 11. ACHIEVEMENT**

- \* Look for evidence of expectancy effects in your service environment. Do you see children living up (or down) to expectations? Consider your own expectations: evaluate your behavior with these children in light of Rosenthal's suggested mediators. How do you think your expectations may be influencing children?
- \* If you work with older children, talk to them about academic achievement and the factors they believe influence it. To what extent do these children believe achievement is internally vs. externally driven? What do they believe causes ethnic, social class, and international achievement gaps? If you're able, you might also want to try educating them about achievement. (How responsive are they?)
- \* If you work in a child care or preschool setting, discuss to what extent you see features of the Perry Preschool program operating at your site? What else is done intentionally to help boost cognitive development? (You may find it helpful to discuss this with staff members.)
- \* Do you see any evidence of "extreme parenting" at your service site (even if not done by parents)? Discuss: what leads you to classify these behaviors as extreme and hence distinct from positive intervention strategies.
- \* If you were to use the principles discussed this week to improve your setting's support of cognitive development, what changes would you make?

### **WEEK 12. MORAL DEVELOPMENT**

- \* Based on what you have learned about the CLASS assessment tool, how would you rate your service site on each of the major domains (and/or dimensions)?
- \* How do adults at your site respond to aggressive or disruptive behavior? Is it effective? Is it similar to the LifeSpace intervention? Consider what it would look like to implement LifeSpace with your age group and setting.
- \* Talk with staff at your site: Have they ever dealt with a child (or children) who exhibited the behaviors described in ODD or CD? If so, why did they believe that child had these behavioral issues? How did the staff cope with these behaviors within that setting?

### **WEEK 13. PEER GROUPS**

- \* Try organizing one of the cooperative learning games described by Mikami, et al. (2005). How did the children respond? Did you find it was effective at meeting the goals established in the article?
- \* Be attentive for instances of peer rejection/victimization. If you observe any, consider what factors in the environment, child, and peers may have contributed to the incident/s.

- \* If your service does not allow you to observe peer interactions, try discussing the issue with a child: his/her perspective on friendship, experiences observing/receiving rejection, etc.

#### **WEEK 14. MEDIA (self esteem. etc.)**

- \* If you mentor or work with children in elementary, middle, or high school, you could ask them about body-image and eating habits. Have they ever dieted? What do they think healthy eating should look like? Who do they think is beautiful/handsome?
- \* Interview children at your service site about their media diet. How much time do they spend on TV, videogames, internet, etc.? What specific shows/games/etc. do they like to watch? You might also ask them whether they believe media exposure has any effect on them (or on kids in general).
- \* Talk with staff at your site. How do they define self-esteem? Do they explicitly aim to boost children's self-esteem at the site? Do they believe there might be any negative consequences of this?

#### **WEEK 15. CONCLUSION**

This week, you have to come up with your own prompt :)

(You may not use a prompt I wrote for an earlier week.)

You may use this week's readings, or draw on information from earlier in the semester, but don't forget that you still need to find a way to build your prompt (and write your log) around specific, cited details from course content.