Using Observation to Understand
Very Young Children and their Caregivers
SS 2019

Deep meaning lies often in childish play.
~Johann Friedrich von Schiller

Prof. Julie Ribaudo
2710 SSWB Office: 734.936.4949
Cell: 586-360-7521
Email: jribaudo@umich.edu

Office hours – Monday Afternoon 12:15 – 1:30
Others (gladly) by appointment

Course Text:


Course Description:

This course will examine theories and techniques for observing and understanding the behavior and interactions of infants and young children and their caregivers. This course will emphasize evidence-based tools for observation that address diverse groups of infants and young children in their primary environments (e.g., family and alternative caregiving contexts). Special attention will be given to issues of diversity as it relates to understanding the nature of interactions. The course will be divided into classroom activities as well as involvement in an evidence-informed intervention project through the department of Psychiatry. Students will be part of a Child Team working/playing with an individual child on a weekly basis to assist the child with separation and reunions while their parent attends a parenting support and intervention group. The course will contribute to post-graduate readiness for endorsement in infant-family practice.

Course Content:
In addition to 9 or 10 weeks (depending on the term) working with an assigned child, students will debrief with team members, and the treatment team clinical staff. We will address both the objective aspects of observing and interacting with young children and their caregivers, as well as the subjective experience of caring for young children, many of whom face significant environmental challenges, including poverty and maternal depression. Specific strategies for helping children who are distressed or dysregulated will be addressed. Finally, students will have the opportunity to observe and reflect upon multiple domains of child development, including state regulation, attachment behaviors, and emotional, language, cognitive and motor development.

**Course Objectives:**

Students will:

- Develop core skills of MSW students in observation and assessment;
- Through use of videotapes, observation notes and individual feedback, specifically develop expertise to understand and respond to the unique communications of young children, who are much less able to utilize words to express their needs;
- Utilize a multidisciplinary approach including faculty influence from psychiatry, and psychology;
- Consider the behaviors and interactions observed through a multicultural lens, making accurate meaning of what is observed through understanding the child in the context of their caregiving environments, which are influenced by broader societal influences;
- Gain exposure to interacting with parents of young children in a supportive way
- Complete one aspect of training for post-graduate endorsement in infant-family practice.

**Course Design:**

This course will take place primarily in the community, via involvement with Mom Power, a Research project through University of Michigan, Department of Psychiatry and funded by Medicaid. It is a 9 to 10-week attachment-based, supportive, parenting intervention group for high-risk mother-child dyads (0-6 years). In addition to involvement with the project, students will receive guided support (via live interaction guidance as well as weekly observation notes) from the course instructor and research team members. Students will need to be available for approximately 4 hours, which includes set up, the group, clean up and debrief each week.

The class will meet once or twice in the SSW. Following the close of the 10-week session, a final course meeting will be held to debrief the overall experience. These additional experiences are part of the extra 1 credit course attached to this course.
Links to CSWE Practice Behaviors:

Practice Behavior 3
• Apply critical thinking to inform and communicate professional judgments
  o Distinguish, appraise and integrate multiple sources of knowledge, including research-based knowledge and practice wisdom
  o Demonstrate effective oral and written communication
  o Analyze models of assessment, prevention, and intervention

Practice Behavior 4
• Engage diversity and difference in practice
  o Recognize and communicate understanding of the importance of difference in shaping life experiences
  o Gain sufficient self-awareness to eliminate the influence of personal biases and values in working with diverse groups

Practice Behavior 7
• Apply knowledge of human behavior and the social environment
  o Utilize conceptual frameworks to guide the processes of assessment, intervention and evaluation
  o Critique and apply knowledge to understand person and environment

Practice Behavior 10
• Engage, assess, intervene and evaluate...
  o Use empathy and other interpersonal skills
  o Collect, organize and interpret client data
  o Select appropriate intervention strategies

Relationship of the Course to Four Curricular Themes:
• Multicultural and Diversity themes will be addressed by careful attention to the impact of social class, ethnicity, family structure, community support, and ability on infant and parent interactions. Different patterns of development which may result from different biological and/or social environments will be identified and differentiated from those patterns of development which may result from deprivation or impairment.

• Social Justice and Social Change will be addressed through discussion of the impact of economic and social oppression on infant and child family relationships.

• Promotion, Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation is particularly important in social work with infants and young children because of the potential lifelong impact of facilitating or harmful conditions at this stage of life. This course will emphasize factors that may contribute to resiliency and vulnerability and identify the kinds of
environmental conditions, programs, and interventions that promote optimal development.

- **Behavioral and Social Science Research** will be emphasized throughout the course which will draw on empirically based knowledge regarding observation and assessment from a number of other disciplines, particularly developmental psychology and psychiatry.

**Relationship of the Course to Social Work Ethics and Values:**

As child development throughout the life course is so profoundly impacted by the parent(s)/child relationship, this course will emphasize understanding the development and indices of attachment. We will also consider potential ethical dilemmas may arise for social workers working with vulnerable children and families. The impact of social conditions and social policy and the need for macro and micro intervention to improve the lives of children will also be addressed.

**Focus on Privilege, Oppression, Diversity and Social Justice (PODS):**

This course integrates PODS content and skills with a special emphasis on the identification of practice and/or policies that promote social justice, illuminate injustices and are consistent with scientific and professional knowledge. Through the use of a variety of instructional methods, this course will support students developing a vision of social justice, learn to recognize and reduce mechanisms that support oppression and injustice, work toward social justice processes, apply intersectional and intercultural frameworks and strengthen critical consciousness, self knowledge and self awareness to facilitate PODS learning.

**Accommodations:**

If you need or desire an accommodation for a disability, please let me know soon. The earlier that you make me aware of your needs the more effectively we will be able to use the resources available to us, such as the services for Students with Disabilities, the Adaptive Technology Computing Site and the like. If you do decide to disclose your disability, I will treat that information as private and confidential. Also, please notify me if religious observances conflict with class attendance or due dates for assignments so we can make appropriate arrangements.

The families you work with may interact in ways that are triggering or distressful to you. We will have time to debrief for the last hour of each session. You will also have access to Child Team Leadership for support. However, should you find the material and work a child distressing or triggering in an ongoing fashion, you are expected to utilize outside sources of support as well, including CAPS or your own therapist. (See resources below)
Course requirements:

1) **Completion of weekly reading** - I will look for strong evidence of your digestion of the course readings in your notes, your observations and connections during debrief and in your reflection section. Your capacity to integrate reading into debrief discussion will be part of your participation grade as well.

2) **Completion of three Observation notes** – 1 ungraded, 2 graded (60% of final grade) Students will write a note for three of the weeks following the guideline available in Canvas. Each note will have two components:
   a) A description of child throughout the day (see notes outline and observation guide in Canvas)
   b) In addition to the actual observation note, you will add a reflection/processing section. That section should include your thoughts and feelings, interpretations, etc. about the day, the child or particular parent-child interactions. You must address your subjective experience as well...i.e., any countertransference reactions. **It must also contain a section of how you applied that week’s reading to what you saw/experienced.** If another week’s reading leaps out as relevant, you can include that as well or in place of that weeks’ reading if it is too much of a stretch to link the reading to the week.
   c) You will also email your note to your Child Team Leader. **IF YOU ARE UNCOMFORTABLE SHARING YOUR REFLECTION SECTION WITH YOUR CHILD TEAM LEADER, YOU CAN SEND THE OBSERVATION SECTION ONLY TO THAT PERSON.**
   d) Upload the note in assignments and send an email with your note to your CT leader

3) **Completion of a final presentation (15% of final grade)**
   a) Will be discussed in class

4) **Attend all sessions (25% of final grade); absences will lower your grade since:**
   a) This project relies on the development of a strong caregiver/child relationship to help young children manage and thrive during separation from the parent.
   b) The children will come to rely on you...predictability, reliability and consistency are core to any strong relationship... “being there” is incredibly important to the children
   c) **From the time you enter the building, there will be no texting or emailing. This means while waiting for families, while interacting with the children and families or in the debrief sessions. Once the room is clean at the end of the session, you can check your phone before the debrief process begins**
   d) Your active participation includes listening well to others and contributing in all activities related to the group, such as pitching in while setting up, cleaning up, and getting
organized for debrief, and engaging in debrief. I will also listen for your attention to, use of and curiosity about the readings as part of your participation grade as well.

e) Finally, I will also consider your actual interaction with the children – do you show evidence of deepening your understanding of the meaning of behavior? Do you work to incorporate aspects of attunement and mirroring? Are you able to stay regulated or signal your Child Team leader if you need assistance? Do you communicate with your teammates when there are issues? Do you consider and raise issues of identity in debrief, helping all of us think more carefully about ourselves and our clients in the context of identities and culture?

NOTES are due to Canvas by Saturday of the week of the observation at 11:59 pm. – the quick turn-around will insure your notes are written when you have clear recollection. You will also send the note portion (reflection section optional) to your assigned child team leader by the same time. Given the pace of notes coming in and our short turn-around time, your notes must be turned in on time.

- Please use only first name of the child and first initial of the mom in your notes.

- When you email a note to your Team Leader or to another part of the treatment team, as an attachment, you must include the following statement in the email. Do the same for any email that has any client information - even if only a first name. The phone number offered is mine -

The information contained in this message may be privileged and confidential and is intended only for the use of the named recipients. This communication is protected by federal law, both the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and 18 United States Code Section 2511. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that you have received this in error and that any review, dissemination, distribution, or copying of this message is strictly prohibited. If you have received this communication in error, please notify us immediately by phone at 734-936-4949 (collect, if long distance) and destroy the message as you would confidential information.

GRADING of notes and final presentation will be based on:

- Nuanced observations of various domains of child development, behavior and interactions
- A capacity to decode/understand or be curious/wondering about a child’s behavior I.E., Intelligent confusion vs. ignorant certainty
- Use of text to decode/think about child
- Your reflective capacity – the ability to think about what you feel and feel about what you think and use that to understand the child/dyad. Your capacity to ponder countertransference reactions and to note areas of judgment, pain or identification.
WEEKLY AGENDA

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. May 14</td>
<td>SSWB Rm. 2752</td>
<td>*Muzik et al.- MP Overview/Primer</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Course Introduction</td>
<td>*Lillas and Turnbull – Awake States Stress Response Chart</td>
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<td>Course Requirements</td>
<td>*Sample Notes</td>
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<td>MP Overview</td>
<td>*Observation Guide</td>
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<td>Challenging Behavior</td>
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<td>2. May 21</td>
<td>MP Week 1</td>
<td>*Lieberman, Ch. 1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Notes - Everyone</td>
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<td>Arrive 1:00</td>
<td>*Murphy – When a Child is Inconsolable</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>*Lieberman and Van Horn</td>
<td>(Read for ideas how to “contain” themes and feelings of children, as well as to understand how fear can be masked by aggression)</td>
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<td>3. May 28</td>
<td>MP Week 2</td>
<td>*Lieberman, Ch. 3</td>
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<td>*Lillas and Turnbull</td>
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<td>*NCAST Child Communication Skills</td>
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<td>*SSP Scoring (just peruse)</td>
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<td>*Play Activities</td>
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<td>4. June 4</td>
<td>MP Week 3</td>
<td>*Lieberman, Ch. 4</td>
<td>Notes – Sarah’s Team</td>
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<td>*Slade – Parental Reflective Functioning</td>
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<td>*Davies – Attachment as a Context for Development</td>
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<td>5. June 11</td>
<td>MP Week 4</td>
<td>*Lieberman, Ch. 5</td>
<td>Notes – Virginia’s Team</td>
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<td>*Stern – Ch. 7 (ebook through lib.umich.edu (<a href="https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/lib/umichigan/reader.action?docID=764897&amp;query=">https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/lib/umichigan/reader.action?docID=764897&amp;query=</a>))</td>
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<td>*Greenspan – Social Emotional Development</td>
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6. June 18  MP Week 5  *Lieberman, Ch. 6  Notes – Kristin’s Team  
*Fraiberg - The Clinical Significance of Baby Games

7. June 25  MP Week 6  *Lieberman, Ch. 7  Notes – Sarah’s Team  
*Slade - Imagining Fear  
* Find correct ASQ age and prep to observe your child through its use  
*Developmental Milestones Chart  
*Development of Grasp

8. July 2  No MP  Meet in 2752  *Lieberman, Ch. 8  
*Fraiberg – Ghosts in the Nursery

9. July 9  MP Week 7  *Lieberman, Ch. 9  Notes – Virginia’s Team  
*Lyons-Ruth – Attachment and Aggression  
*Building Resilience  
*Lillas - Stress Regulation  
(revisiting to see how your child is doing)

10. July 16  MP Week 8  *Lieberman, Ch. 10  Notes – Kristin’s Team  
*Finkelhor, et al.  
*Norton  
Optional: Miron, Lewis and Zeanah

11. July 23  MP Week 9/10  *Lieberman, Conclusion  
*Lovegrove Lepisto – Discovering the Inner Life of a Child

12. July 30  Course Wrap up  FINAL PRESENTATIONS  *Jones-Harden – You Cannot do this Work Alone  
*Keller - Repairing Links  
(Optional:  
*Tutors

Additional Information:

Mental Health & Wellbeing  
The Office of Student Service’s Health and Wellness Program provides supportive services to MSW students which promote wellness, self-care, and maintenance of a healthy academic and mental health balance, as well as to increase disability awareness. Students may experience situations or circumstances that impede educational success and/or quality of life. Students may contact Health and Wellness Advocate Nyshourn Price regarding any health, mental health or wellness issue(s). This could include need for advocacy and/or referral to School, university, or community resources, financial resources, or
counseling centers. All meetings with students are strictly confidential and can take place in the School, over coffee, or locations where the student feels comfortable and non-threatened.


day,

Nyshourn Price, LMSW
Phone: (734) 763-4261
ndp@umich.edu

Students can also contact the Health and Wellness Program via ssw.wellness@umich.edu.
Additional resources can be found in the MSW Student Guide to Health and Wellness: http://ssw.umich.edu/student-life/health-safety.

You also have access to an embedded CAPS therapist - Megan Shaughnessy-Mogill, LLMSW (mshaughm@umich.edu)

Emergency Preparedness
In the event of an emergency, dial 9-1-1 from any cell phone or campus phone.

All University of Michigan students, faculty and staff are required to familiarize themselves with emergency procedures and protocols for both inside and outside of the classroom. In the event of possible building closure (i.e. power outages, severe weather conditions, public health notices, etc.) you may contact (734)764-SSWB(7793) for up-to-date School closure information.

Be Prepared. Familiarize yourself with the emergency card posted next to the phone in every classroom/meeting room. Review the information on the emergency evacuation sign (located nearest the door) and locate at least (2) emergency exits nearest the classroom.

If you are concerned about your ability to exit the building in the case of an emergency, contact the Office of Student Services and/or email ssw-ADAcompliance@umich.edu.

For more information, view the annual Campus Safety Statement at http://www.dpss.umich.edu/. Register for UM Emergency Alerts at http://www.dpss.umich.edu/emergency-management/alert/