

**Developmental Seminar: The Ecology of Childhood**  
**Moravian College**  
**Department of Psychology**  
**Spring 2009**

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**Instructor:** Dr. Michelle Schmidt

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**Class meeting time:** TR 12:50-2:00pm

**Office hours:** M 1:00-2:15; TR 11:30-12:15

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“Children need people in order to become human.... It is primarily through observing, playing, and working with others older and younger than himself that a child discovers both what he can do and who he can become—that he develops both his ability and his identity.... Hence to relegate children to a world of their own is to deprive them of their humanity, and ourselves as well.”

*-Bronfenbrenner, Two Worlds of Childhood: U.S. and U.S.S.R. (1973).*

“Development, it turns out, occurs through this process of progressively more complex exchange between a child and somebody else—especially somebody who’s crazy about that child.”

*-Bronfenbrenner, as quoted in Childhood, Robert H. Wozniak (1991).*

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**Course description:**

This course will explore the various environments in which children develop. Using an ecological model as our guide, we will examine (a) environments in which children are directly involved and (b) the connections between those environments; (c) environments that children are affected by, but not direct participants in; and (d) the larger cultural, social, and economic environments that influence children’s development. Topics will focus on aspects of children’s families, home life, school life, and neighborhood, with particular attention to historical and global perspectives that influence our understanding of these many layers of environment. We also will consider how social policy affects children and families and how we can all be advocates for children’s issues.

**Specific course goals:**

- Gain an in-depth understanding of ecological theory
- Learn skills for observing children in their natural environments
- Enhance scientific writing skills appropriate to developmental psychology
- Improve communication skills—both oral and written
- Understand the importance of serving and advocating for children

**Required texts:**

Fraser, M. W. (Ed.) (2004). *Risk and resilience in childhood: An ecological perspective* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed).  
Washington, DC: NASW Press.

Jenson, J. M. & Fraser, M. W. (Eds.) (2006). *Social policy for children & families: A risk and  
resilience perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

**Course grades:**

Participation (x 13 minus discussion leader day = x 12) <i>(Note: Days marked “(P)” on the schedule below indicate days where a participation grade will be assigned.)</i>	8 points each session	=	96
Discussion leader (including handout for class)	40 points	=	40
News Articles (x3) (due 2/19, 3/19, 4/9)	25 points each	=	75
Research Paper (due 3/31)	100 points	=	100
Advocacy Project (due 4/28)	50 points	=	50
Finding Your Passion Presentation (due 4/21, 4/23)	25 points	=	25
Personal Ecology Analysis Paper (due 2/10)	50 points	=	50
Guest Reaction Papers: “Why do they matter?” (x2) (due dates vary)	25 points each	=	50
			<b>Total Points: 486</b>

**Note: If students do not appear to be doing the readings for our class discussions, there will be pop quizzes in class. Quizzes will be worth 25 points each and will be added to the total points available for the class.**

## Specific assignments:

**Participation.** This course is a seminar by design. My approach to seminars is one that includes a great deal of discussion and participation by all members of the group. As such, after laying down some foundational material at the beginning of the semester, we will venture down a pathway of reading and discussing and writing about issues pertaining to children and their many environments. On many days, we will have student-led discussions and, on other days, we will have guests from the community who work directly with issues pertaining to children and their families. Regardless of who is leading the “roundtable” discussion, students will be assigned an individual discussion grade for the day. This grade will be assigned based on both the student’s own evaluation of participation and the instructor’s evaluation of participation.

**Discussion Leader.** Each student will serve as discussion leader (in pairs) one time during the semester. The goal will be to challenge the class to think about the day’s readings. Students should be prepared with a list of questions/issues for the class to explore together—they should both pose questions to the class and engage in that discussion themselves. Discussion leaders may choose to begin class with no more than 5 minutes of overview of the readings, but the rest of class must be made up of open and active discussion. Discussion leaders are responsible for keeping discussion going for 1 hour. They should be prepared to close the discussion when appropriate, so that we have time to do participation evaluation forms. Discussion leaders should provide the class with a handout to guide students through the discussion. Organization and preparedness are critical for being a good discussion leader.

**News Articles.** Three times over the course of the semester, students will be required to turn in newspaper articles that present stories on issues pertaining to infants, children, or adolescents (see sample article at the end of the syllabus). Appropriate newspapers, for example, include: *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Daily News*, *Philadelphia Inquirer* (these represent the top 8 newspapers in the country, based on circulation). You must turn in a copy of the article and a 1-page typed page with two subheadings: (a) Summary of the issue and (b) Reaction to the article. Each section should have a concise, single-spaced paragraph. Do not turn in more than a single typed page. Also, do not turn in something that does not follow the required format.

**Research Paper.** Students will complete a 7- to 8-page APA-style literature review (NO LONGER) on a topic of their choice (not including title page and references). The paper should investigate a topic that falls under the umbrella of “the ecology of childhood” and should be an issue that the student feels strongly about. The research paper will set students up for the advocacy project due at the end of the semester...so topics should represent students’ passions! Papers must include at least 10 empirical papers on the subject (no internet sites) and should include APA style citations and a reference page. Papers will be downgraded for poor APA style. It is highly recommended that topics be approved by the instructor.

**Advocacy Project.** At the end of semester, students will turn in an advocacy project that follows-up on their research paper. Students will need to somehow advocate for the issue that they are concerned about. An advocacy project might include an *op-ed* paper or a thorough and thoughtful letter to a congressman. Again, it is highly recommended that students discuss their choice of advocacy project. If the project is something other than an *op-ed* paper or a letter to a congressman, students MUST get approval for the project.

**“Finding Your Passion” Presentation.** At the end of the semester, students will give a 5-7 minute presentation to the class on their research paper and advocacy project. These will be formal presentations. Students should be dressed professionally and should have a well-prepared and timed presentation. PowerPoint, handouts, and other aids are encouraged.

**Personal Ecology Paper.** Early in the semester, each student will complete a personal ecology paper. Following Bronfenbrenner’s model, students will outline major sources of influence in their own lives. This personal analysis will serve two purposes: (1) to familiarize students with Bronfenbrenner’s ecological theory, and (2) to provide students with an opportunity to understand how their own environments influenced their development. Papers should be broken down into sections, labeled with the systems identified in Bronfenbrenner’s model. Papers should be typed and subsections should be single-spaced. Papers may not exceed 3 single-spaced pages.

**Guest Reaction Papers.** We will have 5 guests in our class over the course of the semester. You must write a 1- to 2-page thoughtful paper in response to two of those people. Papers should focus on the topic: “Why do they (or the topic) matter?” Students will be told which two guests they will have to write a paper about. Papers are due at the start of class on the class day following the visit.

## CLASS POLICIES

### Civility

There is an expectation in this course that students will be respectful of one another. So, please don't do things that interrupt with the learning process—cell phones ringing, gum popping, etc.

### Attendance Policy

As Moravian College's Attendance Policy in the Student Handbook states, "students are expected to attend classes regularly." If you have an unavoidable situation that prevents you from being in class, please advise the instructor before the class meeting. Excused absences will require appropriate documentation (e.g., doctor's note). Otherwise, your attendance will be expected. Unexcused absences will be handled on an individual basis, and will result in a 3-point deduction per absence on the final average. A grade of zero will be recorded for class participation on any missed day or for any missed presentations. Whether excused or not, if you are absent, it is your responsibility to get missed material from a classmate.

### Academic Integrity

The Policy on Academic Honesty (see Student Handbook) states, "Moravian College expects its students to perform their academic work honestly and fairly." Therefore, students are expected to be honest in all matters pertaining to this class, without exception.

All work submitted for evaluation in this course must be original work. It may not be "borrowed" from another student, a printed source, or online source without proper credit as outlined by the APA Manual 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (available in the Reference section of Reeves Library). Please note that no part of your assignments may be shared with other students in this class or with students in future classes, and you may not refer to papers from previous classes. All papers submitted for this class must be original work completed to meet the requirements of this class.

**IT IS THE EXPECTATION IN THIS COURSE THAT YOU COMPLETED PS211 AND YOU ARE COMPETENT IN APA STYLE. PLAGIARISM WILL NOT BE EXCUSED ON THE BASIS OF "I DIDN'T KNOW THAT WAS PLAGIARISM..."** Students may not plagiarize. The Moravian College Student Handbook states, "[w]hen students use the specific thoughts, ideas, writings, or expressions of another person, they must accompany each instance of use with some form of attribution to the source." Failure to do so is plagiarism, a major form of dishonesty. Specific procedures for attribution for this course are outlined in the APA Publication Manual (5<sup>th</sup> edition) (3 copies are available in the Reference section of the library). If you are not sure what constitutes plagiarism, please set up an appointment with the instructor. Otherwise, adherence to the guidelines set forth by APA will be expected. Students must turn in copies of all sources used for all graded assignments that require background materials and are expected to "keep all notes, drafts, and materials used in preparing assignments until a final course grade is given." A student judged to have violated the policy on academic honesty will receive a grade of zero for the relevant assignment or a failing grade for the course, at the discretion of the instructor. Any such violation will be reported in writing to the Office of the Academic Dean. Students are responsible for adhering to all policies outlined in the Student Handbook.

### Policy on Late Papers/Assignments

Late assignments will be accepted for 48 hours after the due date and time (12:50pm on the due date is when the clock starts). Within 24 hours of the due date and time, papers will be graded beginning with a maximum of 80% of the possible points. During the second 24 hour period, papers will be graded beginning with a maximum of 60% of the possible points. For example, a paper worth 100 points will be graded beginning with 80 points as the maximum number of available points within 24 hours of the due date and time, and that same paper will be graded beginning with 60 points as the maximum number of available points between 24 and 48 hours of the due date and time. After 48 hours, papers will not be accepted...do not even ask.

### Learning Services Office

The Learning Services Office provides assistance to students who are experiencing academic difficulties. If you feel you need special services through this office, you may call 610-861-1510 or visit their offices.

## SCHEDULE FOR THE SEMESTER...

<u>DATE</u>	<u>Topics &amp; Assignment Due Dates</u>	<u>Readings</u>
<b>Week 1</b>		
1/20	Introduction to the course	
1/22	Schmidt out of town	
<b>Week 2</b>		
1/27	Theorists, Issues, and Other Business	handouts, RRC Ch 1
1/29	Theorists, Issues, & Other Business... <i>Newspaper Article Assignment Overview</i> <i>Personal Ecology Paper Overview</i>	handouts, RRC Ch 1
<b>Week 3</b>		
2/3	Risk & Resilience	SPCF Ch 1;RRC Ch 2
2/5	Policy & Advocacy	SPCF Ch 1;RRC Ch 2
<b>Week 4</b>		
2/10	<b>Topic:</b> Health Policy ( <b>P</b> , student led discussion #1) <b>Personal Ecology Paper Due</b>	SPCF Ch 5
2/12	<b>GUEST:</b> <i>Dr. Christopher Morabito</i> <i>Attending Physician, Onsite Neonatal Partners and</i> <i>VP Medical Strategy, Hudson Global</i> ( <b>P</b> ) Community Issue: Childhood Obesity	handout
<b>Week 5</b>		
2/17	<b>Topic:</b> Childhood Depression ( <b>P</b> , student led discussion #2)	RRC Ch 11
2/19	<b>GUEST:</b> <i>Erin McLean, Children's Bereavement Coordinator,</i> <i>St. Luke's Hospice &amp; Ryan's Tree</i> ( <b>P</b> ) Community Issue: Children and Loss <b>Newspaper Article #1 Due</b>	handout
<b>Week 6</b>		
2/24	<b>Topic:</b> Education Policy ( <b>P</b> , student led discussion #3)	SPCF Ch 3
2/26	<b>Topic:</b> School Failure ( <b>P</b> , student led discussion #4)	RRC Ch 5
<b>SPRING BREAK</b>		
<b>Week 7</b>		
3/10	<b>Topic:</b> Child Maltreatment ( <b>P</b> , student led discussion #5)	RRC Ch 4
3/12	( <b>P</b> ) <b>GUEST:</b> <i>Rochelle Freedman, Program Coordinator,</i> <i>Project Child Lehigh Valley</i> Community Issue: Child Abuse and Neglect	handout

<b>Week 8</b>		
3/17	<b>Topic:</b> Child Welfare ( <b>P</b> , student led discussion #6)	SPCF Ch 2
3/19	<b>(P) GUEST:</b> Nancy Martin, Director of Family Services, Community Services for Children Community Issue: Poverty <b>Newspaper Article #2 Due</b>	handout
<b>Week 9</b>		
3/24	<b>(P) GUEST:</b> Russell “Rooster” Valentini, Homeless Liaison for Allentown Schools Community Issue: Homelessness	handout
3/26	<b>FILM:</b> <i>Waiting on the World to Change: Poverty in Camden</i>	handout
<b>Week 10</b>		
3/31	<b>FILM:</b> <i>Update on the Kids from Camden: Keeping Hopes &amp; Dreams Alive</i> Discussion of films <b>Research paper due</b>	handout
4/2	Schmidt out of town—no class	
<b>Week 11</b>		
4/7	<b>Topic:</b> Children with Disabilities (Schmidt, discussion leader) <b>FILM:</b> <i>Children in Crisis</i>	SPCF Ch 6
4/9	Children in the news: Analysis <b>Newspaper Article #3 Due</b>	
<b>Week 12</b>		
4/14	<b>(P) Topic:</b> Substance Abuse ( <b>P</b> , student led discussion #7)	SPCF Ch 7, RRC Ch7
4/16	<b>Topic:</b> Pregnancy ( <b>P</b> , student led discussion #8) <b>OR</b> <b>Topic:</b> Suicide	RRC Ch 10 RRC Ch 12
<b>Week 13</b>		
4/21	<b>Finding Your Passion: Presentations I</b>	
4/23	<b>Finding Your Passion: Presentations II</b>	
<b>Week 14</b>		
4/28	Final Discussion <b>Advocacy Project Due</b>	SPCF Ch 9
4/30	Wrap-up/Catch-up	

**Note: Readings may be added or deleted over the course of the semester, at the discretion of the instructor.**





## Section 1: Microsystems

Children's **microsystems** will include any immediate relationships or organizations they interact with, such as their immediate family or caregivers and their school or daycare. How these groups or organizations interact with the child will have an effect on how the child grows; the more encouraging and nurturing these relationships and places are, the better the child will be able to grow. Furthermore, how a child acts or reacts to these people in the microsystem will affect how they treat her in return. Each child's special genetic and biologically influenced personality traits, what is known as temperament, end up affecting how others treat them.

## Section 2: Mesosystem

The **mesosystem** describes how the different parts of a child's microsystem work together for the sake of the child. For example, if a child's caregivers take an active role in a child's school, such as going to parent-teacher conferences and watching their child's soccer games, this will help ensure the child's overall growth. In contrast, if the child's two sets of caretakers, mom with step-dad and dad with step-mom, disagree how to best raise the child and give the child conflicting lessons when they see him, this will hinder the child's growth in different channels.

## Section 3: Exosystem

The **exosystem** level includes the other people and places that the child herself may not interact with often herself but that still have a large affect on her, such as parents' workplaces, extended family members, the neighborhood, etc. For example, if a child's parent gets laid off from work, that may have negative affects on the child if her parents are unable to pay rent or to buy groceries; however, if her parent receives a promotion and a raise at work, this may have a positive affect on the child because her parents will be better able to give her her physical needs.

## Section 4: Macrosystem

Bronfenbrenner's final level is the **macrosystem**, which is the largest and most remote set of people and things to a child but which still has a great influence over the child. The macrosystem includes things such as the relative freedoms permitted by the national government, cultural values, the economy, wars, etc. These things can also affect a child either positively or negatively.

## Section 5: Chronosystem

Later, an additional level of the environment was added. The **chronosystem** refers to the