

**HD 4490: Children's Learning in a Social Context**  
**Fall 2013, Cornell University**

Instructor: Nadia Chernyak  
Class Location: Warren Hall, 137  
Class Meetings: 2:55-4:10pm M/W  
Office Hours: 1:30-2:55pm Mondays, or by appointment.  
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**Overview of the Course:**

Young children are rapid learners, and within a very short time frame acquire a great deal of knowledge about the world. For example, by age 5, a child already grasps basic concepts about others' minds, causality, social norms, and even some rudimentary moral concepts. How do children accomplish the task of learning so much in such a (relatively) short timeframe? Much of learning is done in a social context, and this course explores the ways in which children learn from others. Through reading recent empirical research articles, we discuss (1) *mechanisms* of learning from others, and (2) the *type* of knowledge that is acquired in a social context. Throughout the semester, we read, discuss, and dissect cutting-edge empirical research on young children's learning.

**Prerequisites:** This course is aimed towards upper-class students, with experience with reading research and writing in psychology/human development. Two courses in Human Development, or Psychology, or advanced permission from instructor.

**Course Goals:**

This course places priority on students' acquisition of analytical, critical thinking, and writing skills. Course objectives include:

- 1) Enhancing students' knowledge of cognitive development
- 2) Learning to critically analyze empirical research
- 3) Improving research writing skills through peer and instructor feedback

**Course Requirements:**

- 1) *Attendance and Active Participation:* Students are required to **attend every class session, do the readings ahead of time, and participate actively** in course discussion. If you are unable to attend due to illness or emergency, please email me as soon as possible. Extended absences from class will not be tolerated. **Failure to do the readings prior to class will result in a 0 for both participation and discussion post marks for that day.**
- 2) *Discussion Posts:* **Students must post reactions to the readings on Blackboard by 5pm prior to the class day (e.g., by 5pm Wednesday for a Thursday class).** Late posts are not accepted. Discussion posts are graded for level of analytical and critical thinking. Note: Discussion posts should not be summaries of the readings, but rather an analysis of the research question, methods used, and/or follow-up questions and ideas. Discussion posts which receive high marks should show evidence of analysis and critical thinking about the readings. Some questions that you may want to

consider as you do your discussion posts (these are merely suggestive starting points): *Conceptual Questions*: What did the experiment set out to test? What contribution does it make to the understanding of children's learning? What did the children learn, and how does it relate to broader phenomena of learning? *Methodological Questions*: What do the findings and methods show? How would you follow-up?

- 3) *Assignments*: Assignments are noted in the syllabus, and explained in class. No late assignments are accepted. If you must miss class that day due to illness, **it is your responsibility to email the assignment to the instructor prior to class session in order to avoid losing credit for the assignment.**
- 4) *Final Research Project*: All students are expected to synthesize a research proposal. Proposals are shaped over the course of the semester through meetings with the instructor, peer feedback, and instructor feedback. A large part of the course is devoted to shaping students' ideas.
- 5) *Leading Discussion Groups*: For select weeks, students will lead discussion. To prepare, discussion leaders must prepare questions, and create an interactive activity for the class to engage in. Students may optionally assign (short) assignments to facilitate the activity. Discussion leaders are encouraged to be creative in how they format the activity, but as a requirement, **discussions must be interactive.**

#### **Course Policies:**

- 1) *Academic Code and Plagiarism*: All students are required to abide by the Cornell University Code of Academic Integrity. Please read through this code carefully: <http://www.cornell.edu/UniversityFaculty/docs/mail.html>. Plagiarism of any kind will not be tolerated, and may result in a failing grade for the course.
- 2) *Late Assignments*: Late assignments will not be accepted, with the exception of the final draft. Final drafts will be marked 15% off for every 24 hours they are late.
- 3) *Illness and Extenuating Circumstances*: In the case of illness or emergency, please be in touch with me as soon as possible. Be prepared to provide proper documentation in the case of a long-term illness or emergency (i.e, missing more than 1 day of class). Even in the case of excusable illness, the student is still responsible for submitting all assignments, discussion posts, and questions when due.
- 4) *Texting/Email*: Phones and email during class are distracting to others, and do not allow you to participate fully in discussion. **Texting and email during class is prohibited, and will result in a 0 for participation points for the day.**
- 5) *Special Accommodations*: If you require special accommodations or have a learning disability you would like me to be aware of, please be in touch with both Student Disabilities Services and me at the *beginning* of the course.
- 6) *Extra Credit*: There is no extra credit. The best way to keep your grade up is to do the readings and to stay engaged.

**Grading:**

- 15% Discussion Posts & Assignments
- 10% Active Class Participation
- 10% Literature Review
- 15% Rough Draft
- 5% Peer Reviews (2.5% each)
- 35% Final Paper
- 10% Oral Class Presentations (5% each)

**Readings:****Wednesday August 28: Introduction to the Course**

Class Goals: Course and classmate introduction, sign up for discussion groups, overview of how the class will work.

**Monday, September 2: Labor Day, No Class****Wednesday, September 4: Theories of Development**

Class Goals: Introduction to broad theories of development

Readings:

- 1) Gelman, S. A. (2009). Learning from others: Children's construction of concepts. *Annual Review of Psychology, 60*, 115-140.
- 2) Vygotsky, L. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. *Mind and Society* (pp.79-91). Cambridge, MA.

Assignment Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Tuesday 5pm.

**Monday, September 9: Methods in Developmental Research**

Class Goals: Discuss different methods used in developmental studies

Readings: Individual assignment (see "Assignment Due" below)

Assignment Due: Pick one citation from the Gelman (2009) study, read it thoroughly, and prepare to explain it to the class. Please include the citation from your chosen study in your blackboard post.

**Wednesday, September 11: Joint Attention and Shared Intentionality**

Class Goals: Understanding of joint attention and shared intentionality

Readings:

- 1) Tomasello, M., & Carpenter, M. (2007). Shared intentionality. *Developmental Science, 10*, 121-125.
- 2) Tomasello, M., & Fararar, M. J. (1986). Joint attention and early language. *Child Development, 57*, 1454-1463.

Assignments Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Tuesday, 5pm. Find a youtube (or other) video of "joint attention" and bring the link to class.

**Monday, September 16: Inferring the Intentions of Others**

Class Goals: Read empirical research studies concerning how we learn from others' intentional behaviors.

Readings:

- 1) Baldwin, D. A. (2008). Infants' contribution to the achievement of joint reference. *Child Development, 5*, 874-890.
  - 2) Tomasello, M., Strosberg, R., & Akhtar, N. (1996). Eighteen-month-old children learn words in non-ostensive contexts. *Journal of Child Language, 23*, 157-176.
  - 3) Carpenter, M., Call, J., & Tomasello, M. (2005). Twelve and 18-month-olds copy actions in terms of goals. *Developmental Science, 8*, F13-F20.
- Assignments Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Sunday 5pm.

### **Wednesday, September 18: Imitation**

Class Goals: Read empirical research on mimicry and imitation

Readings:

- 1) Meltzoff, A. N. (1995). Understanding the intentions of others: re-enactment of intended acts by 18-month-old children. *Developmental Psychology, 31*, 838-850.
- 2) Lyons, D. E., Young, A. G., & Keil, F. C. (2007). The hidden structure of overimitation. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 104*, 19751-19756.
- 3) Kenward, B., Karlsson, M., & Persson, J. (2011). Over-imitation is better explained by norm learning than by distorted causal learning. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 278*, 1239-1246.

Assignments Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Tuesday 5pm.

### **Monday, September 23: When Children Trust Others for Information**

Class Goals: Read and discuss mechanisms for selective trust in others.

Readings:

- 1) Koenig, M., & Harris, P. (2005). Preschoolers mistrust ignorant and inaccurate speakers. *Child Development, 76*, 1261-1277.
- 2) Jaswal, V., & Neely, L. (2006). Adults don't always know best: Preschoolers use past reliability over age when learning new words. *Psychological Science, 17*, 757-758.
- 3) Lutz, D. J., & Keil, F. C. (2002). Early understanding of the division of cognitive labor. *Child Development, 73*, 1073-1084.

Assignments Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Sunday 5pm.

### **Wednesday, September 25: When Children Trust Others, Part II**

Class Goals: Read and discuss when children selectively trust others.

Readings: Individual assignment (see "Assignments Due" below).

Assignments Due: Do a search for preschoolers' selective trust, read it thoroughly, and prepare to explain it to the class. Include the citation in your blackboard post, due by Tuesday 5pm.

### **Monday, September 30: Teaching and Learning**

Class Goals: Learn about the benefits (and drawbacks) of natural pedagogy.

Readings:

- 1) Bonawitz, E., Shafto, P., Gweon, H., Goodman, N. D., Spelke, E., & Schulz, L. (2011). The double-edged word of pedagogy: Instruction limits spontaneous exploration and discovery. *Cognition, 120*, 322-330.
- 2) Strauss, S., Ziv, M., & Stein, A. (2002). Teaching as a natural cognition and its relations to preschoolers' developing theory of mind. *Cognitive Development, 17*, 1473-1487.

- 3) Csibra, G., & Gergely, G. (2009). Natural pedagogy. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 13, 148-153.

Assignments Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Sunday 5pm.

### **Wednesday, October 2: Convention and Conformity**

Class Goals: Read empirical research on children's learning about normativity

Readings:

- 1) Rakoczy, H., Warneken, F., & Tomasello, M. (2008). The sources of normativity: young children's awareness of the normative structure of games. *Developmental Psychology*, 44, 875-881.
- 2) Corriveau, K., Fusaro, M., & Harris, P. L. (2009). Going with the flow: Preschoolers prefer nondissenters as informants. *Psychological Science*, 20, 372-377.

Assignments Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Tuesday 5pm.

**\*\* By this date, you must have come to see me about your final project idea\*\***

### **Monday, October 7: Learning through Peer Collaboration**

Class Goals: Discuss how we learn through collaborating with others

Readings:

- 1) Sommerville, J., & Hammond, A. (2007). Treating another's actions as one's own: Children's memory of and learning from joint activity. *Developmental Psychology*, 43, 1003-1018.
- 2) Gauvain, M., & Rogoff, B. (1989). Collaborative problem solving and children's planning skills. *Developmental Psychology*, 25, 139-151.

Assignments Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Sunday 5pm.

### **Wednesday, October 9: Learning from Parents**

Class Goals: Learn about parent-child scaffolding

Readings:

- 1) Corriveau, K. H., Harris, P. L., Meins, E., Fernyhough, C., Arnott, B., Elliott, L., & De Rosnay, M. (2009). Young children's trust in their mother's claims: Longitudinal links with attachment security in infancy. *Child development*, 80, 750-761.
- 2) Hammond, S. I., Müller, U., Carpendale, J. I., Bibok, M. B., & Liebermann-Finestone, D. P. (2012). The effects of parental scaffolding on preschoolers' executive function. *Developmental psychology*, 48, 271-281.

Assignments Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Tuesday 5pm

### **Monday, October 14: FALL BREAK (NO CLASS)**

**Wednesday, October 16: NO CLASS. Please use the time to work on your literature reviews.**

### **Monday, October 21: Literature Review**

Class Goals: Gain feedback from the class as we discuss project ideas

Assignments Due: Rough draft, and brief discussion of project idea (5 minutes) to entire class.

### **Wednesday, October 23: Preschool Observations**

Class Goals: Observe a preschool classroom.

Assignments Due: Sign-up for a time to observe the preschool. Details for assignment to be announced.

### **Monday, November 4: Questions and Explanations**

Class Goals: Read empirical evidence about children's learning through discourse.

Readings:

- 1) Callanan, M. A., & Oakes, L. M. (1992). Preschoolers' questions and parents' explanations: Causal thinking in everyday activity. *Cognitive Development, 7*, 213-233.
- 2) Frazier, B. N., Gelman, S. A., & Wellman, H. M. (2009). Preschoolers' search for explanatory information within adult-child conversation. *Child Development, 80*, 1592-1611.
- 3) Legare, C. H. (2012). Exploring explanation: Explaining inconsistent evidence informs exploratory, hypothesis-testing behavior in young children. *Child Development, 83*, 173-185.

Assignments Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Sunday 5pm. Preschool observation assignment due in class.

### **Wednesday, November 6: Learning to Revise Our Beliefs**

Class Goals: Read empirical evidence about children's learning through statistical reasoning

Readings:

- 1) Lu, H., Su, Y., & Wang, Q. (2008). Talking about others facilitates theory of mind in Chinese preschoolers. *Developmental Psychology, 44*, 1726-1736.
- 2) Amsterlaw, J., & Wellman, H. M. (2006). Theories of mind in transition: A microgenetic study of the development of false belief understanding. *Journal of Cognition and Development, 7*, 139-172.

Assignments Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Tuesday 5pm.

### **Monday, November 11: Pretense and Play**

Class Goals: Read empirical evidence about children's learning through play

Readings:

- 1) Schulz, L. E., & Bonawitz, E. B. (2007). Serious fun: preschoolers engage in more exploratory play when evidence is confounded. *Developmental Psychology, 43*, 1045-1050.
- 2) Lillard, A. S. (1993). Pretend play skills and the child's theory of mind. *Child Development, 64*, 348-371.
- 3) Buchsbaum, D., Bridgers S., Weisberg D. S., & Gopnik A. (2012). The power of possibility: Causal learning, counterfactual reasoning, and pretend play. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences, 367*, 2202-2212.

Assignments Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Sunday 5pm.

### **Wednesday, November 13: Science and Fantasy**

Class Goals: Learn about how children might learn about intangible concepts.

Readings:

- 1) Vosniadou, S., & Brewer, W. F. (1992). Mental models of the earth: A study of conceptual change in childhood. *Cognitive Psychology*, 24, 535-585.
- 2) Wooley, J. D., Boerger, E. A., & Markman, A. B. (2004). A visit from the Candy Witch: Factors influencing young children's belief in a novel fantastical being. *Developmental Science*, 7, 456-468.

Assignments Due: Blackboard discussion post, due by Tuesday 5pm.

**\*\* Rough Draft Due\*\***

**Monday, November 18: Rough Draft Peer Discussion**

Class Goals: Read and revise each others' rough drafts.

Readings: Each others' rough drafts

Assignments Due: Commentary on your peers' rough drafts (due to me and your group via email by 5pm on Sunday).

**Wednesday, November 20: Special Topics– To Be Announced**

Class Goals: Special topics.

Readings: TBA

Assignments: TBA

**Monday, November 25: Individual Meetings for Rough Drafts**

**\*\* NO CLASS, BUT MUST SIGN UP FOR MEETING TIME TO DISCUSS YOUR ROUGH DRAFT WITH ME DURING CLASS TIME\*\***

Class Goals: Meet with me individually to discuss your rough draft

Assignments Due: Be prepared to discuss your rough draft and final project ideas.

**Wednesday, November 27: THANKSGIVING BREAK (NO CLASS)**

**Monday, December 2: Class Presentations and Course Wrap-Up I**

Assignments Due: Prepare a 10-minute presentation of your final class topic.

**Wednesday, December 4: Class Presentations and Course-Wrap Up II**

Assignments Due: To be announced

**Final Assignments Due:** Final Assignments are due December 13<sup>th</sup> at 5pm. Assignments must be turned in via hardcopy to my mailbox on the ground floor of MVR.