Course Domain and Boundaries

This is an introductory course on the relationship between theory and practice in infant mental health. It is intended for graduate students in Social Work, Education, Nursing and Psychology. Its purpose is to furnish a conceptual framework, based upon recent developments in attachment theory, for understanding how the emotional qualities of the infant-parent dyad influence the infant’s development, the parent’s capacity to give care, and finally the professional’s state of mind regarding the family. Emphasis is given to how the experiences of early childhood persist over time, and how they are summoned up again by the presence of a baby. This understanding becomes in turn the basis for learning how to plan a treatment approach which takes into account the family’s capacities for change.

Specific Knowledge and Skill Objectives

The students should learn:

A. Theories of the relationship between early parent-infant interaction and subsequent development.
B. Consequences of failures or disruptions of the attachment process for both parent and child.
C. Strategies for effective intervention to strengthen early attachment.
D. Transference and countertransference issues pertinent to infant mental health work.

Class Agenda

Friday, June 11
Morning –
  Class Introductions; course parameters
  Attachment Theory
Afternoon-
  Adult Attachment Interview
  Observing infants and parents – what do we look for; what do we see?

Friday, June 18
Morning –
  Transference and Countertransference
Strategies for intervention
Infant-Parent Psychotherapy

Afternoon-
Strategies for intervention
Watch, Wait and Wonder

Reading Requirements

In prep for Class One:

OPTIONAL:

In prep for Class Two:

Case Studies in Infant Mental Health: Risk, Resiliency, and Relationships (ordered through Ulrich and Shaman Drum). Chapter 1 (pp. 1-14), Chapter 3 (pp. 27-39).

Paper Requirement (MSW students only)

I. Briefly describe a vignette of problematic infant-parent interaction, observed or imagined. The described interaction may be short, lasting only minutes. It is usually easier to write about an interaction which is problematic. It will be helpful if you have formulated this by the second class, so you can enter into discussions with this in mind.

II. Describe the working model of relationships that the infant may be constructing based on the above interaction.

A. How would you characterize the infant’s model in terms of attachment categories? What are the specific behaviors you would anticipate seeing in the Strange Situation.

III. Describe the parent’s corresponding internal working model (i.e. AAI state of mind regarding attachment). How might this parent talk about their attachment experiences in the Adult Attachment Interview?

IV. How should the therapist attempt to modify this working model as it is played out between parent and infant? Organize your description as follows:
A. What observations and/or questions might the therapist use? Be specific.
B. How would you, as the therapist, work directly with the parent-infant interaction? Describe the therapeutic framework you would be thinking about.

V. What obstacles will the parent’s working model create for the working alliance?

A. What problematic feelings are likely to be induced in the therapist?
B. What would these feelings communicate to the therapist?
C. How can the therapist use these inferences to guide her treatment? Be Specific.

1. Length: 4 – 5 pages. Brevity is appreciated. Papers beyond that limit may not be read in their entirety.

2. This is NOT intended to be an in-depth, clinical case study but a demonstration of your grasp of the concepts taught in this course.

3. Papers are due on Ctools by July 10 at 11:00 p.m. If your paper is unavoidably late, write an explanation on your paper and I will deal with it on a case-by-case basis.