Goal - Observing Children
The goal of observation is to enhance your understanding of the major concepts and milestones of development through observation of real children rather than just reading or hearing about how children grow and develop. Child development refers to the kinds of changes that occur from conception through late adolescence. Physical (fine and gross/large motor), cognitive, emotional, social, self-help, and aesthetic development will be explored through these observations, providing a brief account of development as it occurs. In addition, using well-written running records teachers are better able to track a child’s interests, how a child is getting along, learning, and progressing in a program, become the basis for planning developmentally appropriate curriculum to help the child build skills, and have documentation to support classroom assessments. Observations, recorded over time, can present a comprehensive picture of a child’s development.

Piaget’s Concrete Pre-operational Stage (2-7 years of age)
The preschool-aged children that you will be observing have entered into Piaget’s preoperational stage of cognitive development. The key feature of children’s thinking in this stage is symbolic representation. The child is now able to use a symbol, an object, or a word to stand for something else. The use of symbols can be clearly seen in the child’s use of language; for example, the child can now represent objects in the environment with the appropriate word and can refer to past and future events. The use of symbols is also apparent in children’s drawings, imitation, mental imagery, and symbolic play. For example, a preoperational child might be observed feeding her doll imaginary cereal or drawing a picture of the balloons at her last birthday party. Thinking in terms of symbols does permit more flexibility and planning in their problem solving.

Despite these increases in cognitive skills, the thought processes of preoperational children result in characteristic differences in reasoning. Because they do not use logical operations, their reasoning often seems flawed to adults. One of the most easily observed differences in how preoperational children reason at this age is the tendency to view the world from one’s own perspective only, a phenomenon that Piaget termed egocentrism. Because of egocentric thinking, preoperational children may “hide” by covering their eyes or only parts of their bodies, believing that if they can’t see the seeker than they, themselves, can’t be seen.

Other preoperational reasoning errors result from thinking that is intuitive, rather than logical. For example, preschool children are incapable of conservation – they do not understand that certain properties of objects, such as volume or mass, do not change just because the superficial appearance of the object changes. Preoperational children are not only tied to their perceptions, they are also unable to de-center their thinking, or think about
more than one aspect of a problem at a time. Their thinking shows what Piaget called irreversibility – they are unable to reverse or mentally undo an action.

During this stage of development, children acquire new words at an astronomical rate. These rapid gains in children’s vocabulary are accompanied by mastery of more complex grammatical structures such as forming past tenses and plurals. As children acquire the grammatical rules of their language, a type of error called overregularization may occur in which children overuse the basic rules of language. For example, a 2 ½ or 3-year-old may say, “I bringed my puppy,” or “My feets are cold.” Children also become more likely to use correct syntax – that is, they become more aware of how words should be ordered to convey a particular meaning.

Children’s knowledge about gender and gender-role expectations develops very early. Preschoolers have a strong sense of gender identity, a sense of being male or female. Between the ages of 4 and 6, children develop gender constancy; the realization that gender stays the same regardless of how one looks or behaves. At this point, they may adopt very rigid standards for what they believe is appropriate male and female dress and behavior.

Preschool children are more likely to play with sex-appropriate toys; that is, boys are more likely to play with stereotypical “boy toys” – such as trucks; and girls are more likely to play with stereotypical “girl toys” – such as dolls and kitchen sets. Over the preschool years, gender segregation also increases, as children are more likely to play with same-sex peers rather than opposite-sex peers.

Preoperational children’s social interactions become increasingly reciprocal and coordinated, which is reflected in their play. Children’s play can be divided into four categories, ranging from least to most socially complex – nonsocial activity (onlooker and solitary), parallel play, associative play, and cooperative play. Around the age of 4 of 5 there is a developmental shift in the type of play in which children engage. Four and five year olds begin to demonstrate constructive play, drawing pictures or working on puzzles in pairs or groups, purposefully creating and constructing something together. Play also becomes more complex as children begin to experiment with both everyday and imaginary roles through pretend or dramatic play. This type of play involves advances in cognition, perspective taking, and communication skills.

While there are individual differences in development, most children develop typically. Some children, however, may show significant maturational delays or differences – these children are often identified with developmental disabilities. While many developmental disabilities are identified based on delays or differences from what we know of typical development, and different labels are used to describe the patterns of difference. It is important to remember, however, that a child with a disability is first and foremost a child, and that all children are typical in many ways. So instead of saying ‘disabled child’, it is more appropriate and respectful to state ‘a child with a disability.’

**Writing Skills**
- If you struggle with your writing skills, there are several resources including enrolling in CLDDV-48, securing a mentor through the Mentor Program (see instructor for
referral), utilizing MJC’s writing lab or tutoring center, or working with a skilled high-
school or college student or peers to review your assignments before they are due.

- The following pointers will help your success in writing effective and informative 
  observational reports.
  - Use the spell and grammar check functions in your computer’s writing 
    program.
  - Carefully review versions of commonly used words such as they’re (they are), 
    their (their shoes), and there (There are the missing shoes.)
  - Carefully review words such as then and than
    - Then connotes the relationship between actions, such as, “We will 
      learn about running records and then write a running record.”
    - Than connotes a comparative measurement, such as, “Amanda is taller 
      than Dylan.”
  - The over use of the word “then” is another area to consider. Try to limit your 
    use of it in your observational reports as it is often used excessively.
  - Learn the correct format for quotations. Anytime you are reporting what the 
    child said, you must use the standard quotation format. Example: Kevin could 
    not reach the ball. He said, “Teacher will you get the ball for me?”
  - When children are using tricycles, the word that describes how their feet work 
    is pedal. Examples: He is pedaling. She pedals to the end of the concrete 
    path.
  - Write your running record reports in present tense.

**How to record your observation:**

**Directions**

- Observations must occur in a licensed preschool center-based program. Licensed 
  children’s centers are programs that operate either preschool and/or full-day 
  childcare services for children between 30 months and 5 years of age. They are 
  licensed by the State of California, Department of Social Services, Community Care 
  Licensing and receive site visits and inspections on a regular basis.

- The following are **NOT** acceptable as observation sites: family child care homes 
  (even if they are licensed or part of a special program in the community), faith based 
  nursery programs, family events, park visits, or play dates. Past experience has 
  demonstrated that these observations are not effective for the purpose of this course.

- Select a program that is willing to work cooperatively with you and provide the 
  necessary information such as the child’s birth date. It is appropriate to give a 
  fictitious name to the child to keep the child’s name anonymous.

- Find a position where you can observe without interfering or interacting with the 
  activities of the classroom. Come prepared with your paper and writing implements 
  so that you do not interrupt the staff. A clipboard or supportive binder is appropriate, 
  so that you can write “on your lap.” Keep a low profile.

- **Computer Generated Work/Word Processed Work/Paper Headings:** All papers 
  must be word processed (typewritten), with no less than a 12 font, space and a half. 
  In addition, each paper submitted is required to be labeled with the information below
Papers will be graded as follows:
- Required Information – 10%
- Conforms to format provided – 10%
- Written content, answers assignment – 50%
- Writing (grammar, spelling, syntax, structure, etc.) – 30%

Running Record:
- Write verbs in present tense.
- Select ONE preschool-aged child who is 3, 4, or 5 years of age. The child you select is the focus in your running record. Follow the child as s/he moves, if necessary. Quickly record in sequence all activity and try to quote, word for word, the child’s speech. It is not necessary to quote a teacher’s comments; just summarize teacher comments. Your very first sentence in the running record needs to identify the child who is the primary focus. If it is relevant, include interactions with other children and adults in the classroom.
- Observe and document in writing a ten-minute period of time.
- Be specific and date each running record.
- Times – note times every five minutes
- Every five-minute time interval is required to have a minimum of 8-10 sentences. Since this is a ten-minute running record, the finished running record will have 16-20 sentences recorded.
- The running record can be likened to turning on a video and recording everything that happens in that time period.
- Avoid subjective statements where you give your opinion or make inferences about things like,
  - Goodness or badness (instead of saying that the child’s behavior was bad, state that when the other child is grabbing the puzzle, the child reaches over and hits.)
  - Intentions (instead of saying that the child is waiting for the teacher to notice him, state: without saying a word, the child is quietly standing next to his teacher)
  - Feelings/Emotions (instead of saying child is mad, state child is stomping feet, etc.)

Subjective Summary:
- Verbs will be written in a mixture of tenses as you share what child did in the past in order to explain child’s current skill base.
- After recording ten minutes of information, you, the observer, share your professional opinion about what you observed. When you share your opinion, follow it with a statement of something observed to support your statement.
- Stay away from words such a good and great and also stay away from labeling and diagnosing behavior such as attention-deficit or autism.)
Suggestion to help the child continue to progress (When making the suggestion, take a look at the child’s current skill base and then make a suggestion to scaffold to a more complex activity):

- You, the observer, will share your professional recommendation for future curriculum activities. Suggest similar activities that will help the child increase proficiency in the area that s/he is building skills. If the child appears to be at the mastery level of his/her developmental stage of development, then suggest a more complex activity that you believe is still developmentally appropriate for that child.
Sample Running Record Assignment

(Set up your assignment using this same format; the sample format in the syllabus is not correct. You are welcome to copy and paste this sample into your own word document and then replace the existing information with your information.)

CLDDV 101
Last name, first name:  Smith, Laurie
Title of Assignment: Running Record #1
Due Date: Wednesday, October 20, 2010
Date Turned In: Wednesday, October 20, 2010 (on time) or Wednesday, October 27, 2010 (late)  (Note: if you are turning in the assignment on time, then you will enter the same date for “Due Date” and “Date Turned In.”  If you are turning it in 7 days late, then you will enter two different dates.)

Name of preschool:
Address of preschool:
Phone number of preschool:
Name of head teacher:
Date of visit:
Number of teachers present:
Number of children present:

Name of child (it is okay to give the child a fictitious name):  Angelica
Birth date of child:  January, 2006
Age of child including years and months:  4 years and 9 months

Running Record(Objective reporting section):
Beginning Time - 10:00 AM
Melinda watches the other children interact with the equipment and others. Her head moves back and forth and her eyes are fixed on them. She stands for a long time just looking at children who are climbing up the stairs on the climbing structure. Then she follows them as she walks with alternating feet up the ladder and crawls through a tunnel that is attached to the climbing structure. Her right arm reaches out in front of her, and then she tucks her left arm under her chest and moves a little forward as she crawls. As she crawls, her lips are pushed together and her eyebrows are furrowed. She repeats this until she is through the tunnel. She follows them down the steps. Melinda puts her right foot down on a stair, and then brings her left foot to meet the right one. She repeats this until she is on the ground. By the time she is down, the other children are climbing up the steps again. Melinda walks in the other direction and approaches the swing set slowly. She says, “Teacher, I want a turn on the swings.” The teacher smiles and encourages her to climb onto a swing. She holds
onto the chains and pulls one knee up but couldn’t quite get herself onto the swing seat. Without asking for help, the teacher walks over and lifts Melinda onto the swing.

10:05 AM
Melinda holds onto the chains with both hands. Her right hand is higher than her left hand while holding onto the swings. She swings her legs back and forth in an irregular rhythm. Kevin, another child, walks over and stands by the swings. He says, “Can I have the swing when you are done?” Without saying a word to him, Melinda gets off the swing and walks inside. She pulls the train set off the shelf and starts pushing the train that is part of the train set. She puts the track pieces together and her lips are pressed together and her eyebrows are furrowed. She looks at the train pieces and her tongue is in the corner of her mouth. She hooks up one train car to the next with the magnets on the ends of each train car. She reaches with her right hand and with her left hand keeps it near her body; she adjusts and pushes to arrange the cars.

Ending time - 10:10 AM

Subjective summary section:
Melinda seems to be a well-adjusted child who gets along well with others. When she followed the children on the climbing structure and tunnel, she was a little slower walking up the steps and crawling through the tunnel, but didn’t seem to become frustrated. When she wanted the swing, she asked and then waited. She also gave it up when another child wanted a turn. Melinda seems to use her right hand almost exclusively. When manipulating the trains, she never picked up a car with her left hand or used it to make the cars go. She used her left hand only to gently tap a car into place, and she did this without extending her arm or reaching with it. She was not able to get onto the swing, which many other children her age can do by this time of year. She concentrates when she is focused on an activity. I observed her level of concentration by looking at her face, especially her mouth as she typically pressed together her lips.

Suggestion for future curriculum:
My recommendation is that Melinda be given opportunities to exercise outdoors and to use her large and small motor skills to enhance coordination and gain mastery in activities as running, crawling through tunnels, swinging, and climbing on the climbing structure. In addition, in the classroom, teachers can provide opportunities for experiences with scissors, play dough clay, small pegs, stringing beads and other objects for her to practice her fine motor skills including her pincer grasp. Teachers can continue to support
Melinda in her verbal skills by encouraging her to communicate with the children and the teachers in the classroom.