Objective
The goal of this course is to offer an inspiring peak into issues of developmental psychology. Since practically everyone in the course has taken some courses in developmental psychology (or so I assume), I shall focus on specialized topics, although they will be properly introduced. The course will consist of lecturing, group discussions and student presentations related to some interesting and foundational issues in cognitive development. The first three days will also include classroom experiments; presentation of stimuli, data collection and evaluation. Regarding the exam I will follow a “Pick your favorite day” policy.

Themes

Monday

Concepts and concept learning; Fodor’s heritage
9:00-10:30: Theories of concepts in psychology
10:45-12:15: Fodor’s paradox – what does it take to learn a concept?
12:45-13:30: Classroom experiment: Attention and change detection

Readings: The first two of the following four articles are a bit heavy going. The debate that takes place in them is based on Susan Carey’s 2009 book The Origin of Concepts. It is not necessary to read these papers before class; they are recommended readings. One goal of the Monday class is to offer a reconstruction of the argument for and against concept learning in a helpful way.

Also recommended is the following volume (we will touch upon some of its ideas in class): Roberto DE Almeida & Lila R. Gleitman (eds.)(2018). On Concepts, Modules, and Language; Cognitive Science at its Core, Oxford University Press

Tuesday

Perceptual development
9:00-10:30: Perceptual development in general; sight restoration after congenital blindness
10:45-12:15: The development of color vision: Why is it hard for children to learn color names?
12:45-13:30: Classroom experiment: Speech perception

Readings:

Wednesday

Numerical cognition
9:00-10:30: Core cognition in general; numbers in core cognition
10:45-12:15: The development of the concept of number following infancy
12:45-13:30: Classroom experiment: Numerical cognition

Readings:
The mandatory reading is Carey, Chs 4 and 8, the rest is recommended.
Dehaene, S. (2011). The number sense. Chapters 2,5,6,9

Thursday

Conceptual development and social understanding
9:00-10:30: Intro: the development of mindreading ability
10:45-12:15: Mental files – a representational framework for understanding social cognition
12:45-13:30: Combining concepts in childhood; some ongoing research

Reading:
Victoria Southgate, Coralie Chevallier and Gergely Csibra (2009): Seventeen-month-olds appeal to false beliefs to interpret others’ referential communication Developmental Science (2009), pp 1–6