

**Ed 100a: Exploring Teaching**  
**Fall, 2005**

**Child Study<sup>1</sup>**

*In the words of a wonderful Native Alaskan educator: “In order to teach you, I must know you. ‘I pray for all of us the strength to teach our children what they must learn and the humility and wisdom to learn from them so that we might better teach.*

Lisa Delpit, Other People’s Children, p. 183

**Rationale**

Good teachers are always learning about their students—how they see the world, how they think, express themselves and learn. Knowing and caring about students as learners helps teachers form relationships, earn students’ regard, decide what and how to teach, assess student understanding, communicate with families about student progress.

In this investigation you are trying to learn how one child experiences the world-- what do things look and feel like to this child, trying to see things from the child’s perspective. Your basic task is learning how to observe and think about children and about their experience of school and the world outside school. This includes being reflective about yourself as an observer and discussing your thoughts and observations with others. Hopefully the careful study of one child will help you develop your capacity to discern and appreciate the abilities, needs and potential of all students and gain some new self awareness as well.

Your final child study report is due on INSERT DATE. It will draw on experiences in the field, course readings, feedback from classmates and me as you work on learning about your study child and children in general.

**Getting Started**

1. During the week of Oct. 17, decide which student you want to study based on class discussion and your teacher’s advice. You might want to choose someone who puzzles you or who presents some challenges. Make notes about why you chose this particular child to study. Decide on a **pseudonym** to use in writing and talking about your study child in order to protect his/her privacy.

2. Start paying close attention to your study child each time you visit the classroom. See the syllabus for a suggested focus each week. Make notes in your field notebook after each classroom visit. Jot down your impressions of the child, interesting anecdotes, things the child says or does, your speculations and impressions. Use your notebook as a place to look at the child (and at yourself observing the child). Date your entries. The more you write in your field notebook the more you will have to say and the more you will find that you are seeing.

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<sup>1</sup> This investigation reflects the profound influence of Dirck Roosevelt who is spreading the tradition of child study developed at the Prospect School in Bennington, VT to teachers and teacher educators in Michigan and Massachusetts.

3. Try to observe the child alone and with others, in different settings (e.g. on the playground and in class) and in different subjects. Try to interact informally with the child (e.g. during transitions, at recess, on the playground, as you assist the child at his/her desk).

4. Use the headings in the Descriptive Review framework to jot down notes, anecdotes and impressions. Talk to your teacher. The readings will also give you ideas about what to look for, how to get to know students, how teachers use this kind of information to inform their teaching. Keep track of ideas from readings and discussions that seem relevant to your child study so that you can draw on this in your final integrative report.

5. Remember that you are not doing research on this child. Rather you are trying to learn about him/her through close observation and interaction within the constraints of time and setting. Do not discuss your study child by name outside of class.

### **Sharing and Reporting What You Are Seeing and Learning**

We will form child study groups in class so that you can talk about your study child with others and learn about other children through your colleague's eyes. Remember that you will be getting to know your study child over time. Use your study group to check out your impressions, see if your evidence is compelling, get new questions to pursue. The write-ups that you do in conjunction with your oral presentations should be incorporated into your final report.

#### **1. First oral presentation and reflection (Oct. 31)**

The purpose of this initial sharing is to share your initial impressions, base your ideas in supporting evidence, clarify your questions and figure out what you need to learn more about. **Always protect your child's privacy by using a pseudonym in writing and speaking. Do not discuss your study child outside of class.** Bring a write-up of what you plan to share.

Your presentation and write-up should include the following:

- Briefly describe the setting where you are getting to know your study child.
- Say why you chose the student. What were your first impressions?
- Give a verbal portrait of your study child. (See first two headings in the Descriptive Review framework.)
- What words or phrases would you use to describe your study child?
- Invite your peers to ask questions to help you clarify and provide evidence to support your first impressions. What do you want to learn more about?

Each person will have about 10 minutes to present with 5 minute for questions and comments from the group. support your beginning understandings. After the sharing, make some notes about the hunches you now have that you want to explore further.

Now that you know something about each other's setting and study child, what are some possible strategies, opportunities, openings that you could create or take advantage of to gain a more rounded picture of your study child?

## **2. Analysis of student work on Nov. 21 with Write-up Due Nov. 28**

We will spend time in class analyzing a piece of work from your study child. The work can be a piece of writing, a picture, a math journal. We will practice together on a sample of work from another child and then, in pairs, you will analyze your child's work using a protocol provided in class. This exercise will give you some insights into your child as a writer or mathematical thinker or artist. It will also give you practice describing as concretely as possible what your child knows and can do and thinking about how, as a teacher, you could move his/her learning forward in this area.

Afterwards, write a description and an analysis of the work and what it reveals. In your write up be sure to describe the activity or assignment that elicited the work. Describe the work itself. What capacities does the work reveal? What knowledge and skills does the work reveal? What does the student need to work on? Can you think of another task or assignment or activity that would move this student's learning forward? What questions does this analysis raise for you? After getting feedback and revising your analysis, incorporate this into your final report.

## **3. Continuing Study**

Keep working on understanding how your child sees the world, what s/he is good at, knows how to do, cares about. Try to negotiate at least one opportunity for a 1:1 conversation with your study child which you plan in advance and write up. Here are some ideas for how to plan your interaction.

1. Elicit a story or anecdote from the child.
2. Read and discuss a story, maybe a Leo Lionni story.
3. Work on a math problem, puzzle or some other task.

Take notes so that you can incorporate this into your final report.

## **4. Oral Presentation (Mon. Dec. 5)**

This is an opportunity to begin pulling together your ideas and developing a nuanced portrait of your study child. We will spend 15 minutes on each child. First you will give an oral presentation (8-10 minutes). Then there will be 5 minutes for comments and questions. Each group will be joined by a guest associated with the Education Program (e.g. education faculty, teachers). The guests will have a short form for providing feedback on your presentation.

### **Guidelines for Oral Presentation**

Think of an interesting way to present your child. Your presentation should accomplish the following:

- Your listeners should be able to visualize your study child because of the detailed and vivid verbal portrait that you paint.

- Your listeners should learn something about your child as a learner and thinker and as a member of the classroom community. Have you uncovered any patterns that suggest areas of strength or concern?
- Your listeners should understand why you characterize your child in particular ways because you provide supporting evidence (anecdotes, artifacts, observations).
- Your listeners should get a sense of some of the lingering issues or questions you are working on, puzzling about.

You may want to use a handout or bring some visual(s) to support your presentation. (No pictures of your child.). Have fun with this.

### Assessment Criteria

Here are the criteria outside guests will use to give you feedback on your oral presentation.

1. Quality of preparation.
2. Quality of description: uses vivid descriptive language, presents rounded picture of child
3. Attends to child as learner and member of classroom community
4. Adequacy of supporting evidence: provide anecdotes, observations, artifacts to support claims and to illustrate key qualities; does not rely solely on generalizations and judgments).

### **5. Final Integrative Report (during exam week – date to be determined)**

Your final report will draw on the previous work you have done and should have the following sections:

#### a. Reflection/connection with readings

Choose one passage (or anecdote) from three different readings that most informed your understanding of your study child and the process of coming to know an individual student. Include each passage (or summarize the anecdote. Explain why you chose each passage and what each taught you about your study child or the process, importance, challenges of getting to know individual children.

#### b. Description and analysis

This is the place to present a written portrait of your study child that addresses all aspects of the Descriptive Review framework. What is this child like? What are his/her strengths? Areas of vulnerability? Imagine that you are introducing the child to next year's teacher. What should the teacher know about this child? Be sure to include evidence (anecdotes, work sample) to support your characterization. What recommendations would you make to the teacher about how to support this child's learning?

#### c. Self-assessment

How have you benefited from this investigation? What are some challenges in getting to know children well (besides time constraints)? What have you learned about yourself from doing this child study? What is the most important thing you want to remember about knowing children as you anticipate becoming a teacher (or parent)?

Assessment criteria:

1. Description: rich and detailed with supporting evidence, examples, etc.
2. Interpretations: thoughtful, probing, showing curiosity, offering more than one possibility.
3. Reflections: honest, questioning, insightful
4. Writing conventions

Peer Feedback Form

Name of presenter:

Name of participant:

Date:

**What stood out from the presentation?**

**Questions to consider:**