

...the teacher must bring not only the capacity, but the desire, to observe natural phenomena (Montessori, 1912/2011, p. 100).

Opening Eyes in the Back of Our Heads: Changing Teachers' Views of Children Through Observation

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Paper presented within the Division K, Section 7 Session: Facilitating Preservice Teachers' Competency Through Guided Experience, Observation, and Practice

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Abstract:

Kid-watching (Goodman, 1978) creates an attentive presence in teachers. Training pre-service teachers to attend to the child present before them equips them with data for informed instructional choices. Less emphasis on the curriculum, or standards, or scripted lessons affords the responsive teacher to behold the child, not as deficient, but with potential. An alternative view of the child emerges, an individual with rights rather than with needs. This report describes how pre-service and in-service teacher preparation courses utilize child observation assignments to train students in 'kid-watching'. Results indicate an increase in awareness and sensitivity to children and their activities. Students report a transformation in their personal perspective toward education and teaching children.



<http://www.wordle.net/show/wrdl/3320937/Observation>

In our system, she must become a passive, much more than an active, influence, and her passivity shall be composed of anxious scientific curiosity, and of absolute respect for the phenomenon which she wishes to observe (Montessori, 1912/2011, p. 100).

Kid-watching changes teachers into responsive participants in children's lives (Goodman, 1978). Becoming the teacher that children need starts with looking, learning to watch, becoming absorbed in the stuff children are doing, showing, sharing. The route to discovering the salient features of children's lives comes through observation. The path to transforming an early childhood teacher educator preparation program follows the child (Hurtig Casbon, Shagoury, & Smith, 2005).

The teacher must understand and feel her position of observer: the activity must lie in the phenomenon (Montessori, 1912/2011, p. 100).

Three regional universities adapted the observation assignments throughout the early coursework within their teacher preparation program; enhancing a good program through lessons in micro-ethnography (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris 2005) reaped important benefits. The aptitudes and attitudes of our teacher preparation candidates commended them toward the field of early childhood education; the amplitude of 'kid-watching' strategies changed these young professionals into master teachers, through observation. It was, in fact, the children who showed these teacher-wannabees how to become life-long learners.

Over a period of three years, reports were collected from more than 350 students. Each student turned in 3 observation reports, each between 2 to 10 pages. The initial analysis of the case study answered the evaluative questions – did the student understand and execute the assignment? Further content analysis exposed themes and patterns of change and transformation by these students: “I didn’t imagine going into a child care center would show me so much about teaching and learning.” “Thank-you for making us go and look at children.” “When I first read about this, I just wasn’t sure. But now I see how important it is.” Other themes included transition to professional behaviors, insight into school administration and operations, content area information and background, links between home life and school, and fine arts in education. Some even admitted being turned off from continuing their academic pursuit of a teaching career, just because of what they saw in the field.

A simple liberating thought came to our aid, namely that things about children and for children are only learned from children (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 51).

Next Steps

Adapting our procedures and the process of teacher preparation requires attentive responsiveness to the changes in the workplace environment. The 21st Century Skills provides a map for the future needs of our children (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010). Implementing these changes in our teacher corps requires new movements in teacher education (INTEL Corporation, 2011). Changes in the role and significance of observation within this changing education environment heighten the need for training/retraining teachers in observation strategies (Nugent & Morell, 2011). Transformations to teacher education may come from the arts education community (Big Thought, 2011)

...the observation of the way in which the children pass from the first disordered movements to those which are spontaneous and ordered—this is the book of the teacher; this is the book which must inspire her actions; it is the only one in which she must read and study if she is to become a real educator (Montessori, 1912/2011, p. 106).

Norm & Norma

Domains of Development = P.L.A.C.E.S.

Physical Language Aesthetic Cognitive Emotional Social

Stages / Planes of Development

0-3 Infant & Toddler

3-6 PreSchooler & Kindergarten

6-9 Primary

9-12 Upper Elementary

Eyes in the back of your head

Kid Watching – Monitoring ongoing development through daily activities that are integral to instruction

Three Purposes for Observations

1. To know the individual child
2. To measure the child's progress
3. To evaluate the program

Main Types of Observations

- Narratives
- Sampling
- Child Study

Narratives

- Diary
- Anecdote
- Running Record
 - Settings & Demographics
 - Thick rich descriptions of everything w/in sight and ear range

Sampling

- Event
- Time
- Artifacts
- Portfolio
 - What goes in?
 - Who chooses?
 - How is material managed?
 - What does it mean?

Child Study: Thick, rich descriptive observations of children in natural settings that captures all aspects of their lives: classroom environment, friendships, parents and family life, and community. Child Study may include tools, such as developmental checklists, interviews, surveys, and observations.

References and Resources

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