

## Description of Project

### **1. Introduction**

Young children in the USA increasingly find themselves in institutional settings in which their daily contact with adults revolves primarily around childcare providers and family members. Opportunities to interact with adults engaged in diverse activities are extremely limited. The introduction of child labor laws, the industrialization of society and the construction of child-centered approaches to early childhood education have endorsed the assumption that children should be focused primarily on the world of play in lives separate from adults. Conceptions of good early education have led to diminishing attention on how a child can learn about, participate in and contribute to the adult community. Perceptions of risk in today's society, the fragmentation of social capital, and the commercialization of children's identity in the media and market place have had a sobering impact on how children participate in society.

The purpose of this qualitative long-term research study is to better understand how and in what ways young children (4-6 years) attending group child care access varying levels of contact with adults who are *not* in primary care roles ("real life" adults) and the role of teachers and context in this phenomenon. Second, the research will seek to document the impact of these interactions on the children's conceptions of and participation in the adult community, and to better understand the relevance of these contacts to children's roles in the negotiation and generation of social capital.

### **Definitions**

*Contact* is defined in a continuum from opportunities for the child to observe adults engaged in typical activity in the center or elsewhere, through to more long-time engagement with an adult in- or outside the center.

*Real Life adults* are defined as people 18 years of age and over who do NOT have the primary role and responsibility of caring for and supervising the children.

*Social Capital* is defined as access to social networks, the ability to sustain and make use of these networks, and engagement in civic life.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will contribute to the literature in the following ways:

- Research into the social networks of children has been limited to peer, school and family contexts while this study focuses in on more peripheral contacts.
- This study is notable for exploring the context of child care in relation to neighborhood.
- The concept of social capital has been examined almost exclusively in terms of children as passive recipients. This study will explore aspects of how children may be involved in the active generation and negotiation of social capital.

### **2. Specific Aims**

This research will focus on the following descriptive aspects:

- What are the qualities of young children's contact with real life adults in child care?
- What is the role of the teacher in facilitating and monitoring this contact?
- What "center" and demographic features influence this "contact"?

The research will explore the following dimensions:

- In what ways does “contact” influence the child’s role in accessing, negotiating and generating elements of social capital?
  - a) What are young children’s conceptions of “real life” adults? In what ways does contact impact young children’s conceptions of adults?
  - b) In what ways does contact influence the child’s comfort, skills, confidence, and sense of agency in participating in “adult contexts”?
- In what ways does contact impact the *real life* adult’s views regarding children?
- In what ways does contact impact teacher views regarding the value and role of *real life* adults in children’s care and education?

### **3. Research Protocols**

#### **a. Setting and Participants:**

The Child Study and Development Center at the University of New Hampshire will act as the site for the study.

- 56 children aged 4-6 years attending the CSDC.
- Five teachers at the centers.
- Four to six “Real life adults” identified by teachers at the center.

As Executive Director I will send a letter and informed consent forms to staff and parents/guardians at the center. Staff has identified the focus of this research as an area of interest. No compensation will be provided but the activities involved would be typical for the CSDC curriculum and for our ongoing processes as a laboratory school.

#### **b. Investigator Experience**

Dr Nimmo has been the Executive Director of the Child Study and Development Center at UNH for the past two years and approves research conducted at this site from a variety of social science disciplines. Currently, Dr Nimmo is leading an IRB approved study on teacher engagement in action research. For the prior decade, Dr Nimmo was on the faculty in Human Development at Pacific Oaks College in Seattle, where he taught graduate thesis development classes with a focus on qualitative research methods. He conducted action research into teacher’s work with long-term investigations through interviews and classrooms observations. Dr. Nimmo’s research, which included work during his doctoral program at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, focused on video-reflective interviews of how teachers supported collaborative learning and community-building in early childhood sites. Dr. Nimmo has 15 years of experience in naturalistic observation methods, interviewing techniques, and qualitative data analysis.

#### **c. Data Collection Procedure:**

1. *Baseline surveys to Teachers of children 4-6 years (See Appendix A):* This survey will collect basic demographic information regarding teachers, and baseline context information regarding teacher reports of children’s contacts with real life adults in and outside the center over the previous six (6) month period. The survey will be completed at the beginning and end of the research period.

2. *Photo elicitation Child Interviews: Pre, mid-way and post. (10 minutes each)*  
 A semi-structured interview will be conducted both individually (with all children with consent) and later as a group at the beginning, mid-way and at the conclusion of the research period. The interviews (**see Appendix B**) will focus on four (4) specific real life adults identified by the teachers in the baseline questionnaire. A photograph/s of the adults engaged in typical activity will be used to elicit responses (Rasmussen, 2004). In addition, children will be asked about their basic knowledge of all the *real life* adults coming into the center regularly:
  - a. Who is this? Tell me what you know about this adult? *If needed:*
  - b. What does s/he do?
  - c. Where does s/he work?
  - d. How does she help you and your school?
  
3. *Real life Adult Interviews: Pre, mid-way, and Post* The interview will be conducted individually at the beginning, mid-way, and at the conclusion of the research period. The interviews will be conducted with four specific real life adults identified by the teachers. Photograph/s of the children engaged in typical activity at CSDC will be used to elicit responses. (**see Appendix B**).
  
4. *Teacher Journal:* The 5 teachers at the focus site (CSDC) will maintain a personal journal regarding all events/anecdotes related to contact with real life adults. The journals will also be a place for reflection on the process of facilitating contact and the associated issues that arise. Basic guidelines are in **Appendix C**.
  
5. *Teacher Dialogue:* Audio-tape and a field note journal will be used by the researcher to document the teacher's discussion and assessment of strategies to encourage contact with real life adults for at least four (4) monthly meetings. Edited video-tape as noted in # 7 below will be used to stimulate reflection
  
6. *Post-study Teacher Interview/Survey:* This interview will include items from the baseline survey as well as more open-ended questions intended to collect data regarding the nature and impact of contact over time. Additional questions will be constructed in response to analysis of data collected to better understand the teachers' responses to these contacts in their pedagogy and curriculum.
  
7. *Focused Event Video-documentation:* At least six planned events (2 in each of 3 classrooms) involving one or more of the four selected "real life adults" will be video-taped in their entirety or to a maximum of one hour in each case. These events could be:
  - a. visits by the adults to the classrooms,
  - b. field trips to visit the adults in their settings or
  - c. pre and/or post visit discussions with the children led by a teacher.
 The video-tape will be coded for themes and edited to be used to stimulate conversation amongst the teaching teams (see #5 above).

*Teacher Participation in Research Process:* Four of the potential teacher participants for this study are also engaged in an ongoing professional development activity in which we discuss action research activities at CSDC. For this proposed study, I will invite teachers to collaborate with me in the process of reflection, planning, and interpretation throughout the study. Teachers will NOT have access to raw data from this study except to the extent that they share their own personal observations and reflections in the group and view edited video-tape from their own classrooms. I will share my initial analysis of the data in thematic form only to elicit discussion.

#### **d. Obtaining Consent and Assent**

Please see the attached written consent documents for: (1) teachers; (2) Parents, and (3) Adults. Consent forms will be distributed through the usual CSDC routes. I will check in verbally with each child to ensure that they assent to the interviews and will not continue if they show reluctance.

#### **4. Data**

##### Analysis:

##### *Base-line Teacher Questionnaire:*

Analysis will create a background description of the teacher's demographic information and their perceptions regarding different elements of the phenomenon of interest.

##### *Child and adult interviews:*

Analysis of these data will consider linkages between the two sources and will code for emerging themes across responses.

##### *Field Notes, Journals and Event Video Documentation:*

Analysis of qualitative data will initially be descriptive: What does the phenomenon look like? Second, the analysis will be thematic coding (grounded theory) as guided by the research questions, with the focus on looking at themes that are supported by a number of data sources (triangulation).

##### Data Security:

As explained in the consent forms, all tapes, transcripts and other materials collected will be stored in my locked cabinet in my Pettee Hall office with access only by me and my graduate research assistant. Audio-tapes will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study. Video-tapes will be stored for future research purposes and will only be used in publications or presentations with prior permission from the participants.

#### **5. Risks**

There are no known risks to any of the participants in this study. The data is unlikely to contain information of a sensitive or confidential nature.

#### **6. Benefits**

All of the activities are typical for the CSDC curriculum with regards to children, teachers, and community adults. Teachers stand to benefit through a more intentional focus on this aspect of their curriculum. Children will have the opportunity to share their perspective with adults and engage in a more developed program of activities related to contact with community adults.

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