

Appendix C - An Elementary School Example: My Observations of Jimmy

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Introduction

This paper is the product of approximately twenty hours of my observations of one student in my third grade class, referred to as Jimmy in this report.

There were several questions I had about Jimmy, which initially guided this study. Being Jimmy's teacher, my questions focused on issues important to a teacher. The first two were, "How much time does he spend on and off task?" and "What are Jimmy's on and off task behaviors?" My definition for "On and Off Task" is: "On Task" behavior is doing the assignment given by the teacher at the appointed time. "Off Task" behavior would then be doing anything other than the given assignment.

Other questions were: "How does Jimmy relate to his peers?" and "Who are his friends?" Also, I was interested in the student, teacher and parent triangle. I wanted to see what types of interactions there were between the teacher (myself) and student (Jimmy). Were they positive or negative? Also, I noted interactions between teacher and parent during PT conferences. In this project I did not study the interactions between student and parent. Finally, I wanted to get to know Jimmy better by discovering some of his likes, dislikes and views on school and home.

JIMMY - A BREF DESCRIPTION

Jimmy is a 4' 2", blonde, eight year old. He has lived in the same intermountain state all of his eight years, with one move from a small suburb to another, which is where he lives now with his family. Jimmy is the oldest of four children. He is the only boy. His father is an office worker in the city, which is located approximately fifteen miles north of their home.

Jimmy can hardly be described as typical.

Jimmy's mother: "He's a - very different, (laughs) - I don't know - he comes up with some things sometimes. I told my friend, 'He's not dumb he's just different sometimes.'"

Me: "He has a lot of real creative, different things you wouldn't even think of. He . . ."

Mrs. W. (Interrupts) "I don't know what he'll grow up to be."

Qualitative Inquiry in Daily Life

Most of the time in school Jimmy displays a passive temperament, but in my interview with Jimmy he didn't describe himself as passive. I asked how he got along with his six year old sister.

Jimmy: "Let's see - we like to play. I get along with her. I used to be really mean to her and she used to be really mean to me, but I'm used to it now and she's used to it so we don't fight anymore."

Me: "That's good."

Jimmy: "Do you know what I do when I'm mad? I slam the door in my room and I throw shoes on the wall. I make noises on the door and my dad starts to come and he gets mad."

When I asked him why he threw temper tantrums he said he didn't know, but he just didn't want to do anything else so he'd keep on slamming the door.

Jimmy has varied interests. When I asked what his most favorite thing to do was his reply was Cub Scouts' and video games. He is also interested in break dancing, space, and especially dinosaurs. His parents commented on his knowledge of dinosaurs.

Jimmy's father: "Two years ago he was after us to take him to Dinosaurland and he was the guide. He told us, 'Now this is a Brontosaurus and it lived back then and it was a plant eater and it was from this age' and everything. He knows everything about dinosaurs."

When I asked him if he knew a lot about dinosaurs, he very matter-of-factly said, "Yeah I do." He said he very often has to correct the teachers because they don't know how to say the names correctly.

Jimmy is a smart boy. He usually does well on assignments if he gets them completed. His father mentioned that once you get him interested in something he really runs with it. It's getting his interest that's difficult sometimes.

Me: "What do you think about school?"

Jimmy: "It's kinda fun."

I was surprised when he said he liked math better than reading because he has a much harder time in math, but his reasoning made sense:

Jimmy: "Cause reading has more things and it's kinda longer."

This section is a very brief introduction to Jimmy. The remaining pages of this report will give a more detailed and fuller description of him, his behaviors, interactions, and attitudes.

Qualitative Inquiry in Daily Life

Setting and Classroom Procedures

I am a third year teacher at Hillview (not the actual name) which is an elementary school located in a rural area thirteen miles south of the largest city in our state. This suburb of the state's capital is made up of middle and middle-upper class housing subdivisions and small farms. The suburbs are growing rapidly as more and more people move their residences away from the city, while maintaining jobs there.

The people of the community are generally very family-oriented. Thus, the job of teaching is easier than usual because the parents are very supportive. In a survey taken in my class I found that most of the students' fathers work in the city and most of their mothers are housewives. A predominantly Mormon community, the families participate in a lot of church-centered activities here.

There are currently just over 700 students enrolled at Hillview Elementary. The school was built in 1963 with self-contained classrooms. In the late 60's the district decided to adopt an open classroom concept, which was the latest trend in California at the time. Therefore, in 1971 an open pod area was added to Hillview Elementary. The self-contained classrooms were used by grades kindergarten through third and the pod area housed the fourth through sixth grades. This arrangement lasted until the district created the Middle School for the sixth through eighth grades. The growing elementary school then put grades three through five into the pod area.

The pod is a big open area. The Media Center is in the middle with the third grade to the north, fifth grade to the west and fourth grade to the south. Gradually the district is deciding that the open classrooms do not work. The open school philosophies of team teaching and sharing ideas are still the goals of the district; but now some walls are being put in. Two years ago, walls were put up to separate the fourth grade, fifth grade and the Media Center from each other. The third grade is still open to the Media Center, but this will be remedied as soon as the district allots the necessary funds. The walls were erected to cut down on the distracting noise levels between grades. The walls have almost eliminated the problem.

Each grade's area is made up of an open space from which three rooms branch off. My classroom is the middle room. It has a front wall and two side walls but no back wall. It is open to the other two third grade classrooms. Mrs. C. is on the right and Mrs. J. is on the left. The chalkboard fills up the entire front (north) with brown Alphabet Cards above it and colorful turkeys, made out of paper bags and colored construction paper, stapled on the wall under the chalkboard and down the sides of it to liven up the dull green board during the Thanksgiving season.

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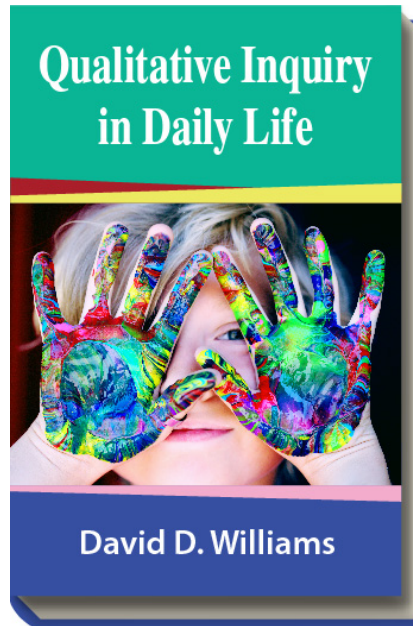
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