

# Field Observation Report

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## Introduction

The purpose of this assignment was to be able to observe a real class in a real classroom setting. We were able to observe the interactions between the teacher and the students and the interactions between the students. The goal of the assignment is to be able to make connections between the content that is learned in our educational psychology course and what is observed in the classroom. After finishing all of my observations and completing this assignment I will have a better idea of the dynamics of a classroom. For my first class observation I observed at Gordon-Dewitt Elementary School in Cuyahoga Falls.

## District Profile

Gordon-Dewitt Elementary School is located in Cuyahoga Falls City School District in Summit County; it is a suburban district. The percentage of African American students in the district is 2.4%. The percentage of Asian or Pacific Islander students in the district is 1%. The percentage of students that are Hispanic is 0.7%. The percentage of multiracial students in Cuyahoga City School District is 1.8%. The percentage of students that are white in the district is 94.1% (Ohio Department of Education [ODE] 2007a). The percentage of students in the district that are considered economically disadvantaged is 28.9%. The percentage of students in the district that are disabled is 15.6% (ODE 2007a).

The Cuyahoga Falls City District rating is Effective (ODE 2007a). The number of indicators met is 23 out of 30. Those not met were 5<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics and social studies, 6<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics, 7<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics, science, and social studies indicators. The district's Performance Index Score was 95.5 out of 120 points (ODE

- \*The individual's name has been changed.

2007a). The district's Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) was not met. The Mathematics Proficiency Goal was not met. The districts School Improvement Status is labeled Improvement Year 3 (ODE 2007a).

The Value Added Gain for all grades in Reading is -1.2, classified as Red (ODE 2007b). This means that progress was made, but not as much progress as expected. The Value Added Gain for all grades in Mathematics is 0.9, classified as green (ODE 2007b). This means that the progress made exceeded expectations. The Value Added Gain for all grades in all tests is -0.2 and classified as yellow, this means that progress matched what was expected (ODE 2007b).

### School Profile

Gordon-Dewitt Elementary School is a suburban school located in Cuyahoga Falls City in Summit County. The percentage of students at Gordon-Dewitt that are multiracial is 2.9%. The percentage of the students in the school that are white is 94.8%. The percentage of the students at Gordon-Dewitt Elementary that are considered to be economically disadvantaged is 33.3%. The percentage of students at the school that are disabled is 18.1% (ODE 2007c).

Gordon-Dewitt Elementary School's rating is Effective (ODE 2007c). The school met 7 out of 10 Indicators. The Indicators not met were 4<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics, 5<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics, and 5<sup>th</sup> grade social studies. The school's Performance Index Score was 92.1 out of 120 points. The School's Adequate Yearly Progress is Not Met. The Mathematics Proficiency Goal was not met. The school's improvement status is Improvement Year 1 (ODE 2007c).

The Value Added Gain for all grades at Gordon-Dewitt for Reading is -0.2, classified as yellow (ODE 2007d). The Value Added Gain for all grades for Mathematics is -0.4, classified as

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yellow (ODE 2007d). The Value Added Gain for all grades for all tests is -0.3, classified at yellow (ODE 2007d).

My first impression of Gordon-Dewitt Elementary School was a familiar one that I associate with my own elementary school. The building's location was situated relatively close both a business and a residential district and also close to other schools in the Cuyahoga City School District. The school was box shaped with a large playground behind it covered in blacktop. On my first visit to Gordon-Dewitt the playground was filled with students out for recess. The school seemed very busy when I first arrived, but that was probably due to the fact that it was lunchtime.

The office workers were very nice and didn't seem to mind sharing their small space with twenty or so University of Akron students for a few minutes. The principal of the school, Mr. P\*, was a very enthusiastic character and before he sent us away to our various classrooms he gave us a short overview of the school and some of his students. Gordon-Dewitt Elementary houses kindergarten classes up through fifth grade classes. Mr. P was very considerate of each of our majors and tried to place us accordingly. Those students who were Early Childhood Education majors pretty much went anywhere, but mostly to the lower grades. For those of us who will eventually be teaching older students in specific areas Mr. P placed us in the higher grades, third grade, fourth grade, or fifth grade, because in these grades the school separated each subject and two teachers team-taught. Mr. P tried to place us in a class that was studying our specific subject area at the time.

### Classroom Profile

- \*The individual's name has been changed.

On Monday, February 25<sup>th</sup> I observed Mrs. T's\* fourth grade class. Mrs. T welcomed me into her classroom and introduced me to the whole class. She was very willing to have university students observe in her class. Mrs. T's students were very curious about having a stranger in their class until Mrs. T explained why I was there; after that the students went about their normal business. I was amazed at how extremely well Mrs. T's class behaved. The students in the class were all 9 to 10 years old. The students were seated in groups of about four or five (some had less due to absences). There was a majority of girls over boys in the classroom; most of the children were White, there were two black male students. During Reading class one learning disabled girl joined the class, and during Ohio History two girls with cerebral palsy joined the class.

### Observation and Analysis

Each time I visited the class right after lunchtime. The first fifteen minutes the teacher gave the class free time to work on homework or other projects. After that it was time for Reading. The class was given an assignment where they were given a sentence and a picture and were supposed to write a story around it. During my observation the class was reading the book *Stone Fox*. After Reading it was time for Ohio History. The class was beginning to learn about the three branches of government and the difference between local, state, and federal governments. While visiting this classroom I observed information processing, cooperative learning, and the cognitive development of children in the Concrete Operations Stage.

### Information Processing

In my class I observed different instances of examples of information processing. The fourth grade students in the class had a relatively short attention span, but Mrs. T deals with this

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by changing the subject every fifteen to twenty minutes to keep the students from getting bored. It is very important for the students to pay attention when learning new material, otherwise it is more likely that the information will not be properly encoded in the memory and will be lost. Mrs. T makes use of a kitchen timer to keep track of the time spent on a certain assignment. For one assignment the students are given a challenge and given exactly twenty minutes to complete the assignment. Also many of the assignments were in the form of fun little games that would keep the students interested while they worked on them. To keep the students attention when they begin to get rowdy Mrs. T claps her hands three times and all the students in the class know to clap back and pay attention to her. Mrs. T gives explicit directions to the students for their assignments and activities. For example when reading class started Mrs. T told the students to get out a pencil, a piece of paper, their reading folder, and their reading packet. These items were the only ones allowed on their desks during reading; she also made sure everyone had their name on their packet. Mrs. T helps the students become organized by doing this. The students are at Piaget's Concrete stage of learning, and Mrs. T appropriately uses rehearsal with the students, for example the class rehearses their new spelling words aloud together and their assignment is to write each word three times in alphabetical order. Another strategy Mrs. T uses to help the students remember the three branches of government is mnemonics, "The Executive branch starts with E and they Enforce the law, the Legislative branch starts with L and they make the Laws, and the Judicial branch starts with J and they Judge the laws". Mrs. T also uses visual imagery throughout the classroom: there is a poster about rocks and minerals that shows a picture of the rock and tells what kind of rock it is, and there is also a poster that shows a city with its various institutions and surrounding hinterland.

### Cooperative Learning

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In this classroom the students are encouraged to learn cooperatively. The students are seated in groups. These groups work together on various projects and activities. When each member of the group is required to achieve a goal for the whole group to be rewarded, students are more likely to be motivated to help each other and participate in cooperative learning (Hardcastle Stanford & Parkay, 2007). The groups are monitored together, when a group does something good, like complete an assignment quickly and correctly or just behave well they are rewarded with a puff in their basket. Puffs can be given and also taken away if someone in the group misbehaves, so the students in the group are motivated help each other learn and keep each other in line. Groups are rewarded for having ten puffs at the end of the week with an extra recess. The students are always encouraged to help each other in their groups. During reading class after one girl had finished her assignment she immediately started helping a group mate who was having trouble with the assignment.

### Cognitive Development

I also observed the cognitive development of the students in the classroom. As I stated above the class is at Piaget's third stage, the Concrete Operations Stage. One instance of a concrete operation would be an assignment that Mrs. T gave the students: the students were shown a picture and one sentence that went with the picture; the students' task was to write a story about the picture including the one sentence. The story had to be at least twelve sentences long and the students had twenty minutes to write it. This was an appropriate, challenging task for students at this stage. Another activity the students did was before they started a new chapter book, Mrs. T asked them questions about the story that they had to answer based only on the cover of the book and the title, *Stone Fox*. This is an example of the students' ability for deductive reasoning. Also, during the concrete stage it is important to emphasize organization

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and time management, Mrs. T does this by constantly reminding students which materials should be out and where they are supposed to go, also during individual work time the students must be working on something the whole time, they must be doing schoolwork, drawing and coloring is not allowed. Mrs. T used scaffolding in history class. Scaffolding, one of Vgotsky's strategies, is an approach to teaching based on the student's current level of understanding and ability; Mrs. T varies the amount of help given to students based on their moment to moment understanding of the material being learned (Hardcastle Stanford & Parkay, 2007). To help the students better understand the three branches of government she reviewed the students on material they had already learned about Ohio government to help them better understand the three branches of government. When talking about the new book the class was about to begin to read, the teacher used Piaget's clinical method when asking questions about the book, she also had the students explain how they came up with the answer that they did. During reading Mrs. T used guided participation, another one of Vgotsky's strategies, and would read along with the students, asking questions as they read, helping students who lost their place, or working within a student's zone of proximal development and helping them figure out the answer to a question that they had trouble with.

### Conclusion

I enjoyed my three visits to Mrs. T's class very much. Before I went into the classroom I had no idea what to expect; I hadn't been in an elementary classroom since I had been in elementary school. I think that by observing the concepts that I had only read about in a real classroom really gave more meaning to them. This experience taught me that the fieldwork process is one of the most important parts of becoming a teacher. My educational psychology class has taught me so much about how my students learn and what strategies work best, but

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seeing those strategies practiced in a real classroom situation brings a whole new understanding to the definitions. By actually seeing and doing what I have learned in class I am re-enforcing the knowledge that I already have.

After doing this assignment I feel that I have a much better understanding of the concepts I talked about above. Reading about the concepts and actually seeing them in real life are so different. In my notes Information Processing is little more than a diagram, but in real life you can't see information being processed in someone's brain. I observed the strategies that the teacher used to promote Information Processing in her students. Cooperative Learning was a little bit easier to observe. The students I observed were very eager to participate and do well. The way that the classroom was set up created a great atmosphere for cooperative learning. With the students already seated in groups and held accountable for group activities the students were very willing to help out their classmates. Cognitive Development was a little bit harder. From my book I knew what stage the students should have been in and what their characteristics should have been, but in real life trying to find perfect examples of those characteristics is hard, so I had to watch closely and infer as to how some actions and lessons could be related to the cognitive development of the students. I learned a lot from this experience but I know that there is still so much that I don't know about the development of learners. I look forward to future assignments like this.

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