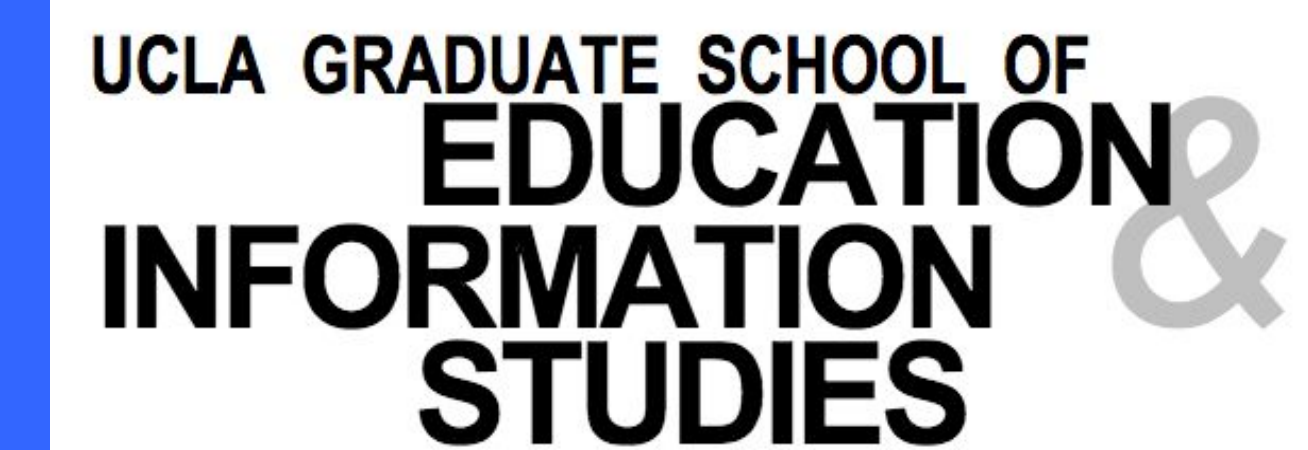




# Connecting across difference using ethnographic tools

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## INTRODUCTION

We are living in a time with limited opportunities to meaningfully and respectfully engage in dialogue with people's whose experiences are different from ours. In light of this, we consider how B-Club, an afterschool program, can be a space where "children and adults with diverse cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic identities learn together" (Dubetz, 2016). Through our work with elementary school children and undergraduates in a play-based after-school program in Los Angeles, we seek to answer the following questions:

1. How can writing ethnographic fieldnotes help undergraduates in listening more fully, lovingly, and emphatically to others, especially children?
2. What do people learn from working across lines of differences (i.e. race, class, gender) as they come together in a shared space?

## CONTEXT

- B-Club is "a dynamic, hybrid language space where kids are free to spell, utter, write, draw, speak, dance and invent language in their own ways" (Orellana et.al, under review) and where children have freedom to create in many ways (Orellana, 2015; Orellana et. al, forthcoming).
- The program serves students ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade and undergraduate college students (UGs) enrolled in Education 194, a course that introduces UGs to ethnographic research and sociocultural theories of learning.
- Undergraduates (UGs) are interested in careers in Education and come from a range of disciplines including English, Chicano/a Studies, Sociology, Psychology, Anthropology, and African-American Studies.
- Undergraduates (UGs) also range in their experiences working with children. Some have been camp counselors, tutors, and mentors.



## DATA

- Ethnographic fieldnotes written by UG college students from Winter 2017, Spring 2017, and Winter 2018.
- Two-step phenomenographic interviews (Pratt, 1992) with undergraduates over the course of Winter 2018.
- Observations of UG students at the after-school site.



## ANALYSIS

- Over the course of Education 194, the team has engaged in an iterative process of reading fieldnotes, writing analytic memos, conducting interviews with the undergraduate participants, and discussing what we were seeing as a collective.
- Guided by a sociocultural approach to the development of the undergraduates' views of children, the analytic process pivoted around identifying – and collectively responding to – the struggles and experiences of the UGs at B-Club.
- The codes utilized in the analytic process included *Seeing Community*, *Seeing Children*, *Building Community of Learners*, *Building UG-Child Relationships*, and *Connections to Theory*.
- A two-step phenomenographic approach (Pratt, 1992) was applied to draw out the "architecture of variations" (Marton & Booth, 1997, p. 111) in the "actions, intentions, and beliefs" (Pratt, 1992, p. 209) of the UGs as they were asked about specific incidents noted at site or in their field notes. Overall, in an iterative process of communicating across ethnographic methods (Harding, 2015).
- Data analysis and team discussions helped the research team understand how UGs' views of children shifted through "positivity resonance", which we define as "micro-moment(s) of warmth and connection that you share with another living being" (Frederickson, 2013, p.10).

## SEEING WITH AUTHENTICITY + RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

**UGs and children coming from different walks of life, different ethnic backgrounds, different socioeconomic backgrounds are coming together in this play-based after-school program and we are seeing how UGs experience site and see kids across these differences as well as similarities.**

"He was exuding confidence. He started to jump onto the branch with one hand, followed by a one hundred eighty degree spin onto the floor. I began to call him Spiderman, as he continued to propel himself off the branch. I would shout, "WOAH, SPIDERMAN I SEE YOU!" He would smile, and repeat." – Anthony



"Eventually, Tristan and I began talking about being Filipino. I asked him if he knew how to speak Tagalog, to which he responded "Opo" OC: *This moment made my heart melt because though I am not fluent in Tagalog, I am familiar enough to know various signifiers and connotations within the language because my mother and grandmother are Filipino. [...]* We discussed different types of Filipino foods and he told me that he really enjoys eating fish" – Pauleen

"Sonia is mixed with many different ethnicities, and after I asked her what she was mixed with, she asked me what I was. I told her I was black, specifically Ethiopian, but all the kids exclaimed, "Ooooooh, don't say that!" I would have loved to know what their preference would have been instead of black. I responded, "Why not, I'm black, it's okay y'all. Black is beautiful." Taliyah is a young black girl, and she was quietly listening. We started to talk about the construct of race, and Sonia says, "I wish you were my teacher, this is interesting!" Jessica looks at me and says, "People make fun of Taliyah because of her skin." I looked at Taliyah and said, "How does this make you feel?" and she proceeded to tell me that she makes fun of them right back when they make fun of her. I told all the kids to embrace their ethnicities and skin color. I was teaching Taliyah about black excellence, and told her to always recognize the beauty in blackness." – Anthony

## STRUGGLING TO SEE

**In interviews, undergraduates talked about their struggles to connect or relate to kids and reflected on their assumptions about the kids, their positionality, and their own "unlearning" (Kleinsasser, 2000).**

"[...] when I first started I didn't know what I was putting myself into but being there at club, actually learning about like student led organizing versus adult led organizing, **I was very caught off guard because I come from a strict background so I'm used to structure and I kind of felt like the kids were [...]** I wasn't sure what our instructions were on controlling them" – Cassandra

"[...] when I see her [one of the B-Club kids], kind of, I always, like, **observe her from far and she does seem like she has you know, struggles**, but obviously these are just my opinions like I don't know, but it seems like she has a lot of internal struggles. I don't know like in her family life, you know, **she probably doesn't get enough attention**, something like that" – Gabi

## SUMMARY + LEARNING

- Our findings illustrate how a diverse undergraduate student body entering from different walks of life into the context of a play-based after school program with a diverse group of kids learned to see children in different ways via the undergraduate students' (UGs) utilization of various ethnographic methods and the instructors' pedagogically and culturally relevant support.
- Furthermore, working as a team, addressing our own different ways of seeing, informs our teaching, service, and research.
- Future studies could address in what ways changes in how UGs view children affect practices with children.
- **Overall, our analyses show that writing ethnographic fieldnotes, as a tool for learning, was an opportunity for UGs to reflect on how they built relationships with the kids and questioned their own assumptions about teaching, play, and learning.**



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