

Frances Chaput Waksler
Wheelock College, USA

First Graders in a College Sociology Classroom: A Reflection

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8077.8.3.03>

Abstract Once a year from 1995 until 2008 I offered a sociology class session in which first graders from a local private school joined college undergraduates who were enrolled in my advanced theories course entitled Sociological Studies of Children. The sessions had two goals: to have college students interact with the first graders guided by what we had been learning in class and to introduce first graders to college and to sociology. These joint classes are worthy of further reflection for what they suggest about the potential theoretical, methodological, and practical uses of ideas drawn from the “new sociology of childhood.”

This paper is a retrospective description of and reflection on these joint classes. It begins with a presentation of the theoretical background that framed the event. It then details the preparations for the class with the college students; the class itself, including the format and content of lectures and discussions; and the post-visit discussion with the college students. Additional issues described are the influences of the adults (parents) who accompanied the children and some unexpected matters that arose in some of the classes.

The first graders’ participation in a college sociology class drew on the ideas of taking children seriously as learners about sociology and recognizing children’s expertise about what it is like to be children. Taking seriously children’s actions, comments, and concerns in non-judgmental ways provides insights into children’s ways, alternative modes of interaction, and new approaches to studying children.

Keywords Ethnomethodology; Phenomenological Sociology; Sociology of Childhood; Sociology of Education; Symbolic Interactionism

Frances Chaput Waksler is a Professor Emerita of Sociology at Wheelock College, Boston, MA. Her theoretical work is grounded in phenomenological sociology, ethnomethodology, and symbolic interactionism. Her substantive interests include the general topic of face-to-face interaction and the sociology of childhood, of deviance, and of medicine.

email address: fwaksler@comcast.net

Website: franceswaksler.com

During my academic career, I have studied, written about, and offered courses in what has been termed the “new sociology of childhood” (see Matthews 2007). My work has explored, through theoretical and empirical materials, children’s worlds as children themselves view them (see, for example, Waksler 1986; 1991a; 1991b; 1996). In 1995, I began considering the implications of these findings in a college classroom when I invited first graders from a local private school to attend a college



Figure 1. Photo Yuko Sato.

class session of an undergraduate advanced theories course entitled Sociological Studies of Children. Joint classes with first graders continued once a year until my retirement in 2008.

In this paper I look back on these joint classes, describing the theoretical perspective that framed them, preparations for the classes, the format and content of lectures and discussions, and insights that emerged. The classes were designed not as research exercises but as ways to let our interactions with the first graders be guided by our course readings and class discussions about children’s worlds as children perceive them. In what follows, I describe the classes as they occurred and the theoretical, methodological, and practical issues that flowed from them.

I find these joint classes worthy of reflection and of relevance to qualitative theorists and researchers for what they indicate about the insights that the “new sociology of childhood” can provide – for both the understanding of children’s worlds and the possible outcomes of implementing these ideas in real-life situations. Furthermore, those who teach in elementary schools may find it worthwhile to consider such collaboration with local colleges; similarly, those who teach in college – in sociology of childhood, early childhood education, and in other academic areas – may also see the promise of such collaboration and the insights it can provide.

Background of the Classes

My initial invitation to the first graders was offered rather casually: I had visited a first grade class to do

a presentation on greyhound rescue operations and, in passing, mentioned to Ms. Duffy, the teacher, that it might be fun to reciprocate by inviting her class to my college sociology class. Having offered the invitation, on my way home I asked myself: What was I thinking? What can I do? I knew I wanted to do something sociological, but can first graders understand sociology? My own work in the sociology of childhood provided me ample evidence of young children's unrecognized competence, but was I going too far? Is sociology "too hard" for young children or is that simply an assumption that reflects an underestimation of children?

When I told colleagues, primarily developmentalists, of my plans, they assumed that we would play games or that the children would serve us as objects of observation and subjects of study. When I disclosed that my goal was quite different – to give a sociology lecture followed by discussion in which first graders and college students would be full participants – I was met with shocked surprise and, I suspect, some questioning of my knowledge of children, if not my general competence. Nonetheless, I wanted to offer the first graders as "typical" a college class as I could manage – after all, I *had* invited them to *college*. The goal of the class for my students was not to use first graders as objects of observation in any research sense but, drawing on ideas from their course readings, to participate with them in learning about childhood – for children indeed have expertise in being children. The goal for the first graders was to give them a sense of sociology and of what college is like. The yearly event has been routinely described as a highlight by my students and the first graders.

Theoretical framework

My theoretical and empirical work in the sociology of childhood, conducted within a phenomenological sociological perspective, has focused on suspending theoretical and everyday life assumptions about children and turning attention to children's perspectives as they formulate them. Adults' ideas about children's perspectives may differ dramatically from children's perspectives; adults claim that their status *as adults* legitimizes their views, further complicating understanding. Children themselves are fundamentally important resources for grasping children's perspectives and the meaning of their actions. Setting what children can and cannot do, know, understand, think about, and worry about as *empirical* matters broadens and clarifies both theory and research.

The course to which first graders were invited, Sociological Studies of Children, included a variety of readings, primarily sociological but also philosophical and postmodern. Readings varied from year to year. The most recent set of readings included, in this order: Danby (1998), a critique of developmentalism as a model for understanding children and an exploration of a sociological approach termed "talk-in-action;" Cavin (1994), an observational study of a young child's uninstructed use of a camera as a way of exploring a child's perspective; Atkinson (1980), an examination of the everyday use of a developmental model and, implicitly, a critique of that model; Sheets-Johnstone (1996), an analysis of reading babies' bodies for understanding their worlds; Waksler (1996), a study of matters that trouble children and their innovative ways of addressing those troubles; Harris (1998), an examination of the important role of peers in children's lives; selections from R. Stainton Rogers

and W. Stainton Rogers (1992), an exploration of the variety and relativity of ways that children are conceptualized; and G. Matthews (1994), an examination of the depth and complexity of children's ideas.

It is against this background that I offered a sociology class to first graders simply to see what such a class would be like.

Preparation

Every November approximately 15 first graders (ages 6-7) joined the 10 to 20 college students enrolled in an advanced theories course, Sociological Studies of Children. The first graders' visit served my students as a way of practicing what they had learned about different ways to think about and interact with children. My students were asked to participate in class as they usually do without children present and discuss their experiences afterwards against the background of the course readings.

I asked my students to treat the first graders as fellow students, not as topics of research. I emphasized that they and the first graders were colleagues jointly participating in a class. I particularly requested that they avoid using what Joyce described as "The Look," which she identified in her observations of people watching babies. She wrote,

The Look can be impressionistically characterized as a constant, whole-hearted, everlasting smile accompanied by sparkling eyes fixed with fascination upon the child... The Look is very difficult to describe verbally, but I found it immediately recognizable when I saw it. (Joyce 1991:115)

In addition to asking my students not to use The Look, I urged them not to laugh at children when

the children were not joking, remember ideas from their course readings, and simply (or, it turns out, not so simply) to treat them as colleagues. My students followed my instructions but emphasized afterwards how difficult it was to do so.

Towards the latter part of class we provided food for our guests, but even this rather straightforward undertaking was guided by the course perspective. In preparing the "menu" I asked that my students bring not "kids' food" but the kinds of food that they themselves would bring to an adult party. [Further details are provided in the next section of this paper.] I made one exception – for me – and brought Jell-O Jigglers cut into the shape of dog bones, which all the students, college and first grade, seem to enjoy, and, oddly, became a tradition.

The first grade teacher prepared the first graders for the visit by talking about what sociology might be. I discussed with her some of the specific topics that might arise and that her students might want to consider beforehand. One such topic was what the children thought was hard for them as children and that they wished they could change. They also discussed what college students might be learning about children. They were aware that the college students in the class wanted to learn about children from children and that they, the first graders, could learn something about what college and college students are like. She encouraged the first graders to participate in the college class as that would be helpful to the class, and in every joint class the children did so enthusiastically and substantively.

When the first graders arrived they went to the college's Resource Center, a child-friendly place, where they could relax after a 45-minute bus ride and eat the lunches that they brought. After

lunch, the Resource Center staff provided them with crayons, paper, and other art supplies. Their enthusiasm for being at college was very evident. One child accosted a college student exiting the bathroom and excitedly asked, "Are you a college

student?" From the Resource Center, they moved to a classroom for the sociology class. In the next section, I describe the general format of the class, compiled from reflections on the 13 years that the event took place.



Figure 2. Photo Yuko Sato.

The Class

I arranged the classroom so that my students and the first graders were seated among each other. [Accompanying parents and the first grade teacher, by prior arrangement, were given back-row seats and were not included in the class except as observers.] I wanted both sets of students to participate equally as students. My students listened respectfully to the comments of the first graders and contributed related

comments of their own. I designed the content of the lecture and the questions for general discussion so that they would have relevance to my students, as well as the first graders. [After the class some of my students said that they wished I had given this lecture to them on their first day of class because it made very clear what sociology is.]

The lecture, interspersed with general discussion, usually lasted about 45 minutes and the first

graders seemed to have no problem with either the time or the format. My students and the first graders listened to my lecture, participated in the general discussion, and were attentive to the comments of one another.

In line with my goal to make the class as typical a college class as possible, I brought lecture notes, as I always do, and referred to them as I lectured.



Figure 3. Photo Yuko Sato.

Sample Lecture Notes

What is sociology?

Study of people together

What they make together (countries, towns, hospitals, schools)

What they do together (teach, learn, work, play)

What children do when they are together

Games

Rhymes (including ones you don't tell adults)

Social rules (for example, hand raising)

What we have been studying

Possible topics to address:

What is hard about being a child?

What are adults like?

What kinds of things are scary? What do you do about them?

What looks do people give children?

Guided by these lecture notes, I began by defining sociology as the study of what people do together, contrasting it with psychology's emphasis on what goes on inside people. Sociology studies large groups (countries, cities) and small groups (friends). I asked if students built the school they went to (Nooooo) as a way to show their dependence upon unseen others. Can you have a class if Ms. Duffy does not come and there is no substitute? (Nooooo) Can Ms. Duffy have a class if no students are there? (Nooooo) Then I asked about games that require other people. Can you play hide and seek by yourself? Seesaw? Checkers? I pointed out that these topics show the kinds of things that sociology studies. I also told them that my own interest is in interactions (I used the word) when people are together.

I then introduced the topic of rules: laws, formal rules, rules of organizations, such as schools, and informal rules. The first graders, as well as college students, talked about their school rules, some of which they made themselves (truer of first graders than of college students). We then discussed informal rules. I asked them about rules for raising their hands.

At first, they suggested that hand-raising was just something they knew. I asked, however, about different ways of raising hands: if one really wants to say something; if one doesn't want to but thinks one ought to; if one is anxiously waiting for one's turn. And how does one learn all this? I made the point that they learned and were following informal hand-raising rules without being aware of doing so. I did

not use the sociological term "ethnomethodology," but that is the kind of investigation to which they were being introduced.

I had a range of topics available to raise for general discussion, but I tried to be alert to anything going on in the class that would serve as a sociological topic. During one class two first graders started to answer a question at the same time and we discussed how one decides whose turn it is when two people speak at once. We did not really come to a conclusion, but the example served as an implicit introduction to the sociological topic of "repairs" addressed by conversational analysis.

We then turned to what we had been studying in the course and specific questions that my students had raised from readings and class discussion. For example, throughout the years I asked my students to avoid versions of the phrase "getting down to a child's level" because it may be seen as condescending. Some of my students initially objected so we addressed the issue with the first graders. Do you like it when adults lean over or stoop down to talk to you? Responses varied, but some first graders expressed clear objections to the practice. [When the students later met together in small groups, the physical arrangement seemed to facilitate face-to-face interaction without the need for bending or stooping, as shown in the photo below.] My students concluded that it might be useful in working with children to be attentive to the power implications of different physical orientations. Other topics that arose included children's views of being patted on the head by adults, adults giving them The Look, and general concerns about adults' behavior. A few times the first graders came armed with specific advice for adults:

Some First Graders' Advice to Adults

Try to be a good example of what you want us to do and be.

Treat us the way you would like to be treated.

Remember that we don't know everything yet.

Teach us the things we *really* need to know.

Teach us the "how to" part instead of doing it for us.

Recognize that we're trying to do our best.

Listen; let kids talk.

Be ready to help us with *any* kind of problem.

Really think hard before you decide to spank us.

Ask, "Who did it," before punishing somebody.

Be polite.

Ask respectfully rather than ordering us.

Keep us safe, please.

Following the lecture, the class met in small discussion groups, one or two of my students and one or two first graders. The first grade teacher and I, in consultation with our students, prepared beforehand some possible topics as starting points for the discussions and listed them on the white board.

Some Ideas for Conversations Generated by First Graders

Holidays: Halloween/Christmas/Easter

Sports: Baseball/Hockey/Basketball/Soccer/Softball/

Lacrosse/Gymnastics

Military groups

Pets

Animals

Toys

Art

Caterpillars and butterflies

Undersea life

Reptiles

Birthdays

Ballet/Tap



Figure 4. Photo Yuko Sato.

The small groups were constituted informally, with both sets of students looking for others with similar interests. Participants were expected to *exchange* ideas. My students were advised to engage in interactions not as teacher/student, researcher/subject, or adult/child but as equals and as colleagues – fellow students. I asked my students to choose topics that *they* were interested in so that they could participate with genuine enthusiasm. Some discussions remained on the original topic, others moved to other areas of interest. One of my students described what she found to be a fascinating conversation about friendships (not one of the topics offered) with each participant presenting ideas. My students expressed some surprise at the topics that the first graders wanted to discuss and the depth

of the first graders' knowledge. They also described having learned new things from the first graders (for example, about undersea life and reptiles). I stayed out of the discussions, taking great pleasure in standing back and watching the interactions. The expressions on the faces of all participants and the sounds of their voices suggested equals discussing topics of common interest.

The class ended with a large display of food provided by my students (potato chips and dip, tortilla chips and salsa, fruit plates, cheese – including havarti with jalapenos – hummus and pita bread, cookies, cakes, juice, and soft drinks). The food table looked not unlike what one might find at an adult party (except for my Jell-O Jigglers). The first graders

seemed enthusiastic about both the variety and their relatively unlimited access. An intriguing difference appeared between the children whose parents were present and those whose parents were not. The latter seemed to take larger servings of everything and come back for seconds and thirds. Those with parents present were much more carefully policed. One interesting issue arose regarding a rather spicy dip for chips. I overheard one parent directing a child away from it, saying, "That's for adults." Focused on a child's perspective and without thinking of how the adult might view my comment, I replied to the child, "But maybe you'd like it. Do you want to try it?" He nodded and did so – though he did not offer a judgment. I asked one first grader how many Jell-O Jigglers she wanted and she said "Ten." I simply gave them to her, for I had indeed asked. I had my own opportunity to experience the frustration of children when one of the mothers asked if I would like some ginger ale. When I replied yes, she poured about an inch into a cup and handed it to me.

The visit ended with the first graders lining up to receive gifts provided by the college (cups, pencils, and folders with the college logo) and distributed by my students.

The Influence of Adults as Audience

As a part of school rules for "field trips," some parents (typically three or four) accompanied the first graders. Initially, I had not anticipated that adults other than the teacher would be present and found parental presence, unobtrusive as it was, somewhat constraining. Despite their lack of inclusion as participants, they were observers and evaluators of the class. Through their presence, however, I also became aware of the constraining influences that parents could have on their children (as already

noted in the foregoing discussion of food), as well as on the topics I felt comfortable discussing in front of them.

Certainly, some accompanying parents found the class odd, unfamiliar as they may have been with the perspective of the sociology of childhood and puzzled as they may have been with my treatment of the first graders not as children but as students of sociology. I did speak with the parents briefly before class, advising them that they might be surprised by some of the comments made by the first graders. Otherwise, I did not provide any orientation since the parents were not to be active participants in the class. I am well aware that the class may have violated their assumptions about children's knowledge, competence, judgments of adults, and concerns. [One of my college students described the class to her mother, a first grade teacher. Her mother said, "That's crazy." My student tried to explain that the class really worked but was unable to convince her mother that it wasn't senseless.]

To provide but one example of the awkwardness of the parents' presence, in the general discussion of "being a child" and "what adults are like," the first graders routinely displayed a subtle and detailed grasp of adults' behavior, motives, and expectations – knowledge that attending parents might have found both surprising and disconcerting. After one such discussion a parent was overheard commenting to another parent, "Don't you feel like an idiot?" Much to my surprise, I found that I came to try to protect the parents from what the children said, as well as to protect the children from making incriminating disclosures in front of parents. An example: I once asked the first graders how they obtained money for things they wanted. One child replied, "I steal it from my brother." [Fortunately, his mother wasn't



Figure 5. Photo Author.

one of the attending parents.] I quickly changed the subject.

One of my favorite discussions, and one that I felt constrained to monitor more closely in the following years, was about the topic of what adults are like. In this particular discussion the first graders offered, unsolicited, some wonderful, albeit unflattering, imitations of adults' gestures, tones of voice, specific adult-sounding comments. One, for example, described her frustration at trying to tell her mother something important while her mother was preparing to go out for the evening. She imitated her mother putting on make-up and combing her hair while saying, "Ah," "Oh," "Hmm," and, in the child's view, paying no attention whatsoever to what she was being told. Fortunately, the parent being imitated was not in the class, but the teacher and parents may have known who was being portrayed. To avoid embarrassing the parents, I never solicited such imitations in the future, though I would have loved to do so. [Children's imitations of adults would be fascinating to videotape and study but may be too fraught with parental objections to be feasible.]

What emerges clearly from these considerations is the power that adults have to oversee children and their worlds. The literature in the sociology of childhood describes, for example, children's restricted rights to talk (Sacks 1972). Such restrictions are most evident in *when* children can legitimately talk, but the classes under discussion here also indicate that there are restrictions on *what* children can talk about – or talk about safely – in the presence of judging adults. The open and non-judgmental format of the classes led children to speak frankly in ways that were risky, but only because parents were present. Interestingly, the first grade teacher, who came to be familiar with the format of these classes, never

intervened, never offered criticisms, and continued to return with each year's students, and parents in succeeding years continued to support the visits.

Post-visit Discussion

In the class following the first graders' visit, my students reflected on the joint class. I first asked my students what I was like because I want to be sure that I acted in the ways in which I encouraged them to act. They responded that I was the way I usually am in class except that I used a smaller vocabulary. They expressed surprise at the first graders' willingness to listen to a lecture and to participate in discussion in both the large class and in small groups. They spoke of their difficulty in not giving The Look, not laughing at some of the things that the children said when it was clear that the children were not intending to be funny, and not focusing on "cuteness." They expressed surprise at the children's food selections when unpoliced by adults. They commented on how some of the parents seemed to "hover" and "smother" the children (their choice of words).

We discussed how all of their readings framed the ways they interacted with the first graders and indeed served as the basis for the very idea of such a class. Together we identified particular insights from the readings that guided their behavior and that illustrated aspects of childhood that they had studied. Atkinson (1980), for example, addresses the social construction of childhood and the ways that adults "create" children, evidenced in the class by the actions of some parents and by my *not* treating children like children. The Stainton Rogerses (1992) explore the varied "stories of childhood," emphasizing that no one story has primacy. The children's stories of childhood were equally and

legitimately "stories." G. Matthew's (1994) idea of children as philosophers directs attention to children's competence as thinkers, Cavin's to children as actors in worlds that, in part, are of their own making, in part not. Both ideas were evident in children's comments and actions. And Waksler (1996) illustrates some of the difficulties of childhood, difficulties that my students both heard about from the first graders and saw in action. Our discussions were designed to show that suspending ideas of what children are like makes it possible to explore children's ideas as *they* formulate them.

One year the college students had read Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's article (2003) about what children can learn from "rough and tumble play." When the children had finished with the snacks we provided and before it was time to line up to leave, four or five children began roughhousing on the rug. A few parents stepped in quickly to stop the play. My students were puzzled, wondering why they did so. [It might, of course, have been that the parents viewed such behavior as inappropriate in a college setting, though neither the first grade teacher nor I gave any such indication.] My students seemed particularly struck by the automatic way in which the play was interrupted.

In a number of classes students noted the sense of anger towards adults that was evident in the first graders' comments. It was clearest the one time they did imitations of adults but was also displayed in general comments. It is also evidenced in the above list of advice to adults, for presumably the comments address adults' failings.

My students became aware of the problems for children who are not allowed access to resources available to other children. For example, children

whose television watching is restricted or forbidden lack what sociologists would call the "cultural capital" shared by other children. In one discussion of Pokéman cards, one child said that she didn't have any cards. I simply acknowledged her statement, but part of me wanted to take up a collection so she could get some. And children whose parents were not present in this class had more access to the food made available to all.

That my students found the joint class valuable is indicated in their final papers describing both the course and this specific class. The following comments are illustrative:

I have realized that children do think about things in sociological ways and they have the ability to do so. This was especially seen in the class where we had the first graders come in and they did discuss their sociological ideas on certain subjects. (L.O.)

I have an increased understanding of how sociology can increase my understanding... I feel that I experienced...this learning when the first graders attended class. Some of the children participated and began to think about the sociological ideas being presented to them. (C.K.)

I enjoyed preparing for and having the first grade class come in to spend time with us. I learned that even though we, as adults, may think many of the things they do or say might seem cute to us, in reality many children are actually trying to do better, learn more, and are trying to understand what is going on in the world. There were many children in that class who seemed to be asking valid questions about what the professor was saying. I found that this was something I had never realized about young children. (M.C.)

My students have said that the course, and the joint class in particular, have changed the ways they

interact with children and have led them to be more attentive to children's perspectives.

A surprising idea for me that emerged is that children can serve as models for adult students. The first graders' enthusiasm, willingness to ask and answer questions, and overall participation in the learning process can be instructive for college students.

Some Unexpected Matters

While the classes always ran smoothly, occasionally some issues arose in a particular class that needed to be addressed at the time and/or for the future. Those who work with young children may be less surprised than I was at some of these matters, but within the framework of a college classroom they were noteworthy.

Familiar with the sound of a college classroom, even with spirited class discussions, I was initially taken aback by the level of noise and degree of activity of the first graders. They were respectful and, in adult terms, "well-behaved," but the energy of the class was distinctly more highly charged than what I was familiar with. I saw the first graders' active involvement as desirable but initially was rather surprised by what that involvement sounded like. Once I knew what to expect, however, I came to enjoy the sound of the high energy and enthusiasm.

I found it particularly difficult to know how to navigate what looked like a sea of raised hands offered by the first graders when I asked a question. I wanted to call on them in a systematic fashion but was puzzled about how to do so. I did my best to give everyone a chance and to give extra chances to those who seemed most eager. At times, however, it

became difficult to respond to all who raised their hands, especially to those who did so for every question or with no particular comment to make.

Recently it happened that while all the students were seated in the square made by the four tables, all the first grade girls ended up together on one half and the boys on the other half. Because of where I was placed, nearest the girls, the boys had a much greater chance of being called on. Once I recognized the consequences of the seating arrangement, halfway through my lecture I moved myself to the opposite side of the square. The girls then participated more actively in the discussion while the boys continued their participation.

One year we met in an amphitheater-style room with curved long tables and chairs that were fixed in place. The chairs swiveled. As soon as the first graders sat down it became clear to me that swiveling in the chairs was a temptation not to be resisted. Instead of starting my lecture, I asked all the students (including mine) to swivel in the chairs so they could see how they worked. After a few minutes the students were sufficiently swivel-sated and I began my lecture with, thereafter, stationary students.

In one class I asked, "What are children like?" The first child said that children like ice cream. Though it was not what I had in mind, I continued the informative discussion of what children like.

One time my lecture was abruptly ended when a first grader asked, "When are we going to have snacks?" I said that we would do so as soon as we met in small groups, then abridged my lecture.

Conclusion

My goal here has been to reflect on joint sociology classes with first graders and college students for the insights that they provide. The first graders' participation in a college sociology class was based on the idea of taking children seriously as learners about sociology and recognizing children's expertise about what it is like to be children. The classes supported the legitimacy of these ideas. What the classes accomplished is best seen in that very description of what was immediately evident during the classes themselves and in the ensuing discussion with my students. I turn now to what I see as particular insights that emerged.

The most direct thing I learned from these classes is that they were possible. In the introduction I asked: Is sociology "too hard" for young children or is that simply an assumption that reflects an underestimation of them? Although I cannot answer this question definitively, I can say that the first graders listened to a sociology lecture, participated relevantly in discussions, remained attentive, and were enthusiastic about the ideas presented. They "did" a college class, and succeeding first graders did so over the course of 13 years.

Another outcome of the class is that these first graders at the very least now know that there is something called "sociology." [I never knew it existed until my first college sociology course. In retrospect, I wonder why I signed up for it since I didn't know what I was signing up for.] It is not clear how much the first graders will, in later years, remember of the details, but the idea and the word itself should be familiar. It does seem that sociology can be explained to first graders in a way that allows them to gain a very basic sense of what sociology is

and does. G. Matthews asserts (1994) that children can "do" philosophy, even if they don't define it as such. A similar claim might be made for sociology, for children live in and act in a social world and, to do so, they need to have some grasp of its workings.

The class built on and illustrated a number of themes of the course and, more generally, in the sociology of childhood, and served my students as a forum for acting on those ideas. It offered an opportunity for my students to interact with the first graders not as teachers/students, researchers/subjects, or adults/children but as colleagues working together to achieve understanding. Taking seriously children's comments and concerns in a non-judgmental way provided insights into children's ways and into alternative modes of adult/child interaction.

The class also reinforced the idea that children are rich sources of information about childhood. They indeed have their own ideas about being a child, ideas to which adults may not be privy (and may not want to be privy) but that children may be willing to articulate when genuinely asked. When the influence of adults can be muted, as it was in these classes, important insights can be gained about children's worlds – those they share with adults, those they share with other children, and those they inhabit in the unsupervised interstices available to them. These insights hold promise for future research and theorizing about the sociology of childhood.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the teacher, Ms. Joan Duffy, the children, the parents, and the administrators of Nashoba Brooks School in Concord, MA for their

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participation in and support of this project over the years. I also want to thank my many students enrolled in Sociological Studies of Children for their active participation in planning and participating in the class and their enthusiasm for the experience.

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Appendix: Photo Permission Form

Note that the request asks for signatures of both parents and children.

Date _____

PERMISSION

I hereby give permission to Professor _____ to use the photos taken in class, HDS 357 Sociological Studies of Children: Recent Works, on November 14, 2008 which include a photo of _____ (insert child's name). The photos will be used in articles that may be published in academic journals.

Parent's signature: _____

Child's signature: _____

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