



Research Assistant: Cross-Cultural Experiences of Nordic Childhood and Education

Semester & Location:	Spring/Fall - DIS Copenhagen
Type & Credits:	Elective Course - 3 credits
Major Disciplines:	Child Development, Education/Educational Studies, Human Development
Faculty Member:	Jennifer Duncan-Bendix
Program Director:	Tina Mangieri, tma@disstockholm.se
Coordinator:	Kenzie Zimmer, mz@dis.dk
Time & Place:	Will be decided in consultation with research mentor

About the Research:

The Nordic countries as a whole share a strong sociocultural theoretical premise in their early years education from a social pedagogical approach, which is emphasized in Denmark through a special focus on children's freedom to play and have influence on their own lives (Ringsmose & Kragh-Müller, 2016). Ongoing research investigates the various practices and values that characterize education in Denmark – but students enrolled in the Child Development and Diversity (CDD) program at DIS experience them first-hand through weekly practicum visits to childcare institutions and schools. Additionally, their immersion into Danish-speaking sites requires that they rely on their direct observations in order to understand what is happening. As 'cultural outsiders,' students have the opportunity to observe and experience critical aspects of daily life in institutions and schools that Danes themselves may take for granted.

This project harnesses the common experiences of students enrolled in CDD (and specifically the students enrolled in the Child Development and Education core class) to investigate how their observations and interpretations of experiences in their Danish practicum sites (as well as on study tour in Finland) might contribute to a discussion about salient characteristics of both Danish and Finnish pedagogical practice from an 'outsider's perspective.' The project also employs a second lens to investigate the

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students' reflections on the practicum experience itself, and what they might potentially indicate about students' reflections on their own learning while abroad.

As the study is focused specifically on the ability to access CDD practicum sites, potential Research Assistants must themselves be enrolled in the CDD program.

Researcher Bio:

Jennifer Duncan-Bendix

Masters of Education for Daycare and Primary School (Aarhus University, 2014). BA (Human Development and Family Studies – Early Childhood Development and Education, University of Connecticut, 2006). Assistant Program Director of Child Development and Diversity, DIS (2014-present). Pedagogue in the International and Danish communities in Copenhagen (2008-2010). I am specifically interested in the cross-cultural practices, discourses, and research related to how we create active and caring environments for young children. With DIS since 2007.

Description of role and responsibilities of the Research Assistant

You are expected to spend a minimum of 10 hrs per week on the project. The workload may vary over the semester. If you are travelling to do field research in a different location, additional time may be required.

As research assistant you will:

1. Participate in weekly meetings with your research mentor at a time set collectively at the beginning of the semester.
2. Participate in three meetings with all Research Assistants during the semester:
 1. An orientation at beginning of the semester: introduction and strategies for successful international research work
 2. A workshop on resources and responsible research practices mid-semester
 3. A final workshop discussing strategies and best practices for effective communication of research, especially to those not in the field
3. Write an assessment of your own strengths and weaknesses in the research process at the beginning of the semester. Revisit at the end of the semester as part of an evaluation of your own participation in, and learning from, the research project.
4. Keep a research journal and submit it in person or via email every week (or another specified interval) to your research mentor, describing the activities of the week, and outlining goals for the following week.
5. Conduct literature reviews.
6. Participate in carrying out the research project. This may include: conducting and transcribing focus group interviews, performing structured observations at practicum sites, participating in initial rounds of data analysis. *The specific responsibilities in a given semester vary depending on the phase of the project and will be set by the research mentor at the beginning of the semester. Be prepared to contribute to tasks*

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that may come up during the semester. Research processes are not always predictable.

7. Present the relevance of the research and/or findings to peer(s) from other disciplines at the End of Semester Showcase.
8. Make a final oral and/or written presentation of the research you are involved in, depending on what is agreed with your research mentor.

Learning Objectives

The primary objective is for you to experience the world of research and gain experience that will prepare you for any future career you choose to pursue. By the end of the semester you will grasp the complexities of the research project, and have made your own contribution to the project. You will also have learned to communicate ideas and findings, both orally and in writing, to members from your particular discipline as well as peers from other disciplines.

Additional objectives include:

- Identify and analyze the main characteristics that distinguish Nordic practices in early childhood.
- Experience and evaluate methods for conducting and interpreting observations, as well as documenting processes of investigation.
- Develop experience in the processes of qualitative research, including literature reviews, methodological development, observations, coding and analyzing qualitative data, and presenting findings.
- Learn to appreciate 'the uncomfortable' as a sign of learning when your own views on childhood, caretaking, and education are challenged from a cross-cultural perspective.
- Gain experience in the mutual benefits and challenges that can result from strong cooperation with professional colleagues (faculty and other Research Assistants).

Readings

The readings will be agreed on with the mentor at the beginning of the semester, and the exact content will differ depending on your background. You will receive guidance concerning the basics of the research, concepts, study designs, methods of analysis, etc.

As a foundation for the content related to education and childhood in Denmark, you will complete the readings assigned in your CDES core course and practicum course. For this Research Assistant position, you will also complete the following readings:

- Blalock, A. E., & Akehi, M. (2018). Collaborative autoethnography as a pathway for transformative learning. *Journal of Transformative Education*, 16(2), 89-107.

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- Cohen, L., -, Manion, L., & Morrison, K. R. B. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5. ed. ed.). London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: an overview. *Historical Social Research*, 36(4), 273-290. <https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.36.2011.4.273-290>
- Gant, V., Cheatham, L., Di Vito, H., Offei, E., Williams, G., & Yatosenge, N. (2019). Social work through collaborative autoethnography. *Social Work Education*, 1-14.
- Garbati, J. F., & Rothschild, N. (2016, March). Lasting impact of study abroad experiences: A collaborative autoethnography. In *Forum qualitative sozialforschung/forum: Qualitative social research* (Vol. 17, No. 2).
- Henderson, E. (2017). *Autoethnography in early childhood education and care: narrating the heart of practice*. Routledge.
- Hernandez, K. A. C., Chang, H., & Ngunjiri, F. W. (2017). Collaborative autoethnography as multivocal, relational, and democratic research: Opportunities, challenges, and aspirations. *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 32(2), 251-254.
- Lapadat, J. C. (2017). Ethics in autoethnography and collaborative autoethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 23(8), 589-603.
- Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Ringsmose, C., & Kragh-Müller, G. (Eds.). (2016). *Nordic social pedagogical approach to early years* (Vol. 15). Springer.
- Tobin, J. J., Wu, D. Y., & Davidson, D. H. (1989). *Preschool in three cultures: Japan, China, and the United States*. Yale University Press.
- Tobin, J., Hsueh, Y., & Karasawa, M. (2009). *Preschool in three cultures revisited: China, Japan, and the United States*. University of Chicago Press.
- Vandermaas-Peeler, M., Duncan-Bendix, J., & Biehl, M. S. (2018). "I have a better sense of how interconnected the world is": Student perceptions of learning and global engagement during study abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 30(2).

Field research

This project includes field research in early childhood centers as an extension of the mandatory practicum experience in the Child Development and Diversity program. Expenses related to field work will be covered by DIS. The field work will be planned with the research mentor at the beginning of the semester.

Approach to Mentoring

All DIS research mentors have been trained in mentoring students but their approach to mentoring may differ. Mentoring is about engaging at a different - and often deeper - level than what is typical in the class room. However, mentoring also comes with some degree of ambiguity, which is important for you to be prepared for. The research mentor will work closely with you throughout the semester but part of the training is also for you to use your own judgement, to make assessments and decisions. As part of



planning your tasks and responsibilities for the semester together, the research mentor will talk to you about her/his approach to mentoring.

Expectations of the Research Assistant

The specific expectations of the individual research assistant are agreed upon at the beginning of the semester. In general, a research assistant is expected to take initiative, take ownership of the project and work independently. You must also be prepared for meetings and be willing to part take in relevant discussions. In cases where more research assistants are involved in the same project, you will be expected to engage in some teamwork. Carrying out a research project is not a straight forward and predictable process. This is part of what makes it exciting. It also means that communication is crucial. You are expected to take responsibility for communicating about problems or issues that arise.

A basic expectation for this project is that you continually demonstrate your curiosity and openness – both towards the academic content, but also in relation to your peers and the team dynamics. You are expected to:

- Balance independent investigation with your contribution to the project
- Take responsibility for the learning of the group as a whole (be prepared to contribute personally but make space for others as well)
- Be willing to experiment and be creative – especially in relation to sharing ideas, or trying new things (preparing for observations, designing interview questions, contributing to discussions, etc.)

Data

The project involves DIS students as the primary source of data – but also secondarily involves observations of children and staff members at Danish and Finnish children's institutions. Consent forms will be sought from students each semester, and additionally requested from the centers and schools at which the students collect direct observations. Student (as well as staff and child) identities will be treated confidentially, and will be referred to by pseudonyms or unique ID numbers.

Data collected during this study will be kept in a secure location, and will be destroyed after 5 years (2025). Within this time limit, the data could potentially be used for future research, but it has already been anonymized to comply with confidentiality and privacy regulations.

Evaluation and grading

All research assistants are assessed on their participation in the seminar on responsible research practices, weekly status reports to the research mentor, self-evaluation and presentation to peers from other disciplines. Additional evaluation and grading depends

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on the individual research project and project phase and is outlined by the research mentor at semester start. It may include literature reviews, a poster presentation for an expert panel, a working paper, etc.

<i>Participation</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Journal/Logbook Entries</i>	<i>10%</i>
<i>Annotated Bibliography (Literature Review and Research Methods)</i>	<i>25%</i>
<i>Research Presentation</i>	<i>25%</i>
<i>Research Paper Final</i>	<i>30%</i>

Disability and Resource Statement

Any student who has a need for accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the Office of Academic Support (acadsupp@dis.dk) to coordinate this. In order to receive accommodations, students should inform the instructor of approved DIS accommodations within the first two weeks of classes.

Policies

Attendance

It is crucial for your learning that you stay on task and hand in assignments on or before the due date. All work– including in-class projects – have to be completed in order to pass the class. Late papers or projects will be marked down with 1/3 of a grade for each day it is late.

Academic Honesty

Plagiarism and Violating the Rules of an Assignment

DIS expects that students abide by the highest standards of intellectual honesty in all academic work. DIS assumes that all students do their own work and credit all work or thought taken from others. Academic dishonesty will result in a final course grade of “F” and can result in dismissal. The students’ home universities will be notified. DIS reserves the right to request that written student assignments be turned in electronic form for submission to plagiarism detection software. See the *Academic Handbook* for more information, or ask your instructor if you have questions.

[Academic Regulations](#)

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