



## Shadow a Student Exercise

It's useful to ground ourselves in a child's experience of school before starting school design work. Pick a student to shadow for a day (or a couple of hours if you're short on time). You might want to meet the child at her front door and ride the bus to school with her in the morning, to get a better understanding of the mind frame in which she arrives at school. Or start your shadowing when she arrives at school. Spend the day with her as a "fly on the wall" and see what her day is like. What is she doing, who is she doing it with, what is she learning? When is she most and least engaged? In what ways is the day meeting and not meeting her needs? There are lots of different things you can focus on during a shadowing exercise (e.g., curriculum, instruction) but for our purposes here we want to concentrate on the ways in which the organizational structures of the school (scheduling, staffing) are and aren't creating an excellent learning environment for the child. Namely, how time is being used, how individual attention is created (differentiation) and how teaching quality is supported.

You can use the attached shadow template form to record your observations over the course of the day (this can help you remember the full day as you reflect on it afterwards). Then think about the following and jot down some notes. We will debrief on this at our first study session group.

**Use of time:** What are your thoughts on 1) how time is structured, and 2) how well it is used within that structure? (e.g., Are the blocks of time long enough? Are they sequenced well? How much time is on task?)

**Individual attention:** How much of the day was structured to suit the specific needs of this child? How much of the day did the child spend doing things on the right level for her in the right way for her? What configuration of adults and students was she with over the course of the day? When was she most lost and when was she most engaged? In what ways were her social and emotional needs met?

**Teaching quality:** What instructional staff did the child interact with over the course of the day? To what extent did they meet her needs? What could help them meet her needs better?

[See what one administrator learned from a similar experience, courtesy of PBS.](#)

**Shadow Template**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Environment</b>	<b>Engagement levels</b>	<b>What learning is happening?</b>