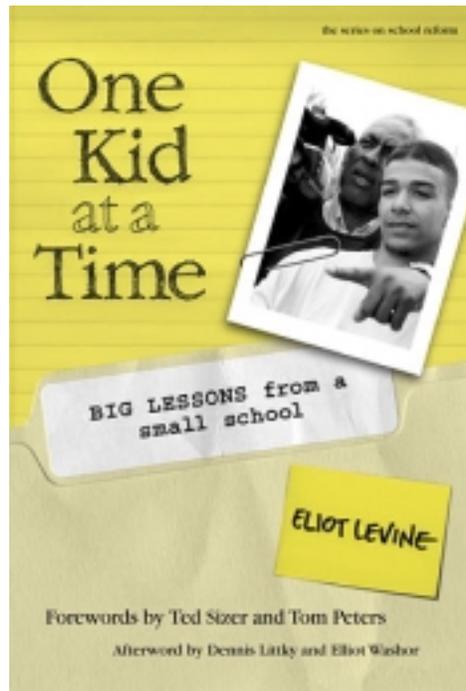


# One Kid at a Time: Big Lessons from a Small School

(Teachers College Press, 2002)

## A Study Guide for the College Classroom

by *Eliot Levine*



"An incredible-imaginative-passionate tale about how America's educational approach can be reformed."

- Tom Peters, Author of *In Search of Excellence*

"*One Kid at a Time* helps us see how preparing young people for the real world works best when it is intensely caring, relevant, community-focused, and tailored to the limitless varieties of our children's passions and concerns."

- Deborah Meier, Author of *The Power of Their Ideas*

## **A Note to Instructors**

*One Kid at a Time* draws teachers and aspiring teachers into school reform's key debates through the compelling story of an urban public high school that has challenged all the rules -- and succeeded. The book and this study guide challenge educators to examine their beliefs about learning and to make education more relevant and personalized. Activities are designed to generate dynamic class discussions through individual and group work.

All students at the Met School have a personalized curriculum. Students stay with the same teacher for four years and complete in-depth projects and internships based on their interests. Student progress is assessed through exhibitions (not tests) and extensive teacher narratives (not grades). Every Met graduate has been accepted to college, even though the majority are the first in their family ever to attend.

*One Kid at a Time* looks deeply at the thorny realities of an actual school, so it complements more theoretical books on progressive education such as those by Ted Sizer, Deborah Meier, and Alfie Kohn. It also serves as a powerful counterpoint to books by more traditional authors such as E.D. Hirsch.

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## **Study Guide Topics**

- ◆ Personalized Learning
  - ◆ Learning Through Interests
  - ◆ Learning Through Projects and Internships
  - ◆ Assessment Through Exhibitions and Narratives
  - ◆ Evaluating Innovative Schools
  - ◆ Creating Innovative Schools
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### **1. Before Reading the Book**

- **Reflection:** Describe the children you would like to emerge from a year in your classroom. What would they know and be able to do? What would you like them to remember about you and your time together? (After reading the book, answer these questions again. Explain why aspects of your response changed or stayed the same.)

### **2. Overview of the Met School (Introduction and Chapter 1)**

These initial readings are recommended for all students. They provide a rapid overview of the school and brief case studies of three students.

- **Reflection:** What are your initial impressions of the Met? As a future teacher, do you see the Met as a nightmare or a dream come true? As a former high school student, what do

you think you would have liked and/or disliked about this school? Do you have fundamental disagreements with the Met's philosophy? (Throughout the book, reflect on the ways that you agree or disagree with the Met's principles and practices.)

- **Action:** During the first month of the semester, identify successful local schools whose approach to learning represents a range of perspectives. Identify, nominate, select, and invite guest speakers. Among your visitors, try to include students who are showing their work and discussing their experiences.

### 3. Personalized Learning (Chapter 2)

- **Reflection:** Should teachers get involved with their students' personal lives? How much? In what ways? In Chapter Two, a Met teacher visits a student at the hospital daily for two weeks. Another teacher buys hiking boots for a student. In contrast, a local college professor says, "None of this Mr. Big Heart stuff! If you want to get involved personally with students, become a guidance counselor." What types of relationships do you want to have with *your* students? What are your boundaries? In what ways do you agree and disagree with the Met's philosophy about relationships?
- **Classroom Spotlight:** In your teaching or internships, have you had the opportunity to build strong relationships with students? Which relationships stand out most strongly? In what ways have these relationships been helpful to students? What factors have made it easier or harder for those relationships to flourish?
- **Take Action:** Create a plan for making changes to your school or classroom that make teacher-student relationships more to your liking. What do you plan to accomplish? What steps will you take? How will you know if you have succeeded?

### 4. Learning Through Interests (Chapter 3)

- **Reflection:** Think back to your best learning experiences. What were they? What made them so positive? The Met believes that students learn best when they are respected, treated well, and allowed to follow their interests and passions. Has this been true in your experience?
- **Take Action:** Design and implement a classroom activity that allows students to pursue their interests, including some interactions with the world beyond the school or classroom. Possible starting points include the interest exploration activities on page 31. What are the challenges of designing and carrying out such an activity? Reflect in writing on the pros and cons of this experience and how it compared to your usual classroom activities. Ask your students to do a similar reflection. What do they say?

### 5. Learning Through Projects and Internships (Chapters 4 & 5)

- **Reflection:** Why do you think students in most schools receive credit for English class but not for writing articles in the school newspaper? Why do they receive credit for Computer Science class but not for the website they developed in their spare time? Would you like to change this in your own classroom? Why or why not?
- **Reflection / Research:** In what ways could a traditional classroom be changed so that students could do extensive, interest-based projects? What obstacles would you

anticipate, and what steps could you take to overcome them? Review your state and district standards and curriculum frameworks (available on most district and state websites) to see what regulations might help or hinder your ability to make changes.

- **Classroom Spotlight:** From your own school, what examples do you have of learning through projects and internships? Which of these activities feel most real or authentic? Which feel most contrived for the learning situation? How do these differences in authenticity affect students' learning and personal development? Their engagement and enthusiasm? What factors influence your ability to use authentic learning activities?
- **Take Action:** Design and implement a strategy for making authentic work happen more often in your classroom or practicum site. What are the obstacles and success strategies that you can predict before the beginning? What additional ones cropped up during the course of your work?

## **6. Assessment Through Exhibitions and Narratives (Chapter 7)**

- **Classroom Spotlight:** Have you had opportunities to use performance-based assessment (PBA) with your students? If so, which instances stand out most strongly? In what ways has PBA affected your students' learning? How does this differ from the effects of traditional assessment? What factors make PBA more or less successful? What factors influence the degree to which you use it? Would you like to make greater use of PBA in your classroom? Why or why not?
- **Take Action:** Design and implement a strategy for using performance-based assessment more often in your classroom or practicum site. What are the obstacles and success strategies that you can predict before the beginning? What additional ones cropped up during the course of your work?
- **Take Action:** Write a detailed narrative evaluation of one of your students (even if you are also required to submit a letter grade). Select the student at least two months before the narrative is due. Start the narrative with positive feedback about the student's strengths, growth, and learning highlights. Use statements that will inspire hard work in the future. Be detailed, referring to actual work the student completed. Be constructive, emphasizing the student's strengths and potential for growth, while honestly discussing any difficulties. Comment on personal qualities such as responsibility, time management, motivation, attitude, and contribution to the school community. Offer suggestions for improvement. Discuss the narrative evaluation with the student, amend as appropriate, and then send it to the student's parents. Finally, evaluate this process. What did you like and dislike? How does it influence the student's learning and your own experience with the student? How do the student and parents feel about receiving this type of evaluation?

## **7. Evaluating Innovative Schools (Chapter 9)**

- **Reflection:** The challenge of evaluating student progress on "personal qualities" (e.g., resourcefulness, organization, persistence, responsibility) is discussed on page 127. Choose any of the personal qualities discussed in the book, or any other personal quality that you think is particularly important. Propose strategies for assessing student progress on this personal quality. Think broadly and creatively about a range of possible strategies.
- **Reflection:** The Met is planning a study of the long-term success of its graduates. Discuss what long-term outcomes the study should evaluate. Feel free to look at conventional

measures (e.g., college graduation rates and job salaries), but also think creatively about what long-term "success" looks like based on your understanding of the Met's philosophy. Although some measures might only be usable in schools that have the Met's structure, it would also be valuable to have measures that would permit Met graduates to be compared to graduates of more conventional high schools. (Feel free to share your proposals with The Big Picture Company, [www.bigpicture.org](http://www.bigpicture.org), which is the organization designing the study.)

## 8. Creating Innovative Schools (Chapter 10)

- **Research:** What does it take to start an innovative school in your district? In your state? If your state has charter legislation, what does it say? How would it influence the type of school that you would like to create? Other than becoming a charter school, what other routes have allowed innovative local schools to come into existence?
- **Reflection/Research:** If you had the opportunity to design a school, what would be its main principles and practices? Based on topics raised in *One Kid at a Time* and any other resources you consider important, discuss at least ten key design issues that focus on multiple levels of a school's operation (e.g., individual, school, community, state).
- **Take Action:** Contact local education groups and individuals to find out what innovative schools are starting in your area. Read their literature, attend their meetings, interview their supporters and critics, etc. If you're excited, try to get involved. Find out how their needs dovetail with your interests. See if you can take on a significant project that they would otherwise have to leave undone.

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### Book Ordering Information

- Teachers College Press, [www.tcpres.com](http://www.tcpres.com), 1-800-575-6566
- Review copies available upon request
- Also available from Amazon.Com, currently for 30% discount
- For bulk purchase discounts, contact [books@bigpicture.org](mailto:books@bigpicture.org) or TCPres

One Kid at a Time. Big Lessons from a Small School. [View on timeline.](#) ~August 2001. First Big Bang at Bryant University. [View on timeline.](#) ~September 2001.Â Students work with a mentor at an internship of their choosing, learning professional expectations, communicating effectively with adults from different backgrounds, and producing real world work. The internships give students a deep sense of how their interests play out in the adult world, and provide an authentic environment and audience for their work.