Christina Pateras September 25, 2011

PDI Studio 5

For our first session at the Ark Community Troy Charter School, on September 22nd, the Studio Five class went with Professor Ron Eglash to observe the 5th and 6th grade students. Once we arrived half of the studio class went to the 6th grade classroom, and the other half went to the 5th grade classroom. I spent about two and a half hours in the 6th grade classroom and met with each student in a group setting first. This classroom had a very laidback setting and the children seemed very comfortable with their teachers. The class was mostly taught by a Caucasian man and was helped by an African American woman, from what I supposed. The teachers had previously set up the desks in three large groups with a few separate islands of about two or three students. In the 5th grade class room there was three groups of five PDI students that organized an ice-breaker activity with the children. There were approximately fifteen children in the class and they were spilt into groups of four to six students and matched up with the studio groups. Each of these three groups sat at one of the large groups of desks with the students. From there, we all conducted our activities.

As the children were divided up into groups I started to take in the setting of the classroom first. Every student was wearing a polo shirt with the school’s logo on it; the colors varied but most had on either purple or black. Everyone also had on khaki pants and black shoes, which were also part of the school uniform, however these were all the students own purchasing. The boys had on basketball sneakers and the girls either had on fashion sneakers or ballet flats. The rules of the uniform were not as strict as most uniform codes. The students were not required to tuck in their shirts or have solid black shoes on. Most of the boys also had cargo pants on instead of dress pants like most schools would require. Also the students’ shoes sometimes had a colored logo on them, or one girl’s flats had flowers on them. From their outfits my eyes wandered to the items attached to the wall around the classroom. There were maps, schedules, and other posters on the wall which the teacher used as a teaching aid. There were also snacks laid out which were later passed out to the students after their rotation activity.

Sam, Ellie and I came a few minutes late and were not given much time to talk to our first group. However we were able to have about a five minute conversation with them and we also managed to fit in our activity. Our first group was a group of five boys. We started talking to the boys individually about their favorite hobbies and their lives at home. They didn’t seem very willing to talk to Ellie and I, and were giving us short or one word answers to everything we asked. However, our group naturally pulled back together when we found ourselves talking about a similar topic: video games. The boys heard all heard *Halo* mentioned and immediately paused their conversation to paid attention to the conversation going on with Jarrett and Sam. Ellie and I were trying to get some information out of these boys about why they like this video game, so we pretended as if we have never played a video game before and the boys taught us about *Halo.* As a group we found this as a great opportunity to start our activity. We asked each of the students to draw their dream video game. They were less interested in drawing it and began to just explain to us. Some of them wanted it in outer space, others wanted it in the school, and some didn’t understand why it couldn’t be exactly like *Halo.* Ellie was asking about the video game in the school and one of the boys murmured “Yeah, then we could tell the teachers!” The boy next to him heard him and started waving his arms and was signaling to him “No.” We found that the group of boys was very interested in playing video games and they were absolutely obsessed with *Halo.* I noticed that each of the students was carrying around a piece of loose leaf with a few bullet points on them so we asked what it was for. The students wrote out questions to ask us about our lives, and one of them was what we are going to school for. We responded with the simplest answer we knew and told them we want to learn to make things. After hearing this, one of the boys asked if we could design the next *Halo* game for him. After this, the teacher rang the bell and raised his hand. The children all followed and the class was silent; he then told us it was time to switch groups.

We then talked with our second rotation of children. We talked to them about school and what classes they enjoyed most. They all said music, and we learned that they were beginning to learn instruments and how to read music. The group spilt off into two groups naturally; and Ellie and I began talking with two boys. They were telling us about their plans for after school. Boy #1 told us that he wanted to be a professional basketball played and Boy #2 wanted to be a chef. Boy #1 told us that he spent a lot of time playing sports and his favorite was obviously basketball. I asked him how he learned and about his favorite teams but he said he didn’t know. Boy #1, who I assumed to be African American, seemed to be very shy and wasn’t willing to share too much information about his life outside of school, so I tried not to push too much out of him. I did find out, though, that he was 10 years old and from Albany. Boy #2, who I assumed to be Caucasian, told us about how his mom loves to cook and he learned how to cook from her. He was very chatty and was willing to share every thought that ran thought his head. He was also 10 years old and has lived in Troy his entire life. He seemed very close to his mom and his entire family. He told us that he wanted to go to college but only to party. We asked if that was absolutely the only reason and he said, “Well I guess I want a girlfriend too.” These two boys allowed us to learn a lot of information about each other by telling stories from the past. They told us about the camping trip they just went on as a class and the high ropes course they participated in. I then learned that another one of the boys in our group was from Puerto Rico and another was from Jamaica. These two boys seemed to be trying to put on the image of being very tough and sort of controlled the conversation when we talked in a large group. They both seemed to be very confident, however were still very friendly with the rest of the group. Boy #1 asked if we were coming back soon, so I told him yes and he responded with his “happy dance” (as Boy#2 told us) as he walked away.

Then we switched groups again and met with our third group. This group was all girls who I assumed were all African American. They told us about their families and what they do for fun. Girl #1 told us that she enjoys dancing and listening to music. We asked all of the girls what their favorite musician was and they all responded with Beyoncé. We asked why they liked her so much and they said they liked her outfits and the fact that she was a very good dancer. We then had some small talk and naturally spilt into a few group to have more intimate conversation. Girl #2 was telling me about the acrylic nails that her mom bought for her from the drug store and helped her put on. She told me that she wanted them because her mother has the permanent acrylic nails from the nail salon and wanted nails just like her mother. She was missing about half of her nails but told me she was afraid to take them off, and she also liked to tap them so she wouldn’t take them off anyways. Girl #2 and her friend Girl #3 began telling us about what they want to do when they grow up. Girl #3 told us that she wanted to be a lawyer. I asked her why and she said she didn’t know, but Girl #2 told us that she was really good at arguing and always won. Then, Girl #1 and Girl #4 caught my attention and asked me to draw a butterfly for them. They were drawing butterflies with Sam and Jarrett and wanted me to join in. The teacher ran the bell and signaled that activity time was over and it was time to go back to their normal seats for snack time. The girls took their butterfly pictures with them and returned to their assigned seats.

After this the students had a small snack break and ate the peanut butter and crackers that were handed out by the teacher’s assistant. The table of boys from rotation two asked for a drink and she gave them some grape juice.

The teacher collected the students’ attention by putting two numbers on the *Smart Board*. They were beginning to study decimal numbers, so he asked a few questions about the decimal number and a few about the whole number. Some students were very excited to share what they knew, and others kept to themselves. The teacher asked about the place values and went through some premade videos, which I gathered were made by the authors of the textbook. After two videos there was a short five second song to which the children got up and danced, the teacher joined in too. Some of the students chose to stay in their seats including the two boys whom I thought were trying to act tough earlier during group two. After these videos which reviewed the general information about decimals including place value and number value, the students were instructed to start the work from their textbook. The teacher told us we were free to go sit with a group of students and look at their work and help them if they need it. I sat with Girl #3 how was still confused about the concept of decimals, so I helped her and gave her a few hints that I learned at her age. I used the guides attached to the walls in the classroom to show her how to count the places, and I also flipped through her text to find a better figure to help her. The other students around us working with Sam and Ellie were finished rather quickly and started conversation. Girl #3 stayed focused on her math problems while the other students chatted, which I was very impressed with. She understood decimals once I taught her how to do the expanded form of the decimal. She didn’t understand it at first but I showed her how to count everything out and assign values to each of the numbers. We went through all the problems together and then the teacher reviewed the answers by having students write what they though was correct on the *Smart Board* and then he went over those answers with the class.

Our professor announced that it was time to leave for 12 o’clock class. The students, including myself, that had to leave made their way out of the classroom quietly while the students continued learning about decimals.