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Studio Trip 3

Third Ethnographic Investigation

On November 3rd we went back to the Ark Community Charter School to continue working with the children there. This time, we were letting the students run the trip. The first thing we did was ask them ten open ended questions and encouraged a group discussion. The questions related to eating habits and knowledge about nutritional food. For example we asked questions like: when was the last time you ate fast food? What do you consider fast food? What do you cook for yourself? What types of food does your family normally eat? The goals of these questions were to get the kids talking and opening up to each other. We also were trying to obtain information about their lifestyles. Christina and I wanted to figure out what food to base our game on, which snack they preferred or were most drawn to.

After we went through the questions, we handed out laptops and sent the kids to this website: <http://cooking.coolmathsgames.me/>. The website contained many cooking games that all revolved around math. We told the kids to play any of the games, but we had them keep track of which game they were playing, what they liked about it, and what they disliked about it. We found that they were immediately drawn to the flashy, colorful games. One game called, “How to Make Ice Cream” grabbed the attention of many of the kids. They liked this game because the instructions were very clear. Games that clearly listed the instructions held the kids attention and kept them from getting discouraged. This ice cream game allowed them to drag items, select items, and feel as if they were in the kitchen themselves.

The games that only took place in one scene, such as “Big Bobo’s Burger Joint” were not as successful with the students. The students quickly got bored of these games. Also, games that were too simple bored the kids. They seemed to love flashy images and congratulation messages when they moved on to the next step or level. We noticed that they need a competitive element to the games and they needed a very interactive game. The more independence and responsibility they were given, the more drawn in they were. Background music also seemed to hold their attention. Games with sound affects and music excited the kids and got them laughing and having fun.

Christina and I have changed the general concept of our project several times. We originally started with the idea of making a physical cook book based on all healthy foods and healthy eating. Then we changed our project to an online cook book and then we added in the idea of solving math equations to move on to the next step. What we realized through working with the kids was that they need a goal in order to complete the problems. We decided the best way to incorporation cooking and fractions was through a game. The reason we had them test out all different cooking games was to see what drew them in the most. Games with a kitchen setting and different levels were the most exciting and that is what led us to creating our game, “Cookie Creations.”

“Cookie Creations” takes place in a kitchen. The game is completely interactive and the chef or person playing has all the control. He or she must select the correction ingredient or sove the fractional problem correctly in order to move on. From testing out different games we noticed that kids were easily bored with games that focused too much on math. If the education purposing of the game stood out then they would navigate away from the game and on to another. In our game, we mixed the kitchen cooking scene with math problems. When they are approached with a problem, there are things on the screen to help them. For example, if they have to solve:

½ cup + \_\_\_\_\_\_ = 2 cups of flour

They have a measuring cup on the side of the screen and dots of flour on the other side. They are able to drag the flour to the measuring cup to help them solve the problem visually. If they know the answer immediately, they will be able to select the correct answer from a drop down menu. If they enter the wrong answer, they will be sent back to the problem. Many games on the website ended once they did something wrong, which appeared to be very discouraging for the students. We want them to be congratulated when they do something correctly, but also have the opportunity to go back and fix their mistakes.

We have several things still to figure out with our game. We would like to incorporate a competitive element, such as different levels or maybe a time limit for the game. Possibly have different foods they can cook. I really liked our idea of focusing on healthy eating. We have surveyed the kids on their eating habits and cooking habits. Based on our surveys, we have discovered that when they cook for themselves, they tend to bake and when the bake, they mainly bake foods from premixed boxes. We choose to pick a food that they all seem to enjoy and a “fun” food. “Fun” food games seem to distract them from the math element behind the game, which held their attention. We have discussed adding sounds to the game and maybe a timed element. Overall, we have finally settled on our final design and have determined that cooking games that involve fractions are a good way to encourage the kids to learn and learn while having fun.