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PDI Studio V

Ethnographic Description #2

Our second visit to the Ark Charter Community School expanded our understanding of our target user and helped us to develop some concepts for our final prototype. Once again, the sixth graders were quite amusing to interact with keeping all of us on our toes. Our interactive activity was well received and an overall success.

Our group came up with the idea of using sand art to test the students on how well they responded to different sets of instructions. Prior to our visit, we bought small bottles for each student and made six different colors of sand. (We actually used salt and food dye but I will continue to call it sand art.) We had different tests for each of the four groups. The first group consisted of four girls. With the first group, we let them create whatever they wanted. They were given simple instructions on using the funnel to better fill their bottles with sand. Our group wanted to see what cool sand art creations the kids could make without any advice or influences.

With the first group and actually all the groups, we were quite surprised by how polite the students were with each other and us. They waited for each other to be done using the colored sand and were very polite when asking us to refill colors for them to use. One girl, we can call Girl A, had experience making sand art and she took it upon herself to make new colors by mixing the colors that were given to her. She understood that mixing the sand would create something new, but she wasn't sure what would result. Because the majority of her sand was blue, the entire mixture turned blue. After realizing this, she decided to try again by shaking the bottle more gently. Once Girl A started shaking her bottle, the rest of the group joined in; we then started seeing blue bottles in everyone's hands. The boys had a rougher start, but once they saw what the girls were doing they followed their lead. Spooning the sand into the funnel was a difficult process for them to grasp. However, if they made a mess, even a small one, they were upset and very apologetic to us. At the end of the time period, the students were proud of their sand art and made sure to show off their work to their fellow classmates.

The second group consisted of three boys and three girls. With the second group, we tried to see if they could divide the bottle into ten equal sections and fill the different colors of sand to the levels they marked on the plastic bottle. This task was more difficult for the students; we had to sit down with them and guide them as they drew where they thought the lines should go.

The students did not seem to enjoy this activity as much as compared to the previous group. Marking increments on the bottle was not an enjoyable process or so they made it seem. One boy struggled immensely with this task; all he wanted to do was play around with the sand. For most of the group, marking up the bottle was a slow start to the activity, but once the kids started experimenting with the sand their attitudes changed. Due to the nature of the sand, it was difficult for the students to fill the sand up to each level they marked. Although they made an effort to follow the markings, many of their creations ignored the ten levels. With this group, there was very little shaking and mixing of colors as seen with the previous group.

The third group consisted of four boys. With the third group, we asked them to divide into groups of two and work together to create two separate bottles. This was more of a test of how well the kids cooperated together to create the sand art.

The goal of this group was to see how well they worked with each other. Surprising, the group I was watching planned out a whole strategy as to how they would attack this activity. They planned the colors and the orders they would put them in for each bottle. However, while they were working, there were disagreements as to which bottle belonged to who. Eventually they came to an agreement once we calmed them down. The students shared tasks like holding the bottle, holding the funnel, or pouring the sand and switched off so each partner could get a turn. The two groups of two showed off their sand creations when they finished and argued over which one looked better. For all groups, the boys loved comparing and competing with each other to see who could make the better bottle of sand.

The last group consisted of only two girls, so we let them do whatever they wanted. We joined in as well and made our own sand art. This group was very laid back as we worked alongside them giving them advice and support as we made our own designs.