Samantha Riccio

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Ethnography Essay

When I first walked into the Ark Community Charter School I started to get a little nervous of how the students were going to react to having strangers in their classroom asking them so many questions. As I waited in the lobby I stared at the large wall with the attendance rates on it! I found it very interesting that as the grades increased the percentage of attendance decreased. First grade had 98%, second 96%, and third was 90%. Although they did not show the sixth grade attendance rate I was very curious as to the rate of the classroom I was about to walk into. As we walked in the teacher introduced us to the class. The students stared at us as if they were ready to ask us questions of their own, which they were. As soon as we sat down, even before I was able to ask their names, they asked mine. Student A1 was very outgoing. She spoke as if she was in charge of the table and was prepared and knew what she wanted to say. Marie and I handed each of the girls a canister of Play-Doh and their faces lit up with excitement. As we all cracked into ours canisters of Play-Doh we slowly began to chat. I started by asking the group of 4 girls what their favorite subjects are. Student A1 replied surprisingly with math. She went on to explain how math was something that just came to her. She also commented on how math was something everyone in her family was good at. Student B1 was reluctant to reply for a moment and then said gym and recess. After a few more moments of though she also replied with math as her favorite subject because she is good at it and it’s easier to her. The other two girls at our table were shyer and did not say much. They more so just sat there and nodded along with what the two outspoken girls had to say. Students A1 and B1 began to talk back and forth about a recent overnight fieldtrip they had had. Student B1 went on to tell about how she was excluded from the trip due to some previous trouble she had gotten into. She talked about how when her brother was he age he got into a fist fight before and was still allowed to go. She stated that she felt that it was unfair that she wasn’t able to go but continued to say it was fine she didn’t go. Student A1 and B1 kept going back and forth telling each other stories as if I wasn’t even sitting next to them anymore. Most of what they were chattering back and forth about was hard for me to catch and understand. The other two girls at the other end of the table just sat there rolling their Play-Doh and creating things with their hands as they listened to all the conversation going on around them. As we all talked we all played with the Play-Doh and had something to do with our hands. Next I asked them what they liked to do in their free time outside of school. Student A1 went on to tell me how she likes to swim and bike and dance. She explained how she attends church with her family and sings gospel music. A1 also said she took a music class and she would sing songs by artists like Adele and Michael Jackson. A1 also went on to tell me about how she recently read The Hunger Games and then saw the movie after she finished the book. I was a little shocked to learn that a sixth grader was reading that book. She did go on to tell me she was scared of all the kids killing other kids. Student B1 joined in saying she too wanted to see the movie The Hunger Games. B1 also stated that she loved to play with marbles and magnets. I found that very surprising considering that was a good example of what I would play with then I was their age. At the end of our rotation we told the girls they were all allowed to keep their canisters of Play-Doh. They each had a smile on their face as we told them and it was a priceless moments. The teacher called a rotation so the next group of four students came to our table. This time it was two girls and two boys. I began by asking all of them what their favorite activity was. Student A2 was a girl and she said she like to play basketball. I asked if she played for a team but she told me she just liked to play with her friends and family after school so times. She also told me she was very good at drawing. Student B2 was a boy. He told me he loved to draw and create games. He also added he loved to listen to music. His peers joined in said that he was really good at drawing and was an artist. Student C2 said her favorite things to do was to hang with friends and play kings. Throughout the entire experience in the classroom students kept asking me if I went to RPI and if it was expensive to go there. I was also asked several times if it was hard there. It was really hard to come up with an answer for the students because I wasn’t sure exactly what I wanted to answer. Next I asked this group what their favorite subject was. This group dynamic was very different than the first groups. Student B2 told me he loved science. So I asked what they were learning about and he told me body odor. Students B2 and C2 both said they loved art. B2 told me about how his project is still hanging in the art room. In comparison to what I predicted from these students they were a lot more involved in the real world than they were video games.

At the end of the day we were able to speak with the woman who leads the educational programs at the Ark Community Charter School. She talked about the program they have initiated at the school called Fast Forward. It’s a way for students to keep focused and motivated in school. She also discussed how they involve movement classes and music classes throughout the students work week to keep them involved and participating in the classroom. I also really thought one of her quotes were very memorable. She stated “Smart is not what you are, it’s what you become.” I feel with that as their motto this charter school can go really far.