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Ethnography Assignment 8

For assignment eight, my group created an ELA game that aims to teach students word type through the use of popular songs and lyrics. We created a game where a clip of a popular song is played accompanied by the display of lyrics on a laptop screen. Four of the words in the song lyrics are highlighted, and the students are supposed to work within their team to try and figure out what the word type is for each highlighted word. In this version of the game the students are able to pick from five word types: noun, adjective, verb, preposition, and conjunction. There are game boards that have spaces for each of the five word types. During each round the participants place numbered disks which correspond to the highlighted word on the word type places on the game board. The game is played by two teams, and whatever team gets the most correct answers in a round wins that round.

My hypothesis for how children would learn with this device was that the children would be more likely to stay focused on the game due to the use of recognizable songs and lyrics. I believed that the students would pay attention and tend to lose less focus as the game progressed as there were little breaks between rounds and each round presented a new song and new lyrics to analyze. I also hypothesized that the children would be able to recognize word types better after just a few rounds of playing as there are patterns and repetition built into the game. Since we used similar words in different rounds, I thought that the children would be able to recognize these repeated words throughout the game. Another important hypothesis of the game was that the children would become quicker in recognizing word types in the later rounds, showing signs of learning and understanding. I also thought that the students would need less outside help as the rounds progressed. Additionally, I hypothesized that by working together in teams the children would have someone to work with during the game if they had trouble or needed to talk over a word with someone else.

However, we quickly discovered that the group chemistries were variable and changed drastically from group to group. The teams were mostly groups of two, with an occasional group of three. What I found occurred most often was that one member of the group would be better at understanding and recognizing word types. This member would often answer all of the questions within the round, leaving the other teammate out, through usually unintentionally. The team member who did not contribute to the answer did not oppose and was not upset by his or her lack of participation. This teammate usually seemed content as long as their group was able to answer each round.

Another behavior I noted was that the students often needed more encouraging and help in solving the problems we presented to them. The majorities of the students were often asking for help on each problem and had difficulty answering all four questions per round. I think that this can be partially attributed to the fact that the students had not yet been taught about prepositions, one of the word types in our game. To combat this in the future, it could be good reinforcement if the definition of each word type was constantly displayed on the game board or playing screen in each round. For example, I often found myself saying that a verb is an action word, or an adjective is a describing word.

A simple reference that was easily visible to the students could eliminate some of the questions and need for outside help. However, it seemed that some of the students actually did know the word types once we started to help them, but either needed encouragement to participate in the game or lacked confidence in their answers. I hypothesized that the element of group participation would eliminate the lack of confidence in answering questions, as the group bears responsibility for the answer and if it is wrong the blame cannot be placed on one individual. I had thought that the game process was simple and straightforward, and that the students would have a similar solving strategy as I would when it comes to figuring out the word types in each round. If I was presented with the game that we had the children play, I would look at the highlighted word and figure out what purpose it served within the sentence. However, the students often looked at the highlighted words in isolation, trying to figure out the type of word in isolation of the rest of the words in the sentence. This became an issue as some words we had highlighted could take on different definitions and word type depending on the context. To combat this in the future, it may be better to choose words for the children to analyze that have very concrete definitions and word type categories. However, this could actually hinder English comprehension education as the students need to how learn to analyze words within the context of a sentence.

Our third visit to the school was a success on several levels. My group had overestimated the skill level of the student body in general when it comes to the speed upon which the students can analyze and recognize word types. A vital piece of information that we learned from this third trip was that the students need time to look at a word, understand the meaning of the word, analyze the placement of the word in the sentence, and finally determine what word type. My group did not take into consideration the amount of time these students would need to go through their individual thought processes. Each word took a considerable amount of time and debate before the students could come up with an answer.

For future iterations, my group had pictured a game where the students had to choose word types very quickly as that word was said in the song. The speed required in this game will most likely be intimidating and overwhelming for the majority of the student body. Additionally, the group element of our game did not serve the positive purposes we had hypothesized about earlier. We had hoped that by working in groups, the students could talk with each other and find collective answers. These thoughts were falsified as it became apparent that the groups were not very collaborative and allowed only one student to answer for the group. This is a major concern and something that needs to be addressed in future models.