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An ethnographic investigation is an important step in designing a gadget or product for a certain group of people. The investigation will help reveal many of the specific problems or needs present in the group that are not easy to see from the outside. In designing products to help the 5<sup>th</sup> graders at Ark Charter School learn, an ethnographic investigation is very important. The investigation provided insight into the interests of the children as well as the methods used by the school to teach the kids.

The investigation consisted of meeting with the kids to get to know them. The method our group used to help get the kids talking was by having them draw anything they desire and suggesting something they liked or enjoyed, such as a favorite thing to do, place to go etc. This method was fairly successful at revealing the interests of the kids. Many of the kids liked to draw, many drawing their favorite things, while others just drew shapes or “doodles” as they talked to us. It is important to note that not everyone was willing to share through either drawing or talking. However, many of the children were very willing to share and we were able to learn a lot about them.

There were many things that stood out as common interests in groups of the children. First, the majority of the kids said their favorite type of music was rap, hip hop, or R&B. These interests could stem from the culture in the areas the kids lived. Their parents, siblings, and friends could be listening to these same types of music. It is important to note the taste in music because it shows the culture behind the children’s social lives and could be very useful if music is part of the gadget we create for them.

Other common observations are the children’s interest in social media and electronic devices. Many of the kids talked about Facebook. Some had recently gotten one or were planning on getting one in the near future while others have had a profile for a couple of years. This was very interesting simply because it shows the penetration of social media into youth society. I was unaware of how young Facebook users were getting and how important it was for 5<sup>th</sup> graders to “stay connected” with their peers. Other interests associated with “staying connected” also showed during the investigation. Many of the kids talked about all of the electronic devices that they own or are going to get in the near future. They talked of their cellphones, laptops, iPods, iPads, and gaming systems, some listing most or all of these devices. This was surprising due to the thought that most of these children come from underprivileged households, and many of these electronics are fairly expensive. It seems as though the kids need to be “Up with the times” and have the newest, “coolest” things.

One final common interest that stood out among the kids was their favorite subject in school. Excluding lunch, recess, gym, etc., the most common answer was math, followed by science. This showed that the kids really are interested in technical subjects. A few of the kids even mentioned making robots and video game design as what they would like to do when they grow up. It is important

to reinforce those interests and find a way to keep the kids interested in math and science as they age and the subject becomes increasingly difficult.

There were also a few interests that stood out in some groups more than others. The main dividing factor was between the girls and boys. When asked about their favorite activities, and things to do, the boys and girls usually answered differently. Many of the girls said that they enjoyed shopping with their mothers while the boys mentioned that as a dislike. Also, many of the boys cited sports and video games as a couple of their favorite things to do. The boys were interested in football and basketball, and were also interested in playing a lot of Xbox. It is important to note however, that there were a few girls who also enjoyed playing Xbox. This interest in gaming also goes back to the interest in electronic devices and having the newest and “coolest” thing. Of those whose interests included playing video games, many mentioned the next new game that was coming out and that they were going to get it for Christmas or for their birthdays.

After the ethnographic investigation it is much clearer as to what types of gadgets the children would enjoy playing with and learning on. It is very apparent that the kids are concerned with the “next big thing” and “staying connected,” especially involving technology. It is also clear that the kids enjoy math and science and should be encouraged to pursue those interests. These things will help guide the design process of our reaction gadget and teaching aid so that they will have a positive impact on the kids.