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PDI Studio V

## Ethnographic Description 2

On our second trip to the Ark Community Charter School, we brought a reactionary device to analyze the student's interaction. Our device consisted of a marker, supported by a cup and attached to four strings equally spaced around the exterior and a whiteboard with graph lines. The students could then draw on the graph by pulling on the strings. Before we went I made a prediction. I predicted that they students would enjoy the physical action involved with the drawings but not be interested in the corresponding coordinates on the graph. In some ways I was correct that the students did enjoy the drawing, but they also seemed engaged with the graph coordinates as well.

To my surprise, almost all the kids were very excited about the graphing part of our device. I'm not sure if it is because they had already mastered this concept or if the drawing aspect made it more appealing. We started by asking some of the groups if they knew about graphs and to point out a couple of coordinates. In each of the groups it was obvious that most if not all of the members wanted to stand up and help find the points. Some of the more quite children had to be asked directly, but they were usually able to figure it out. In all of the groups there seemed to be one student who was more comfortable and eager than the rest with graphing. We offered this person a chance to be the "director" and direct the rest of the group. The students seemed very proud of their knowledge and we had a few volunteers from each group who thought they were up to the task. The error of this may have been that we didn't give the quite kids a chance to be the director, as they weren't as likely to volunteer. The upside to volunteering though gave us the groups more natural leaders. This exercise was not only to teach graphing, but also to develop teamwork skills.

We learned very early on that teamwork and team building are things that the kids could certainly improve upon. Each group was different of course, but most of the teams would try to talk over each other and lacked the necessary communication for our activity. The leader was given a sketch of the drawing and he or she would then call out the points in order and help direct the group into creating it. We started easy by making a simple box where only one student needed to pull at a time. This typically worked well, unless a trouble maker purposely pulled his or her string when it was not his or her turn. This happened a great deal in one group. This group of all males was especially difficult to work with. They had a hard time focusing as a

group and actually drawing anything. They seemed to just want to pull the strings as hard as they could and “free draw”. I’m not sure how the teacher split up the groups but I was surprised to see these specific boys all together in one group. As much as it was difficult to work with them they did bring about a good point, that just drawing anything they wanted and making the marker move around was considered fun. It reminded me of the video game “deprogramming” that the school advisor had talked about. It seemed like they boys, the same ones who only talked about video games were only interested in pulling their string as often as they could. They didn’t care about actually making anything, because it seemed to take too much time and effort to do that. In retrospect a way we could have gotten them more involved in the process could have been to show them the most complicated drawing, the batman symbol, at the beginning. To show them if they tried hard they would be able to accomplish something awesome. Squares and triangles didn’t seem to get their attention.

Overall getting any group to draw a diagonal line was difficult. The communication and motor skills required to pull a string at the same time as someone else proved to be a challenge. Lines often times came out crooked and jagged, or nowhere near where they were supposed to be. We realized from this that the marker was too light and the slightest tug on the string would move it. This made synchronizing especially hard. But, mostly the problem was the communication. There was one group, in particular who came over and announced that they were they artistic ones in class who liked to draw the most. This artistic group seemed to have much more patience than the rest. They took their time doing the drawings and were able to successfully make a diagonal line, which looked nearly perfect. This group was able to talk about what they were going to do before they did it, and then had they motor skills that other groups lacked to actually complete it. I cannot be sure what made this group more capable than some of the others, but I think their artistic background helped them get the right kind of motivation to actually draw what we told them to.

The students in general all seemed to like our device. Even the few times they didn’t want to use it properly, they still saw it as something fun. It was encouraging to see the kids react so positively and made us think we’re somewhere along the right path. We do need to consider if we want teamwork to be a part of our lesson, or change it to more of an individual task. In general, it seemed like they liked the hands on activity and even the graphing part of it. Including some element of a challenge might make it more interesting. There are many avenues we could go down for our final project, and I am excited to see the students’ response then.