

Harlemteam/eckson/tceduzone/fieldnotes/J24/07

Eckson's fieldnotes

TC Eduzone January 24, 2007

These notes were taken at a meeting held between the "educational settings" research team; Linda Lin, Hervé Varenne and myself, Eckson Khambule and the representative of TCeduzone, Yaowen. Linda and I joined Herve and Yaowen minutes after they had started "talking."

After Linda and I had joined in, Yaowen started over again and explained TC's Eduzone background and its core programs which include the reading buddies and math buddies. In both programs graduate students from Teachers College are used. They are recruited, interviewed and "hired" to work, or to use the Eduzone language, to become "buddies" with the students whom they spend 25 minutes helping with reading in the case of reading buddies and math, in the case of math buddies. [It is not clear whether these graduate students are trained or it is assumed that since they are in the graduate schools of education they know how to teach reading and math. Perhaps this and other pertinent questions are dealt with during the selection process!

I noticed during Yaowen presentation, that the reading buddies' activities were often referred as "reading intervention." This implies that there is a reading problem that has been identified whose cure depends on the child forming a special relationship with the "intervener," the TC buddy (Old Timer in Lave and Wenger's language). [The project is

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currently undergoing evaluation and there is no scientifically tested evidence of its performance, however, there are indications that it is a success. Note the following: the reading buddies, on the one hand, are accepted at level 1 [presumably with inadequate reading skills,] but by the time they finish they are said to have progressed to the next level. Math buddies, on the other hand, are said to make to it the fourth level or the math skills acquisition measurement grid. All this according to Yaowen. Some artistic works (including drawings, sculpture, original maps that have been "tempered" with artistically to demonstrate the children's geographical areas of origin and paintings) are proudly displayed on different locations of the campus and they also bear testimony to the "success" of the program. [In addition, the fact children are awarded certificates (of completion or participation? Not clear), essentially means that there is success since a certificate can only be given to someone who has successfully demonstrated some knowledge, skills or attitudes toward learned work.]

It also emerged that there are various other components to TC Eduzone which include art, computer training, pottery, and sculpture.

There is seems to be an adoption of the holistic approach to all of this that is, parents are not left out, they are not merely invited to facilitate their children's learning or to "help out", but precisely to address their own learning needs as well. Thus, according to Yaowen some are assisted with computer skills which, clearly, may translate into useful skills for helping their children with "supplementary education" at home. [It seems to me that it's not just "No Child Left Behind," it's also "No Parent Left Behind" as well.]

Seems to me that the project has an open-door policy for the children's parents even

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though the actual doors are always closed and need require identification each time one passes from room or office to the next. This security system is setup in this fashion according to Yaowen, because there are no security personnel on campus.

Combined together, the math buddies and reading buddies assist an average of 100 students per semester. These students are likely to be drawn from or are concentrated in one school (e. g. CS 200). I also noted the use of weekends for extra-educational activities.

The Eduzone has also done work with organizations that provide "education" outside the domain of the school such as churches. It emerged that one the churches that have had some kind of "educational" interaction with Eduzone include Riverside Church where math/algebra classes were offered. It would be interesting to know why this church and not others.

Some more notes:

During the course of the meeting Yaowen pointed out that most of the students in their program come from low income families or families with low socio-economic status. However, this does not seem to take away the "agency" from the kids to learn. In essence, when provided with an opportunity and a conducive environment (such as ED Gordon campus!) to learn, they can do it with style. The case of one of the TC buddies who joined the program with low expectations of the children's performance or potential

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We were told the story of

to perform only to discover, later on, that his/her assumptions proved to the contrary, illuminates that "learning" or the ability to "learn" transcends some socially constructed barriers such economic status. In relation to this whole thing about poverty and education, Yaowen also mentioned that, in fact, contrary to whatever perceptions and views we might hold about schools in Harlem, there is considerable progress that is being, which of course, we might not be aware of until such time we engage in a study like this. According to her, schools in Harlem "are doing very well."