

LINDA – Fieldnotes – May 19, 2007

Subject: Baby College

Location: P.S. 242 on 122<sup>nd</sup> Street between 7<sup>th</sup> and Lenox Avenues  
(aka Adam Clayton Powell and Malcolm X Blvds)

Time: 9:50 – 12:20

Notes written in black are to be send to Betina

My thoughts are written in purple and in Geneva font

Notes written in blue are to be taken out

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### Settling in

Betina is sitting on the wall in front of the school with about three boys who look to be about 10 or 11 years old. She smiles at me and I come over and sit with her. She is wearing light blue jeans, a red fleece jacket or pullover, a black coat, and brown suede sneakers. Her hair is tightly pulled back to the back of her head. I sit next to her. After I greet her I ask, “Can we wear jeans?” She says of course. I am wearing light gray slacks and a dark blue sweater under a thin black jacket.

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She begins telling me about a community building on the block, apparently run by HCZ [probably Community Pride, but I didn’t hear]. She tells me that they work to strengthen block and tenant associations. With this description I recognize that I read something like this online. She tells me that several of their families have had to move out of the city, so they [HCZ] need to work on housing.

[This sounds to me like a funding pitch, i.e. look at all the great work we do and how much we care about our families.]

A fourth young man shows up and there is some discussion about his clothing as inappropriate. Apparently they were supposed to wear slacks, but he is wearing jeans and a T-shirt. Two of the boys are wearing gray slacks and white button-down shirts under their coats. I ask Betina if she knows where they are going, and she says no.

[My first impulse is to ask them why they need to be dressed up, but sitting next to Betina I content myself with observing them briefly. Are they connected with Baby College? Do they attend this school?]

A heavily pregnant woman arrives in a car that looks like a private cab (Lincoln town car?). She complains how it’s too early for her.

By now, random raindrops are falling and I ask if we are waiting for Brenda. She says yes, then says we might as well go inside. Once inside, HCZ workers greet Betina.

[Notes for Betina begin here]

There are far fewer people in line to register (about 8, as opposed to last week's 30 or so), and fewer HCZ workers sitting behind the registration tables. A quick glance looks like people are checking in and obtaining name tags. Today, there is no need for waivers from Oprah.

Betina walks into the auditorium past Brenda, who is standing in the doorway. Brenda is also wearing slacks, with black boots. Today she is carrying a brown leather purse rather than her TC bag. [I can't remember what else she was wearing.] We greet one another. She and Betina exchange remarks about missing one another. Betina tells Brenda we were waiting outside, Brenda says she's been walking around and suggests that maybe Betina showed up when she went to the bathroom. When Betina walks in the auditorium and starts chatting with people, Brenda asks me, we can wear jeans? I laugh and tell her that's the first thing I asked Betina.

Betina talks with Abasi. Brenda and I hang back rather than going to speak with them.

Betina, Brenda and I sit together on the right side of the auditorium. Brenda comments that there are less people today than last week. Today there are people sitting in every section (rather than just the middle). Betina and Brenda chat, and Brenda and I chat. Brenda reports that people appear to be eating bagels and fruit for breakfast.

### **Introduction, or "Announcements and Welcome"**

Around 10:05 Mr. Abasi says into the microphone, "Good morning everyone." People reply, Good morning. Apparently this response is not quite lively enough, and Abasi repeats, GOOD MORNING, EVERYONE. People repeat, louder, GOOD MORNING.

Mr. Abasi asks, "Does anyone know what the topic is today?" People call out, "Brain development." Mr. Abasi confirms this, and tells us that today we'll be playing Jeopardy. He explains that if players don't know the answer, they'll have until the song ends. He sings the theme song to Jeopardy, ending with, "Boom boom!"

He asks, "How many people have had a visit from an outreach worker?" Some hands go up. "That's it?" Somebody calls from the audience that they didn't hear the question. He asks again, and more hands go up.

Rayven, the woman who wore the apron last week (today she is simply wearing the HCZ blue shirt), heads down the aisle. Mr. Abasi asks how many people played with their children for at least an hour. Some hands go up.

He asks people to give a "Baby College welcome" to Rayven. He protests, "That's not a Baby College welcome!" People cheer more loudly.

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As this is going on, the HCZ worker videotaping last week, Aisha, is videotaping again. The curtains are drawn on the stage, and there are several large sheets of easel paper taped onto the piano. [I note that I am having trouble hearing, like last week. The auditorium doesn't seem to have good acoustics. I wonder if others can hear better.]

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### **Song, or “Presentation”**

Rayven says, Good morning, everybody. She repeats, I *said*, GOOD MORNING, EVERYBODY! She announces that we are doing Body [inaudible], and asks, “Anyone hear that song?” She tells everyone to get up. Betina stays seated and Brenda and I do too. Rayven has us repeat after her. She starts to clap, then sings and chants:

My body, my body makes music [G-G E, G-G E, D G E]  
 My body, my body makes music [G-G E, G-G E, D G E]  
 My hands go, clap clap clap [claps three times quickly ]  
 My feet go, stomp stomp stomp [stomps three times quickly]  
 My mouth say, la la la  
 My body go, cha cha cha cha [cha cha step]

Rayven does the song again, inviting the audience to join in. Most of the audience clap on the second and fourth beat. A few people clap on the first and third beat. Rayven has everyone perform it again, this time without her chanting into the microphone. [There seem to be more people today singing along than last week; perhaps self-selected?]

HCZ-shirted workers then pass out flyers. They do not hand them to Betina or me. Meanwhile, someone [can't remember who] is going over the letters, color, and shape for the day: H-I-J-K, green, and square.

Mr. Abasi is telling people to read the newspaper. [I miss why.]

[This was much like last week: greetings and song. On the one hand, this pattern helps to establish a sense of stability, a way of “how things are done” at Baby College. On the other hand, people can choose to skip it and arrive late without missing instruction.]

### **Jeopardy**

He then begins the Jeopardy game amid lots of side talking. He asks for one person from each class, including the Spanish class. [I do not see anyone up there from the class I attended last week; I see one of the women sitting alone in the audience.] For the first player, the question is, “What do the letters MMR stand for?” She does not know. It is hard to hear since so many people are talking, including a man talking in a loud voice behind us. There is also a mother and toddler behind us, and she occasionally speaks to

him sharply to get him to be quiet. He drinks milk, then apple juice during the introduction. When Mr. Abasi calls for music, much of the audience obliges and begins singing the Jeopardy theme song.

The next question is, “Name three shots your baby is supposed to have by age 3.” A woman names “tetanus,” and when she pauses, Mr. Abasi and the crowd start singing. We stop when she interrupts, protesting that she didn’t have enough time. She gets the answer wrong, and a woman from the audience calls out that she knows the answer. Mr. Abasi moves to the next person, who gets the answer right. Mr. Abasi indicates that she can select from several packages on the stage behind everyone. The packages are wrapped in pink paper, with white and pink curly ribbon. She selects a flat package.

Another question is, “What is the name of the program director of Baby College?” The person answers, “Ms. Joseph.” He asks for the first name, and she correctly supplies, “Marilyn Joseph.” Mr. Abasi replies, “That is correct,” explaining that Ms. Joseph is still on vacation. The winner picks a rectangular package.

Mr. Abasi then says that we may have “noticed our special guest today,” Dr. Brazelton and [inaudible] (Dr. Joshua Sparrow). Brenda says, “That’s amazing!” I tell her that I hear that he comes every cycle to answer questions. I ask if he is well known, and she confirms this. I ask if he’s here, if she knows who he is. She says she thinks he is a white man wearing a jacket. [I had seen two white men earlier. One was older, with white hair, wearing a blue HCZ t-shirt over a white dress shirt and under a tan sport coat. The other looked to be in his late thirties, with salt-and-pepper hair, and wore glasses and an HCZ shirt.]

[The Jeopardy game seems to test for learning from last week, with the motivation of a prize (both to show up and to display proper learning). In marked contrast to the two previous activities, enough people were side-talking to create a constant buzz that distracted from the game. Last week, we broke for class shortly after the song. This may have been because registration took so long.]

### **Class: 0-12 months**

We break for class. Brenda leaves for the Spanish class, and Betina and I get up and walk toward the door. Dr. Brazelton greets Betina warmly, and she gets into conversation with Dr. Sparrow. I stand nearby and wait. Betina mentions the evaluation project, and Dr. Sparrow tells her he wants to talk with her about it. Eventually she says, I should introduce you, and introduces me to Dr. Joshua Sparrow. Francisca, the outreach worker I met last week, flits around us. When she sees me she gives me a hug.

Betina lets me know that our class is in the auditorium. We move down toward the front, where about 15 people are already seated. A HCZ worker [the instructor?] says, “I’m asking everyone to sit in the first two rows please.” People not sitting in the first two rows get up and move. I follow Betina to seats in the third row.

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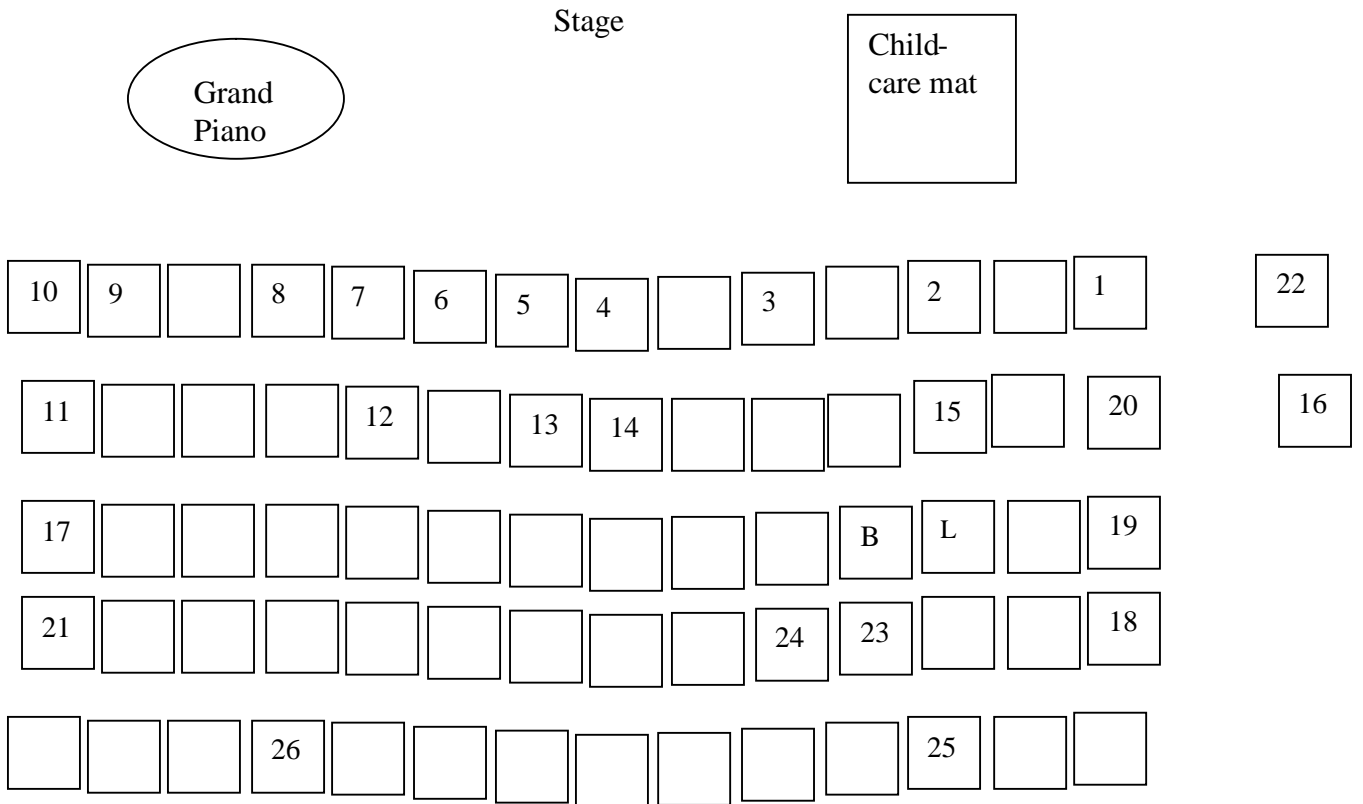
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The diagram below shows seating in the middle of the auditorium. When we first arrived, people were only sitting in the middle section, and in the first two rows. Later, a couple of latecomers also sat on the right side, and the third, fourth and fifth rows.. Person #16 was displaced by person #20 when she got up to volunteer for the activity, and she sat behind #22 on the right side. Betina’s location is marked with a B, and mine with an L. There are also several childcare workers, at least one at a time in the room.

The crooked boxes are my attempt to show how the seats curved very slightly in a shallow U. I cannot see much from where we sit, other than the instructor, whose name I later find out is Ms. Marie.



I do not know if this class started by introducing themselves, or if anyone explained what Betina and I were doing there.

After we arrive, Dr. Brazelton and Dr. Joshua are brought in front of the stage. After another “Good morning,” an HCZ worker introduces Mr. Terry Brazelton and Mr. Joshua Barrow. She explains that they are pediatricians, and that we can ask them questions about anything: breast-feeding, teething, etc.

The first question is about autism. A mother asks if shots should be spread out, rather than given all at once so as not to cause autism. She asks, "Is it true? Should parents recommend that they get the shots single?" Dr. Brazelton explains that parents certainly can request that shots be administered separately. Dr. Joshua tells us that vaccines used to contain mercury, and it was taken out. He tells the class that they should look for fever, and ask the pediatrician to reduce the amount. Meanwhile, Dr. Brazelton makes exaggerated smiley faces at an infant.

Someone else in the audience asks about autism. As Dr. Joshua explains about autism, including the child not looking people in the eye, Dr. Brazelton gets up and moves toward the baby. He brings the baby as an example of a child who does not have autism. Dr. Joshua explains about milestones by age 2, and Dr. Brazelton gets up and starts playing with another baby. "He's so responsive," he says, smiling so widely that his face crinkles up.

Meanwhile Ms. Marie circulates the sign-in sheet with a black pen. When it gets to me, I see that 50 names are printed on it, with 2 names written by hand. At this time, about 16 people are present, plus myself and Betina. I walk the sign-in sheet to #11, at the other end of the second row, but she's already signed it. I walk back to my seat and put the sheet and pen on the seat next to me.

I watch a female childcare worker plays with #16's baby on the mat amid talk about neurons. I realize that we are in the infant class. As the questions continue, more people filter in. A woman with an infant in a stroller sits next to us.

There is a question about spoiling babies, and Dr. Brazelton responds, "It's hard to spoil a baby." He praises a mother for bouncing her baby, "like you were doing a second ago." With a big smile, he exclaims, "Oh! That's the nicest thing anyone can do." (I'm not quite sure what he is referring to.) Another mom, #18, arrives with a baby in a stroller.

Dr. Joshua is telling the class, "I'm wondering if the outreach workers here" can work with pediatricians. Dr. Brazelton is praising a baby as "wonderful" for grasping his fingers. Francisca says anxiously, "We have 8 more classes to go, so..." Another mom, #19, comes in with an infant in a stroller and sits next to me. When she puts her registration items on the seat, her baby tips out of his stroller. The mom behind us gasps, and the baby starts crying. Mom #19 scoops up her baby and rushes out of the auditorium.

A last question that I don't hear. Dr. Brazelton explains that babies are born light, presumably referring to skin color. As he leaves around 10:57, he smiles widely and says, "Good to see you guys. You're wonderful." Francisca escorts the two doctors out of the auditorium.

In the transition time, four moms sitting in front of me start talking: 1, 2, 15 and 16. No. 15 tells the others that her baby was 10 pounds. No. 16 asks if she got a Caesarian, and

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she replies, “No, normal.” No 1. has straightened hair and is wearing a black shirt. No. 2 has hair cornrowed in curves around the back of her head. No. 16, whose name is Liesel, looks Latina, with light skin and thick brown hair. She is heavyset. No. 15 is wearing a mustard-colored sweater, dangling earrings of beads on wire, and what looks to me like a wig in a chin-length bob.

Several charts are arranged on the stage. One of them reads:

Agenda

Today’s topic Brain Development 1

Immunization

Icebreaker

Brain Dev 1

How many?

Development Chart

Reading Singing Playing

Early Intervention

Another is entitled, Baby Growth 1-2 months

Ms. Marie is a soft-spoken young woman. She says, “I need five volunteers!” As hands go up, she calls, “One! Two!” Moms number 14 and 16 get up, and the woman sitting in front of me, #16, also gets up. She puts her baby in a stroller. A slim white mom who is here with a black man gets up with her baby and walks out of the auditorium.

In this game, which seems to be intended as an icebreaker, everyone in the audience closes their eyes and puts their thumbs up. The volunteers select someone and press their thumb down. Once all five volunteers have pressed someone’s thumb down, everyone can open their eyes. Those who had their thumbs pressed guess who did it. I kept my eyes open and watched the game. Nor did I put my thumb up.

During the game, Mom #20 arrives with a small baby and takes Mom #16’s seat. She asks what is going on, and #15 explains, “You’re supposed to guess who pressed your thumb down.”

In the first round, when Ms. Marie asks people to guess who picked them, one woman immediately says, “The person with the keys.” A volunteer slumps and starts to return to her seat. Ms. Marie tells her, “She didn’t guess it was you, she just said the person with the keys.” The volunteer sits down anyways. Number 16 discovers that her seat is taken, and sits off to the right.

To begin a second round, Ms. Marie tells us to take off our keys so it won’t be so easy to guess. Mom #19, who has returned with a soothed baby, gets up to volunteer. She puts her baby into the stroller and tells him she is going to get up. The baby does not fuss. No.

16's baby starts to fuss, and a female childcare worker takes the baby. No. 20 takes out a bottle to feed her infant.

At 11:07 Ms. Marie stops the game with, "Thank you everyone for volunteering." She asks the audience, "So how did that feel? Was it fun?" I can't hear if there are any responses.

"How do things like this correlate with reading, singing, and playing? What do you think about that?" A mom in a cream sweater on the other end of the row says, "I agree. They get to learn a lot of different words." Ms. Marie asks, "Is it important to play with kids? Why can't we just throw them on the mat with some toys?" A mom explains why it is important to play with kids. Ms. Marie asks, "Who are they bonding with?" No. 20 explains that the baby knows the mother in the womb. She tells us that her baby was in the ICU.

Ms. Marie turns to the issue of spoiling a child. A mom on the other side, I think #17, states that she thinks babies can be spoiled. Ms. Marie asks her what she thinks makes her child spoiled. She replies that her son cries whenever she leaves the room, when he can't see her.

Ms. Marie asks, "Who disagrees?" When #17 wants to keep talking, she asks in the direction of our side of the room, "What happened to this side?" Meanwhile two childcare workers are holding and playing with toddlers. One of them, on the other side of the room, speaks with a mother in low tones.

Ms. Marie is silent for a few moments. No. 20 notices and indicates that she should continue. The instructor indicates that she's waiting. No. 20 suggests, "Why don't you just talk louder?" She replies, "Other people are talking." No. 20 says, "That's not it. I just can't hear you." A beat. "Can I give you a suggestion?" Ms. Marie does not seem amenable.

At some point Ms. Marie tells us that we are trying out this location to see how it works. The previous week, they were on stage, and apparently it didn't work too well either. Liesel's baby has been crying for a long time, not soothed by being held by the HCZ worker and by Liesel.

[At this time there is not a lot of side-talking, especially compared to later. But there are babies crying or making noise, and one of the HCZ workers is talking with a mother. I definitely find that in the third row I can't hear anyone very well, except for #20 sitting right in front of me, and later, #25, immediately behind me. The instructor seems to blame the students for not paying attention, which works against having a good relationship between instructor and student. It ignores that they are in the worst location to hold a class, that they are the only class accommodating babies who are sometimes noisy, and that the side-talking came from a HCZ worker helping a mother with her baby.]



While the instructor talks, #20 makes a side comment [illegible]. No. 1 turns around and laughs.

In another exchange, a soft-spoken woman with an African accent speaks. I can't make out what she says. Ms. Marie repeats that her baby is 4 months old, and people laugh. Ms. Marie explains, "People can't hear." No. 20 comments, "I didn't even know she was talking!" Ms. Marie retorts, "Well, move to the front then!"

[Ms. Marie seemed to take #20's comment as criticism. No. 20 was already sitting in the second row; how much closer could she get? The layout, of course, was not ideal, with people stretched across several long rows of seats. With the acoustics as bad as they were and with crying babies, how were any of us to hear when someone spoke softly? I felt that Ms. Marie overreacted to #20, to her detriment as instructor.]

Ms. Marie then asked, "Who sings to their children?" A number of hands went up. She then asked, "Who sings to their children every day?" Fewer hands went up. No. 20 commented, "Not every day!" Sotto voce, she added, "Who has time for that!"

Ms. Marie asked what people sing to their children. No. 17 explained that her baby liked to listen to Biggie Smalls [Brooklyn-born rapper who passed away in 1997 and continues to get radio play]. Skeptically, Ms. Marie responded, "How do you know?" The mom explained that she was playing it one day and noticed that her son listened to it. "That's a first," Ms. Marie said. [Ms. Marie didn't seem too happy that a mom was playing rap to her baby.]

No. 15 volunteered that she sang the ABC song to her baby. Ms. Marie okayed this. Then # 2 told the class that her baby loved Beyoncé, liked to watch her videos on the computer. The instructor displayed surprise, asking, "Already on the computer? How old?" The mother replied, 3 months. [Again, Ms. Marie didn't seem too happy.]

No 22, sitting on the side, says that she tells her baby nursery rhymes. Ms. Marie perks up, and asks the class if they know the words to nursery rhymes. No. 17, recites, "Twinkle twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are." After a pause, she exclaims, "Damn!" She asks, "You mean the whole song in its entirety? I only know one verse." Ms. Marie prompts the class with, "Itsy Bitsy Spider," "Row row row your boat," and another song I don't catch. The audience responds with, "I know that!" "Yeah!" No. 20 calls out, "Hickory dickory dock." Number 15 says, "I know \_\_\_\_" [notes illegible] and starts to chant it.

Number 24 and 23 come in together, a man and woman. They sit behind Betina and me.

Somebody [didn't write down who] contributes "Humpty Dumpty" and "Jack and Jill." Another voice adds, "Hey diddle diddle."

Ms. Marie asks the class if they received a booklet of nursery rhymes. When nobody responds, she says, "I'm gonna get everybody a copy of that." She then asks, "What do you think the purpose of nursery rhymes are?" No 19 talks about listening to a story with rhythm. Meanwhile #24 is speaking with #14 in French. No. 14 is wearing a pink bandana with studded with something shiny (rhinestones?) covering her hair.

No. 20 asks me, "Did she take attendance?" I tell her that a sign-in sheet was circulating. She asks Ms. Marie, "Can I have the sheet to sign?" Ms. Marie hands her the sheet and pen. Meanwhile #15 hands a sheet to a HCZ worker walking by. No. 20 asks, "What is that?" No. 15 replies, "From the book."

[There's a lot going on at the same time: instruction, filling out and collecting forms, soothing fussy babies, side conversations, people walking in and out of the auditorium. Parents with babies are also paying attention to their babies. This is a lot for any teacher to handle, particularly one that seems inexperienced. She is asking a lot of yes-no questions and questions that seem to have a "right" answer, despite her claims to the contrary.]

As No. 20 explains what an early intervention program is, No. 14 gets the sign-in sheet and hands it to #24. No. 20 stops talking about delays in development when Ms. Marie turns her back. "I'm sorry," Ms. Marie apologizes. She plugs in a contraption that turns out to be a bottle warmer. "Anyone else?" she asks. She starts talking about developmental milestones. "One thing I want you to know about these developmental milestones is that children go at their own rate."

Ms. Marie asked how many words a child should know by 12 months. No 20 calls out, 20 words. Others call out 10, 15. No. 25 emphatically names a number. Marie reminds the class that she means 12 months, not 18. No. 20 starts listing words:

Hi	Okay
Bye	Mama
Yes	Daddy
No	Baba, for bottle

"That's 8 words," she announces. She explains that they know more words than this, that they can associate words the mother says with meaning. No 25 adds that they know sounds, making a warning sound, "Ah ah ah ah." Marie says, "I'm just saying, this is just a discussion." She tells the class, "So we've gone from 20 words to 15 to 8."

A male HCZ worker who has been in and out of the room pours a cup of water for one of the moms in the front row.

Ms. Marie reiterates that parents should be aware of the milestones and speak to their pediatrician if their child doesn't meet them. Then she repeats, "Kids will do things in their own time." No. 20 explains that these "new Millenium Babies" learn to do things much faster than what the milestones indicate. She holds up baby, saying, "She's only one month and look at how she holds her head up." A pause, then, "You be acting like you're not interested in what I'm saying." Ms. Marie disagrees. "I'm a veteran," No. 20

continues. "I know what I'm talking about." [I imagine that Ms. Marie looks at me during this exchange. Perhaps I'm making a face. I definitely feel that Ms. Marie wishes that No. 20 would stop talking.]

Ms. Marie flips the chart showing developmental milestones to go to age 6 months.

At some point, HCZ workers had handed out small pamphlets listing the developmental milestones, and much of the audience was flipping pages in the books in concert with Ms. Marie reading the milestones off of her flip chart.

Ms. Marie is talking about children getting nervous around strangers. "Does anyone know what that is called? Stranger anxiety. That's what it's called."

Flipping through the book, we get to 12 months, where it says that babies should know 5-6 words. "We're on page 12," she announces." So it depends on the child. So some could speak more." No 25 says loudly, "Of course."

In response to a question from Ms. Marie, #25 explains that she shows books to Miracle, who I assume is her baby. Another mom says, "My friend's mom is a teacher and she put the words on index cards." She explained that the cards are then hung from a mobile to hang above the crib. Another mom suggests flash cards.

Ms. Marie talks about limiting television to one hour per day. She says, "I want to hear your reaction to that statement." No. 25 says, "I don't know." She explains that she puts the TV on throughout the course of the day. "And I think that soothes her. She'll listen to it." She explains that she puts on children's programs, "as opposed to a picture for myself." Ms. Marie reiterates that "it should just be one hour." No. 21 says, "It depends," emphasizing that some programs could teach the baby. "And what do they get from TV?" Ms. Marie asked. "But if it's just a movie," No. 21 continued, "that doesn't have to do with kids," with the implication that some kinds of TV are ok while others are not. Ms. Marie explains that kids learn better with interaction than from TV. You smile, and she smiles back. You coo, and she coos back. No. 21 protests, "You don't have to be the only one." No. 20 makes a comment I don't catch. Meanwhile #7 is putting pants onto her baby. [I did not notice if she also changed his diaper.]

Ms. Marie asks the class why babies cry. People call out answers, and she lists five: sleepy, diaper, discomfort, hunger, and pain. The man behind me, #24, repeats, "Sleepy, diaper, tired, hunger, and..." The woman next to him, #23, prompts, "and pain."

No 22 says, "I do think my baby is being spoiled." No 21 repeats, "Every time I leave the room, if I leave his sight just for a second, he cries." No. 15 says, "I don't think you can spoil a child." Ms. Marie exclaims, "Oh yes! I have somebody on my side!" No. 15 continues. Ms. Marie asks, "Anyone else?" When No. 21 raises her hand, Ms. Marie says, "Ooh this is a hot topic for you. Let me let her go first." The white mom says something I can't hear. No. 21 then says that she doesn't think you can spoil infants but

at 6 months, then trails off. Ms. Marie says, “Are you saying that at six months kids are *manipulating* us?”

[For me, this interaction captures the difficulty in this particular class. Ms. Marie has a right answer in mind to questions she poses to the class. She then responds accordingly to people who do not have the same answer, showing them up as wrong, unreasonable, uninformed, etc. Ridiculing one’s students is not a good way to build a learning environment.]

No 25 explains, “Every day I have something to do. And she works with me in her own little way. So whenever she cries, I take that time. I play, la la la, (#15 laughs) let her know, [inaudible].” Meanwhile No. 20 is holding a bottle without a top between her legs. [It looks like she poured milk into it.] She unwraps a nipple and the plastic piece that screws onto the bottle from a piece of tin foil. No 22 stands, holding No 20’s baby. Ms. Marie turns her back, to get a cup of water for #14.

Around noon, Ms. Marie says, “So let’s talk about books for babies. Hard cover? Or soft?” As she explains how you can clean the books, #15 nods and mm hms. Ms. Marie asks if everyone has received books, and some people express confusion. Ms. Marie explains that anyone who is attending Baby College for the first time would not have received books, and asks if anyone who was here last week did not receive books. No. 20 asks where they were distributed, “the class, or outside?” “Outside,” Ms. Marie says. “So I’ll make sure you get books.”

“I see you,” Ms. Marie says, waving her hands at No. 25. No. 25 says, “You seen the books with paper like foil?” She explains that she gets these books for her baby.

Ms. Marie asks, “Who did their homework? Who did their homework?” A few people raise their hands. “One thing I want you to do before showing your baby’s favorite toy or book. This is the class textbook.” She holds up a thick volume of paper bound by a plastic comb. “You have to bring it with you to class.” She tells us, “Usually anything I have on the board is from the book or the handout.” She tells people to fill out their Health Check from the book. [This seems to be a form that people tear out of the books.]

Ms. Marie says, “If you do not have health insurance by the time you graduate,” HCZ will help people get it.

No. 25: “I’ll do it next week.”

Ms. Marie: “We need it this week.”

No. 25: “I did it already.”

Ms. Marie: “Check for me.”

No. 25: “It’s not here.” A beat. “Oh yeah, it’s here.”]

She then tells #24, “I need the contract. It just has the rules of Baby College.”

No. 24: Where is it?

Ms. M: The front page. You just flipped through it.

No. 24: This one?

Around 12:07 I lean over to Betina and tell her I have to leave soon.

Then, another HCZ worker gets up to show us sign language. “For those who don’t know me, my name is Sharon.” She explains, “I’m just learning it, I’m not fluent or anything.” She takes us through the signs for

Milk: fist moving up and down, looks like milking a cow

Eat: fingers pushed together, move towards mouth

Juice: Pinkie moving away from mouth, “like a J”

Diaper change: fingers to hips, “diaper pins” and a comment about people not knowing about diaper pins.

Water: three fingers to mouth, sideways, “like a W”

Drink:

Toy: hold up hands in fists, thumb between index and middle finger, shake

Play: both hands thumb and pinkie, shake

Hungry: hand moving up and down torso

Thank you

Sit down: hold index and middle fingers together on both hands, tap one set over the other

Sleepy: head resting on both hands, palms together

People copy her gestures. Someone asks her to show “sit,” which she mishears as “sick.” Sharon explains that babies can learn sign language before they can talk. Some people in the audience start to call out words they want her to teach. Sharon goes over the words again. I leave after this, before class is over.

As I leave, Mr. Abasi gets up to speak with me. He asks me how the class was. We are standing in the doorway, and I don’t think quickly on my feet, so I hesitate to say anything. I tell him it was hard to hear. He presses me and I repeat my answer. I tell him I’d like to ask him about Baby College, and ask if I could talk with him once classes get going. He tells me that would be a good time to talk.

Some thoughts:

This was a tough class: the largest one, in a terrible room, and including babies who have immediate needs. It was hard to hear what people were saying, even if no babies were crying and nobody was having a side conversation. The use of visuals was not very effective in the dim light and because everyone was so far apart.

In terms of pedagogy, Ms. Marie asked a lot of yes-no questions and questions that seemed to have a right answer that sometimes contradicted how people felt. I felt she got more flustered as time went on. Still, many of the students appeared engaged and attentive. It would be easy to say that a few outspoken students did not cooperate, but I think the story is more complicated. As one of them explicitly stated, Ms. Marie came across as not listening. In contrast, Mr. Russell

acknowledged each of his students, told personal stories, and explained how to work the system. He did not get flustered at questions.

Both classes I've observed gave me the sense that there is so much material to cover that there is little time for extended discussion. I think that learning could be deepened by discussion among participants.

I would definitely recommend moving this class to a classroom, since there are about 25 people (not 50). If they must stay in the auditorium it might help to have the microphone. However, this might further distance the instructor and students. I also think Ms. Marie would do better with one of the smaller classes. I know HCZ is very protective of privacy, but it is possible that Ms. Marie would greatly benefit from watching a videotape of herself teaching.