

LINDA – Fieldnotes – June 2, 2007

Subject: Baby College, HCZ

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

Time: 9:45-2:00

304

Notes in purple will be edited out of notes for Betina and Kimberly
Notes written up on Monday, June 4

Topic for day: Brain Development II

Week 5 of Baby College, 4th week that I am present

My task for today is to look for continuity

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Paraphrased Suggestions from Parents

- talk about premature babies
- don't allow strollers on stage
- Ms. Marie needs to speak up
- Ms. Marie needs to listen to students

Preliminary Suggestions from Me

- split the 0-11 months class into two classes if over 50 participants sign up (with a 50% attrition rate, you still have too large of a class)
- training for instructors on how to handle "difficult" students
- talk with outreach workers about dynamics in classes, recruitment and retention of participants, etc.

When I arrive, the line is much shorter today, with only two or three moms. Two HCZ people sit behind the table with a checklist and programs prepared with name tags and lottery tickets attached to the program with large paper clips.

For breakfast today, bagels, muffins, and fruit are laid out on a long table. I do not see people I know in the cafeteria. At 9:53 Mr. Russell starts using his booming voice to let people in the cafeteria know to head toward the auditorium. I use the restroom, then wander down the hallway. I walk past two open classrooms, where HCZ-shirted people who I assume are teachers are preparing for class. I walk into a room and introduce myself. Mr. Hassan welcomes me to observe.

47p

39p

I sit with Brenda and Kimberly in the first row. [I am in the first seat, and will not sit there again; my legs are in the way of strollers, outreach workers, and people moving around the auditorium.] Brenda looks around and comments that there seem to be less people, but perhaps people are still filtering in, like last week.

Brenda is wearing a black sleeveless blouse and light beige pedal pushers. She wears a new pair of shoes each time I see her; today, it's black thong sandals with a large metal ring that goes over the foot. Kimberly is wearing jeans and a black screen print t-shirt with a faded landscape. Her hair is held back by a red hairband, and she wears a silver bracelet. I am wearing a rose colored blouse and brown linen pants, with my gold shoes (mislabeled bronze in a previous post). I have deliberately chosen not to dress down. Brenda, too, looks less office-y but also does not wear jeans.

Introduction

At 10:09, Mr. Abasi begins the good morning routine. The camerawoman who usually has a small hand-held camcorder has a larger camera this morning, mounted on a tripod. She points it at the audience, then at Mr. Abasi. Mr. Abasi introduces someone who "always joins us at Baby College. Please give a Baby College welcome to Ms. Rebecca Brown." People clap, and he says, "That's not a Baby College welcome!" Ms. Brown is wearing a light pink top and beige pants, tight-fitting, and silver hoop earrings. She is plump and you can see her body bulging from her bra and pants. She has very light skin. She seems relatively young, but at ease with addressing the crowd.

48p

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Ms. Brown—NYPL Harlem Branch

After a "Good morning," Ms. Brown introduces herself as the children's librarian at the Harlem branch. With the camera alternately on her and on the audience, she asks a series of questions:

1. How many people have been to the library within the last year?
About a third to half of the audience raise their hands.
2. How many people have been to the library within the last month?
Only a few hands go up.
3. How many people have been to the library within the last week?
It looks like the same people who raise their hands.
4. How many people read to their children?
Many hands go up.
5. Where are you getting your books? Barnes and Noble?

69p

She repeats an answer from the woman in the yellow sweater two weeks ago, "Baby College!"

The camerawoman is now filming an adorable toddler playing in the aisle next to me. She has braids tied with the colorful fasteners, a white jumper striped with pink, green, and blue, pink pants, and white sandals with a large flower over the toes. A mom in a green shirt watches her. There is some side-talking, mostly conversations between HCZ workers and moms, or between HCZ workers. Babies and toddlers are also making noise, occasionally yelling. [It's amazing how three or four conversations plus the babies can make the auditorium sound so noisy and chaotic. I imagine that the regular PS teachers must have this problem as well. I hope that the person in front can see that most people appear to be paying attention.]

At 10:15 Marilyn Josephs comes to sit with Kimberly, Brenda, and me, explaining, "We have a good relationship with her [Ms. Brown]." At this time, there are probably at least 40 people in the auditorium, with more coming in. Marilyn talks with Kimberly.

Ms. Brown then reads from an Eric Carle book, "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?" I don't catch the words, but a website reads, "'Brown Bear, Brown Bear what do you see? I see a redbird looking at me..." (<http://www.dltk-teach.com/books/brownbear/index.htm>) She chants each line in a sing-song fashion, and the audience quickly catches on. People really seem to enjoy this part, with people enthusiastically chanting the next line based on the picture.

After she finishes, she asks, "If you read this book what will your child be introduced to?" People respond and she says back into the microphone, "Colors," "Animals," and adds, "We used a little bit of rhythm." She also tells the audience "just by holding a book" their children learn to turn a page. She says, "you wouldn't believe" that some children come to school without knowing this. There is some side-talking during this discussion. [Women dressed in "African" clothing (head wrap and shapeless floor-length dress in bright orange/red/black prints) are talking loudly.]

53P

She asks, "How many of you have library cards? How many of you want library cards?"

Ms. Brown is explaining that she will clear people's library records, to an approving murmur. At 10:18, HCZ workers pass out yellow application forms for juvenile library cards, then white for adult library cards. Ms. Brown promotes a summer reading program.

Mr. Abasi comes by and tells Ms. Josephs, "You're not supposed to be here!" She holds up her hands, "I'm not, I'm not!"

56P

At 10:20, 2 HCZ staff members pass out water on the right side of the auditorium. Others pass out flyers and sign-up sheets for the summer reading program. Ms. Marie, who has sign-in sheets, skips our row. A woman sitting in the first row of the middle section (from the 2 year old class, had greeted me earlier), hands us extra flyers.

At 10:22 Ms. Brown exclaims, "Oh! Does anyone know where the Harlem library is?" Apparently the audience does not give her a satisfactory response, and she laughs, "You're supposed to sign up and you don't know?" She goes over several library locations. She explains that her branch is on 124th between Lenox and Fifth, "right across from the Marcus Garvey pool." She goes over other branch locations.

68P

Ms. Marie holds a baby while a mom fills out a sign-in sheet. She then asks Ms. Brown a question, perhaps repeating the mom's question. Ms. Luisa then talks with Ms. Marie, perhaps finding out what Ms. Marie asked about.

Baby College Rap

At 10:25 Mr. Abasi says, "Moving right along," and tells us that "everybody must be warmed up already 'cause it's 85 or 90 degrees in this room." The mom from the 2 year old class asks Ms. Brown a question. The camera turns toward Ms. Rayven, who introduces Mr. James. Mr. James is accompanied by another young man, who provides the beat boxing to Mr. James' rap. Mr. James tells the audience to repeat what he says, "We got it going on in Baby College." A few people repeat after him, so he tries again, getting people to clap along and participating more enthusiastically. The toddler in the aisle next to me is also clapping, but on the 1 and 3 beat instead of the 2 and 4.

70p
71p

We got it going on in Baby College
(We got it going on in Baby College)
We gonna have some fun while we gaining some knowledge
(We gonna have some fun while we gaining some knowledge)

I am not fast enough to write down or remember the rest of this part. The next part consists of shoutouts to various groups of people in Baby College, e.g. "We got outreach in the house."

He ends with:

It's the B, the A, the B, the Y,
It's the B, the A, the B, the Y,
It's the B, the A, the B, the Y,
It's the Baby, College!
It's the Baby, College!

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Some people really seem to enjoy it, dancing in their seat while clapping and rapping with Mr. James. Others seem less enthusiastic, simply clapping or sitting still. [I wonder about possible gaps: generational, cultural, e.g. those who don't enjoy rap, or are unfamiliar with it. Not a few people wear expressions that could be read as confusion or displeasure, contrasting to Ms. Brown's reading of the Brown Bear book.]

More Announcements

Ms. Rayven talks about graduation from Baby College. I get the idea that there is some sort of gift certificate involved, and that people have to make up classes to receive it. Brenda marvels at the number of people who have to make up classes, printed in the program. Ms. Rayven closes with, "I have three questions. What's our color?" The answers are purple, PQRS, and diamonds.

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At 10:32 Mr. Abasi announces, "Give it up for Rayven!" Young Mom from Ms. Luisa's class is playing with Green Shirt's adorable toddler. The toddler bangs her hands against the empty chair next to Young Mom, and Young Mom bangs back, with her ring making a more satisfyingly loud song than the toddler's hands. The toddler beams in delight. Young mom does not respond when I smile at her. Ms. Marie is holding a baby. Despite

the warm weather, Ms. Marie wears a salmon pink shirt with $\frac{3}{4}$ sleeves under her HCZ t-shirt. She also wears black pants.

Mr. Abasi announces, "We also have a special guest here, Eastern Star." Later, when Brenda asks, he will explain that they are a sorority that does charity work. "The books they're gonna read, they're actually going to give you a copy." Next, he asks how many people saw the Oprah show last Thursday. A few people raise their hands. When a baby in the front row yells, Mr. Abasi jokes, "She screams when I talk. Maybe I need to stop." He tells the audience, "If you want more information on those programs [featured on Oprah], please talk to your outreach worker. **When you graduate Baby College, you become a part of the Harlem Children's Zone family.**"

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Jeopardy

At 10:26 he announces, "OK, it's time for Jeopardy." He tells the instructors to pick one person. Someone who looks like LaTrina gets up. The mom from the 2yo class gets up. Teacher from 0-11 mos gets up. Mom with an orange head wrap gets up. The first question goes to a man in a blue, white, and red jersey: "Who is the president and CEO of Harlem Children's Zone?" He does not know the answer, and we sing the Jeopardy theme song. At the end, the man offers, "Kenneth Kennedy?" He is sent to the back of the line.

A student from Ms. Luisa's class, LaTrina, is able to name 5 nursery rhymes with some thinking. Ms. Luisa, who has been standing with her body tensed and fists clenched, says with pleasure and relief, "That's five!" Mr. Abasi tells her to go to Ms. Roz (perhaps for the prize).

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The next question is about what counts as ACS cases. The toddler is playing with a toy, drops it, and Green Shirt snatches it up. At 10:42 the Indian woman comes into the auditorium and sits down. I don't hear the next question, but the answer "is absolutely correct." Something about potty-training, and how it's not necessary to potty-train by age 2. [The teacher answered this question.]

For the next question Mr. Abasi drags Ms. Marilyn up to the stage. "Who is this person? And what does she do here?" The "contestant" from Ms. Marie's class doesn't know, but people in the audience raise their hands. As Ms. Marie approaches the stage, Mr. Abasi says, "I knew Ms. Marie was going to come down here for this!"

[In a conversation with Mr. Abasi later, it seems that Jeopardy is used to gauge the learning in the classes. I am not sure to what extent instructors' performances are evaluated based on this "fun" activity, but based on Ms. Marie's reaction, and on Ms. Luisa's writing of the pediatrician's names, Jeopardy may be important.]

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Mr. Abasi surveys the line of "contestants," asking, "Who's been here since week 1?" He says, in a surprised tone, "You're not sure what she does here? She's the director? Of films?" The contestant replies, "HCZ director." Mr. Abasi congratulates Ms. Marilyn on

her promotion. He feeds the contestant, "Assistant director? Program director?" He tells the audience, "The names of all your staff is on your program. Please welcome her back, For 5000 Baby College dollars, somebody tell me who she is?"

The next question goes to a woman from the Spanish class. "I remember you from last week," Mr. Abasi tells her. He asks her a question about DTaP. She doesn't get it. Mr. Abasi says to the next contestant, "Wait a minute! Weren't you here last week too?" A young white mom from the expecting class shyly nods yes. She is wearing a pink and white striped polo shirt, jeans, and sneakers. Her straight blond hair hangs to the middle of her back. The top section is held back from her face by a barrette.

Mr. Abasi says, "Mr. Hassan, you're sending a ringer!" Somebody calls out that someone else wants to play, but she is not here today. She also cannot answer the question, and Mr. Abasi turns to the audience. Tyrone, from Ms. Luisa's class, answers correctly: Diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis. "What group are you from," Mr. Abasi asks. People cheer and clap. Tyrone must have come in late; he is now sitting near Young Mom. LaTrina also probably came in late; she is now sitting with a group of African women in the row behind Young Mom and Tyrone.

72p

The man in the red white and blue gets another question. At 10:54 Tyrone and LaTrina are talking. The former teacher from 0-11 mos class gets another question wrong. The mom from Spanish class gets up again. Mr. Abasi repeats, "Something easy." Someone in the audience jokes, "Your name." Mr. Abasi chuckles and repeats it into the microphone. She gets the answer right. The young white mom goes next. The question is where is the office. She gets Madison Ave, but stumbles on the main street. Mr. Abasi tries feeding the answer to her. A woman behind me complains, "She up there every week too."

73p

Mr. Abasi announces that the 1 and 2 year old classes will be combined today, working with Mr. Russell. At 10:59 people start leaving the auditorium.

57p

Class: 0-11 months with Ms. Marie

Kimberly asked me to return to the 0-11 months class with Ms. Marie to look for continuity with Brain Development I. It is on the stage again. Desks are arranged on the stage along with chairs. Some moms have strollers on the stage.

Ms. Marie is on the auditorium floor as people make their way to the stage. [A possible other way to build a better classroom environment: do other instructors greet parents as they arrive? I usually arrive later than most parents, but I remember other instructors greeting latecomers warmly.] Also talking on the floor are Ms. Marilyn, Mr. Abasi, and Ms. Rebecca Brown. The moms on the stage are not talking with one another.

When she gets up on the stage, Ms. Marie asks some of the moms if they want to put their babies on the receiving mat. [I don't know if I recorded this, but at some point

somebody told me that Baby College used to provide daycare for infants, but people got tired of changing diapers. Moms in the 0-11 mos used to get a break, and they like this.] She announces, "Today we're gonna talk about brain development and make a book." Alicia's [misnamed as Liezel in another set of notes] baby is laying on a desk, playing with a bright yellow luggage tag made of lightweight cardboard. [When Ms. Marie called roll, this parent told her to call her "Alicia" although it seems she usually goes by Liz.]

T P

Each table is set up with crayons, luggage tags, glue, and at least one pair of scissors. Some tables also have markers on them. Ms. Marie tells the moms, "We're gonna try to get a second childcare worker because I know it's gonna be hard to cut and paste while holding the babies. She passes around the sign-in sheet.

On one side of the tables, three notepads are propped up with sheets hanging below them. An easel also displays signs, including an agenda:

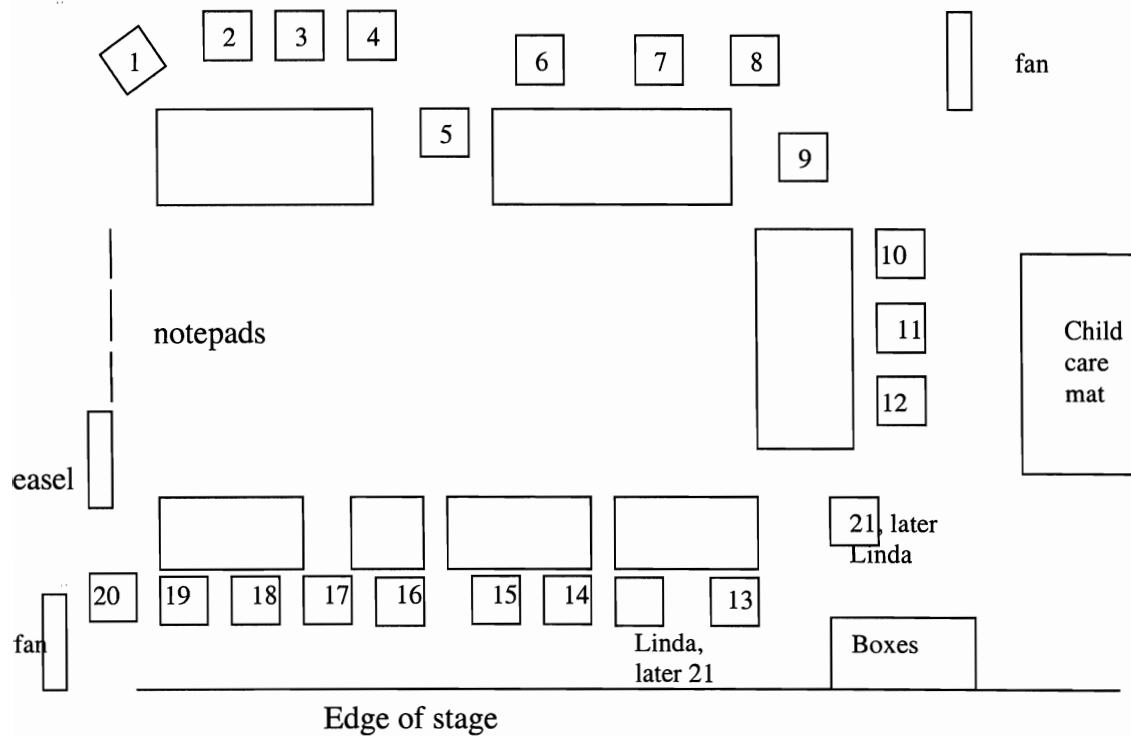
Agenda

- welcome/greeting
- icebreaker
- Today's topic brain development
- What is child development?

Another chart lists the letters for the week, PQRS, and has an example of a word that starts with each letter: "Q is for queen."

Of the 18 women present, at least three do not have babies. I see one on the mat. There are two men present.

[Proportions on diagram are off; I am not sure exactly what the seating in the left corner looks like. At first I take a seat in the circle, but when a mom arrives late, I move to let her sit at a desk.]



A parent, #10, asks about her name on the list of make-up classes, which is there by mistake. Ms. Marie says she will speak to somebody about that. A few parents are starting to interact with one another's babies.

No. 13, who later introduces herself as Sasha, hisses to get the attention of No. 14, then passes her the sign-in sheet. No. 2, previously in my notes as wearing a gold sweater, is wearing a black and white blouse today. She is fanning her baby. At 11:15 Mr. Mark arrives to pass out magazines, 2 per person. He pauses in front of our table, then leaves three magazines. [Later I find out that Mr. Mark is the outreach worker for Student #5.]

No. 15, who No. 5 will later identify as Spanish lady, asks, Are they distributing it from the \$100 they gonna give us at the end of the cycle? I am not sure what she is referring to—prize money? As she waits for an answer she continues to talk, play, and laugh with her baby. "You're so cute, you know that? You're so cute!"

At 11:16, a parent tries to get Ms. Marie's attention. "Scuse me, Ms. Marie?" Ms. Marie asks the class, "Did everyone sign in?" She then turns to the parent. While they are talking, No. 15 interrupts. "Okay what are we doin with the magazines." She realizes (or acknowledges) that Ms. Marie is talking with another student. Holding up a hand, she says, "When you're done."

[This is a tough class, as Ms. Marie will tell me later. There are so many pulls for everyone's attention: babies, questions from the instructor, questions from "parents," outreach workers coming in and out, a strange researcher, noise, a

15p

large class. This incident captures for me the difficulty of this class, and how Ms. Marie can so easily read parents as being uncooperative, and parents can read Ms. Marie as “not listening” and not caring.]

With magazines and other supplies in front of them, some parents begin to work on their books, although Ms. Marie has not yet given explicit instructions to do so.

No. 15 Spanish Lady catches my eye and says, “Hi, how are you. Never seen you before. Where’s your baby.” I introduce myself and tell her I was here two weeks ago, observing.

At 11:21 another mom, #21, arrives. Mr. Haneef, the outreach worker with long dreads, brings her a padded folding chair. Meanwhile I ask Ms. Marie if I can introduce myself. I stand up and tell the room my name and say I’m here to observe from the development team, to make Baby College even better. I tell people if they have any suggestions to talk with me. A mom from the other side of the room asks me to speak up. I repeat myself. [Mr. Abasi introduced us once as “the development team,” but Kimberly later tells me this is inaccurate, since the development team writes for grants.]

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At 11:23, Ms. Marie finally says, “So you can get started on your books.” No. 15 Spanish Lady says, “What are we doing? You haven’t explained it.” Ms. Marie is talking with someone else. [I seem to remember that earlier she explained that you could cut out pictures, draw, and write to make the book.]

[Another instance of how a situation can be read in the worst possible way: a parent looking like a troublemaker and Ms. Marie looking disrespectful. This reminds me again of how much Baby College is like school: overworked, overwhelmed teachers seen as “bad” teachers and students who learn to fulfill the role of “bad” in terms of attitude, behavior, lack of cooperation, etc.]

I ask #21 if she wants to switch seats with me so she can have access to the materials. Four babies are on the mat with a childcare worker, Ms. Yasmin. Sasha, #13, cuts out a picture of a child holding a videocamera, with the word “Truth” printed on the page. It is a striking image. Elijah, her baby, lays happily on his stomach on her lap. Moms cut out pictures with their babies on their laps.

Two women come into the auditorium, both wearing white t-shirts. Later I find out they are from Eastern Star, the sorority. Neither look like college students, they look to me to be in their late thirties or forties. One of them tells us, “We gonna give out books.” Several moms, including Sasha, squeal in recognition, “*Blue’s Clues!*” Ms. Marie goes to get a bunch of the books out of a cardboard box.

The woman who comes onto the stage is wearing jeans with her white t-shirt, thong sandals, dangling earrings, and a ring on her big toe. She introduces herself as Danette. “Hi everybody, I come from ___!” I can’t hear what she says. “I just want to talk to you

about the importance of reading to your children.” [It doesn’t seem that this group is particularly resistant to that idea.] Ms. Marie walks back to the box for more books.

At 11:38 Ms. Marie asks #21, “How you doing?” Immediately she apologizes. I don’t hear for what, I guess coming in late. The Eastern Star woman wants the class to read the book aloud together. “Will somebody read with me, with enthusiasm?” No. 15 wins laughter when she reads in an exaggerated sing-song of fake cheer. As a second mom reads the next page, people continue to cut, flip, and paste. There are no volunteers for reading the next page, which apparently has a lot of text. Toe Ring suggests that the person who reads this page should “wiggle” along with the text. Finally Ms. Marie says, “I’ll do it.” She reads the page without inflection, duly wiggling. A baby cries softly as Mom, #2, preps a bottle. The baby stops crying when offered the bottle.

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No. 14 reads the next page. The former teacher goes to a baby on the mat who is further from the childcare worker than the other babies. Ms. Yasmin pulls him closer to her and to the other babies. Ms. Danette reads the next few pages. Then #5 volunteers. Today she has a different hairstyle, a black ponytail tied high on her head. She wears a black blouse with white polka dots, jean shorts trimmed with black and white polka dots, gold hoop earrings, and a thin gold chain with a pendant. She also wears a watch and silver bracelets.

At 11:34 Danette leaves, after promising another book. Side talking starts on the other side of the room, between #2, 3, and 4. No. 14 smiles at #21 and her baby. I note this in contrast to her avoidance of me.

At 11:36 a man brings more magazines. Ms. Marie asks, “Would anybody like more magazines?” Alicia (Liz) says, “Yeah!” [She was one of the first to begin looking through the magazines; she seems engrossed by this task.]

No. 21 asks Mr. Haneef, “What are we supposed to be doing?” He tells her, “Making books.” He takes her baby. Ms. Marie holds up dark blue yarn and asks if anybody wants yarn to tie their books. Several people say yes.

I leave at 11:38 to find Ms. Marilyn and introduce myself. I run into Mr. Abasi first in the cafeteria, talking with Ms. Brown. I ask if Ms. Marilyn is around and he says she’s not supposed to be. I tell him I should talk with both of them, and he asks, now? I say I can talk with him first. [I don’t think I handled this well; I am probably stepping right into whatever politics is between the two of them.]

I ask him if he’s seen the protocol and he says yes. I tell him that I’m doing something different, I’m not using the protocol, I’m taking notes instead. I tell him I’m taking an ethnographic approach, so I want to speak with people about how they are experiencing things: instructors, parents, himself, etc. He says now he can tell his staff, because they have been asking about us.

I ask if the 0-11 months class is always the largest class, and he says no, it happened that way this year. He tells me that the expecting class is also large. I ask if the babies used to be cared for in childcare, and he says that was a long time ago, probably in the first few years. Babies need to be held, fed, changed. He tells me that moms would get upset if a baby had diaper rash, would accuse the childcare workers of improperly changing the baby. After a few minutes he gets a faraway look as he watches people down the hall. An outreach worker comes to talk with him and I excuse myself.

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Marilyn Joseph comes into the auditorium, and I speak with her next. We speak for a long time, or I should say, she speaks for a long time. She tells me it's the first time she's been on vacation during a cycle, and it's strange for her for people not to know her. She tells me she's been working for HCZ for a number of years and has been directing Baby College for a few years. (I forgot the numbers: 15 and 6?) She tells me proudly how Baby College trains women to become advocates for their children and themselves. She talks about how "we do what it takes," citing an example of a mom who praised an outreach worker for coming to her house before Baby College and helping her to get the baby ready. I tell her this is exactly the kind of detail that I want to record. I ask if Betina or Kimberly has spoken to her about accompanying outreach workers, and she says no, but she seems enthusiastic about it.

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[Ms. Joseph comes across as very warm, but I get the sense that she is performing for me. Is her job on the line with this evaluation? What about other staff? Betina has said something about evaluating the program, not the staff. Do people believe this? What is the relationship between Baby College people and HCZ people? (i.e., is there an on-the-ground vs. theory divide?) What about outreach workers vs. senior staff such as Abasi and Marilyn, i.e. those dealing directly with parents vs. the program?]

Added June 6

Ms. Joseph also mentioned

Ms. Joseph must be used to performing for development people as program director.

[Ms. Joseph has not seen the protocol. I am unsure if I made a mistake by mentioning it. She seems to envision a mom that needs to be taught how to be an advocate for their children. This may be true for some but not all moms. This seems to be a trend for HCZ in general: draw a composite picture of "the Harlem parent/child" and act on it: uneducated, don't know about health care and reading to the baby, etc. It's fine when it is true for the majority of participants, but it seems condescending when half or more already seem to get it. Ms. Leavy mentioned the \$100, so this is definitely a powerful motivator (though not necessarily the only motivator).]

When I come back to the auditorium, people are still working on their books. I am not sure if Ms. Marie had a chance to go over the many charts listing developmental goals at different months, or if anyone listened when she did. I look at Sasha's book, which she has called "Elijah's Book of Five Senses." I praise the book, telling her that doing the

five senses was a good idea. [Aliko wrote and illustrated a book on the five senses, and this was a unit I taught in my pre-K science classes.] No. 21 shows me the pages of her book as well, saying, "I don't know what to call it." She narrates the pictures as "playing," "hugging," "eating," and so on. "Action words," I say, but this is still not a title. She's started another book that she wants to be about food, but all she found so far are pictures of junk food. And, to make matters worse, the junk food is from a food magazine. She holds up the magazine, and I see that it's also a gourmet food magazine.

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The former teacher comes up to me and asks if she can speak with me. She wants Baby College to address preterm babies, either by talking a little about it in each class or having a separate class for moms with preterm babies. She tells me, "When other moms say, 'Oh my baby's doing that!' I can't say that." She explains that her baby is doing gross motor movements. "He just turned 9 months," she tells me, but he's not doing the same things as indicated on developmental charts. She understands that some moms don't want to talk about their babies being preterm, but she is not embarrassed to talk about it.

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#15 Spanish Lady gets up to check on her baby. Later, she will tell Yasmin loudly to get the blanket off her face and to put a toy on it (to weigh it down). Yasmin and Mark both try to tell her that the baby is pulling the blanket over her face herself, but she is not mollified until Yasmin pulls the blanket off her baby.

I start talking with Sasha, who asks me what I think of the class. I tell her it's hard to hear, especially the day we sat in the audience, and that the "classroom" is difficult. She says, "Ms. Marie has a tiny voice." She tells me that they started in a classroom, but there were too many people, and even today not everyone is here. "With strollers and everything," it was too crowded. On the stage the space is enough, except today there are desks. She tells me also that people don't need to bring their strollers up, it's not necessary. No. 5 has her stroller on the stage.

77p

At 12:30 Ms. Marie asks people to share their books. Spanish Lady volunteers first. She talks about food safety. I can't really hear her from where I sit. Then #12's baby vomits milk all over the floor, close to my feet. I get up. Haneef is telling the mom, "You should've said, vomit!" [I suppose she had been trying to get his attention or help.] I stand up and hand Haneef a box of tissues, which looks absolutely useless against the enormous puddle on the floor. The few napkins laying around also look useless. Haneef leaves, saying he's going to get somebody to clean it up. The mom looks upset.

A mom with an accent goes next. I can't remember what was in her book. Alicia goes next. Her book has colors and shapes, e.g. green, heart, square. While she reads, a man in a brown uniform comes with a white bucket. Haneef asks, "Aren't you going to mop?" The man answers, "Sweep." He picks up handfuls of sawdust from the bucket and scatters them over the mess. The few napkins the mom has put down have long been soaked, and he covers them as well. Another baby is crying, and the mother gets up.

Ms. Marie reads someone else's book, months of the year, at 12:37. Mr. Haneef is telling #21, sotto voce, "I want you to challenge yourself." She announces, "I want to read

mine,” as the other mother is still reading. Ms. Marie acknowledges her and tells her she can read hers later. Sasha goes next, giving her book to Ms. Marie to read. Ms. Marie shows seeing, hearing, and something else, then asks, “You’re still working on the other two?” Sasha seems confused, then locates the last two pages on her table.

A man reads his book of things his son can be, which has people like “soldier” and “football player” in it. Moms murmur in what sounds to me like a disapproving tone. No. 21 finally gets to read her book, which she has named “__’s first book,” after her child (I don’t catch the name).

While she reads, there is a baby crying. People wear expressions that could be read as tired, hot, and/or bored. People are not looking when #21 reads, and #2 is busy tying her book together. The other man, who has the white partner, reads his book. I can’t hear it at all. When he finishes, people clap, which notable since they did not clap for others.

No. 21 gets up and leaves the stage. She sits in the first row of chairs and changes her baby, her stroller nearby.

Then #2, who I still think of as Gold Sweater, reads her book. The former teacher goes next, and hers is an actual story, a “Bedtime Story for Benjamin.” It’s a meandering story, without a clear plot line, but it’s the first we’ve heard with complete sentences and interacting characters.

Ms. Marie asks if anyone else would like to go. At 12:42 Ms. Marie reads another person’s book that has letters, colors, and numbers. No. 21 gets up and walks away from her baby. The baby starts crying. Mr. Haneef jumps off the stage and distracts the baby, who immediately stops crying.

Ms. Marie asks people what grade they gave themselves on their homework. No 2, Yellow Sweater, gave herself an 8. Number 7 gives herself a 5 “for getting mad.” Somebody else says ruefully that she was late. Ms. Marie asks someone else, “What were you gonna work on?” I notice people packing up. Liz’s baby is in a baby carrier, others have their books stacked neatly. Ms. Marie asks #5, “I think yours was self-discipline. Not eating dairy. How did you do?” No. 5 shakes her head, “Not good.” Ms. Marie asks for a grade, and she responds, “One.”

No. 14 gets up and leaves. At 12:48 Ms. Marie dismisses the class. I stay to help clean up the incredible mess left behind, with markers, manila luggage tags, crayons, magazines, and bits of paper strewn on the desks, and lots of paper scraps on the floor. This includes programs and flyers that Ms. Brown distributed. I pick up and save a couple of these. A mom also helps to clean up. Ms. Luisa eventually comes to help. I chat with Ms. Luisa for a little bit. She considered taking the day off but decided she didn’t want to leave her students. Ms. Marie also speaks with me for a little bit, telling me this is a tough class. [I didn’t hear Ms. Marie ask the parents to help clean up, but I think with the moms having to deal with babies and how everyone seemed to want to get out of there, perhaps she felt she couldn’t.]

Debriefing with Brenda and Kimberly

I meet Brenda outside, who waxes enthusiastic about her class, saying what a great teacher Mr. Hassan was. Kimberly soon joins us. She asks how our classes went, and seeing my face, she tells us to go outside. Both Kimberly and I felt the classes were “okay” whereas Brenda felt that the expecting parents were very engaged, talked a lot with each other. Kimberly thinks there should be soap in the bathrooms given that parents are changing diapers. Mr. Abasi comes out while we are talking, and speaks with us for a few minutes. He goes back inside.

78P

Ms. Leavy and Overstaying My Welcome

After we finish I go inside to use the restroom again. I start talking with a HCZ worker and walk with her into the cafeteria. I spot a mom from Ms. Marie’s class and start talking. This is the mom who felt that Ms. Marie doesn’t listen, and who, according to Betina, Ms. Marie regards as her toughest student. Ms. Leavy says she doesn’t want to tell on Ms. Marie, but quickly starts complaining that Ms. Marie turns her back or starts doing something else when she is speaking, or when “the Spanish lady” is speaking. I ask her if she thinks Ms. Marie does it to everyone or just to them, and she says, “I take it personal.”

79P

[I have seen her do it to other people, but I can see why Ms. Leavy and Spanish Lady might think she singles out the two of them. Firstly, Ms. Marie seems to do it to them consistently, and thus, it is easy to imagine that she does it on purpose—especially if they feel that Ms. Marie dislikes them. Secondly, Ms. Leavy and Spanish Lady stand out in the class as outspoken, tough, unapologetic women, harder than the other women. The other women are soft-spoken and reserved. The former teacher is not afraid to speak her mind, but she fits within the “good student” mold. The “stroller” comment may indicate that other parents feel that Ms. Leavy and Spanish Lady disturb or hinder the class. I wonder if class may play a role here. Do people think of Ms. Leavy and Spanish Lady as low-class, what they do not want to be?]

80P

She says that today, when Spanish Lady began reading her book, and Ms. Marie turned away, Spanish Lady caught her eye and held it. Ms. Leavy felt pressured to maintain eye contact, even though she wanted to play with her baby, since she sees it happening. She tells me that Spanish Lady is ready to explode, whereas she dislikes it but is not boiling mad [my words not hers].

She also mentions that there is the problem of “going around the question,” leaving a question unanswered. This is in response to me feeding her a story about questions going unanswered in another class, specifically, what do you do if you can’t find a doctor who will explain the shots to you? Next, she mentions the outreach worker. She didn’t like Mr. Haneef. She says, “He has a strong personality, I have a strong personality.” She

asked to change outreach workers, and now she has Mr. Mark, who brings her another couple containers of juice. She asks him for ice as well. Mr. Mark is much younger than Mr. Haneef.

Then she starts telling me about mice in her apartment and how the outreach worker can't do anything to help her with it. Baby College has no weight with her landlord. She voluntarily registered herself with ACS, she tells me in a whisper, and they were able to take care of it right away. The landlord took the cabinets down, as she had been requesting, and sure enough, there were three holes behind the cabinets. Baby College "don't have the weight" to help her, she tells me. Ms. Leavy wants people to be able to pull weight for her, to help her get things done. In another situation she had to call and call and call until she found the person who could help her.

437

10

This shortened version is for Betina/HCZ:

She then tells me some very personal stories about traumas in her childhood. She also tells me about her autistic son who faces many challenges. She has another eighteen year old son and another daughter, other than the baby who sleeps while we talk. She also mentions the \$100 parents get upon graduation.

She tells me that ACS helps you, in a tone of surprised conversion. She lists the things that ACS has gotten for her: rattlers, stroller, a crib but she had already bought one. She tells me that ACS wants her off the rolls, because she doesn't need them, but she says she still does. When she says people don't want to go to ACS, I tell her, well, aren't people afraid of having their kids taken away? She tells me they do that only when it's warranted.

438

This may have led into our talk about molestation. She tells me people she knows have been molested. Then she tells me she was molested, but not penetrated, by her stepfather until she was 12 and by a girl cousin who tried to force her to go down on her. She confronted her mother recently, and her mother pretended that she never told her as a child. I told her that in another class, somebody said that if you molest the mother you molest the child, and I said I agreed with this because you carry this with you. She tells me that she also recently spoke with the cousin, who told her that her brother had been raping her.

439

440

At some point I ask her about her kids, and she says she has 4, two boys and two girls. The oldest is 18. "I know I don't look old enough," she says. The other son is autistic. She tells me lots of stories of trying to protect him, e.g. on the bus, where she had to intervene when another boy was hitting him. She got on the bus, and "the matron" yelled at her. She also yelled at a teacher when another boy bit her son. She told me all she could do was yell at the teacher, and she realized that if her son bit another child, she wouldn't want the other parent getting very upset with her. She tells me she doesn't let any man alone with her kids, only once in an emergency, and he still tells the story of when she called him to pick up the kids. She says you can't trust any man.

During some of our conversation, Mr. Russell holds the lottery drawing. She pauses to look at her ticket when he calls the numbers, which are then called in Spanish (but not French). Not everyone stays for the drawing. As we continue speaking, the cafeteria is clearing out. Soon it is mostly HCZ workers, not looking very happy, as Ms. Leavy takes her time changing her baby. When I finally say goodbye and get up to leave, Mr. Abasi tells me I should take a parent into a classroom the next time. People were waiting on us to have their meeting. I tell him I didn't expect the conversation to go on so long, and he says, you'd be surprised.

[This is very embarrassing and upsetting. What if Baby College workers resent me? If I were in their shoes I might. I'm ambivalent about being gone for 2 weeks; at least they won't have to look at me, but I also don't get a chance to do any repair work.]

Some thoughts

[Ms. Leavy's situation raises the question of who does HCZ serve and how? Is it supposed to be for new moms, and not for moms with many years of parenting experience? For all moms? For some? In teaching parents new beliefs about discipline and child-rearing, what about the physical and emotional environment, such as rats and bullies? It would be easy to reduce this mom simply to wanting the money, but three hours every Saturday for nine weeks is a lot of time to invest for \$100. It might be more useful to look at the process of HCZ learning how to serve Harlem: by getting into housing, by working with tenant associations, by working with youth, etc. Does Ms. Leavy count as Harlem? If so, does this work serve her? If not, what would?

Based on these two observations, I see several issues in terms of Ms. Marie's class. One, the interpersonal issue: Ms. Leavy and Ms. Marie seem to dislike one another. According to Ms. Leavy, this is also happening with Spanish Lady. This happens, but in other classes I see instructors acting respectfully towards all of their students, such that whether or not they like them is irrelevant. Ms. Marie may not be acting disrespectfully on purpose, but it is in the interpretation that such things are decided. I think the outreach workers, who observe these interactions and interact with parents one-on-one in their homes, should be consulted here.

Two, Ms. Marie is not the strongest teacher. She needs students to be "good," not challenging her, not speaking out of turn, not asking to have their every word treated as "pearls of wisdom." Other teachers are able to take into stride challenges to the curriculum, side-talking, unsolicited contributions, and personal stories. In fact, they utilize these "problems" to keep the class moving. Part of the

problem is the size of the class, plus the babies, which I think is overwhelming her. Ms. Marie may benefit from watching other teachers or watching videotapes of them (and herself).

Three, Ms. Leavy's expectations of Baby College may be too high. Perhaps Baby College is not designed for people like her. The target audience may be new moms who are anxious about being good parents, and thus more concerned about getting the right information than getting help with the day-to-day challenges of raising a family under difficult circumstances. While I haven't talked with other parents, the other issues that have surfaced have been the difficulty of finding a doctor who will take the time to explain things to you (whether or not you believe in getting your child immunized on the proper schedule), the difficulty of not losing your temper and hitting your child when you are "stressed out," and issues that heavily impact people's lives, such as what to do with children who have ADHD, autism, or are preterm. It seems that outreach workers may be able to help with some of this, but are mainly paid to deal with the curriculum. I could be completely wrong on this issue, so I would appreciate being enlightened about this matter.

Four, as my conversation with Abasi shows, I think the class is way too large. There are 20-30 parents, and also 20-30 babies. The class should be split, given that childcare for the babies is not feasible. This would require extra funding to hire another teacher. Should the 0-11 month class be small enough for one teacher, this person could serve as a substitute instead. But the burden on Ms. Marie is far, far greater than a class of 30 parents without children in the room, not to mention classes of 6-10 parents.

On evaluating Baby College overall, it would be very interesting to hear from the parents who did not return after their first or second class. Perhaps outreach workers can shed some light on this.]