

LINDA – Fieldnotes – July 6, 2007

Subject: Baby College Wrap-Up Meeting

Location: Promise Academy, 125th and Madison, 6th floor

Time: 11:15-12:45

I arrive late, having stayed too long at my office working on a report that is never delivered. I need to sign in at the security desk on the first floor, where the security guard is sitting and talking on the phone. Signing in is not enough however; I need to wait for her to get off the phone and call up to the 6th floor. On the sixth floor another receptionist takes my name. She tells me the conference room is on the right, “in the middle.” [Does every floor have a receptionist? Is this for control as well as security? What do they do all day, by themselves in a little island? Why do you need so many ?]

38P
39P
47P
48P
52P
04P

304
387
430
346

Kimberly and Brenda are sitting across the conference table from Betina, facing the windows. I sit next to Betina. There are six leather chairs around this conference table. They are talking about classes they observed. Kimberly takes a moment to explain this to me.

In talk about building community, which everyone seems to agree that BC does, Brenda mentions a baby shower held for one of the young mothers who has no family. She says she does not know if this is done for all expecting parents. Betina says it is. Brenda says that she thinks it came more from the other parents than Baby College. Betina repeats that Baby College does baby showers once a month.

Kimberly talks about Gwendolyn, the teacher of the young mothers, emphasizing that they value themselves as young women, which she called, “the gender aspect.” Brenda mentioned that the Spanish teacher also showing caring, telling parents in her class to call her. Betina mentioned that the French teacher also seemed really good at helping parents, new to the country and overwhelmed by what seems to be “arbitrary codes.” Betina said that there was a strong sense of the class working together to figure out these codes. At some point Brenda mentioned that the evaluation protocol does not cover “caring.”

Betina asked which one was Gwendolyn. Kimberly said light skinned, with curly hair to here (gesturing to her shoulders). Brenda said something about Gwendolyn walking around barefoot, and Kimberly about “earth mother.” Betina said something about speaking with her at a staffwide retreat.

Betina talked about the disaster of the class in the auditorium. She characterized Marie’s style as “matter-of-fact,” which works for some people. She mentioned that Marie has “challenging students,” and clashes with them. She gave the example of a student who did a back-and-forth with Marilyn about discipline, saying, “I’m gonna do what I want.” [I wonder if this was Ms. Leavy.] She said that Ms. Marie “doesn’t like to be challenged,” and is “not as nurturing” as some of the other teachers.

Brenda mentioned that Mr. Hassan emphasizing building community, staying in touch after the program was over. Betina talked about building community.

Kimberly mentioned Myesha as being really good with children, picking a child up off the floor since she thought it was dirty and continuing with the class. Betina talked about an assistant (outreach worker?) having trouble with people telling stories, with one parent telling a story for 20 minutes. The teacher came back and moved it along, “keep it moving.”

Betina then said, “At the end of the day, what is the implementation study supposed to tell us? Do we need to connect it with particular individuals?” She then said that she didn’t have it all figured out.

She then said something about Baby College being “more about building connection to Harlem Children’s Zone, than the sharing of facts,” especially since the majority of their families come through Baby College. “If the point of interest is in building community and connections,” then it doesn’t matter so much what is being taught at any particular moment.

I say something about how this is what I got out of our interview with Prof. Varenne. Betina does not respond to me. Kimberly says this is more of a program issue, building community vs. covering content. Betina says that she doesn’t know if she wants to invest the resources, something like in asking questions about what people get out of Baby College. Kimberly says something about if they want to say that Baby College causes people to behave and think differently, then they need to show it. I say that it is difficult to show and that this would require doing things like going into homes, which takes a lot of resources, as Betina mentioned. Surveys cannot begin to capture these kinds of questions. Kimberly says something about this being a methodological difference.

Betina says that they can take a subset of individuals, maybe asking the teacher to identify people they thought really changed their attitudes over the course of the class, and “resistant” people, and follow them through the years. She says that sitting through another cycle of Baby College reminded her of “my concerns initially of whether or not people’s behaviors are being changed.” She says that this has shown her that we need to move beyond Baby College, to do ongoing interviews. She says that maybe we could have gone on the home visits, if she had thought to ask. She said that we have “an incomplete picture.”

Brenda mentions Jeopardy, and how she likes this. She thinks people got into it as the weeks went on, especially with the prizes. Kimberly and I try to speak at the same time, and I ask if the others saw Jeopardy spilling into the classes, e.g. teachers covering that material. Brenda says yes, Kimberly no. I mention that Mr. Abasi talked about it as a way to evaluate parents’ learning.

Kimberly mentioned the Land of Make-Believe as a place for better implementation. She said that it was billed as a place to play with your children, but this didn’t really happen.

Brenda said she didn't even know what it was until recently, that she found out that other classes went to their children. In the Spanish class, the children were brought to the room and Ms. Esperanza read a story to them.

At some point, Brenda says that Ms. Esperanza encouraged parents to bring in songs they sung as children and she would copy them and make a book for the parents. "I thought that was nice," Brenda says. I say that maybe this can continue throughout the years, since so many of the resources were English or American culture. I refer to Brenda in saying that once translation services were provided, parents seemed to be able to participate more.

Betina mentioned that Mr. Russell encouraged parents to share their resources with one another, e.g. a website that lists free events for children in New York.

Brenda was impressed by all the resources, e.g. the safety gate, socket plugs, etc. Kimberly mentioned that in one of her classes, a mother said that children easily removed those plugs, and that there is another one that you put behind the plate. The instructor asked her to find out the name and come back, and maybe they could talk with the director and get the new plugs. Betina said something about the difficulty of removing the plate and installing a more complicated plug.

Brenda then asked to go over the protocol. She said the hardest to gauge was student involvement. Each class was different, with different codes in each class. [I believe this refers to previous discussions about the Spanish class not talking a lot but still being engaged.] She said the type of instruction was easy to code, but sometimes had to force behaviors into categories. Kimberly asked if Brenda coded the personal story differently from stories on the news, STS or STT. Betina pushed her protocol codes at me. Brenda said that the cognitive activity was also hard to gauge, deciding between 3 or 4. On Betina's page, 3 read "knowledge representation (comprehension, describing)." There was no four on Betina's sheet.

At some point we talk about how noisy the auditorium is. Brenda says in the first few weeks people were just confused, especially when the Spanish mothers were asked to hand over their babies (without knowing what was going on). Betina jokes, didn't you know you handed over the rights to your baby? Betina says that she initially found Rayven "odd," but came to appreciate her later. She calls her a "jester," popping up in class. She says it took awhile to figure out that they were teaching songs that parents could teach to their children. Kimberly also says that she found Rayven's appearances odd. She says that she tells her boyfriend to sing these songs to his nephew. She likes the speckled frog on a log song.

I say something about how well-organized Baby College seems, with so many people. I think Brenda said that it took all of the cycle for parents to get used to the structure, to know where HCZ is, to know about the programs. I say that I think it takes this long, as a newcomer to HCZ I needed to hear things over and over again. Walking in the first day

and seeing so many people in blue shirts, and somebody I met on my first day and greeting me but I didn't remember them.

Kimberly asks a question about lesson plan vs. agenda, and Betina says if we can get the lesson plans that would be good. Instructors meet on Wednesday to go over lesson plans. I say that the instructors I saw often did not follow the order of topics on the agenda but would get to everything eventually.

Kimberly also mentioned getting another teacher for the baby class. I replied that this would be difficult; you would need a floating teacher, since class size depends on who shows up. Betina repeats that you don't know how big the classes are going to be, and that there is a different curriculum. Kimberly asks how different the curriculum is, that if this is a theory vs. practice question, because "reading singing playing" seemed to be the mantra for the day and there wasn't much age-specific material. Betina says yes, the focus is different for brain development and immunization. I say they are different in theory, but that the instructors probably feel they need to know age-specific material, e.g. Ms. Marie who had charts on the various months for brain development.

Kimberly is wearing a yellow sleeveless low-cut sundress with an empire waist, decorated with tan flowers and pink pollen. Her hair begins in cornrows and ends in a natural. She wears a tortoiseshell headband and small dangly earrings. Brenda wears a $\frac{3}{4}$ tight black shirt and a large shell pendant on a black thong.

Either Kimberly or Brenda asks what should be in the report. Betina wants to see sections devoted to different areas: auditorium time, instructional time, materials and use of materials, how people are utilized and dispersed (although none of us focused on it), topic areas and interrelatedness (contributed by Kimberly).

Next to evaluate is Harlem Gems, which has a DVD training. [Was there one for Baby College?]

Betina mentions the hiring of Eliza Gordon, who is possibly related to Ed Gordon, since they come from the same area of Jamaica. Also they will need to buy—no, hire, a new Senior Researcher, since Kimberly is leaving. [Real life intrudes in all the talk about being committed to the community.]

Brenda asks if the report is going back to the Baby College staff, mentioning our encounter with Marilyn. Betina hedges with her usual "Um?" and says that she has no reason not to give them feedback. She says that she doesn't want us working under that constraint. I say that my understanding was that she would filter what would be useful, and she says that she didn't plan on doing a lot of filtering.

When we finish, Betina asks me how my project is going, if I am doing something like getting into the community. I tell I would not say that, but that I am getting to know institutions in the community. I tell her we're getting into community gardens, and she

says that they “have the pulse of the community.” I say that we’re talking with a lot of people, I can’t keep up with it all.

Kimberly asks Brenda if she wants all of her materials (she is leaving for Atlanta next week). Betina turns to me and asks if I have “given any thought” to what next. I ask her for her thoughts, and she repeats the bland things she said before, about how different my perspective is. I tell her that I felt constrained by my tenuous position (I think I said I felt insecure about my position) and did not talk to as many people as I would like. She repeats her concern about taking too much of people’s time. I say that the program directors, Marilyn and Abasi, would take us aside and talk with us for quite a bit. We decide to talk with Ed Gordon first then decide. [I think it’s pretty clear that neither of us really want to continue working together.]

I am struck by how subjective this process is, with lots of “I think” and “I feel” kinds of assessments happening with little to show for it. And these are the quantitative people!! I should not be surprised; this is, after all, how knowledge is made and millions of dollars are allocated in a very conventional process.