

CIA Beacon Heights Elementary

**Community Inquiry**

The halls at Beacon Heights are filled with various forms of art representing many different peoples and cultures. In the main entrance are benches with tile art made by the students. The walls are covered in student art that seem to have a lot of ethnic diversity. Some walls only have one or two pieces that have people of color but others have a lot of it. In the morning before class starts the halls are filled with students from a lot of different backgrounds. It does seem predominantly white but not as white washed as other schools I've been to. There also isn't much segregation. I haven't seen an instance where a group from one cultural background is standing off alone. All of the kids are bantering with each other. The few students who are alone are usually heading somewhere or simply waiting for class to begin.

During lunchtime, Mrs. Dinh let's her student go to lunch by themselves. When they are in her class they are generally quiet with a few outbursts but when they get in the halls the volume quickly rises. Not to a crazy level, but the kids are less conscious about their actions. They head to the lunchroom and either has a lunch brought from home or get school lunch. They can also choose where they want to sit in the lunchroom by grade level. This was interesting because I saw a few kids from my class sitting with kids in other classes in different groups. The main groups that I saw were groups of boys and girls. Ethnicity wise I didn't see any particular groupings, lunch groups were pretty well mixed. There was a table separated for

kids who couldn't eat nuts. I don't like when schools do this because it separates the students.

During recess there were a lot of groups playing games: Tag, kickball, foursquare etc. Everyone who wanted to play was included. At one time a younger student wanted to play with the 5<sup>th</sup> graders and they didn't want to let him, but then the kid grabbed the recess aid and coerced the 5<sup>th</sup> graders to let him. There were one or two students reading alone along the fence and a few wandering around by themselves. Some conversations I heard were about various You-Tubers (girls), and sports teams BYU vs. U (boys), Some kids were discussing Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton (girls and boys). They were talking about how neither of them were good candidates and making jokes that they would have to move to Canada. The kids did seem to be grouped by grade and gender, there wasn't a ton of mixing. There are also a few kids with autism and I was surprised that everyone was including them if they wanted to play.

In my classroom the teacher uses the diversity of her classroom to her advantage. She has a mix of both ELP, learners who are behind, and a few kids of color. She mixes up the grouping of the students so that they aren't clustered. Each group has a mix of kids so that there isn't a definable group, but within the groups the students are happy to help each other. For example there is a child with autism and within the group they take turns helping him stay on track. It's good to see that the teacher doesn't just assign one student to help him all the time.

Beacon Heights seems like a school that celebrates its diversity. They incorporate celebrating every culture through art and simply being inclusive in the classroom.

During recess I didn't see anyone being bullied or being excluded without consequence. Some questions that I have: Is there a way that the School sorts students into Classes? Do they try to make classes equally diverse? Or pick teachers who handle Diversity in their class better? What are their pullout supports?

## 2. The Surrounding Community



Beacon Heights Elementary is located in Sugar House near Foothill Boulevard. Numerous parks including Sugar House Park, Laird Park, Dilworth Park, and Carrigan Canyon surround the Elementary.



Nearby amenities include Foothill Village and The Commons at Sugarhouse, a Megaplex movie theater, and the Hogle Zoo. One problem that I have heard a lot of people mention is the traffic jams that happen on Foothill Boulevard. Many of the teachers say that they have to leave for school early or avoid the road altogether because of the traffic.

While walking around the neighborhood many of the houses seem well taken care of. It seems like it's a Middle Class community because there aren't a ton of huge houses but I couldn't find a house that looked run down or dilapidated. Some children were outside playing soccer or other games with siblings or friends in their yards without supervision. This seems to show that the community is fairly safe if parents are letting their kids play outside alone. The diversity of Beacon Heights is around 28% and families with low income enrolled in the school is at 20% (Communications Department | Salt Lake City School District). Both of these are not very high compared to other schools in the Salt Lake School District.

The community surrounding Beacon Heights seems like it has a lot of resources for students. There are many centers such as the Hogle Zoo, The Leonardo, and The Museum of Natural History etc. that teachers could utilize to enrich their students' learning. Also because the community is fairly well off the school can get good support from the PTA and easily get materials and resources necessary for their class.

### 3. A Conversation

For my conversation I contacted Elsa Davis, the After School Coordinator for Beacon Heights. She had a few minutes to talk to me right after school ended and when her program started. I started off by asking her how she thought the school was doing as a whole. She said that she thought it was a pretty great school. She mentioned that the school had a little diversity and that there wasn't much of a bullying problem.

The parents are very involved in the PTA and do a lot for the school's teachers and donate quite a bit for school supplies. She also mentioned that the school gets a Beverly Sorenson Taylor grant for art and also has a competitive Chess team. I then asked her about what she thought about the kids. She told me that she has a very diverse group of kids that she works with. The reason they are in the program is because their parents work so they have their kids stay in the program until they get off work to pick them up. I asked her if this caused the students to have behavior problems? She said that she had kids from kindergarten to 6<sup>th</sup> grade and didn't notice any abnormal behavior problems. Behavior problems usually stem from the kids because they have been in school all day and are still stuck at school until 5. So she tries to make her program fun so they aren't bored. She said some of the kids are more street smart simply because their parents are gone and sometime have to fend for themselves which can cause some behavior problems but it doesn't happen all the time. I then asked what she was most pleased with by her community. She told me that the best thing is that the parents are so involved. She hasn't had any issues with parents not know what is going on. When there are field trips, programs or events happening she gets a lot of parent volunteers to come help out.

#### 4. Write Up

This CIA assignment helps me as a student to get to know my students and their community. By knowing my students funds of knowledge I can be able to alter

the curriculum to best reach the kids. One thing I noticed across all three areas is how involved the parents are in daily school life. By noticing this I can use the parents of my students as an asset to my classroom. When I have my own class I will want to know which parents are the most involved and which would be likely to help with class activities. Another good thing to know is that there is going to be some diversity in my classroom. This is beneficial because it will allow me to discuss cultural values in my class and how they differ for every student. I can also alter curriculum so that it suits the culture of my classroom. If there are students of color in my class I will want to pick literature and materials that include people of multiple ethnicities. It's also great to know the surrounding area of your school so that you can plan field trips. Because Hogle Zoo is so close, you can know to gauge your classroom to see if they have all been there before. If the students have been there several times it might be better to plan a field trip somewhere else to get the most out of it. I would like to find more about where the parents work in the community. Do they work at the Colleges nearby? In Salt Lake? Do the parents have to commute to work? By knowing this information I could understand more of my kids background knowledge to alter my lessons. For example if some of my kids' parents work in colleges and museums, I can use this to get those kids to engage in those topics in class.

### **Funds of knowledge Analysis**

Rayannah:

I picked Rayannah because she is a student of color and she is a little low in math and writing. In class she likes to talk and answer questions. It seems like she has a lot of rapport with her fellow classmates. She's always bantering and having fun. She sometimes likes to bring up conversations in class to get a reaction out of people. For example she frequently brings up Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, and her classmates quickly get in an argument every time. Or if something controversial pops up such as a swear word in a book, she immediately points it out. When she is out at recess there are several girls and boys she plays with. I haven't ever seen her sitting off by herself.

When working in a group she easily gets her work done, but when she has to work on her own she tends to get distracted and the teacher has to keep reminding her to focus. It seems that when she is given an assignment she jumps into it and doesn't read the instructions. When she was writing an opinion essay on bats, the teacher gave a graphic organizer to help them organize their thoughts. They were supposed to use it to write a five-paragraph essay: Intro, three supporting paragraphs, and conclusion. Instead of organizing her thoughts she simply started writing facts down on each line without any organization. When I found her organizer like this, I explained what she needed to do and helped her think of arguments. When she knew what to do she erased her previous work, and got her thoughts out. It just seems she skipped the instructions, and filled in the blanks with random information.

Rayannah's Mother (Angelina)

I scheduled a meeting with Rayannah's mom to get more information and asked the following questions:

1. What are some things your child might do on a particular weekend?

Rayannah loves to Dance and loves the attention she gets from it. She sometimes just dances when she is bored or if she wants to get your attention. She often spends time playing with friends or being involved in whatever her mom has going on. They are a very close-knit family.

2. What kind of activities do you like to do with Rayannah?

When she has time Angelina loves spending time with Rayannah. Last weekend they both entered a Spelling Bee that they found was posted at a library. They each entered their age group and practiced together until the contest. Angelina likes to talk to her daughter about everything that's going on every morning. They spend their breakfast time going through the newspaper and talking about current events.

3. What subject does your child like to study at school?

Rayannah has a love for politics; her mother instilled this in her. They often talk about what is going on every morning. She also loves Social Studies for the same reason. Rayannah is very pert about her opinions and had no fear in sharing them.

4. Are there aspects of school that your child has indicated he does not like?

Rayanna dislikes independent work. She is very much a social kid and prefers working with friends. If she is left to herself she tends to daydream and get



distracted by what's going on outside etc. Even at home she is the same way. She likes working on homework in the company of her family and doesn't get anything done when she is left to herself.

Because I know these things about Rayannah, I can use it to better my instruction. Since I have noticed that she works better in groups, I can make more of the assignments in that form. If I do assign independent assignments I will make sure she understands what we are doing before letting her take off on her own. When a controversial topic comes up in class I can be better prepare to counter Rayannah's questions or simply have a private discussion with her to help her know what is appropriate to bring to the classes attention. Some questions that I would like to ask her would be about her family life, interests, and traditions. I feel like if I knew more about her then I would be able to craft lessons that were culturally appropriate for her or at the very least more engaging for her.

Hossein:

I picked Hossein because is an Iranian ESL boy who is low in most subjects due to the language barrier. In class Hossein is very quiet and doesn't try to speak much. He does have a few friends who help him out, but I don't think there is anyone who speaks his language. He does have conversational English and this shows through in his writing as well. When he is around his friends at recess he is very talkative. Most of the conversations that I heard involved Pokémon or some video

game that had come out. A lot of the time he is being pulled out by various resource teachers. I think this causes a problem simply because he is out of class while the teacher is giving instructions. He then comes back to class and has to be caught up by the students around him.

In class the teacher differentiates for him. He still has to do the same assignments as all of the other children, just at his level of comprehension. For example the students were working on explorer reports. The students had to write an essay about their explorer, but the teacher allowed him to make a power point to present his information instead. When he is in class during group work he has the support to do his assignments because of the other kids, but when its independent work the teacher has him come to a kidney table and work with him if he needs help.

In his instance I know that he needs a lot of support in the classroom to be successful. Since he has a great relationship with one of the students in the class, I might try to pair them up for group assignments. For all of the worksheets and papers that I would hand out, I would want to have them in simplified vocabulary or have the definitions of difficult words. Further information that I would like to know about Hossein would be his IEP, what his family and culture is like and his specific interests.

## **Student Interview**

Rayannah

1. Tell me about your family?

She has five people in her family, Her mom and dad and two older brothers. She also has a pet dog. Her dad works in politics (but she couldn't remember her dad's title) and her mom is a stay at home mom. She said she sometimes visits her cousins in Cedar City.

2. What do you like to do? Free time? Hobbies?

Rayannah likes to dance. She has been in dance since she was 7. She sometimes goes to her friend Sage's house and they often play games, watch movies, and jump on her trampoline. She isn't fond of playing sports and only does so when she has too, like in P.E. In the winter her family goes skiing.

3. What is your favorite subject in school? Least favorite?

Her favorite subject is music. She is currently learning how to play the violin and loves it. Every year the students get to pick an instrument they want to learn and the music teacher helps them learn songs. Her least favorite subject is writing. She doesn't mind doing poetry or journaling, but she hates writing essays because they take so long to finish.

4. When your family gets together or goes out on the town, where do you go or do?

When her family gets together for parties or holidays, they usually come to Rayannah's house. Everyone cooks a ton of food then they play games and tell stories. She said it's the old people who tell stories though. Her favorite restaurant to go to is Hub and Spoke, or Olive Garden, when she gets to pick where they go. Her family also goes to the movies frequently and when its warm the go on hikes a lot. By the time I asked this question Rayannah said she was done and wanted to go do something else. So I thanked her and let her leave.

This interview was helpful because it let me know a lot about her family life and situation. From what she said her family seems pretty close and they do get around to restaurants and the around the city. Hub and spoke is a local family owned restaurant nearby so they don't only go to chains. I could use this by having my students draw maps and see if the class could map the local restaurants and not just the chain stores. By knowing what her favorite and least favorite subjects are I can try to cater my lessons to what she would enjoy more. Since I know she's not fond of writing, I could try to engage her in different ways to change that sentiment.

**Write up**

Both of these exercises gave me deeper understanding about the students funds of knowledge. In the first shadowing exercise I had the chance to observe the students without having to ask questions. In this setting I could get a view of how they act around their peers as well as insights into their feelings. In the interview I got more information about specific likes and dislikes, but I'm sure the answers might have been catered somewhat to what Rayanna thought I wanted to hear. Also in the interview you need to build a good relationship the students in order to get more personal about culture and beliefs. As a teacher I would have more time to build that relationship. The big take away I see from this assignment is that the more in tune I get with my classes' funds of knowledge the better I can enhance what I teach to be more relevant and culturally inclusive. . When I have a class I would like to be able to do this intuitively as an everyday thing.

### References

Communications Department | Salt Lake City School District. (n.d.). District Demographics :: Salt Lake City School District. Retrieved October 11, 2016, from [http://www.slcschools.org/schools/District-Demographics.php#.V\\_1snFyg60v](http://www.slcschools.org/schools/District-Demographics.php#.V_1snFyg60v)