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Peer reviewed

Roderic Crooks

One-to-One Program: Day 32.

The parole officer is back. He is sitting at one of the picnic tables in the courtyard, shielding his eyes from the glare so he can read the paperwork he has brought to a skinny boy in an enormous sweatshirt. The sweatshirt kid fiddles nervously with the iPad in his lap, refusing to look the officer in the eye. On the side of the courtyard closer to the wall of the school building, the girls' soccer team is in the process of assembling, having been excused from class by an announcement over the public address. "iPads, iPads, iPads," Coach Morales chants, reminding his players to leave their tablet computers in the office before they leave's Number Seven's school grounds for the game.

Los Angeles Academy Schools College Prep # 7 is located here, in South Central, perennially one of the poorest parts of the city, a few miles from the futuristic skyline of downtown. Academy Schools refers to each of its 25 junior and senior high schools by number, until a donor gives enough money for the right to have the school renamed in his or her honor. About 650 black and latinx students study here daily, most of them from Spanish-speaking homes. In the three years I will study this school's exemplary, federally funded experiment with information technology, a program that gives every student, teacher, and administrator a tablet to promote computer literacy, there will never be a white or Asian student. Number Seven has no gymnasium, library, or cafeteria; instead, the school has this courtyard, a strip of blacktop smaller than a basketball court, that hosts lunch, assemblies, parent-teacher conferences, staff meetings, and classes. I come here to stretch out between class observations.

The parole officer says, “Keep doing good things and stay away from all that stuff that got you in trouble.” He repeats this advice a few times as the sweatshirt kid signs his way through the stack of forms with a ballpoint pen, using the back of his iPad like a clipboard. The wind catches the edges of the sheets, threatening to take them up in a gust. At the other end of the long courtyard, in the little bit of shade there is today, another kid is playing an accordion, norteño-style. The soccer team files out the metal gate past the security guard to the street, shuffling to the music.

Days like today, when the wind picks up and blows hot air over the mountains and down into the city, everyone gets listless. The smell of smoke and gasoline hangs in the air, skyscrapers on the horizon a rippling mirage in the bone-dry air. Teachers trail off while reading aloud, realizing gradually that they have become lost on the page, their students too absorbed in their own thoughts to offer assistance. I walk inside the school, each classroom visible from the hallway through a slim rectangle of safety glass: the teachers have turned off the lights inside their rooms, making of each a small, cool cave.

In 5th period geometry, Ms. Bermudo, who is also the technology coordinator, has something to show me. Her students are seated in small groupings of tables in the darkened classroom, the undersides of their faces lit by the spectral glow of LCD. She grabs an iPad from a boy called Hector to demonstrate why so many student devices are inexplicably out of storage space despite the fact that teachers have not been using them to teach classes: the kids have been making slide shows. The images of this particular slide show are all photos downloaded from the Internet: cars, women in various attitudes of PG13 sensuality, musicians, sneakers, famous beaches, outrageously polychromatic sunsets, murals — an extensive, curated visual encyclopedia of the Southern California aesthetic. Playfully, commending Hector on his

creativity, Ms. Bermudo proceeds to delete all the obviously non-educational material from the tablet one file at a time. The class titters at Hector's misfortune, reciting rules about the iPads to one another to punctuate Ms. Bermudo's teasing. Because she has shown them that she is in control, she can afford to be indulgent, to let them have a laugh.

A student at a nearby table chimes in, "You should check his browser history, Miss." The class erupts into jeers and catcalls, clearly savoring Hector's continuing embarrassment.

Ms. Bermudo, bemused, says, "I should." She continues her examination of Hector's iPad, languidly swiping to delete Hector's collections with the same elegant gesture seen in advertisements. Hector looks beyond Ms. Bermudo, still standing above him, and rather matter-of-factly informs his classmate that if anything objectionable should be found in the browser history, he will beat the other kid's ass.

The class looks to Ms. Bermudo, and a hush falls over them as they wait to see if she will punish the threat of violence, an expulsion-worthy infraction. A bell rings, ending the class period, but all the students remain seated. They sit expectantly, looking at Ms. Bermudo, waiting for her to tell them whether or not they can move.