**Discussion Analysis**

` I decided to do my discussion analysis on a 20 minute segment during day number four of Jess and my Hunger & Poverty Unit. The twenty minute section revolves around the article “The Hunger Banquet” that the students had read for homework the night before. The twenty minute section that I have chosen starts very close to the beginning of the DVD with Jess’s line “What I think would be a fun idea is if the students put on a Hunger Banquet for the community” and ends when Jocelynne says “I’m taking this right now” (referring to the World Hunger Quiz). I have been told numbers do not lie, and I look forward to delving into the data regarding our own group-led discussion. The class is a relatively small one with only nine members: one professor (Allen), two group leaders (Jess Ferris and myself), and six students (Jake, Brian, Jess Cole, Jocelynne, Danielle, and Jenn. I chose to use a very simple method for collecting data: simply keeping track of who was talking, in what order, and for how long. This, paired with a couple other observations, gives enough data to get a truer picture of what happened in this “whole group” discussion. The truer picture gives us some insight on teacher to student speaking ratios, comments vs questions, student participation vs non-participation, and even more. Before watching the recording I thought I knew what had happened in our class discussions, now I am not as convinced.

The first area of examination is the relationship between student participation and teacher participation, but this is a particularly complicated area in this particular discussion. Our class typically had one professor (Allen) and eight students. However, in this discussion, we had one professor, two group leaders, and six students. This gives us a couple different ways to separate and break up data. Either we consider Allen a teacher (bringing the total to 3) or we consider him another participating student leaving only Jess Ferris and myself as teachers. Let’s first look at data while classifying Allen as a third teacher. In this scenario the teachers talked for a total of 9 minutes and 35 seconds and the students talked for a total of 9 minutes and 8 seconds. This means students talked 48.8% of the time to the teachers 51.2% which is amazingly close to 50/50. The ratio (still considering Allen as a teacher) of teachers to students is 1:2 so an even distribution of teacher to student talk, where each member of the classroom spoke equally, would put teacher talking time at 6 minutes and 14 seconds to students talking time of 12 minutes and 28 seconds. This means that the teachers talked 3 minutes and 21 seconds longer than our even share, which I am going to personally consider less than ideal.

Luckily for Jess and I, we have Allen in the class and can fool around with the numbers enough to make ourselves feel better. If we change Allen’s designation to student in this class the data observed tells a different story. In this scenario the teachers talked for a total of 4 minutes while students talked a total of 14 minutes and 43 seconds. This means the teachers talked 21.4% of the time while the students talked 78.6% of the time which brings the ratio of student to teacher talk close to 4 to 1. In a classroom with this caliber of “students” I think this ratio of discussion could be a very productive level. I see instances where this might be too high of a percentage of student voices, but that is only if the discussion moved in the wrong direction or waited too long in one place. If the discussion does not need to be guided I think a lot of good can be done by letting it take its own path.

There are more ways that these same numbers can be examined other than along a strict teacher/student looking glass. First I want to establish that for the rest of this analysis Allen will be considered a third teacher. That leaves us with data from six students who talked for a total of 8 minutes and 54 seconds. The first way I would like to compile these adjusted numbers is separating each individual student. Jocelynne talked for 5 minutes and 11 seconds and Jess Cole talked for a total of 2 minutes and 52 seconds for a combined total of 8 minutes and 3 seconds. This means the total combined time of the other four students was a paltry 51 seconds. That means that Jocelynne and Jess together talked 9.4 times longer than the other four students combined. Jake, Brian, Danielle, and Jenn made up only 9.6% of the total student participation in the discussion and an even more shocking 4.5% of the discussion. That is 4 out of 9 total participants!

This ratio (and granted 20 minutes is not a huge snapshot) is alarming, and if it was indicative of all five days of our group I am surprised that it was not very apparent to me. Even more troubling is if we divide the students down gender lines. The ratio here is a bit skewed: 2 to 1 in the favor of the females but even allowing for that the numbers are staggering. The two male students combined to speak for only 18 seconds or 1.6% of the entire speaking time in the discussion. The female students spoke for a total of 8 minutes 36 seconds and accounted for 45.6 percent of the total spoken time in the discussion. These numbers again are a touch unsettling.

If we add the teachers back into the equation the ratio equals out drastically over the gender divide. The four males in the class spoke for a total of 8 minutes 35 seconds or 45.9% of the discussion while the five females in the class spoke a total of 9 minutes 54 seconds and made up a total of 54.1% of the discussion. I believe the division of voices along the gender line is an interesting area to keep an eye on. I definitely do not think that that the ratio between the two genders voices being heard in the classroom necessarily needs to be 50/50, but a consistently female heavy or male heavy ratio could be the cause of some underlying tone in a classroom. It might be the case that the thoughts and ideas of both genders are not valued and expected in equal amounts. There are of course reasons that this number could be skewed one way or the other, a classroom could be majority male or female and most scenarios there is only one gender of teacher voice.

Moving away from the student participation times in the discussion, I have a couple other observations. The total time spent not-talking in this 20 minute segment was negligible, only 32 seconds (10 seconds of silence, 10 of a phone ringing, and 12 where there were so many voices to make the discussion indecipherable) but I think this could have been a bit of good luck. When I get the chance to analyze my own classroom discussions again I will be sure to time out the pauses and distractions just as much as the student participation. I was relieved to see that the time not spent on actual discussion was only 2.7% of the total. I think the amount of silence definitely could see a large increase in a discussion without being detrimental to the discussion in itself. Silence can be a time where students and teachers regroup themselves and internalize what has just occurred in the discussion. There might be people who can properly digest what was just said while also listening to something else being said but I would not claim myself among them.

From here I would like to move this discussion analysis towards an individual student. In the poorest of efforts to maintain confidentiality I am going to refer to this student as Bob. Bob did not speak once in this twenty minute segment. As a group leader in this small of a class that is something I should have noticed and attempted to address. Something as simple as “Bob, what are your thoughts on this?” probably would have done the trick. I am upset I didn’t do this because past experience with Bob tells me that his thoughts are worth hearing. It also would have brought the combined total of teacher questions in this 20 minute segment up to two. Additionally, in this twenty minute segment Bob left the class for 2 minutes and 35 seconds and had his computer screen on and his phone out the entire time. It disturbs me that I did notice this during the actual class even though my trivia players constantly inform me that I can be rather oblivious. It helps to do this type of self-analysis once in a while in order to make this kind of discovery.

The numbers in this twenty minute segment can have differed drastically from how the numbers would have looked if taken from the entire class period. Still there are lessons to be learned from this exercise; most importantly that time doing a self-analysis of your own teaching is always going to be well spent. The worst thing that can happen is that my general perception of m classroom is confirmed. More likely, however, is that every different analysis will point out things that I might have missed or never considered. It might be as simple as one student who never speaks up or something more troubling like a disproportionate number of male or female voices consistently in the conversation. This analysis has helped develop a skill I will try to remember to use often in the future.

DATA

1. F18
2. A2
3. F9
4. X5
5. A25
6. Everbody3
7. C25
8. M10
9. J10
10. M6
11. C10
12. F2
13. A6
14. M2
15. A20
16. Everbody 6
17. C8
18. A100
19. X12
20. A21
21. J6
22. F26
23. A25
24. B6
25. M28
26. F2
27. M20
28. D10
29. A20
30. J8
31. A5
32. C10
33. B2
34. Silence 8
35. A21
36. M10
37. J6
38. F14
39. M3
40. A40
41. J28
42. B2
43. J78
44. Phone ring 10
45. J25
46. M12 Question on Active Learning Thoughts
47. M28
48. C42
49. J28
50. C4
51. X6
52. M8
53. A50
54. C30
55. J22
56. M2
57. C17
58. M12
59. C24
60. J42
61. M11
62. C?2
63. J48

**Data Key**

M=Me

F=Jess Ferris

A=Allen

C=Jess Cole

J=Jocelynne

X=Jenn

D=Danielle

B=Brian

K=Jake Knaggs

F18 = Jess Ferris talked for 18 seconds

**Totals**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Name | # | Time  Talked |
| Me | 15 | 2m42sec |
| Jess F. | 6 | 1m18sec |
| Allen | 13 | 5m35sec |
| Jess C. | 10 | 2m52sec |
| Jocelynne | 11 | 5m11sec |
| Jenn | 3 | 23 sec |
| Danielle | 1 | 10 sec |
| Brian | 3 | 18 sec |
| Jake | 0 | 0 sec |

**Non Talking Totals**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| All Talking | 2 | 10 sec |
| Silence | 2 | 12 sec |
| Phone | 1 | 10 sec |

**Other Notes**

Jake Break 2 minutes 35 seconds

Teacher guided questions

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