

5-9-2012

What about the Quiet Students?: Investigating Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Non-Participatory Students

Elise Appold
Valparaiso University

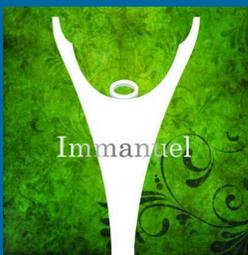
Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholar.valpo.edu/sarp>

 Part of the [Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

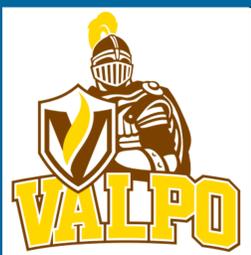
Appold, Elise, "What about the Quiet Students?: Investigating Students' and Teachers' Perceptions of Non-Participatory Students" (2012). *Education Senior Action Research Projects*. Paper 15.
<http://scholar.valpo.edu/sarp/15>

This Research Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Department of Education at ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Education Senior Action Research Projects by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.



What About the Quiet Students?: Investigating Perceptions of Classroom Discussion

Elise Appold; Dr. Del Gillispie
Department of Education, Valparaiso University



OBJECTIVE

While student-teaching in an 8th Grade classroom I have observed that only a certain amount of students participate in class discussions. Other students sit idly with seemingly nothing to say. Sometimes they seem to be listening, while other times it seems that they are not paying any attention. My observations caused me to wonder:

- When do students like to speak up in class?]
- What classes do they feel comfortable talking in?
- Does the way they are feeling on a certain day affect their willingness to participate?
- Do they feel like "talking an issue out" helps them comprehend an issue more thoroughly?

I also investigated Middle School teachers' perceptions of quiet students.

- Why do they think some students sit quietly?
- Why do only some volunteer?
- Moreover, do teachers give points for participation?
- Do they believe that content knowledge is broadened through dialogue only?

The data that I collected helps me to know my students better and prepares me for continued work in a Language Arts classroom.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The research represented in this review does not just contain observations about quiet students. It contains research that probes why teachers are so bothered by silent students, and it contains research that discourages teachers from just applauding the participating students.

It, also, contains research that theorizes discussion and its purpose and research that criticizes teachers who determine intelligence without considering culture. I have included all this research because I want to be sensitive to my students' unique needs, behaviors, and cultures in the classroom.

I want to be able to use discussion as pedagogy, but I want to ensure that it is benefiting all of my students and helping all of them to learn content and develop deeper understandings.

METHODOLOGY

To investigate this research question, I decided that the best avenue for collecting the information I needed would be through surveys given to 7th and 8th grade students and Middle School teachers (40 students and 3 teachers). The surveys were to be anonymous and questions were crafted succinctly to gather accurate data.

I have realized that I am doing research in this area every day. I am constantly trying new methods for leading, guiding, and facilitating discussion in my Language Arts classroom.

I have recorded students' discussions and made notes along the way about ideas that worked well and- likewise- ideas that were not so well received. More than the surveys though, I find these observations to be the most informative piece of research I have produced.



STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS

-56% of students reported in their surveys that they were most willing to participate when they felt knowledgeable about a subject or were especially interested in the subject.

-Another 26% said that if they feel comfortable with the teacher they will speak up in class.

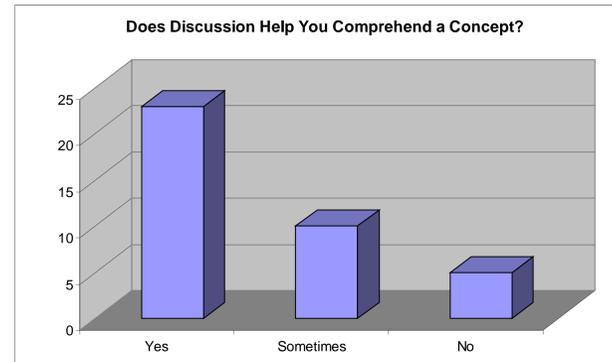
-When asked how a teacher would respond to a wrong answer given, 70% of students said their teacher would make a constructive remark and move on with the discussion.

-However, 18% of students wrote that their teacher would help them find a right answer and then move on with the discussion.

-More than half of the students- 58% - revealed that they would feel embarrassed if they volunteered a "wrong" answer in class.

-18% of students said that if they said a "wrong" answer in class, they would not feel badly because their "wrong" answer helped the class find the "right" answer.

STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS (CONT'D)



-58% of students reported that they believe that discussion helps their ability to comprehend.

-I found it interesting that 25% of students said discussion only sometimes helps them comprehend because:

- 1) Discussion can become "off topic"
- 2) It depends on the people involved or
- 3) They might still be confused.

-Yet, 13% said that discussion was not beneficial to their comprehension because:

- 1) They have their own opinions and like being private
- 2) They are ahead of their other classmates
- 3) They still feel confused.

TEACHER SURVEY RESULTS

Do Middle School teachers give points for class participation?

-2/3 responded "no"

Do you believe discussion broadens students' content knowledge?

-All of the teachers responded "yes," that discussion enhances students' and even teacher's content knowledge.

-1 teacher added, though, that discussion does not always broaden knowledge the way you want it to be broadened.

Alternative pedagogical methods for increasing comprehension?

Group work, Cooperative learning, and/or individual inquiry.

LIMITATIONS

One of the ideas I hoped to research was the concept of "right" and "wrong" answers. For some classes like Science, Math, and Spelling there are correct answers and there are incorrect answers.

However, often in a Language Arts classroom there are unclear divisions between right and wrong. Readers are supposed to form personal responses to a text and talk about their opinions.

One of my survey questions asked about how teachers responded when students gave the wrong answer. I thought that some students might respond that, depending on the situation, there are no "right" answers.



Yet, not one student alluded to a question having more than one acceptable answer, which led me to believe that students are not *expressly* taught that discussion is often based on opinions and shared experiences.

I believe that this idea of "right" and "wrong" has become a deadly implicit curriculum in our classrooms. One of my goals as a teacher is to help students differentiate between facts and opinions, beliefs and ideas.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE TEACHING

My research leads me to see the value in thoughtful class discussion. Using discussion can offer so many benefits to students. It allows them to externalize their thoughts and hear multiple perspectives on an issue. These concepts are very important steps on the road to becoming good writers.

I would not be opposed to requiring class participation in a Language Arts classroom. Vocalizing ideas might be a scary thought for some students, but it helps to prepare them for high school and the job of being a life-long learner.

Contact Information

Elise Appold

elise.appold@valpo.edu

(708) 910-8810

Dr. Del Gillispie

del.gillispie@valpo.edu

(219) 477-5001