

Comm. 156I Qualitative Communication Inquiry

Final Narrative Project

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Sitting to Participate

Introduction

Over the years of education one of the most beneficial things one could do is participate in class. Many scholars have researched the causes for participation in a classroom and what affects it has on student's grades. For our study we are looking at participation and seat location. As current students we feel that majority of the students who participate inside the classroom sit in the front of the classroom. We defined the front of the classroom as the first three rows, the back of the classroom as the last three rows, and the middle of the classroom anything between the front and back. This brings us to our research question; is the placement of students in a classroom associated with how much they participate in the classroom? To give us a better idea of this subject we researched six scholarly sources, handed out forty surveys to a convenience group, did participation observation, and interviewed two people.

Literature Review

Through our review of scholarly articles we found that articles could be split into three groups. We had articles that looked into seat location in the classroom, teaching techniques, and then we had one that looked at an online forum. By having these different types of articles it allowed us to broaden our knowledge of the different concepts around us. In our research we wanted to find out if the placement of students in a classroom was associated with how much they participate in the classroom. We could have only looked at those factors, but it was important for us to understand other factors that could come into play.

The first set of articles that we looked at studied the affects of the seat locations in a classroom. Parker, Hoopes, and Eggett (2011) article was beneficial to our research because they looked at the effects of seat location in classroom participation. To add on to that idea these researchers also looked at the behavior traits of these students. This is similar to what we are doing for this project and will allow us to compare and contrast our research. They took half the class and gave them assigned seating and the other half of the class was free to sit where they wanted. The study concluded that people sitting in the front of class participated in discussions significantly more than other students in class did. This study is essentially the same question we have but goes a little deeper with trying to figure student behaviors, so most of the conclusions made in this study may be used to reinforce what we find in our research. It may also be slightly different because they were able to assign the seating for half the class, where we are just going in and observing the classroom. The next article that looked at seat location was Perkins and Wieman (2005). Their main focus was on seat location and the affect it can have on participation and the overall performance of the student. The researchers gathered their information by assigning the students the seat, not letting them choose where to sit. By doing this, it allowed the researchers to see if their performance or participation increased. We feel that this article will help support our hypothesis that students who sit closer to the front of the class will participate more. We also felt that it would be interesting to look into if we had more time. Perkins and Wieman

were able to look at to semester to compare and contrast, but their study still showed that students that sat in the front of the classroom participated more after they were moved from the back. To help support their research Perkins and Wieman also collected surveys from the students. This study was well done, but it still seems like they could have collected more data to back up their conclusion. This is why we collected surveys, did participant observation, and interviewed two teachers.

Once we had an idea of these articles we wanted to look into other factors that could effect classroom participation. For this we looked at articles that studied the different teaching techniques that could effect participation. Ibe (2009) did his research by looking into the different metacognitive strategies. We felt that this article would be helpful for us because it looks at ways for teachers to create an effective method of instructions. Class participation is not all because the student sits in the front or the back; it is also dependent on the teaching methods put in practice. Ngozi explains in this article that metacognitive is the process of “thinking about thinking” (Ibe, 2009). Further down in this research Ngozi discusses how there are still students who happen to participate more then others, and teachers just assume that the students who do not speak up have the problem already figured out. While this article does not directly correlate with our research question, it does correlate with student participation and other factors involved. The research also discusses a useful theory, the constructive theory of learning (Ibe, 2009), that helps support the idea that some students have different intelligence and learning styles. This means that not all students will participate. Another teaching technique that was discussed by, Krohn, Aspiranti, Foster, McCleary, Taylor, Nalls, Quillivan, and Williams (2010) looked into the effects of participation when students receive credit or no credit for participation, and the effects of self-recording participation and non-recorded participation. We are able to use this article because it informs us on different factors that cause students to participate in class. Krohn, Asp, Foster, McCleary, Taylor, and Nalls created four levels of participation: non-participation, credit-level participation, frequent participation, and dominant participation. The research was done in larger courses that required participation with 55+/- students. In these levels they found different effect if students received credit with or without self-recording participation or if students did not receive credit with or without self-recording participation. By putting different constraints on participation it would effect how people participated. It caused some students to participate less, and some students to participate more. Using data found in this article will help us find limitations in our research and will also help us create our data sheet. The next article that discussed teaching techniques was Romano (2010). This article explores different strategies for teachers to help them have full class participation. We know that this article is only one page, but we felt that it would be very helpful in our discussion section of our paper. Romano goes through six different strategies that could help teachers have better class participation. He talks about “*The Lone Raiser*,” the student who is always first to raise their hand, Romano suggest to have some students write out the answer and then ask for volunteers to read their answers, pick random students or ask for student participation in a certain pattern, record yourself teaching and see where you can improve, and finally make the classroom feel like a community. Each of these sections has a description and we feel that there are helpful tips that we could write about. These teaching tips can also give us something to look for in a classroom. Does the teacher we are observing practice any of these activities, if so, is their classroom participation higher or lower?

Finally the last article that we looked into was a study done on an e-forum. Mason (2011) explores the participation students have with an online forum which posed a problem that happens in real-life. This was done one a university virtual learning environment, like Desire2Learn. Mason’s rational for this research was to identify different levels of participation. To collect the data on how people engaged this forum he passed out in-class surveys. Mason found that students knew that there was a benefit to the forum, but they did not participate. The students felt that it was not explained

clearly enough, there was not enough encouragement, or moderator participation. While this research was done on on-line participation it can still help us gather information on why students participate in a classroom setting. In this research students said that there was a lack of time, lack of encouragement, and lack of a moderator's participation. In our research we may find similar reasons why students do not participate.

Overall all six articles were very beneficial to our research because it allowed us to see other scholars' findings and create some of our own coding schemes. It was also very helpful to have articles that discussed different elements that could effect classroom participation.

Method

1. Class observations- This portion of our research was used to see how participation was in a real time setting. This method was useful because it showed how participation happened in class. We used sheets to chart the types of participation by students. We also used our sheets to note where in class each student participated from. The types of things we noted in the class observation were if the participation was enticed from the professor, or the student, and if the participation was a new idea, repeated idea, or something that was not related to the discussion. We thought this was an important part of our data because it gave us the chance to observe how participation happen in the class room without disturbing the setting because we were a part of the class. We also observed two different types of classes because they operated differently. One class was an open lecture, while the other class consisted of mainly group work within the class. This allowed us to observe how participation was effected by the teaching methods as well.

2. Surveys- we planned to pass out 40 surveys to students at San Jose State to get there opinion on how seat location effect the amount they participated in class. These surveys will give us a good demographic on who is a part of our study. Also, the questions asked will give us a good idea of why students chose where they sit and why they sit there. Overall, the survey will be used to back up the data that we collected during the class observations, but on a larger scale.

3. Interviews- We conducted two interviews for this project. Instead of interviewing students, we interviewed teachers because we thought getting a different perspective would be helpful in interpreting the data we collected from the previous methods. We decided to write the interview after we completed the class observations and surveys so we could ask questions pertaining to the results we found in our study. We aimed most of our questions to the teachers take on class participation and what they think effects it. We thought this was important because the teachers have taught many classes and have seen a lot types of participation than we have. Overall, the interviews showed us how a combination of seat selection, and teaching style effected the participation of students.

Findings and Discussion

After observing and collecting surveys we found two main ideas that stuck out in our findings. We found that the same amount of students participate in class whether they sit in the front or the back of the classroom, but our data also shows that students who sat in the front of the classroom

participated more. As we read through our scholarly sources we found some articles that supported our findings and concluded that participation was affected by the student's seat location. In Parker, Hoopes, & Eggett, (2011) they concluded that people sitting in the front of class participated in discussions significantly more than other students in class did and Perkins, K., & Wieman, C. E. (2005) article concluded that students that sat in the front of the classroom participated more after they were moved from the back. (Perkins & Wieman, 2005) This information helped us to answer our research question.

Through our participation observation we found that the number of students who participated was spread throughout the classroom, but the number of times they participated was greater for students who sat in the front of the classroom. Out of our two classes we observed sixty accounts of participation. Out of sixteen students nine of them were located in the front of the classroom, one was located in the middle, and six were located in the back. Out of those students 55% of the participation came from the front of the class while 37% came from the back of the classroom. We gathered this information by creating a map of the classroom, and noting when and where a student participated. This information was further supported by the forty returned surveys we collected. 52.5% of the participants stated that their seat location affected the amount they participated in class. Survey number 33 answered Question 4, Do you participate more in class depending on where you sit?, by saying "yea, the closer I sit to the front, the more I pay attention, and I participate more often."

Where our data shows that students participate more when they sit in the front of the classroom other data show that it has to do with teaching methods. In other studies scholars have found that putting different constraints on participation can affect the amount of students who participate. Krohn, K. R., Aspiranti, K. B., Foster, L. N., McCleary, D. F., Taylor, C. M., Nalls, M. L., Quillivan, C. C.; Williams, R. L. (2010) studied the different affects of self recording and teacher recorded participation. In this study they found that some students will participate more with different constraints, but it will also cause other students to participate less. They found that students participated more when they were graded on it, while other students participated less when there were no point value to it. (Krohn, et al., 2010) When interviewing we found that Dr. Webb grades participation by the amount they participate in group discussion and Professor Lim said she grades them more on their class activities. Seeing the contrast we also notice that more students participated in Dr. Webb's class. This could be because he grades on the group discussion where as Professor Lim graded on different activities. Another article that discussed teaching methods that would increase classroom participation was by Romano, M. (2010). In his article he discusses different strategies which increase student participation. One of which is "Creating a Community" (Romano, p.14). This strategy goes well with the way Dr. Webb grades participation. By creating a group setting it can cause students to feel more comfortable around each other and communicate more. This could be a factor for students to participate more rather than seat location.

While teaching methods can play a role in classroom participation our data shows that the placement of students in a classroom is associated with how much they participate. In participation observation we showed that the students in the front of the classroom participated more and the data in our surveys showed that more students rather sit in the front of the classroom because it is easier to pay attention and follow along.

Limitations and Future Research

For the amount of time that we had to do this study we feel that we found adequate information. This does not mean there were not limitations to the data we collected. The first limitation that arose was when we were told that we had to do participation observation. This was a limitation for Tim because he only has one class on campus and the other one is online. Since this was the case he could not observe a classroom that he was participating in himself, but had to find another classroom where he could observe them. After we got past that limitation we started researching our scholarly articles so we could create our surveys and our interviews. We had one question in our survey, question 5, that was going to work for our original idea for a research project, but as things evolved we found that this question would not gather information that was helpful to this study. With this we decided to throw that question away as we were coding our data. Along with that limitation we found that we should have collected more surveys to come up with a more definitive answer to our research question. We met the requirements for the assignment, but having more surveys would have been helpful. Besides these limitations and the normal ones like times we feel that our research study went very smoothly. For future research we feel that we would need to collect more surveys and possibly do two different focus groups, one with students and one with teachers. It would also be interesting to research the affects of assigned seating in a classroom and personality traits. In Parker, T., Hoopes, O., & Eggett, D. (2011) and Perkins, K., & Wieman, C. E. (2005) articles they both looked at participation under the lence of assigned seating and unassigned seating. Since we were participants in our settings we did not have that much control over what went on, but if we were given more time we feel like this could bring out more data on assigned seating and participation. We also felt it would be interesting to do a different research study that looked at the affects of students in a classroom when they had a teacher with disability or, if the students were in a set classroom and the teachers rotated around.

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*Please place in alphabetical order. Place an * next to all required scholarly sources.*

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