Kathryn Atherton

HONR 29900

Final Reflection

During the last eight weeks, my group developed from being motivated by individual ideas to being motivated by the group’s efforts. The very first recitation was frustrating as there were many individuals with great ideas, but with little care or patience for others’ ideas, which caused a lot of interruptions throughout the conversation and pushed some of the members who were shy and/or non-confrontational to become virtually silent in group discussion. Even when I asked their ideas, others would interrupt them. I was resolved to help them build their confidence and help the others develop their listening and cooperative skills. By the fourth week, the more dominant individuals were more apt to listen to each other, and, with some prodding, the shyer members would share their ideas and opinions with the group. I was very impressed when some members of the team would ask those who had not shared their ideas during the recitation what their opinions were. From then on, I saw the confidence of the shy individuals grow. They began working together in recitation, discussing their concerns, opinions, and ideas together before presenting them to the entire group, which I found to be an interesting way for them to develop their ideas and their confidence before opening them up to the criticism of the entire group. Though I was very proud of the team’s development, I was especially proud of these two individuals’ growth over the eight weeks.

I am most proud of Elizabeth. She came to recitation every week with the readings printed out, highlighted, and written all over. Though she started the semester really quiet, she always was very attentive during lecture and recitation and came in with great quotes for the group to use every week. I at first had to ask her whether she had brought any ideas she wanted to share with the group in order to get her to verbally participate, though she was always willing to proofread a paragraph, type up something that needed to be done or contribute her notes to the group. I saw her confidence grow after I had given Abigail a leadership role. The week after, Abigail and Elizabeth began working together on sharing ideas and opinions with the group. Elizabeth became much more vocal after Abigail’s turning point within the group, which makes me curious as to why this was. I think Elizabeth’s finest moment was when, during the second to last recitation, she brought all of the highlighted and annotated readings to class and contributed all of the needed quotes to the group. Nearly everyone commented on how hard she had worked throughout the entire semester, and she was unofficially named the most valuable team member. One teammate poked at this, claiming that she was so quiet during recitation; how could she be the most valuable? She calmly stated that she was more of a listener, to which the rest of the group responded with their opinions on how important listening is, and how they appreciated her. I felt like a proud ~~mother~~ mentor hearing this. She is such a sweetheart and really deserved all of the praise and respect that her teammates gave her during this recitation. I was so happy to see her smiling from ear to ear at hearing this.

Over the course of the class, I learned to be more vocal about giving feedback, while also being okay with sitting back and letting the group do what it needed. I started the semester feeling a bit awkward about my position. I was so used to having to give opinions on the readings and participate in the discussion, but as a mentor, I did not want to overstep my boundaries and become central to the conversation, especially when the group was engaging in great discussions without my help. Slowly but surely, I felt more and more comfortable with sitting quiet and allowing the students’ own conversation to keep the recitation flowing, only answering questions about the assignment requirements. Being in a slightly superior role, however, I felt better about asking students to give more effort or take a step back. I am typically a non-confrontational person and do not like to give negative feedback to someone unless it is absolutely necessary for the group’s productivity or the feedback is anonymous. However, stepping into this mentor role helped me realize that the student’s development depended on my ability to give feedback to some degree. Thus, it was a little easier to tell students when they got off task or when they weren’t committing enough to the group effort.

I would like to improve my ability to ask more questions that require my group to think more critically. I can employ the push-pull methods in attempting to draw out deeper discussions. I can also think more critically during my own reading of the team’s assigned readings, and come prepared with better questions that complement the work that the group is doing if the week’s assignment does not include direct questions about the reading. I would also like to improve my ability to help the group focus on the content of their work, rather than the specific wording of that content. Many times during recitation, the discussion of the group was focused upon what the best word to use in the context was in order to get their message across correctly. Being an engineer, I feel that, while the quality of the writing is important, the quality of the content itself is much more important. Though my group always synthesized really great work, I think we could have had a lot more and a lot longer discussions about the content and the ideas being expressed within the lectures and the readings during recitation had they not had so many little disagreements about whether using the word “categorize” or “compartmentalize” was better in the sentence. I can combat this by starting recitation with a laptop-free discussion, for ten minutes or so, just to get the group’s debate juices flowing. I always found, as a student, that recitations were always more interesting when varying opinions were discussed, rather than when the first idea that was brought up was agreed upon completely. Finally, I would like to improve my ability to read the group’s nonverbal cues to determine when someone wants to speak or has a good idea that is not being seen by the rest of the group. Had I been more skilled in this at the beginning of the semester, I would have been much more successful in bringing out the shy members much earlier on in the course of the class. I can improve this by paying more attention to the group members who aren’t speaking, rather than those who are. Though this may seem like I am being a bad listener to those who are speaking, I think in the long run, it will help the group develop their collaboration and listening skills, as it will force them to incorporate others’ ideas and respond to those in a thoughtful manner.