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Teaching and Leaning III

Dr. Jeranyama

Rounds Observation: Rita Jenness – UPCS

The topic of the rounds was a debate of the Japanese Internment Camps. Ms. Jenness decided to use a Socratic seminar as the format of the debate. The students had participated in this format before so they were familiar with how the activity should go. The first round of students took a starter question dealing with the use of force in response to Pearl Harbor. They picked up the topic easily and were frequently referring to the text. They managed to move through the 25 minutes really easily with infrequent moments of silence. Before they even started talking, they asked to remove the hands raised rule to make things go more free form.

 One of the essential questions was to examine the benefits and limitations of learning about history through a personal narrative. Yuri Nakamoto is the author of and was a prisoner in the internment camps. The students discussed the topic of bias, the advantages, and disadvantages of learning from her text. I was impressed by the students’ ability to lead the discussion on their own in the first round. They drew from outside information, each other’s ideas and from the text as well.

 The second round started rather ominously, the students said they were not going to be as good, and that the first group included all the thinkers in the class. That turned out to be partially true, the second question focused specifically on the conditions in the internment camps. From the beginning, it didn’t really feel like a generative question that the students could use. For a while it was quiet, Ms. Jenness was redirecting and engaging the students to use the text and trying to get them going. It worked but I found that the students were not really using the text; they were getting off topic and moving towards discussion of use of force in the Middle East. It led me to believe that they either hadn’t read it or were just not comfortable talking in class.

 At this point, Ms. Jenness said that she would give stickers to people who did not usually speak up in class. This worked surprisingly well. It got three more people involved in the conversation. The discussion moved towards the conditions in the internment camps again, there were mostly four students that kept up the conversation on why the internment camps were justified. Overall, there was not as much evidence of students citing the text and lower participation too.

 For the final part of the Socratic seminar, students from the first round and second round were allowed to respond to questions and comments from both rounds. This part was rather lively, I feel like people felt comfortable stepping outside of their comfort zone with such a sensitive topic. I didn’t see any issues with respect or conduct. The eleventh graders at UPCS are generally really high performing. Ms. Jenness made an effort to include an opportunity for feedback from the students

 Grouping students more heterogeneously would make for the smoother discussions. The two groups just seemed unbalanced. Also, setting the students up with more generative question would have helped. Ms. Jenness did a good job moderating the discussion though; she had a lot of tools in mind and used them effectively to keep things going.