

**Perceptions and Behaviors of Soundings Students**  
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## **INTRODUCTION**

In the fall of 1998, Mark Springer launched the second of his progressive classrooms: Soundings. Located within the public Radnor Middle School in Wayne, Pennsylvania, the Soundings classroom is based on the idea of democratic student-centered education. Within Soundings, students are given the power to guide their own learning in an effort to foster their development of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary to function effectively as citizens in society (Springer, 2006, p. 1). Rather than focusing on performance and standardized tests, Springer argues that the purpose of education is to encourage and teach students how to ‘think and act independently, to manipulate information, and to articulate one’s own thoughts successfully’ (p. 3). For this to work, students are expected to be active participants in their education. Springer highlights various qualities a student needs to have in order to be successful in Soundings, and we were interested in determining to what extent students perceived and exhibited the traits that Springer describes. Our research was thus guided by one main question: “Do students in Soundings possess the traits that Mark Springer believed would make them effective Soundings students?”. This paper details the research conducted in order to investigate this question and is composed of various sections that state our methodology, data, and conclusions.

## **THE MODEL SOUNDINGS STUDENT**

To answer this question, we attempted to approximate what Springer would like to see in his students with a framework we labeled the “Model Soundings Student” (MSS). Our model is a compilation of the important traits Mark Springer outlines as essential for students to possess in Soundings. After this, we sought out to develop an

accurate portrait of several students from the Soundings classroom and compare and contrast this portrait against the MSS. The traits of the Model Soundings Student are listed in Figure 1.

It seems reasonable to say that students who are aware of these traits are more likely to exhibit them and reap the positive benefits believed to be correlated with them, as believed by Springer and other theorists (Springer 2006). These traits, in many instances, are not simply traits that allow students to be effective students within Soundings, but facilitates their accomplishment of one of Springer's goals: turning his students into effective members of society.

Model Soundings Student
Demonstrates Interest
Manages Time Efficiently
Utilizes Teacher as a Guide
Utilizes Peers as Resources
Collaborates within Groups
Exhibits Adaptive-help Seeking Behaviors
Responds Positively to Feedback
Resubmits Assignments
Reflects Meaningfully
Sustains an Accurate Idea of the Soundings Student's Role

*Figure 1.*

### *INTEREST*

The first trait of the Model Soundings Student is interest in activities. This involves a sincere eagerness to obtain knowledge about the subject; learning because the student *wants to*, and not simply because the student *must*. Within Soundings, the lack of grades supports interest. Rather than having students work toward the “A” – the sign of success in traditional education – Soundings attempts to create a community where achievement is obtained through interest. Students devise their own curriculum, an act intended to foster a deeper personal connection between the student and the material to be learned. A student who scores high in the interest category may engage in extracurricular studying of the subject at hand or find studying of that particular subject simply enjoyable. Additionally, a high interest student is one who contributes their ideas to discussions.

### *TIME MANAGEMENT*

Within the Soundings curriculum, students are given more responsibilities than in traditional schools. Students are given the responsibility for not only creating the curriculum, but also largely managing their schedules for completing assignments. Often, students are handling multiple assignments at once with due dates being suggested guidelines rather than cast-iron restrictions (Field Notes September 2010). Due to this, it is necessary for students to develop a mastery of time management in order to be successful in Soundings.

A student who has mastered time management would be one who does not allow assignments to linger well beyond the suggested due date. Students must also not be

overly distressed over the amount of work in Soundings. Time management requires the student to prioritize.

#### *USE OF TEACHER AS A GUIDE*

Explicit in Springer's educational theory is the role of the teacher as a guide in the classroom. Breaking from traditional schools in that the teacher is not the sole provider of knowledge and help in the classroom, Soundings is built on the idea of a horizontal classroom. This lowering of the teacher from the hierarchical position he or she once occupied is one that should be recognized by the students in the classroom.

A student who effectively used the teacher as a guide would ask appropriate questions. These questions would not be answer-seeking, but rather, method-seeking. Once a problem has been reached that the student cannot reason his way through, he will use the teacher as a problem-solving resource, and not as the problem-solver.

#### *UTILIZES PEERS AS RESOURCES*

In addition, in this transition from a hierarchical classroom to a horizontal one, student's peers become essential to the individual's learning goals. They are, in fact, vital to the progression of the class and integral to one another's development. Students must demonstrate their recognition of peers as a resource to be scored highly in this category. Brown and Campione (1994) specifically highlight the distribution of expertise amongst teachers and students as one of the strengths of the theory of education they support, guided discovery (p. 260-261). Curricula that involve this idea of a horizontal classroom are lauded by many contemporary education theorists for the many benefits they bring to the classroom.

To be ranked highly in this category, a Soundings student might go to a student for help on a minor issue, such as the spelling of a word or the due date of an assignment. Going even further, a student who exhibits the highest degree of this trait might seek out a student who is known to have a particular strength for help in that area. For instance, a student praised for being an excellent paper writer may be sought out by other students for assistance in the editing of a written assignment (J. Smith, Interview, November 17, 2010).

#### *GROUP COLLABORATOR*

Group work on every scale is essential to the Soundings experience. Group work varies from class-wide discussions to smaller group projects. This category specifically refers to smaller groups, wherein students are working with just a few other peers on a specific goal. Springer encourages students to collaborate with the group, learning to take advantage of their own strengths and knowledge and actively working with the skills brought to the group by its other members (Springer 2006).

An effective group collaborator would take advantage of each individual's strengths in the group for effective completion of the assignment while also allowing the group to be an interpersonal effort. All group members, though they may not be completing each section of the assignment, should be aware of what the student who is given that responsibility is doing. Each student should have a fair understanding of every component of the group's project.

#### *EXHIBITS ADAPTIVE HELP-SEEKING BEHAVIORS*

The idea of "adaptive help-seeking" is one we borrowed from Newman (2000). We recognized many similarities in traits between Springer's theory and the idea of

adaptive help-seeking. The primary idea behind this trait is that students know when and how to ask for help. How much effort have they put into solving the problem? Are they seeking an answer, or guidance? Who do they ask for help? The answers to these questions determine whether or not someone exhibits adaptive help-seeking behaviors.

Newman (2000) describes adaptive help-seeking, which is a strategy of self-regulation. He points out that students often do not know when to ask for help and either sit passively waiting for the teacher or ask for help when it is not necessary (p. 315). In order to use help-seeking as a form of self-regulation, students must become adaptive help-seekers. This involves self-reflection on the necessity, content, and target of the request as well as positive affect and motivation (p. 315). Teachers can promote adaptive help-seeking by first establishing that their classroom “maximize[s] and diversify[ies] potential sources for help” and supports students to be autonomous and competent (p. 332). Teachers can support students for autonomy by fostering classroom-learning goals (p. 330). In other words, they can emphasize “long-term mastery, autonomy, and intrinsic value of learning (e.g., by using criterion-referenced grading and collaborative activities)” (p. 330). In addition, teachers can support for competence by not giving students more help than necessary (p. 331). An effective teacher, according to Springer, would probably use these strategies in order to encourage the use of self-regulation strategies.

An adaptive help-seeker knows when and how to ask questions. Relating back to the role of the teacher, a student must recognize instances wherein they really need help and differentiate those from mere challenges in the assignment that can be personally overcome. In addition, the sorts of questions asked by the student should be directed

toward the appropriate source and be an attempt to gain information that will enable the student to finish solving the problem on his or her own.

#### *POSITIVE AFFECTIVE RESPONSE TO FEEDBACK*

Critique is an important aspect of the Soundings process. Every assignment receives a unique critique that is unlike that of traditional schools: the rubric system. It is expected that over the course of Soundings, students will become more familiar and accustomed to the process of critique. As such, students' developing comfort with feedback in Soundings should ease their learning experience (Springer 2006).

Lipstein and Renninger (2007) researched students' perceptions of writing and discovered that responses to feedback contribute to students' learning. If students perceive negative feedback as an attack against their work or do not value it, they will not benefit from it in the way that those who perceive it as helpful do (p. 118-119).

Students who respond positively do not become stressed or worried when a rubric score is returned. Furthermore, poor scores on the rubric are not detrimental to the student's ego, self-efficacy, or other internal traits. Rather, these scores should be viewed as a chance for the student to develop and grow. Additionally, high scores must not inflate the student's ego. Students must view the schoolwork they are doing maturely and within the context of the assignment; high scores simply mean the goals of the task were sufficiently accomplished, not that the student's work is without flaw.

#### *RESUBMITS ASSIGNMENTS*

While students must be able to handle the emotional stress of critique, they must also take advantage of the critique process and resubmit assignments. Soundings is unique in that it provides all students with the opportunity to score the highest mark on



every assignment at their individual pace. It may not be the case that students should resubmit every assignment for that highest score, but students should take advantage of the system to improve each of their assignments to the quality they believe is their best work.

A high score on resubmission requires that students resubmit assignments at least once. It seems impossible that a student's first submission would be of the highest quality. Critique from an outside source can only work to improve the piece. Resubmission is a sign that the student not only is working toward a grade, but working toward quality. Furthermore, low rubric scores cannot go ignored for a student to score in this category. Taking full advantage of the resubmission process requires that a student attempt to do his best work. A student's best work simply would not be a rubric score that reflects insufficient achievement of the activity's goals.

#### *REFLECTS MEANINGFULLY*

Meta-cognition is given much emphasis within the Soundings curriculum. Students answer log questions that largely focus on the material they are learning. This exercise leads students to reflect continually. For students to obtain a high score in this category, they must put effort into the reflection process and genuinely ask themselves why they are performing each of the activities assigned.

#### *ACCURATE IDEA OF SOUNDINGS STUDENT'S ROLE*

In addition to this, the ideal Soundings student would also be aware of his or her role in the classroom. This is linked to the perceptions the student has of the classroom. Markus and Nurius (1986) point out that a student's learning is based on his or her self concept, which is related to what they label his "possible self" (p. 954). Possible selves

“represent specific individually significant hopes, fears, and fantasies” and are “constructed creatively and selectively from an individual’s past experiences in a particular domain” (p. 954-955). In other words, we formulate idealizations of who we can or want to become based on our selective experiences in particular fields. Markus and Nurius contend that possible selves are 1) malleable, (p.964) and 2) shape student behavior and motivation (p. 956; p. 959 - 960). Cultivating a possible self, then, is not only possible in a class, but can also be a powerful tool for fostering sustained motivation in school.

## **PERCEPTIONS**

During our research, we noticed a difference between how students spoke about what was expected of them, and the way they actually behaved. To account for this disparity, we divided perceptions into two categories. First, there are what we have labeled *manifest perceptions*. These perceptions appear in the conscious minds of the students, and are the perceptions they speak of when directly asked. These may or may not be in line with the other types of perception we describe, which we term *latent perceptions*. These perceptions lie in the subconscious of the student and are expressed outwardly by behavior.

From this, our goal then became to construct our double-sided portrait for as many students as possible to compare against the MSS framework described above. To do this, we used surveys, observations, and interviews to craft those portraits.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Three types of methods were employed to assess students' perceptions and behaviors in the Soundings classroom: survey, observation, and interviews.

Members of our Educational Psychology course developed a survey of 40 short answer questions that was given to and completed by each student in Soundings. Answers to these questions were collected in an effort to understand how Soundings students felt about Soundings and their roles within the classroom.

In addition to using student responses, we observed the students working in the classroom. Over the course of the first semester, our group visited Soundings multiple times to watch students working. Our observations were divided between class observations, where our group observed the whole class working together, individual observations, where we focused on individual students, and, toward the end, group observations, where we observed the students working in smaller groups.

Interviews were also used to help us construct portraits of Soundings students. These interviews provided us with the ability to better gauge students' perceptions, allowing us a level of depth not offered from the surveys and a directness unlike what is possible from observations. However, due to research constraints, we were only able to interview eight students. Because our sample size was so limited, we selected the students we felt would give us the most fruitful data. At the time of our research, students were working together in culture groups. We decided to use these groups to select who we would be interviewing.

To select the groups we would interview, we calculated numeric scores for each student from the student's estimated performance on the Math and English PSSA scores (low, medium, high) as well as an academic achievement rating from the teachers. The

Math and English PSSA scores ranged from 1-3, with 3 being the highest, while the teacher's score was based on a scale of 1-5, with 5 being the highest. We added each student's scores together and came up with a composite score, which ranged from 3-11, with the majority of students falling in the 9 or 10 range. The group score was an average of the scores of each individual student.

We settled upon two culture groups to interview: those groups working with Ghana and Colombia.<sup>1</sup> The Ghana group is one of the larger groups and has a high degree of diversity, with a large range of composite scores. The Colombia group, on the other hand, is one of the smaller groups and is comprised of students with higher composite scores. One of the students was also previously involved in an alternative education classroom. The students did not, however, know each other prior to working on this project (personal communication, Gauthier, et al, paper). In total, we used data from seven interviews.<sup>2</sup>

Once the distinction between latent and manifest perceptions became evident in the surveys and observation data, we decided to craft the interviews questions we asked in order to extract latent perceptions. Coming to knowledge about one's subconscious beliefs is no easy task. We attempted to do this by not asking questions about the Soundings program directly. We asked the students questions regarding their culture groups. From their reported behavior in their culture groups, we then inferred the latent perceptions that may have influenced their behaviors.

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<sup>1</sup> All identifying features have been replaced with pseudonyms.

<sup>2</sup> After conducting eight interviews, we decided one of them did not contain information relevant to the student's perceptions. This interview was exempted when we were analyzing data. This left us with a total of seven students

Student's manifest perceptions were obtained through a variety of sources. Surveys provided one route for students to directly communicate their conscious perceptions to us. Additionally, the final interview question was a direct attempt to determine their manifest perceptions. This question simply asked what the student believed to be the most important traits for the most successful Soundings student.

In our comparison of latent and manifest perceptions against the MSS, we developed several ideas. First, it may be that students are exhibiting Soundings-like behavior only because they are within the Soundings classroom where they are being guided to act this way. Secondly, there appears to be a difference between how students act depending on who is in their group. For instance, the more diverse of the two groups, Ghana, acts more collaboratively than the Colombia group. Thirdly, it appears that students take on certain traits of the Model Soundings Student and place much emphasis on that trait over others in a manner that negatively impacts their ability to adopt and develop the other traits.

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These methods produced great quantities of data. For the sake of accuracy and management we sorted and reduced the information gathered. An example of a reduction we performed was the creation of student profiles from various pages of interview transcripts. This was undertaken with great care in order to preserve a high level of precision. At least three of our five members were always present during the management of data to ensure objectivity and clarity. Group members also cross-examined data, thereby conducting quality checks.

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## **RESULTS/DISCUSSION**

### *INFLUENCES ON PERCEPTIONS*

The portraits we compiled indicated a disparity between students' latent and manifest perceptions. We found that students tend to display more of the MSS traits through their latent perceptions rather than their manifest perceptions. In other words, students are more capable of behaving in ways that enable them to succeed in Soundings and less able to verbally communicate these behaviors. The manifest perceptions of students as a whole are displayed in Figure 2.

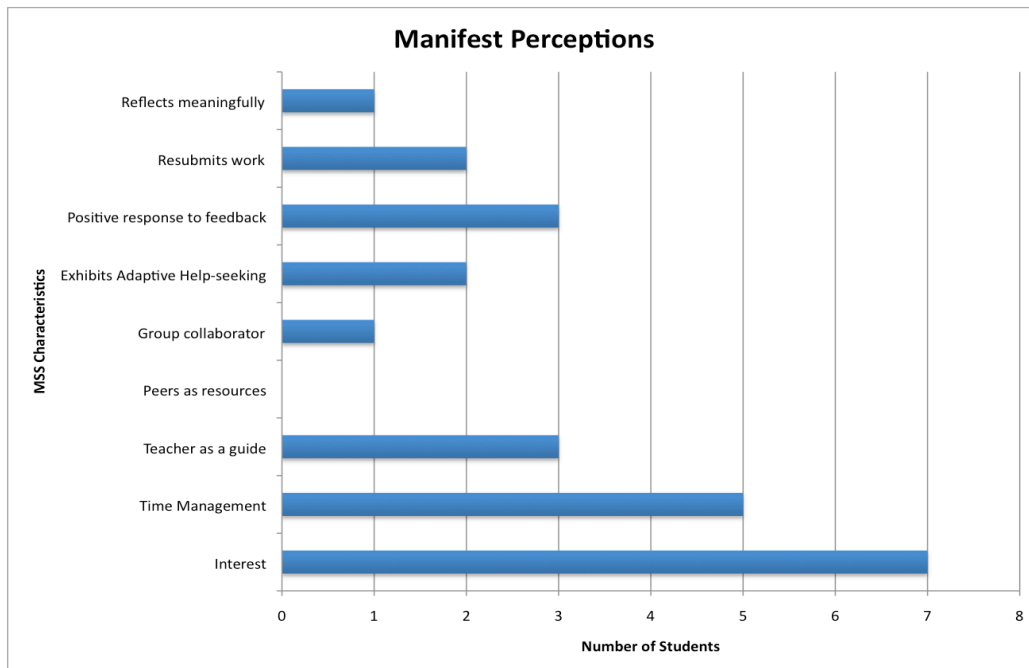


Figure 2

From their responses, it appears that most of the interviewed students are aware that being interested and managing time effectively can lead to a positive and rewarding Soundings experience. On the other hand, there is a noticeable lack of recognition that

reflection, use of peers as a resource, and group collaboration are important traits for a Soundings student.

Figure 3 displays the latent perceptions of the seven interviewed students as a whole. Comparing the two graphs, one can immediately see that students were exhibiting more behaviors than what they could verbalize.

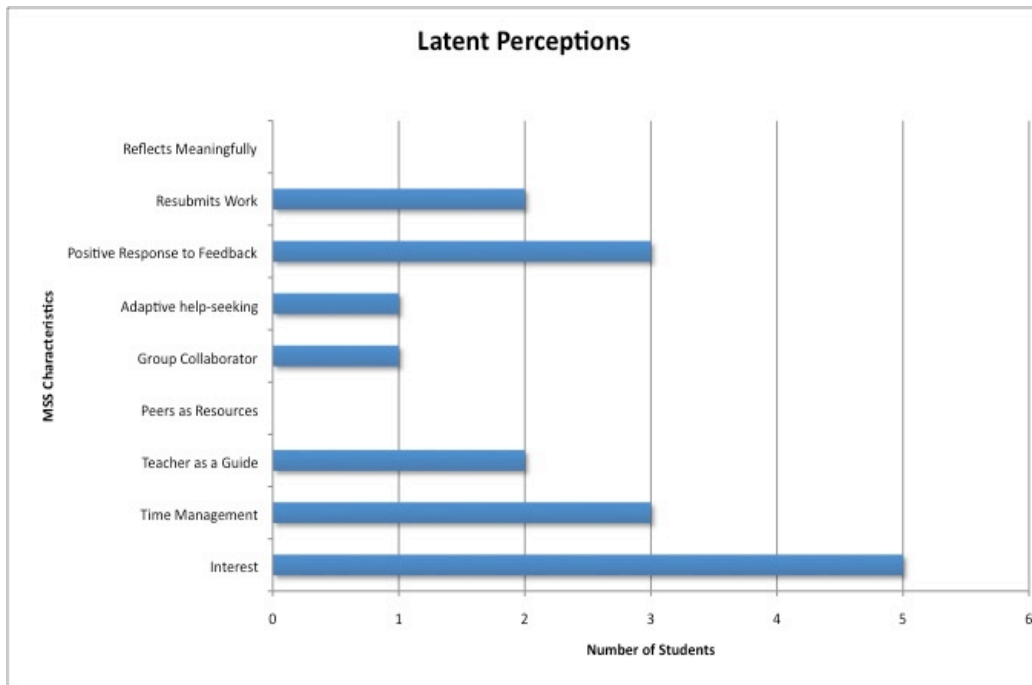


Figure 3

It is important to note that students' inability to vocalize their perceptions differ so greatly from their expressed behaviors. A possible explanation for this phenomenon would be the factors that influence the students' perceptions. It seems likely that a student who has truly internalized an important trait would be able to quickly recall it and

describe it in interviews. Additionally, the expression of these Soundings traits through their latent perceptions may in fact not be due to personal perceptions the student has developed yet, at all. External influences may have been set in place by the Soundings classroom itself that guide students to behave in ways that foster their success within Soundings.

Of course, one would expect this to be the case. A classroom that supports behaviors that enable students to do better within that classroom could only be successful. However, worry surfaces when one considers the classroom being removed. Without being consciously aware of the importance of collaborative work, would students continue to exhibit this trait? Education researchers laud a horizontal classroom not only for its benefits for the classroom experience, but for its benefits in a student's life. The behaviors and traits of the MSS are traits that will aid the students in the long-run if they truly internalize and develop them.

While it may be the case that students have not fully developed the traits of an MSS, this may be okay. For one, these interviews were conducted approximately a third the way through the year. Students need not have mastered these traits so early on. Secondly, the appropriation of traits and simply acting the way the class sets you up to act is believed by many to be a stepping stone toward internalization of those traits. "Participants in [their] classroom are free to appropriate vocabulary, ideas, methods, etc., that appear initially as part of shared discourse, and by appropriation, transform these ideas via personal interpretation. Ideas that are part of the common discourse are not necessarily appropriated by all, or in the same manner by everyone" (Brown, p.236). The



fact that students' behaviors are reflecting Soundings ideals may be a positive indicator that they really are learning and developing these skills.

### *COLOMBIA VERSUS GHANA CASE STUDY*

Our data show that the Colombia and Ghana group differ in their levels of group collaboration and use of peers as resources. Our findings show that Colombia collaborated and used peers as resources less than Ghana.

#### ***Colombia***

Members of the Colombia group identified themselves as a strong group that often shared resources, but expressed little desire or necessity to collaborate. Instead they displayed perceptions of self-sufficiency and efficiency in completing work among each individual member:

##### 1.) Efficiency and personal responsibility

“Our group is actually the farthest ahead right now. We have been really focused on it and we have gotten actually a lot done.... we actually a [smaller] group. I think its actually an advantage, since I don't mean to put everyone else down, but I think that we are some of the smartest people in the class and it's a lot easier to focus our efforts as opposed to being sporadic and spread out.”

This student felt that the addition of more people would harm their project because they could not allocate their time well. Instead of discussion of collaboration, each member “focuses their efforts” on their own, which works well because they each have a high aptitude to complete their assignments.

## 2.) Peers as resources

Student Two actually talks a fair amount about using his/her peers, which is interesting because he/she was in an alternative program before Soundings. “I know like, we all kind of help each other out a bit I’ve had some references that aren’t especially helpful to me, but they might be to someone else who is doing a different kind of write, so I’ve told them that they can look at this. I’ve also gone to them more for clarifications though, than for actual facts.” However, his/her interactions with group members are still very limited, not inquiring for their help in his/her own research but for “clarifications” along the way. It is significant that he/she sees them as useful, but limits their use at the same time.

## 3.) Limitations of communications

On group problems, Student Three notes “[Student One], he/she doesn’t work as much as...he/she’s interested in it, he/she just doesn’t get as much done as...it’s okay. other than that, we work well together.” To some extent, he/she views her peers as resources when he/she needs help on assignments: “I’ll go to someone if I have a question on how something should be, like a log question or a quote, I’ll ask their opinion before I ask mine” However during the survey he/she responded that he/she solely goes to the teachers when she needs help.

Student Three views his/her group members as limited in terms of how he/she works with them. This student noted on his/her questionnaire that he/she never has been critiqued by his/her peers for any of her work. Although he/she asks the group questions of clarification, he/she sees each as independently contributing pieces of an assignment

that will in aggregate be their country project. What we believe is missing is the collaborative aspect of being in a community of learners. In other words, he/she expresses a latent disposition of seeking peers as a resource, although he/she doesn't identify it in the MSS.

### ***Ghana***

The Ghana group seemed to be collaborating in that they were able to manage their tasks and progress without having to depend on the teachers. Several of the students expressed that the group had split up the work evenly. In creating a work plan, they took three things into consideration: productivity, interest, and time management.

#### 1.) Productivity

Student Six reasoned during the interview, "if we are all researching the same thing, it's not as productive as if we were all researching different things and then kind of sharing our information." They therefore first thought about the most efficient way to divide the work and then delegated tasks accordingly.

#### 2.) Interest

The group assigned tasks based on what students were interested in. Student Four explained, "so you got what you generally wanted. One kid in our group had like a fetish with wars, so we gave him all these wars and generals, because we knew he was interested in it and would research it hard, and he did so far." They realized that being interested in the topic was connected to motivation to work and quality of product and again rationally managed the division of work.

### 3.) Time

While the group started out with an ambitious goal of covering three instead of two time periods for their project, they ended up realizing that it might not be a possibility. After speaking to the teachers, they decided, “so we need to come to the consensus that if by pretty much right before Thanksgiving, if we’re not done with our ancient time period, the chances are that we won’t be able to do our 1900s” (Student Four). Taking into consideration the time constraints, the group came up with their personal deadline to ensure that they finish on time. It is notable also that Student Four uses the word “consensus,” which suggests a common decision instead of a majority vote, which is less collaborative.

The group also seemed to effectively manage its members. There was one instance of plagiarism where one student copied a portion of his research directly from the text. Student Four explained what happened during the interview: “it just sounded too choppy, and we were like, ‘did you plagiarize?’ and he/she was like, ‘yes’...we told him/her that he/she should go back and change it, and he/she should definitely change that, because that’s not done. You can’t plagiarize.” Instead of reporting the problem to the teachers, they managed it on their own by forcing him to rewrite those sections. He/she reasoned, “we trust our members enough that we trust that he did it, and if he/she didn’t, then we’ll have to ask him/her again, and if not, then maybe we’ll have to go back and do it, because sometimes the only way to get things done is to do it yourself. But I don’t think it’s going to come down to that, because he/she was really interested in the topic, so I have faith he/she will do it over.” Even if he/she didn’t follow through with the research, they wouldn’t resort to telling the teachers. Instead, they would take it into

their own hands and redo the work themselves. They therefore regulated themselves and utilized adaptive-help seeking strategies to solve their problem.

Our interview data also suggest that the group members used each other as resources. Student Six explained, “Yeah, if I find a website that one of the other group members has some of their information on, actually, one of the people in my group, Student Four, he/she gave me a website that had some info on architecture during the Mao time period.” Student Five also noted that when he/she didn’t understand something, he/she would “probably ask one of my group members, and maybe if like, I couldn’t find something on the Internet or something wasn’t working, I’d ask one of them, and maybe they can find something for me.” They were resources for each other in that they asked each other for help and shared information with one another.

In comparing the Colombia and Ghana groups, the Ghana group is noticeably more collaborative, but both groups use their peers as resources. Given that Colombia is a much smaller group with students who are high achieving (according to their composite scores), it would make sense that they might have an easier time with group collaboration. Student One pointed this out in his interview, but after looking at the others’ interview responses and survey questions, it doesn’t seem that this is the case. There are several factors that could be at play allowing the Ghana group to be more collaborative. One factor may be that being high achieving actually causes students to feel self-sufficient, and therefore less likely to feel a need to collaborate in a group. Group work, then, becomes more about individuals working independently instead of together. Another possible explanation is that none of the students in that group knew

each other prior to working on this project (personal communication, Gautheir, et al, lab paper). Consequently, they may not have been comfortable talking to one another.

### *TRAIT EMPHASIS*

Upon evaluating our data, we noticed a trend that students have particular traits that dominate their perception of class activities. These traits create a framework for understanding the activities and assignments they are given. Even those students who were ranked the highest performers in the class did not necessarily approach Soundings as Springer might have expected.

Student Five provides an interesting example of this. Student Five's most salient perceived trait about Soundings is time management and self-sufficiency. In response to the question "what are you getting out of the culture project?" Student Five answered the following:

"I'm learning how to manage my time. I know that's a cliché, but there's no one telling you that tomorrow you have to get this done, you have to get this done. It's all due in February and you have to figure it out. We have to make sure that everything...we make our own time schedule, and we have to be responsible to get work done in class. And I think it's more fun than in traditional learning because we get to choose what we study, and I don't think I'd really like being told what I have to learn about. The culture you chose is your choice so you should be interested in it."

From this quote, one can see the emphasis he/she placed on those two traits. Furthermore, the discussion of time management is also the dominant feature of his/her description of an ideal Soundings student.

After talking with his/her and reading his/her questionnaires, it appeared that these traits remained dominant in how he/she approached this other task which contained other important focuses -- group collaboration, self-sufficiency and time management, curriculum choice, and working with the teachers. Yet these aspects were completely missing from his/her explanation of what the purpose of the assignment was.

It is not the case that time management is irrelevant or unimportant; it is unarguably an important aspect of this extensive project. However, the group itself and importance of learning about the cultures is completely lost in Student Five's description of the purpose of a group project on culture. This is not a trend amongst the students; other students mentioned these aspects.

This is an important observation. Student Five's focus on these traits may be negatively impacting his/her ability to adapt the others. Even though Soundings has a lot of community-based, collaborative exercises, it seems difficult for students to see their peers as a valuable component in their learning, especially when they seem to possess these dominant traits.

## **IMPLICATIONS**

A common thread in our data is the lack of group collaboration in students' perceptions of Soundings. The reason we chose the culture projects as a basis for our research is that it is a self-selected group project that has so many opportunities for students to work with each other as they explore their own interests. It is a single situation in which many of the ideas and activities that represent Soundings are conflated. In this setting in particular, students had the greatest opportunity to collaborate with their

peers. Instead, we found that students consistently failed to understand Soundings's community model. The idea of group collaboration was generally missing in their manifest perceptions, and while it appeared more in students' latent perceptions, it still was not developed enough to be considered a mastered trait. When students discussed talking with their classmates, the help-seeking was always for clarification or sharing small resources, not a substantive discourse about larger concepts. This absence suggests that this community aspect of Soundings has not yet become a part of students' frame of thinking about their learning.

While the teachers set up their students to collaborate in certain activities, such as conducting Friday meetings in the groups, the students still did not seem to perceive their peers as a vital part of their own learning. Therefore, to increase students' awareness of the importance of collaboration, teachers of Soundings may want to include more meta-cognitive activities that emphasize the idea of collaboration and instill why it is important. This process of reflection could illuminate the potential for using one's peers in a meaningful way to aid the process of learning.

## **LIMITATIONS**

### *TIME IN THE SCHOOL YEAR*

Although we've observed trends, one limitation to our finding is the time in the school year in which we were conducting our research. Students had only spent two to three months in the Soundings classroom. We acknowledge the possibility that a collaborative disposition may take longer to develop, given that traits students found more salient (like interest, self-sufficiency) could have been developed in previous traditional classes. However, one of the students in our research had spent the last year in



another integrated classroom, and still did not articulate collaboration as a major outcome of group work. Students also have spent a reasonable amount of time in a major group project that spans many months of study. While there are limitations, we still feel as if the absence of a collaborative disposition in our research is meaningful.

#### *LIMITED AMOUNT OF INTERVIEW*

The other major limitation to our finding is the number of students we interviewed and the number of times we could interview them without completely disrupting the class. Our data were gathered at only one point during the year from a small number of students, most of whom had high aptitude scores. As a result, it is difficult to generalize from their data to all of Soundings. Rather, we hope that the trends we have identified show something insightful--that, on a larger scale, students only perceive certain aspects of Soundings to be important to them.

#### *WE CAN'T READ THEIR MINDS*

The purpose of asking about the culture unit was to try to gain a more authentic perspective of what students were thinking about during an actual project in the school year. We felt that in our conversations were helpful to these ends, but conversation can't tell us everything about how they perceive their class either.

#### **CONCLUSION**

Our research has provided us with data that both confirms and complicates the findings of several of the theorists in our introduction. Our findings supported Markus

and Nurius's (1986) idea that students perceive possible selves that can be motivated in the classroom. The fact that they did not reference group collaboration in describing the ideal Soundings student may indicate that they did not understand the role of collaboration as an essential part of being a member of an educational community. When students spoke of their ideas of a model Soundings student, it usually reflected the strengths and difficulties they had in the class-- in other words, a projection of themselves and who they thought they could be.

From a different angle, Newman (2000) argues that if students are to be independent and self-regulated, they must also be adaptive help-seekers. While we found that Soundings students do ask their peers for help, they only use their peers for less substantive components such as clarification of words or assignments. When they have larger, more substantial issues, they did not talk to one another, but instead approached their teachers. This suggests that the category of adaptive help-seeking could possibly be refined by differentiating between superficial and substantive requests.

Likewise, our findings add a new dimension to Lipstein and Renninger's (2006) discussion of feedback and interest. The researchers concluded that students who respond positively to feedback are able to retain their interest, which implies that receiving feedback is desirable. Our interviews and surveys suggest that high achieving students may not be receiving as much feedback as other students because their peers often do not critique them unless they are told. They are also less likely to be faced with negative feedback. Further research could distinguish types of feedback students receive and how it affects their interest and development.

In the short term, the findings do suggest the utility of working with the students to develop an understanding of collaboration (as opposed to cooperation) and its utility and benefit to them and to their peers. They also suggest differences among the students in terms of their presenting traits that might influence the ways in which they could be supported to collaborate.

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