APPENDIX D: SAMPLE POSTINGS FACILITATING CONVERSATION AMONG GROUP MEMBERS

supervisor's posting to entire group
Hey team,

As I read through your reflections I am starting to see some similarities. During the semester I may offer you individually an alternative task for the week via email. This email will point out shared experiences between you and other members of our group and give you a chance to discuss the topic more thoroughly.

You would make my semester if you guys would begin finding these similarities yourself and acting on them, but in the beginning I'll help facilitate this discussion.

supervisor's posting to one pair of students
Hi Jessica and Deanna,

As I was reading through your smiles and screams I noticed a scream y'all had in common. You both expressed frustration at your teachers not taking into account the feelings of their students - though this took on a different form in each of your postings. I thought this week for your task (or extra if you want) you might like to read each other’s comments and respond on this topic. Maybe you can think about things that you would do differently in regard to students' feelings in these and similar situations.
**Deanna's posting**

One thing that made me smile was the smiles themselves. The best quality my observation teacher has is the ability to make each and every kid smile. Coach Condor says the most important thing about physical education is to make sure that each individual child is having fun so they will want to participate and be active. As the bell rings, Coach Condor greets the students at the door with a high-five, a "laffy-taffy" joke, or a "I heard something good about you today from one of your teachers." The kids walk in with a positive attitude and a big smile on their face. Each student is treated as an individual with special attention to his or her specific needs. An advantage to the smiles on the children's faces is that they are treated to feel good about themselves. The better they feel about themselves, the more they try and actually participate in the daily activity.

A textbook example of what not to do in a physical education class is what made me scream. Every class has to run around the track for a time as well as do sit-ups for two minutes. The activities are necessary, but the assessment has room for improvement. When the coaches go to record times and numbers of sit-ups, they call each student's name in front of the entire class. First, an average class consists of about forty kids, so calling each name one at a time and twice per class period (once for running and another for sit-ups) is very time consuming which takes away time for student activity. Second and most important, calling out scores in front of classmates can be a very negative experience and could crush an adolescent's self-confidence. We have been taught in all my Kinesiology classes that anything causing a negative self-image is bad, bad, bad.

**Jessica's Response**

As a definite non-jock, I would have been *plenty* embarrassed by having to call out my times in front of the whole class. First of all, from the time standpoint, couldn't the teacher have the students tell him both numbers at once? But more importantly, why couldn't he just walk down the row and have each student tell him quietly one at a time? Or he could sit up front and the students could walk past him one at a time?

But the bigger issue is being aware of the students' feelings. I know that being aware of other people's feelings is something I do sometimes too much. When I was younger, I used to hate going to see live plays because I spent the whole time worrying that someone would mess up and be embarrassed and then I'd have to feel bad for that person. I think my ex-therapist called it being "self sacrificing." Don't worry - I've chilled out since then. But I think that the ability to consider other people's feelings is somewhat innate. I'm not sure how to go about "teaching" it to someone else. But in this teacher's case, it should be pretty obvious to almost anyone. I mean, teachers don't have students read their grades outloud in front of their classmates. These running and sit up scores are essentially the same thing.

The other big question is what is our role as observers to comment on these things we observe that teachers could improve on? Maybe in this case, you could phrase it as a question to the teacher: Do students ever seem to be embarrassed to read their numbers outloud? Maybe if you do it in a questioning, curious tone, as opposed to being accusatory in any way...

Just some thoughts. Good luck!
Jessica's Posting

One thing that made me smile were the students' "Diversity in America" projects they worked on at home and presented in class yesterday. They were so creative! Posters, t-shirts, recipe books, a quilt. Then there were the 6 cheerleader girls (this is 6th grade we're talking about) who dressed up in costumes representing different countries and did little cheers for each of their countries. "Go Zimbabwe! Go China!" It was really cute.

Then there was the moment I wanted to scream. The middle school I'm at (O.Henry) is predominantly Anglo with some Hispanic kids who are bussed from East Austin. My observation teacher told me that her honors class was mostly Anglo kids while her average class was mostly Hispanic kids. (That is enough to make me want to scream in itself!) There is one Hispanic boy in her honors class whom she told me she moved up from her average class. When the students arrived in class yesterday, she had moved the desks around and had placed a large index card with a student's name on each desk so the students would know where to sit. Apparently, she had had the students fill out the cards with their names on them at the beginning of the school year. Because this boy (I think his name is Daniel) came into the class after the beginning of the school year, he didn't have an index card with his name, so he didn't know where to sit. (The teacher was still at morning hall duty.) He and I found an empty desk among the others and I told him he should sit there. When the teacher did arrive in the room, I told her about it and she commented that he didn't have a card because he hadn't been there at the beginning of the year. (I'd figured that much out.) So then I thought she'd get him an index card to write his name on, but no. Then she collected the cards and used them to draw which student would present his/her project next. But poor Daniel didn't have a card to get drawn in order to present his project! I didn't feel like it was my place to mention it for a second time. Yesterday was only the first of a few days of students presenting projects, but it upset me just to anticipate that Daniel will again be left out by probably not getting called on until the very end when she again realizes that he doesn't have a card.

Deanna's Response

Jessica,

I think the situation you experienced with the "left out" student is a perfect example of what we have been learning about with respect to teacher's expectations. When I just read the first two sentences about "my honors class is this and my regular class is that," I wanted to scream along with you. Even though your teacher moved up the boy from regular class, it does not sound like her expectation of him has changed very much by her actions. Something that bothers me is the fact, is this boy strong enough to ignore the actions of this teacher, or will the low expectation of this student effect his ability to learn and do well.

When I read your response, my mind filled up with questions. Did your teacher actually call him a "Hispanic" student? How were the rest of the kids in the class treating him with respect to finding a seat, etc? I would love to give the teacher the benefit of the doubt, and hope that day was just a bad day. I agree with you when you said, "what happens next time they have to draw for projects with these index cards?"

I want to thank you for making the effort to make this student feel comfortable and wanted. It makes me feel better knowing that we are bringing in caring, educated teachers who are aware of situations like this one. As an observer, I agree that it is difficult in questioning a teacher twice about an action that is so obviously shattering to a student's self-image and feeling of belonging. Please let me know if you find out if she made an index card for him (that will be interesting to see).

-Deanna