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HOW AN ENGLISH TEACHER MAY DRAW FROM THE SOCRATIC SEMINAR
METHOD IN ORDER TO FURTHER ENGAGE TENTH GRADE STUDENTS
DURING DISCUSSION

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Education.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Overview.....	4
Early Influences as a Student and a Teacher.....	7
Current Practice, Challenges, and Vision for This Study.....	11
CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review.....	16
Socratic Seminar Structures and Purposes.....	17
A Teacher’s Role in Socratic Seminars.....	20
Preparing to Participate in a Socratic Circle.....	21
The Objectives of the Socratic Seminar.....	22
Various Socratic Seminar Methods.....	25
Higher Order Thinking.....	28
Open Ended Questions and Text Dependent Answers.....	31
Strategies that Incentivize Listening and Responding.....	37
CHAPTER THREE: Methods.....	42
Research Paradigm.....	42
Setting and Participants.....	44
Research Instruments	45
Pre Socratic Seminar Plan and Research Instruments.....	45
Research Instruments Utilized During Modifications to Practice and Second Seminar.....	46
Instruments Used Post Socratic Seminar.....	49
Human Subject Review Explained.....	50

CHAPTER FOUR: Results.....	52
First Socratic Discussion Results.....	53
Classroom and Video Observation Results.....	53
Results of Colleague's Observations for First Socratic Circle.....	55
Pre-survey Results.....	56
Summarized Results of the First Socratic Discussion.....	57
Classroom Observation Results for Research Instruments Utilized During Modifications to Practice.....	58
Second Socratic Seminar Results.....	61
Classroom and Video Observation Results.....	61
Colleague's Observation Results for Second Socratic Discussion.....	64
Results of Instruments Used Post Socratic Discussion.....	65
Post-survey Results.....	65
Results of Focus Group Interviews.....	66
Summarized Results of Second Socratic Seminar.....	69
CHAPTER FIVE: Conclusion.....	73
Major Learnings.....	74
Implications.....	77
Limitations.....	80
Future Action.....	81
REFERENCES.....	86

APPENDICES.....	90
APPENDIX A.....	90
APPENDIX B.....	92
APPENDIX C.....	94
APPENDIX D.....	108
APPENDIX E.....	110
APPENDIX F.....	112
APPENDIX G.....	114
APPENDIX H.....	116
APPENDIX I.....	118
APPENDIX J.....	121
APPENDIX K.....	122
APPENDIX L.....	124

CHAPTER ONE

Overview

The silent, disinterested classroom is a fear of many teachers. Instead, teachers hope for a room of students responding with energy and engagement--a picture of enthusiastic learning that would make the cut for a feel good commercial. When I was beginning my career as an English teacher one area that I was hoping to see just such a picture was as my students and I were discussing a text. I imagined a scene similar to the one in the movie *Goodwill Hunting* in which Robin Williams guides students through a poem as they listen intently to each other, share from their hearts, and then apply what they are reading to their lives. Much to my disappointment, often the crickets would sing as I tried to initiate a discussion on a novel, poem, or text. In order to fill the quiet, I found myself doing most of the talking--telling the students what to think instead of guiding the students to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate a work for themselves.

I had started my career at an international school in Hong Kong and therefore entertained the idea that perhaps the seeming lack of initiative to participate was cultural. However, when I moved back to the United States I met with the same response in addition to a new problem which was students who either strayed from the text completely while discussing or ignored the available textual support that could substantiate their ideas about the text. Students still expected to be given credit for participating even if it was apparent they had not read the text or could not find evidence within the text to support their far-reaching, disconnected ideas. It became clear to me that all students demonstrate a need for a greater context of understanding beyond their

current perspective on the world. Students learn less when the new and well crafted voice--the voice of the one who arguably spent the most time and thought on the subject--is missing from the conversation. In an age where many are correct in their own eyes and everyone is welcome to their own ideas, it is key to impress on students that not only are their own thoughts important but the written word is still a force to be reckoned with (Fisher & Frey, 2015). In fact, examining the written word provides students needed practice in the areas of assessing the credibility of a source, using another's idea to support their current worldview, or deeply considering well constructed new perspectives in order to embrace or reject them (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). The discussions happening in my classroom were not guiding students to practice assessment or use of a text.

To add to the variety of problems I was encountering during discussions, I also had students who spoke up in class demonstrating not only that they had read the text but were thinking deeply about it, yet it was rare for these students to direct their ideas towards their fellow classmates instead of me. They did not have a back and forth conversation with each other that exhibited careful listening and responding to another's ideas.

Overall, the discussions in my classroom were a combination of a rote question and answer session, student speculation, silent non-participants, and students sharing not to hear others but in order to get a grade. As I considered the trend I was seeing with my students during discussion, I began to realize that I needed to find a way to stir up a longing to participate and an interest in hearing from each other, but perhaps even more

importantly, I needed to ignite an enthusiasm for preparation beforehand by guiding students to tap into new, exciting, and credible knowledge.

As I settled into teaching ninth and tenth grade students and continued to facilitate discussions that demonstrated a need for change in multiple areas, I began to search for solutions. Eventually, I landed upon the Socratic seminar--a format of discussion that pulled me from the conversation and ensured that students came prepared to crack open their books. Israel (2002), author of "Examining Multiple Perspectives in Literature," defines Socratic seminars as a formal discussion utilizing a text and open-ended questions. Also, a Socratic discussion relies heavily on participants listening closely, thinking critically, and responding to the thoughts of others. Cooperative learning and respect are taught and practiced skills within a Socratic circle (Filkins, 2016). The discussion format tackled and solved many of the problems that I had been wrestling with for years. I implemented a Socratic discussion where students prepared initial answers to prompt questions that they received a day before the discussion date. On the day of the discussion the class was divided with half of the students discussing in the inner circle and half listening in the outer circle. After six minutes the students in each circle would switch roles and places. I removed myself from the discussion and instead listened in order to grade students based upon their levels of involvement, references to a text, and respect demonstrated for each other. My lack of facilitating made the discussions awkward at first, but eventually my students began to speak up, refer to their texts, and respond to each other's ideas.

Despite the radical changes the Socratic seminar brought to my classroom, there continued to be a variety of challenges that I wanted to address. About fifty percent of my

students began to reference their text while discussing but I wanted to see an even greater number of students reading the text or referring to the text when they are sharing. I provided students stimulating prompt questions, but I wanted to find new methods to encourage students to reach for even higher levels of thought while discussing. Even though I rewarded students with points who clearly acknowledged others ideas, I still had a number of students who did not listen and respond to each other but instead waited for an opportunity to say their prepared piece while directing their response over the heads of their peers in my direction.

I believe that a majority of students are capable and interested in participating in genuine, engaging conversations surrounding texts and sharing their own ideas about others' writing. The challenge is facilitating a discussion that has the components that motivate students to tap into their capabilities. All of the observations and ponderings listed above led me to my research question: *Drawing from the Socratic seminar method, in its fullest form, how does a 10th grade English teacher increase student participation and engagement in the areas of higher order thinking, text dependence, and skills in listening and responding to one another?* In this chapter I will be explaining in further detail my experiences and observations that led me to explore this topic in my current teaching environment.

Early Influences as a Student and Teacher

In the 1980's, the Minnesota Twins were hot. My father would bring me to the games and what would I bring? A book. I would pull my nose from the page to catch

Kirby Puckett hitting a homerun or to flag down the vendor who sold chocolate ice cream cups, but that was about it. The stories and ideas within books held my rapt attention.

Although literature was engaging to me, while in elementary school I was puzzled by the areas I was tested on when it came to assessing what I had learned from my readings. I wondered, why was a date mentioned in the book or the name of a minor character what I was to remember from a text? It was themes, emotions, new concepts, life lessons, and powerful words that stayed with me. Even at a young age, I seemed to recognize that recall was a lower objective to strive for than application or synthesis (Bloom & Krathwohl, 1969).

It was not just my reading assessments that I found difficult; I also struggled with classroom discussions. Not great at off the cuff speaking, throughout my schooling I was shy and hesitant to share my opinions with the class until I could let my thoughts percolate. Eventually, however, I discovered that if my teacher encouraged us to start a discussion with words directly from a text, I had confidence to speak because the words were not my own. Words from a book were a far cry from my stumbling attempts because they were thought-out, fashioned, and honed. I could start with another's powerful thoughts and then comfortably elaborate. As I grew older, I gravitated not just towards books but towards conversations with others that stirred up controversy, puzzlement, and new ideas. Disappointingly, rarely did I encounter such conversations in a school lesson. The years that I did have an excellent literature teacher or classmates that were motivated to discuss a text were some of my favorite moments in school.

With my past reading and discussion experiences as well as my college education tucked under my belt, I started my career as a high school communication and language

arts educator in 2002. I had every intention of making my classroom a place of text-based, stimulating discussions and authentic reading assessments. Of course, our ideals often do not become a reality. Without many ideas of how to put my goals into practice or having the opportunity to learn from trial and error, when starting a classroom discussion I resorted to the familiar teacher dominated question and answer sessions. I would struggle in front of the classroom asking students questions--many of which were from prepared curriculum and had just one correct or expected answer. In response, an eager ten percent would participate while the rest of the students would check out or when I probed, would either give an answer that did not connect strongly with the text or a flat out admission of not having read the text we were "discussing." What was happening in my classroom did not feel or look like the discussions I was hoping for. Students were barely responding to me and they were most certainly not asking their own questions or responding to each other. Another problem was that I was not sure how to assess students in regards to discussions and had just hoped that our conversations would be stimulating enough that all students would want to participate.

Eventually, it became apparent to me that my facilitation of a discussion was squelching students' sense of ownership and direction with where their learning should go. I also had to recognize that the classroom discussions I was facilitating were not motivating a majority of the students to read, participate, or refer to the text. I wanted students to be motivated to read, participate in discussion, self direct, connect their reading to their own lives, use textual evidence during a discussion, respond to their reading in the higher levels of thought, and be fairly assessed. I had attempted to do the above in my first years of teaching and did not get it right. It was obvious the discussion

format, reading assignments, and incentives I was using were not working with students. I began to wonder *how does an English teacher increase student participation and engagement in the areas of higher order thinking, text dependence, and skills in listening and responding to one another?*

I started to ponder how and where to make changes in my practice in order to construct the learning environment I had hoped for. Four years into my teaching career I received professional development instruction while in Hong Kong regarding higher order thinking skills (Brookhart, 2010) and asking questions that facilitate a close read of the text (Fisher & Frey, 2015). Text dependent analysis and questions force students through questioning to synthesize answers based on specific evidence within a passage and demonstrate their ability to interpret the meaning behind that evidence. I became convinced that incorporating the training into my lessons was essential. I also found myself thinking about what incited me to read as a child and my positive discussion experiences throughout my education.

Knowing what my objective was--it became a matter of applying my passion, past experiences, and new learning about the value and implementation of higher order thinking, close reading, and asking text dependent questions. I also recalled how during my student teaching I had overheard a few teachers raving about an English teacher who utilized a fishbowl discussion format and had continued success in getting students to read and interact with texts. After initiating a visit to the teacher's classroom to observe the discussions in action, I remembered having asked for copies of the lesson handouts. With expectation, I dug the teacher's lesson plans, instructions, and handouts out of a dusty file and went to work. The teacher had divided students into an inner circle of

discussion and outer circle of students who listened to the discussion and were encouraged to take notes in preparation for switching into the inner circle after an allotted amount of time. At the teacher's direction, the students traded places--switching from the discussion circles to the listening circles multiple times throughout the hour. The teacher had also prepared a packet of questions for the students to use in preparation for the discussion. The packet included a simple rubric that informed the students on how they were to be graded when they were speaking within the inner circle. The teacher did not participate in the discussion, but instead assessed from the outside and gave points to students who accomplished a variety of objectives one of which was to take on the mantle of leadership and facilitation. Keeping much of the teacher's original structure, I modified a few areas in order to fit my objectives and teaching style. Within a week, I was ready to try a new approach to reading and conversation within my classroom and that initial trial run began my interest and enthusiasm for Socratic seminars.

Current Practice, Challenges, and Vision for This Study

Over the course of ten years, I have conducted a Socratic seminar where students receive open-ended questions beforehand in order to prepare for discussion, then rotate during the discussion between the talking circle and the outer listening circle, all the while directing the discussion with minimal involvement from me. The students are graded with a complex rubric that awards a variation of scores for levels of thought and participation. The discussions that I have had the privilege of listening in on have been impressive, successful, and have fulfilled many of my objectives. In many cases, the inner-outer discussion circles are the best examples of higher order thinking,

participation, ownership, and inquiry I see over the course of the school year. However, there is always more work to be done.

I still see problems with the Socratic discussion in my tenth grade classroom and have a desire to make improvements. Firstly, there is still a good percentage of students in the class who do not strive for higher levels of thought such as questioning the credibility of a source, evaluating arguments, detecting bias, or making connections between sources and the world around them. These students seem content with low levels of response and participation and therefore take a low grade.

Secondly, I realize that I need to improve the questions that I am providing students if the students are to reach the objective of fully accessing the text while discussing. Students find ways to skirt the questions that are linked to the text. They seem content to pick up a few points for surface level answers and personal musings rather than striving for a high grade through usage of textual evidence. Although many of my prompts questions are open-ended, I still need to get better at writing and providing questions that are open to many possible ideas but cannot be answered in totality without having read the text. I would also like to figure out a method that encourages students to go beyond my questions and ask their own.

Thirdly, I also need a way to encourage students to become better listeners, responders, and builders upon each other's ideas rather than just sharing their own. My greatest frustration is when one student puts forward a powerful idea or question and the student's peers do not acknowledge what has been just stated and instead launch into a new direction.

Finally, although I am utilizing parts of Socratic seminar format, I realize that there are parts of the Socratic Seminar that I have never implemented well or at all. I would like to see what would happen if I did every part of the seminar well. I am also curious what would happen if I experimented and broke the standard format of the seminar. I have repeated the same assessment rubric and discussion structure for years. Over the course of time, I have noticed areas of the standard seminar requirements and structure that are lacking. One example is that I have students who come well prepared for discussion but choose to not speak in front of a large group for a variety of reasons and therefore get hit really hard when it comes to their grade. Another flaw in the structure is that if I have a large class there is less time for each student to participate within the timed discussion, there is greater opportunity for repetition rather than unique contributions, and the discussion takes much more time. In order to differentiate instruction not only would I like a variety of discussion structures based upon the principles of the Socratic seminar within my toolbox, but I would like to study which ones meet key objectives and which ones can be improved upon. In fact, at times, students have approached me with suggestions for change or to fill me in on how their previous teachers have tweaked the Socratic seminar. I want to consider their advice, but I need the time to research and implement what the students have suggested. Over the course of this study, I hope to spend time examining how to encourage students towards higher order thinking, how to write text dependent questions, how to motivate students to become attentive listeners and responders, and what successful tweaks to the Socratic seminar have worked for teachers in the past and the reasons for the success. I hope to implement my learning into the classroom and evaluate the results in order to answer the

question: *Drawing from the Socratic seminar method, in its fullest form, how does a 10th grade English teacher increase student participation and engagement in the areas of higher order thinking, text dependence, and skills in listening and responding to one another?* As I modify, experiment, and implement the Socratic seminar to its greatest capacity perhaps the information that results from this study will not only help my students have a more varied learning experience but I can also add further understanding to current learning in regards to discussion formats and facilitation.

In Summary

Reading and discussing a text can be a challenging, rewarding, and perspective changing experience. I believe all students in an English classroom should experience the mental stimulation and deep feeling of satisfaction when one is engaged in a lively text-based conversation with one's peers. A Socratic seminar is one way to construct just such a conversation but balancing all of the factors needed for an excellent discussion is no easy task. In order to implement the Socratic seminar more effectively in a tenth grade classroom, one needs to examine how to draw out students in a variety of ways. Further research is needed in order to discover what motivates and incentivizes students to read a text. Every teacher can utilize more strategies that encourage students to use textual evidence and tap into their higher order thinking skills. Finally, high school students continue to need a great amount of training in the area of listening, responding, and learning from each other while discussing challenging texts and life issues. All of the above reiterates my research question: *Drawing from the Socratic seminar method, in its fullest form, how does a 10th grade English teacher increase student participation and*

engagement in the areas of higher order thinking, text dependence, and skills in listening and responding to one another?

In the next chapter, I address the literature around the Socratic discussion that has worked in the past to help high school students, specifically tenth graders, to read a text in order to discuss it and how teachers have facilitated building higher order thinking, textual reference, and listening skills through Socratic seminars. In Chapter 3, I explain the action research that took place in my classroom related to the implementation of new-found modifications to the Socratic seminar. Chapter 4 looks at my research findings and reflections. Finally, in Chapter 5, I address the summary of my work, implications for my classroom and fellow teachers, and future research opportunities.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Before my students start reading *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* they spend an hour in a Socratic seminar discussing the use of language. The discussion is a necessary introduction because the N-word is stated over two hundred times in the novel. After reading a few articles regarding the excessive use of the word and watching a *Sixty Minutes* program that highlights many differing voices about novel and the use of language in the text, the students address statements such as “some words are so offensive that they should never be used to tell a story” and “the names we use for others are not important.” They listen and talk with each other. Every year students tackle these topics with varied levels of engagement and draw upon the provided supplemental texts to a varying degree. Usually many differing viewpoints are represented and, in the end, we all get something out of the conversation.

Even though I have seen success when utilizing a Socratic seminar in order to engage students, I continue to recognize that during a Socratic seminar there is more to learn in regards to propelling students forward in discussion, thought, understanding, and engagement with a text and each other. In this chapter I will be addressing the research behind the following question: *Drawing from the Socratic seminar method, in its fullest form, how does a 10th grade English teacher increase student participation and engagement in the areas of higher order thinking, text dependence, and skills in listening and responding to one another?*

After covering an overview of how a Socratic seminar works, I will also examine the research and literature that covers helping students be more successful in a discussion.

Next I will provide an in-depth look at higher order thinking and the value of asking questions that encourage students towards textual dependence because these are two objectives of Socratic discussions. Finally, after understanding the full picture of what a Socratic seminar could and should be, I will explore strategies that motivate adolescents to listen and respond to each other. All of this exploration will guide future action research in my classroom.

Socratic Seminar's structure and purpose

A Socratic seminar is based upon an ancient form of dialog in which, through doubt and a system of questioning another, one reaches truth or an adequate general understanding. A basic goal of the Socratic method is to increase understanding of difficult concepts. Socratic questions should not be derogatory or express criticism but should respectfully explore the reasons why one holds certain beliefs (Overholser, 1992). The Socratic process starts by posing an initial question which is open-ended and philosophical in nature after which, without the initial questioner dictating or determining the direction of the subsequent discussion, the group evaluates, ponders, analyzes, gives varied answers, defends interpretations, and makes decisions about the way forward. It is also important to remember when considering the objectives of a Socratic seminar that, as Socrates himself insisted, the only way for the discourse and Socratic system to work is if the persons involved are honest about their thinking (Seekin, 1987).

The Socratic method of discussion is quite different than what occurs in many English classrooms in which canonized texts and a handful of accepted interpretations of the canon are what form the content of the lessons. In these classrooms, discussion takes the tedious form of teachers initiating, students guessing the accepted answer, and the

teacher evaluating the responses. When classroom discussions become so overpowered by the teacher's direction the students think more about the intentions of the teacher than their own responses to a text or a classmate's novel idea (Newell & Durst, 1993). Over the years, education reformers have begun to ask what nature of thinking educators are trying to promote through such curriculum and methods of instruction. The unsettling answers to these questions have helped the focus of instruction move toward encouraging higher order thinking while still continuing to spur on mastery of content (Newell & Durst, 1993). Taba, curriculum reformer and educator, has indicated that teachers should break the habits developed while trying to accomplish the overwhelming task of "covering" a great amount of curriculum and instead be encouraged to walk alongside students in order to "uncover" the thought processes needed to become lifelong learners (as cited in Bridges, 2013). Similarly, Socrates did not encourage students to understand all difficult topics but rather to understand how to ponder and wrestle with a difficult topic when it arises. Copeland, author of a practical book on constructing Socratic circles, points out that as students are being overwhelmed with an increase in standardized tests and pressure to have the answer the nation is looking for:

They have less and less time to work on the critical and creative thinking skills that will ultimately facilitate their growth and development into productive, responsible citizens. Socratic circles are one strategy that provides this opportunity while still having students practice and polish skills in a wide variety of other curricular areas, including reading, speaking, listening, and vocabulary. (Copeland, 2005, p.3)

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In an English classroom Socratic circles are often constructed of an inner circle where the students do the speaking and an outer circle where half the class is listening to the conversation of the inner circle. After a set amount of time, the inner circle stops discussing and moves out while the students from the listening circle move in to try their hand at discussion and response. Frequently, the two groups will switch positions multiple times throughout a single class period. Perhaps the movement of students from discussing to listening and visa versa is not a key part of the Socratic method, but it is a very a physical reminder for students that learning through discussion involves both speaking and careful listening. It is also is an invention by the constructors of the Socratic seminar to involve all, yet reduce the number of speakers vying to get a word in edgewise. From the very beginning of my implementation of the Socratic circle, I had students moving swiftly and fluidly between the listening circle and discussion circle. Although a bit confusing at first, students learn quickly how to make the transfer and seem to appreciate the movement and change of situation.

Literature circles also reduce the numbers of speakers and have students discuss a text. However, the difference between a Socratic circle and a literature circle, is that while literature circles meet in groups of four or five to discuss a work of literature, in a Socratic circle there are a greater amount of students involved in the discussion--roughly half the class--and Socratic circles can be based upon content other than English literature. Socratic circles do not ask students to fulfill specific roles and the students have an opportunity to hear a range of opinions because of the greater number of students participating in one sitting. Also, while literature circles may cover a different text in

each group, Socratic circles usually focus the attention of all the students within one class on one text (Copeland, 2005).

A teacher's role in Socratic seminars. A teacher's role in a Socratic circle is to facilitate students in clarification and consideration of a big idea, demonstrate respect for varying viewpoints, and to ensure that the students follow the seminar process. Teachers construct their circles in a variety of ways. Some participate in the discussions. Others sit out of the discussion and focus on using a scorecard in order to rate student's individual participation. A few teachers do not believe that students should be rated or graded at all during a Socratic circle because they see a variety of ways that this limits or squelches the discussion and instead only grade students on follow-up activities such as a written reflection on what the student learned through the dialogue (Copeland, 2005). I sit out of the Socratic circle finding that students speak more naturally to each other and seem to take more ownership of the discussion if I am not present in the inner circle. I grade students using a rubric about seventy-five percent of the time. I have found that when I do not grade students on the discussion the results are mixed. The negatives are that students prepare less for the discussion and some students choose not to participate at all, while on a positive note, when I do not grade a discussion students seem less anxious about time and their eloquence when speaking.

If a teacher does participate in the Socratic circle and shares his or her opinion, it is important that the students are to accept it as such "understanding that there are multiple perspectives they can take and that the teacher's view, although valid, is not necessarily the one they must take, and certainly not out of hand, without more thought and exploration" (Langer as cited in Newell & Durst, 1993 p. 41). If participating, a

teacher needs to establish early on that all voices are valid in Socratic discussion and students have the right to push back, have a different perspective, or ask for further evidence from the teacher. Socratic circles are to be safe places to construct new learning and explore possibilities. A healthy way to start the circle is with all options on the table--no one is right and no one is wrong--participants are allowed to think differently from one another. If a teacher's view is more right or holds more weight than others the construct of the circle has gone awry and students will lose the freedom to think for themselves and explore ideas without limitations.

Some teachers have students formulate their own questions and bring them to the discussion. However, Copeland suggests a teacher should bring a few prepared questions of one's own in case the students struggle with finding material to discuss. In Copeland's opinion, long silences where students are not engaged is worse than the teacher taking control for a moment or two (Copeland, 2005). I have provided students with all of their prompt questions beforehand in order to give students an opportunity to prepare and find textual evidence. I have not had students formulate their own questions but realize after my research that this is a missed opportunity for students to take ownership and contribute to the direction of the discussion.

Preparing to participate in a Socratic circle. Before a Socratic circle happens, most teachers spend a considerable amount of time teaching students how to annotate, do a close read, and prepare for a discussion of a text (Copeland, 2005). This preparation is important because in order for the Socratic process to function correctly, students must have a foundation of background information before stepping into advanced thinking. According to Athanases (1993) of "Reader Response Criticism and Classroom Literature

Discussion” this is not contradictory to Rosenblatt’s reader response theory. In fact, Athanes states that not only must a text stimulate independent thinking but it also must be a control. The reader must return to the text to “determine if the reading is sound and defensible” (p. 269). Although students within a Socratic circle may be exploring a text on their own while utilizing their personal experience and opinions, their interpretations of a work must not contradict the piece and must have some basis within the text. Many responses are appropriate, but not all.

At the same time, if a Socratic seminar is to succeed, students must come with an open mind and be ready to listen to a text and to others. Their understandings should be tentative--always subject to change--especially when the discussion comes to the examination of literature because such a study involves an ever-changing horizon of possibilities. In the early 1990’s, a study followed twenty-one secondary English teachers from a variety of school districts who had a goal to help students study literature in more thoughtful ways through the use of reader response instruction. The study found that “almost all productive instruction took place during discussion that involved the exploration of possibilities” (Langer as cited in Newell & Durst, 1995, p. 26). If new understandings and change are not possible than learning new things is limited.

The objectives of the Socratic seminar. As part of the Socratic method, students play an active role in using inductive reasoning to see beyond specific instances and begin to discern general principles of behavior. Students are not told what they are supposed to know--instead they build a world of meaning for themselves (Overholser, 1992). One way that Socratic circles accomplish this is that the structure of a Socratic circle has a discourse pattern that is more interactive than a teacher to student ping-pong

of questions and grabs for the predetermined, “correct” answer. Students propose their own ideas and respond to each other throughout the discussion, while the teacher facilitates or is completely removed from the circle of thought. If teachers speak at all in a Socratic circle much of their focus is to help ensure uptake, or in other words, to make certain that a student's contribution to a discussion is heard and counted. Studies have shown that students speak more in class if they learn that their unique perspectives matter to their peers and teacher. The study “From Discourse Communities to Interpretive Communities” conducted by Nystrand and Gamoran (1992) discovered that “classes characterized by more authentic questions, more uptake, more discussion, and more coherence showed evidence of higher achievement” (p. 101). According to some studies, “students who trust their own reasoning test better” and students whose education is connected to their personal lives are more compelled to participate in their learning and development (Tredway, 1995). Emphasizing the importance of engaging students through active learning, Sylwester (1994), whose career focuses on helping educators understand the systems of the brain, noted that modern brain research may provide biological support to educators who argue that the learning process must be connected to one’s own experiences and that research encourages schools to focus on more metacognitive activities (Tredway, 1995). Tredway elaborated upon this idea by stating that:

Students acquire a sense of significance from doing significant things When students meet, make decisions, and solve problems regarding carefully chosen works, they reflect on important values. . . , they then get the message that their

voices count [and] gain a sense of belonging and active participation in their community. (p. 1)

In contrast, other studies argue that while active learning and affirmation from others regarding one's ability to be thoughtful and construct meaning may increase one's feeling of self worth and competence, such feelings do not directly correlate into academic achievement (Weger, Castle, and Emmett, 2010). These observations should not be disregarded, yet because the heart and soul of Socratic seminars is discussing challenging texts and asking big life questions, it has to be acknowledged that students' involvement in a circle encourages them to go beyond academic achievement to build thoughtful habits of mind and heart that will impact their world--a powerful and necessary objective of every classroom.

If nothing else, Socratic circles are a form of discussion that asks students to practice paraphrasing information, deferring to another, taking turns, and waiting for others to finish speaking. Students do not raise hands in a Socratic discussion but have to learn each other's body language and notice eye contact in order to recognize when their turn has come to speak. Teachers report that students who have participated in seminars exhibit these crucial manners of interaction more frequently than do those who have not (Tredway, 1995). Taking part in an inner outer discussion circle does not guarantee a complete elimination of conflict, great leaps forward on standardized test scores, or that all students will respect each other, but it does model for students what a discussion looks and feels like when listening, kindness, and regard for others is practiced. Schools are powerful influences on young learners if the teachers and administration within them are just as committed to the development of students characters as to their minds and if the

adults are both sympathetic and understanding of students interactions with each other (Tredway, 1995). I have seen first hand the powerful character development that happens within Socratic discussions. Students practice not interrupting each other, encouraging each other, and listening to ideas that they do not agree with while still demonstrating respect. I have also watched as students learn their communication flaws as their peers check each other or call each other out on different issues.

Various Socratic seminar methods. Research and teacher practice have proposed a variety of Socratic seminar methods and strategies that could increase the chances of students attaining both the objective of character building and increased academic success. In order to build character, Copeland (2015) argues that instant feedback is a must. One suggestion is that at the end of every discussion round the students from the listening circle give quick feedback on the quality and behavior of their inner circle peers participation in the discussion rather than the content of the dialogue. Calling out specific students is encouraged and then balancing praise with specific suggestions to correct a problem. Some teachers ask the outer circle students to list two strengths and one weakness they are noticing of the group members. It is fine if students from the listening circle say the same thing; in fact, Copeland states that the repetitiveness of the feedback can be confirming and hit home a point. Also, hearing their peers offer feedback and suggestions empowers students to make changes in ways that teachers often cannot inspire because educators can be perceived as judgmental and grade focused. Some teachers have students in the outer circle use an observation form where they tally the contributions students make according to a rubric based upon good habits of conversation. At intervals, the students share the collected results (Tredway,

1995). For fear of losing time that could be given to students to discuss, I did not have the listening circle relay a critique of the inner circle but instead asked that they use their listening time to take notes, prepare for their time in the inner circle, and seek information from the inner discussion that could spur on ideas to bring up once they enter the inner circle. Research tells us that young teens' executive functions, including the ability to respond to corrective feedback, learn from mistakes, and reflect thoughtfully before making decisions and choices, are emerging during adolescence and grow with practice (Blakemore & Choudhury, 2006). The Socratic process could be a forum for teens to cut their teeth on their new and developing brain functions. Also, after considering other teachers' practice student evaluation, I realized that implementing peer critique might be just the tool to use in order to encourage students to participate more.

Teachers and facilitators also propose ways to decrease the influence of an over-talker, support a student who is painfully shy, or help the polite student who cannot get a word in edgewise. One idea is that a quiet student can take notes on what was discussed in order to help absent students catch up on what was missed. Another is to give students a limited number of tokens during the discussion. There are variety of ways that the tokens could be used--one being that students must use a token to speak and they cannot "play" another token until everyone else has put forward a certain number (Copeland, 2015).

In regards to the development of the mind, some teachers find assessment of students Socratic circle performance counterproductive to encouraging students to experiment and grow in their discussion and analytical skills and instead grade students' preparation or written reflections on what they learned in the discussion. Other teachers

keep records of student participation and demonstrated learning on score sheets and rubrics. One teacher proposed making copies of the score sheets and then creating a final spread at the end of the year so that both student and teacher can see progress over time. Teacher's award points during a Socratic circle in a variety of areas, but one area that could be explored further is giving points to students who ask authentic questions that are beyond what the facilitator proposed or when a student effectively listens and responds to new ideas put forward within the group. In the past I have assessed students on the depth and uniqueness of their responses, use of textual evidence, ability to refute, elaboration, facilitation, encouragement, and participation. I have not specifically awarded points in the higher tiers to those who ask stimulating questions or who demonstrate a high level of listening skill. After examining the practice of others, I realize changing my rubric and point system may encourage students to participate at higher levels in some areas of discussions where I see a need for improvement.

Finally, in order to encourage students to reflect on their own learning and character development some teachers have students self assess at the end of the hour and make goals for future discussions. Reflection is a very similar to critical thinking in that one questions, assesses, organizes, and predicts future outcomes. Throughout my practice of Socratic seminars, I have asked for very little reflection, self assessment, or goal creation at the end of a discussion besides having students turn to a talking partner to share their thoughts on their performance and to ask for feedback. It is possible that incorporating more self assessment might improve student participation in a variety of areas within the Socratic discussion.

Unfortunately, there is no clear answer or format for how teachers should promote better dialogue, learning, participation, and response. Each text, group of students, setting, and context have an influence on the vibe in classroom and the flow of the discussion. Teacher preparation, ingenuity, and research are key to facilitating rewarding and insightful conversations. Teachers need to provide the keys that open to new levels of exciting learning, but it is still the students who must unlock the door and take the step through to participation and discovery.

Higher order thinking

Research in the area of higher order thinking provides an understanding for the purpose and goals of a Socratic seminar as well as help to identify and measure the factors of success when students engage in a Socratic circle. A successful circle is one in which a majority of students are thinking critically. Simply put, “critical thinking consists of seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that disconfirms your ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions based upon available facts, or solving problems” (Willingham, 2008, pg. 21). Brookfield’s (1987) book *Developing Critical Thinkers* took the critical thinking a step further, describing:

When we think critically we become aware of the diversity of values, behaviors, social structures, and artistic forms in the world. Through realizing this diversity, our commitments to our values, actions, and social structures are informed by a sense of humility; we gain an awareness that others in the world have the same

sense of certainty we do--but about ideas, values, and actions that are completely contrary to our own. (pg. 5)

In an effort to promote higher levels of thinking rather than rote learning and memorization, Dr. Bloom has been a significant contributor to the research surrounding higher order thinking with the construction of Bloom's taxonomy (Clark, 2015). Bloom's taxonomy is a set of three hierarchical models used to classify higher order thinking into levels of complexity and specificity. Bloom and other scholars over the years have made the argument that higher order thinking is not a single concept but rather a variety of abilities and attitudes in one's cognitive skill set.

With the introduction of Bloom's taxonomy our definition of critical thinking became stronger as did our awareness that there is a great need to teach students to think critically about information rather than focusing on learning the content of information (Burkhart, 2006). It is impossible to teach students all the content available to us in our great world, but we have started to recognize that it is possible to give students the skills to approach their entire world critically. It has always been a goal of formal schooling to prepare the next generation with the content it needs in order to forge into the future, but as Browne and Keeley (1997) write, "As the complexity of the world seems to increase at an accelerating rate, there is a greater tendency to become passive absorbers of information, uncritically accepting what is seen and heard" (as cited in Burkhart, 2006, pg. 6). The vast amount of information available on the Internet requires a young person to be able to navigate the Web with critical thinking skills. As teens spend hours each day sifting through information online, it is necessary for them to be able to evaluate the credibility of a source, evaluate arguments, detect bias, and recognize the difference

between facts and opinions. Unfortunately in a 2005 on-line survey conducted by the National Governor's Association of Best Practices of over 10,000 high school students across the United States, forty one percent responded that they did not feel their school experience provided practical and essential life skills, and over one-third rated their critical thinking preparation as fair-to-poor (Burkhart, 2006).

Willingham's article "Critical thinking: why it is so hard to teach," outlines that the field of education reacted to studies such as the one listed above by teaching students lessons on Bloom's Taxonomy and maxims that encourage students to think critically. For instance, students are encouraged to think from multiple perspectives and now recognize such thinking as a good practice, however, Willingham (2008) argues that "[j]ust as it makes no sense to try to teach students factual content without giving students opportunities to practice using it, it also makes no sense to try to teach critical thinking devoid of factual content" (pg. 21). Students cannot think from multiple perspectives if they have not been introduced to the multiple perspectives; thus content and critical thinking skills must continue to walk hand in hand. There is research that supports that when students are active in their own learning with practical skills woven into the framework of instruction and a few critical thinking skills are taught outright such as metacognition (thinking about one's thinking), students higher order thinking skills are advanced (Burkhart, 2006). Research suggests to start by teaching students what thinking is, then create an atmosphere in the classroom that values good thinking, and finally, integrate higher order thinking skills as well as reflection into the content of the course (Burkhart, 2006). In my own practice and from my past observations, I do think that students recognize when we start Socratic discussions at the beginning of the

year that I value good thinking and that the discussion is an exciting platform for them to practice higher order thinking. After our first few discussions, I hear the buzz in the classroom as students marvel at how deep they went, how involved they were, and how much they learned from each other. It is apparent to me that high school students long to tackle difficult subjects, “sound like adults,” and take matters into their own hands. Through the assessment rubric my students receive as well as being given a carefully documented score for every time they speak, the students are able to gather what higher order thinking is and evaluate if they are reaching higher levels of thought.

To conclude, if the discussion is built upon a text, Socratic seminars by nature demand students to gauge the validity of what they see and hear as well as make decisions based upon evidence. Polite and Adams (1997) share that Socratic seminars provide a format for students to reflect abstractly as well as integrate the meaning of the text into their own lives. If facilitated correctly, it is possible that Socratic seminars can be a powerful format that melds both content and critical thinking together into a dynamic and worthwhile classroom activity.

Open ended questions and text dependent answers

“If meaning is a human act rather than a footlocker full of dusty facts, then we must focus attention on the act of making meaning rather than simply on the accumulation of data.”

R. Probst

Both in times past and today, after a reading assignment is completed some teachers rely on asking students factual questions rather than open-ended questions in order to discuss the text. Recognizing that this happens in even the best of classrooms, it is important for all teachers to carefully consider that the types of questions students are

asked influences how they read. If asked to “recall and recite,” that is how they will read the text. If asked to synthesize information, students read for that type of information. If they know that the questions posed to them will be predominately personal, students quickly catch on that there is no need to read the text at all (Fisher, Frey, Anderson, & Thayre, 2015, pg. 70).

An open-ended question is defined as a question that usually has more than one correct answer and typically requires a multiple-word response. In order to respond effectively, readers must analyze the text and produce their own answer rather than simply regurgitate information from the textbook. Open-ended prompts are often questions that begin with terms such as *why* or *how*. Additionally, because open-ended questions demand more complex answers, they often make a way for several ideas to be put forward so that students can then compare and contrast (Wasik and Hindman, 2013). Asking open-ended questions are an important component of Socratic seminars because the possibilities of what could be said in response are far beyond the limits of the original text and the conversations can become more authentic because they delve into prior knowledge, personal meaning, and interpretation (Probst, 1988). Also, asking open-ended questions that elicit a variety of responses can change the participation percentage in a discussion. Langer (1993), through a four-year study, discovered that if a literature discussion is started from the perspective that there is one text-based or teacher-based interpretation of the work than the teacher will talk roughly 75% of the time. On the other hand, if a literature discussion is based upon the idea that there could be more than one defensible interpretation of a text than students will talk 86% of the time. Langer concludes that if a text is presented with one locked-in meaning, students have less

motivation to personally envision the world of the text or live through the characters (Newell & Durst, 1993). If Socratic seminars are based upon open-ended questions, asked by both teacher and students, it is quite likely that students will respond at higher percentages than if they face a series of closed questions.

Another example that demonstrates the power of good questions is a study by *Literacy Partners International* which involved posing four standard open-ended prompts to first grade students in response to book. The prompts were as follows:

- Tell me in your own words what happened in the book
- Talk about your favorite parts
- This book reminds me of...
- Add something new to the book

It was observed over the course of time that students enjoyed sharing their own thoughts, hearing their classmates' ideas, and demonstrated an "emerging awareness that text could be interpreted in a variety of ways." Intriguingly, once the students became accustomed to the four open-ended prompt questions, and responding in kind, they did not limit their reflections to the original prompts but began to branch out on their own with a variety of new ideas and responses (Blum, Koskinen, Bhartiya, & Hluboky, 2010, pg. 495). This study also observed a noticeable increase in higher levels of vocabulary usage when students responded to open-ended questions posed from the teacher and each other which reflects Vygotsky's constructivist approach in that "language is a mental tool for thinking and that learning is a social activity" (pg. 495). Probst (1988) explains that the meaning of a text is dependent upon having an unfettered reader because it is a "transaction between active minds and the words on the page-it does not reside in the ink, to be

ferreted out, unearthed, uncovered. Rather, it is created, formed, shaped, by readers in the act of reading” (pg. 34). As students make meaning, allowing open-ended questions and text to shape them, they are invited into literature and language in a powerful way that is not just an exercise or simple recall.

Another bonus of asking open-ended questions rather than exhibiting an expectation for one definite answer, is that teachers demonstrate an interest in the students’ varied ideas, thereby building a positive, give and take teacher-student relationship (Wasik & Hindman, 2013). The dynamic of a classroom is quite different between a teacher standing at the front of the classroom searching for the single correct answer from the group and a teacher sitting in the back of the classroom listening in on students questioning and answering each other within a Socratic circle.

Although there are many positives to asking open-ended questions, the process poses difficulties for both teacher and students to navigate. A series of open-ended questions may be exhausting for students who are used to being asked for prescribed answers because the expectations for success do not appear to be clear cut (Probst, 1988). Often when teachers pose such prompts they do not give students the wait time of up to ten seconds needed to formulate quality answers nor do they give the feedback students need in order to measure the quality of their response (Wasik & Hindman, 2013). In the case of conducting Socratic seminars, teachers need to teach explicitly how to articulate thoughts, connect students to the powerful portions of the text that often elicit student response, and will most likely have to provide students assistance in the very difficult task of talking well with others (Probst, 1988).

Finally, open-ended questions may encourage students to not give rote answers from a book but this does not mean that students' answers should be completely divorced from the text itself. A text-dependent answer is in response to a question that can only be answered by referring back to the text. A text-dependent answer encourages careful analysis, well-defended claims, and putting forward clear information. In an effort to engage students on a personal level and have students create meaning, some have swung the pendulum too far in the direction of having all meaning derive from within the student's realm of prior knowledge and personal understanding. Students still need to build a strong foundation of new knowledge and understanding texts is one building block, if not many, in that important foundation. When a teacher asks students to make a personal connection to a text, there is no insistence that the students exhibit anything beyond a surface level of understanding of the content (Fisher, Frey, Anderson, & Thayre, 2015). In order to critique an author's position one must first completely understand it and that understanding takes much more than one's personal connection to a piece. The study "From Discourse Communities to Interpretive Communities" conducted by Nystrand and Gamoran (1992) discovered that asking students more authentic open-ended questions did link directly to higher achievement but only if teachers were asking authentic questions about a text and if a high percentage of the students had done their reading. Students who were asked authentic, open-ended questions during class but not questions based upon a text showed no academic improvement in the long run. Therefore to encourage students to understand and engage with a text not only should teachers be asking open-ended, authentic questions, but they should be asking many text-dependent questions—building questions that focus on

explicit meaning on a sentence level to implicit meaning on a whole text level or across multiple texts (Fisher, Frey, Anderson, & Thayre, 2015). Students should be using evidence from a text in order to make inferences, establish bias, or to understand the purpose of the piece, as well as using parts of the text to create whole meaning. Lastly, if students learn to formulate and ask text-dependent questions of *each other* they build their higher order thinking skills and ensure that we are not “creating another generation of teacher dependent learners” (p. 73). In order for a Socratic seminar to find the perfect balance between engagement and learning a delicate balance needs to be struck between fostering the freedom that comes with accepting a variety of perspectives and insisting that participants deeply understand content. Perhaps a teacher’s role in striking this balance is to pose some discussion questions in a seminar that encourage all students to share and some questions that demand students read to understand.

In my practice, I have provided students with a series of prompt questions to use in order to prepare for the discussion. The questions are all open-ended, some require textual support in order to answer the question, and quite a few are personal. Not all the questions are well received. Some students complain that there are not enough questions that give opportunity for textual support and therefore the students are limited in their ability to score highly with their answers. At other times, it is the exact opposite--the questions are very text dependent and students feel discouraged from sharing personal thoughts or cannot find any textual support so they feel limited in their ability to respond. Sometimes, certain students seem frustrated with the nature of open-ended questions in that there is not always a right answer or the reverse in which there are only a few answers and the discussion gets repetitive as students each share the exact same thing. I

have learned that writing good questions is challenging and a large percentage of the discussions success depends on the questions posed. If it is challenging for me, it is also challenging for students to ask good questions. I have done little with teaching students how to ask good questions and have seen few students ask text dependent questions of each other.

Strategies that incentivize listening and responding

According to recent studies, most American adults retain only twenty five percent of what they hear while the rest is lost to distraction and forgetfulness (Jalongo, 1995). American children's ability to remain attentive and listen is lower than adults, yet in direct contradiction to what is known about listening and retention, most school settings are constructed with the expectation that fifty percent of a child's school day involves focused listening. Even though humans retain very little of what they hear, it is still estimated that eighty percent of our knowledge comes through listening (Jalongo, 1995). If people retain just twenty-five percent of what they hear, yet eighty percent of what they know comes through listening, there is a great need for students to be taught how to become excellent listeners. Rather than just demanding students listen, instructors need to teach students how to focus their full attention, interact with information, and pose relevant comments and questions (Jalongo, 1995).

The first lesson in listening well involves communicating nonverbal involvement. Active listeners do a variety of nonverbal behaviors that communicate to speakers that they are giving a speaker their full attention like maintaining eye contact or leaning slightly toward the speaker. The second lesson for active listeners in training is how to

restate a speaker's message without judgment in a paraphrase that communicates what the listener thinks the speaker is communicating. This restatement gives the speaker the opportunity to check to see if he or she was understood. Some teachers have discovered that students are more comfortable initiating paraphrasing if they are given suggestions in how to start through provided sentence stems such as the ones listed below:

- So you're suggesting . . .
- You think that . . .
- Your plan is to . . .
- What you are asking is . . .
- If I am hearing you right, you believe . . .
- You feel that . . .
- You disagree with the statement . . .
- As I understand it, you want to . . .
- According to you, a good reason to
- If you had your way, we would . . . (Palmer, 2014)

A final lesson in listening involves understanding how to ask questions of the speaker that encourages him or her to elaborate and validates the speaker's message as important (Weger, Castle, & Emmett, 2010). Teachers should coach students through the intentions behind their questions, the force of their utterances, and how their questions are received by their audience (Olson & Astington, 1993).

In a Socratic seminar, active listening is practiced in order to learn but also to respond. A quality response in a discussion demonstrates listening and helps to continue discussion. Responses that demonstrate good listening build on the ideas of others, emphasize connections between statements, reference information that all have accessed, and challenge a speaker when evidence is lacking (Alexandar, 2010).

Despite the importance of helping students to paraphrase, question, and give appropriate responses in order to demonstrate active listening, research in a variety of

settings still suggests that the most powerful way to connect with a speaker are the tried and true nonverbal cues that communicate genuine interest and concern such as smiling or eye contact. People feel a stronger affection for listeners who give positive nonverbal listening cues. Good listeners through their actions create a sense of closeness between speaker and listener. However, research also suggests that while speakers feel a strong sense of social attraction to good listeners, that does not necessarily mean that speakers feel more understood when listeners demonstrate nonverbal listening skills (Weger, Castle, and Emmett, 2010). As a teacher introducing a Socratic seminar to a class, perhaps a good discussion for the students would be how valuable is it for a speaker to feel liked while speaking versus feeling understood and what are the actions that produce both perceptions during a discussion.

Finally, it is important to consider the feelings, actions, and group dynamics that happen within discussions. Often a teacher's well-meaning motivation for creating group discussions or Socratic seminars is to share authority with students. However, one thing to keep in mind is that when power is transferred there is the possibility that those who take up the new mantle of power might not be any better at wielding it and in fact may be worse. Power relations exist between students just as much between teachers and students. As this is the case, teachers need to be highly aware of interruptions of others, domination of females by males, students forcing other students to share, outspoken students ignoring less talkative students input, and students who withdraw out of self preservation to name a just few examples of the ways discussions can go awry. In addition, teens need for approval from their peers cannot be ignored (Alvermann, 1996). The concerns listed above underline the importance for teachers to coach students on

listening and responding as well as the importance of teachers to feel the freedom to pause Socratic circles when a teachable moment arrives in regards to sociability or discussing with respect. Other possible ways to circumvent or combat unfavorable power transfer to particular students would be to form “talk-alike” circles when conducting the Socratic seminars or to lean heavy on the student listening circle giving immediate feedback to the inner circle’s inappropriate discussion practices.

After spending time researching the importance of listening well and how to demonstrate one is listening, I realize that I do little to help students understand or practice what good listening looks and feels like nor have I implicitly taught students how to respond in a way that demonstrates active listening. I have given students sentence stems that put them on the path to articulating what they have heard, but few students have utilized them despite my encouragement to do so. It is apparent to me that much time could be dedicated in my classroom to learning this life skill and it might produce results for my research question.

A final thought when it comes to listening well is that as much as teachers may long for Socratic seminars to be circles of discussions where all students are speaking and involved in an equal capacity, teachers still need to keep in mind that there are other ultimate goals that need to be accomplished in a classroom such as providing platforms for students to think deeply for themselves and encouraging students to give the gift of heartfelt listening to others. These two important endeavors may not always take the form of speaking in front of a group but instead simply listening attentively or thinking deeply without participating audibly.

Conclusion

Tenth grade English students step into a discussion circle with different levels of preparedness, background knowledge, and ability to communicate which makes it imperative for teachers to find learning strategies that fully engage and challenge all students. Furthermore, the students of today demonstrate their continued need to practice analyzing a text, defending their beliefs and ideas with evidence, determining bias, and listening to others with respect and an open mind. Socratic circles offer students a chance to discover their strengths and weaknesses in many of these areas as well as give them an opportunity to grow into thoughtful members of their community who have the skills to deeply process and evaluate the world around them. Specifically, in order for a Socratic seminar to be fully successful, the students should be prompted with open-ended questions that encourage critical thinking, text dependent answers, and a variety of ideas. It is also extremely important to a seminar's success that students are coached in how to listen and respond to their peers with respect, attentiveness, criticism, and mind that is open to new perspectives.

In chapter three, I will provide background for my setting as well as explain my plan for implementing and analyzing new ways of conducting a Socratic seminar in my secondary English classroom. Chapter four takes an in-depth look at the action research and strategies that were put into practice along with reflection on the process. Finally, chapter five addresses my key findings and action steps that will be taken in the future regarding the research.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Overview

In this chapter, I explain how I answered the question: *Drawing from the Socratic seminar method, in its fullest form, how does a 10th grade English teacher increase student participation and engagement in the areas of higher order thinking, text dependence, and skills in listening and responding to one another?* The chapter will describe the purpose for the research paradigm and a description of the research setting including the location, school, and classroom. It also includes a description of the following research instruments: a pre-survey, video recording, log of personal observations, a post-survey, and a follow up interview of a selection of students. Additionally it gives a description of how the collected data will be studied.

According to Mills (2011), Dean of Education at Southern Oregon University, “Action research, like any other problem-solving process, is an ongoing creative activity that exposes us to surprises along the way” (pg. 2). My hope is that through the process of studying my current practice, I will be able to improve the quality of instruction, creatively solve a few problems, and run into a few surprises along the way.

Research paradigm

Action research is a process of self-study and investigation in order to improve one’s practice. The “context is not controlled but is studied so that the ways in which context influences outcome can be understood (Hendricks, 2013). I chose to conduct

action research in a qualitative paradigm because I was seeing problems during class discussion in regards to my facilitation of higher order thinking, student participation, and student interaction with each other and a text. The areas where I needed a greater understanding were complex and subtle: discussion strategies, student relationships, and the way one learns and thinks. Qualitative research seemed to be a good choice for a research paradigm as I wanted to conduct a study on Socratic seminars by using observation, surveys, and talking directly to my participants about their comfort levels in utilizing different discussion strategies, their levels of thought, and how they listen/respond to their peers. My inquiry fit into many of the characteristics for qualitative research: a natural setting, the researcher is the key instrument, multiple sources of data will be used, and I started with inductive analysis (Creswell, 2013). I conducted a phenomenological study because through the usage of a combination of approaches I made an effort to understand my tenth graders experience all-the-while hoping that common themes emerge. Rather than starting with a hypothesis, it was only at the end of my study that I anticipated discovering the source to one or more of the problems I was encountering and, based upon the collected dataset, be able to test out possible research based solutions. Through it all I had to recognize that part of my study involved reporting the multiple perspectives of my students, as well as identifying the many factors that are involved in participating in a discussion, thinking and responding to a text, and responding to others (Cresswell, 2013).

Setting and participants

The location of my research setting is a high school in a northern suburb just a step outside of Saint Paul, MN. It is a private Christian school that is 125 years old with a current enrollment of around two hundred and fifty students and a staff of just over twenty teachers. The staff has very little turnover and the community is tightknit. The community has a history of generations of families attending the school. Staff vacation together and go to church together. Many students go to summer and sport camps together, are very involved in extracurriculars, can name more than half of the student population at the school, and if given the opportunity, even room together in college. Over half of the students have known each other before attending the school as having attended church together or the surrounding elementary feeder schools in the Twin Cities. Although the school is both private and Lutheran, the students are from a variety of ethnicities, income levels and church backgrounds. Participants in my study are tenth graders in an English survey class—seventeen students—ten boys and seven girls. Thirteen of the students are Caucasian, two students are African American, one student's parents are recent immigrants from Ethiopia, and one is an international student from China. Two students are participants in our Resource program, which is a support program for students that exhibit varying levels of abilities and special needs. Both students from the program are very independent and high functioning. Four of the students were once in an Honors section of tenth grade English but could not fit the Honors section of the class into their schedules second semester. It is the second year in a row that all of the participants have had me as their English teacher, so they are quite familiar with my guidelines and procedures.

Research instruments

I had identified problems in my classroom as we discussed texts through the discussion format of a Socratic seminar. Then I conducted a literature study in order to investigate past research and solutions that others in the education field had identified. Next, based upon what I discovered in my research regarding facilitating higher order thinking, creating open-ended questions, and building listening and response skills, I prepared for my study by revising my upcoming lesson plans, handouts, and the Socratic seminar strategies. I also created the following plan and instruments in order to do my action research component which happened over the course of two weeks from May 1st, 2017 to May 15th, 2017.

Pre Socratic seminar plan and research instruments. One of the first research instruments utilized in my study was a Pre-Survey. Using open-ended questions and Likert scales, I asked my participants about their feelings and observations regarding what needed to change in our Socratic seminars as well as their rationale for preparing, participating, or not participating in the discussions. The surveys allowed me to gather quite a bit of data in a short amount of time and gave me focused control over the information that I wanted from the students. (See Appendix A).

I then video recorded a Socratic seminar in which I had not made any changes to in practice or implementation. I planned on comparing my original practice of conducting a seminar to my Socratic seminar structure and method after implementing my literature review findings. The recording also gave the students an opportunity to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of our current Socratic discussion method. I asked a colleague who is an English teacher and very familiar with Socratic circles to conduct the taping.

This colleague was asked to make observations regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the discussion while filming. After the first videotaping, I put the tape on hold to be used at a later point in time as well as interviewed and recorded my colleague's observations. (See Appendix B).

In order to analyze the data collected before implementing changes to my practice, I spent time looking for emerging themes in the comments while paying particular attention to comments that contributed to a further understanding of my research question. Part of this process involved breaking down and coding the data by the categories of participation, higher order thinking, textual dependence, listening, and responding.

Research instruments utilized during modifications to practice and second Socratic seminar. My next step in the study was to prepare students for the changes I was going to make to the Socratic seminar. I shared and discussed with students the results of my literature study with a particular focus on the objectives of a Socratic seminar, how to construct an open-ended question, active listening skills, and the components of a quality response (See Appendix C). Throughout a two week period I conducted daily lessons and had students practice the strategies we were learning.

Throughout this period, I observed and then made note during class and immediately after class of how the learning and practice of the higher order thinking, questioning, and listening strategies were going. Personal observations are something that I do every day in my classroom so it is familiar practice for me. In regards to data collection, observations have the strength of being a firsthand account and being recorded as events occur. The notes that I took for this project were a thorough outline written in

chronological order that covered the setting, mood, conversations, and events of the day. If there was anything unique or in direct relation to my research question, I did further journaling of my analysis and reflection in these outstanding areas.

After we spent two weeks practicing giving quality responses that were backed with textual evidence, constructing open-ended questions, and listening with focus and intention, the class was ready to conduct a second seminar with new expectations and implementations. One implementation I made was having students complete a note sheet that helped them prepare more thoroughly for a discussion in the areas of a close read of the text, textual dependence, posing an open-ended question, personal goals, and life application (See Appendix D). Another change I had made to the seminar preparation was that the provided prompt questions for the Socratic discussion were modified to be more open-ended and text dependent. I also labeled each prompt question by the higher order thinking category it fell into. The students were informed that I would be collecting this note sheet after the upcoming Socratic discussion. In my initial practice of Socratic seminars, I had given students the prompts before the discussion, but I had not given them any extra guidance in preparing for the seminar nor had I evaluated their preparation notes. The students were also informed that the scoring rubric for the Socratic seminar had been changed in order to award more points for text dependent answers, demonstration of exceptional listening skills, and to students who posed their own authentic questions (See Appendix E).

Another change that I made to the seminar was to have students do more than take notes and listen when they were in the outer circle. I had coached them to listen not just for helpful content but to listen in order to evaluate their peers' performance in the

discussion circle. I created an evaluation guide for the listening circle that helped students to speak to the quality and behavior of the participation in the inner circle (See Appendix F).

When the second seminar commenced I listened in on the students' discussion, keeping a chart of the names of the participants and noting anything of interest next to an individual's name. I also jotted down quick, big picture observations. I was looking to see if the extra steps I required of the student in preparing for the discussion resulted in a greater exhibition of higher order thinking during the Socratic circle. I was curious see if the changes motivated students to give a variety of answers, refer to their text, and reach for the type of thinking the questions were geared towards. I also noted during my observations if students changed their behavior because they would receive an increase in their grade if they gave solid textual evidence or posed an authentic question. I carefully observed how students were listening and responding to each other as well as how they were responding to their new role in the listening circle. I noted if the feedback from the listening circle prompted the students in the inner circle to participate and respond with interest and respect for each other.

During the second seminar of the study, my colleague returned to film and to make observations of the changes. This colleague was asked to make observations regarding the depth of the students' answers, how often students' referred to their text in order to support their ideas, and the quality of listening and responding the students exhibited.

At the end of the discussion, I collected from the students the notes they had used to prepare. Later in the day, I examined the students' notes against the scoring rubric in

order to observe if the level of effort demonstrated on the note sheets correlated with the depth of participation within the discussion.

Another observation tool that I incorporated was the use of a post-survey. Using open-ended questions and Likert scales, I asked my participants after the discussion about their feelings and observations regarding the changes I made to our Socratic seminars (See Appendix G). Additionally, immediately after the class ended I wrote down first impressions, outstanding differences from my previous Socratic seminar experiences, and the negative and positive reactions my students and I were having towards the changes made.

Finally, after the class period was finished, I interviewed my colleague in order to record an outside observer's perspectives regarding the results of the changes to the Socratic discussion. (See Appendix H).

Instruments used post Socratic seminar. At a later point in the day, I took time to carefully examine my quick notes taken throughout and immediately after the discussion in order to make sure they were legible and covered all that I had observed. I then reflected on my notes, individual student participation charts, student preparation worksheets, my outside observer's responses, and students' post-surveys. I took time to journal all of my observations in full detail. I particularly focused my observations in regards to the changes I had made in my practice and the seminar to improve questioning, listening, and responding. The videos were a key part of my journaling that happened later in the day. I watched the videos in order to help me reflect on how the seminars had gone. I also compared the video of my initial practice regarding Socratic seminars with the videos of the changed seminars. The videos were a tool that gave me the ability to

slow down what was happening in the discussions, re-watch segments, and make observations that I had missed during the discussion happening in real time.

Two days after the second seminar I pulled four students whose written feedback or actions within the circle warranted follow up. I conducted a follow-up interview with selected students, which provided me an opportunity to go in depth with a few individuals to a level that I could not do with all the participants within my study. I based my follow-up questions upon the students' post survey responses and selected students who provided a variety of perspectives. I selected a student who was well prepared for the discussion, one who was not, a student who participated at a high level, and a student who participated at a low level. I also included in this selection a student who had a positive attitude and one who had a negative attitude at the beginning of the study and checked for change in their attitudes at the end. (See Appendix I).

Once I had collected data from the first discussion, implementation weeks, and second discussion I continued the process of transcribing, coding, breaking down information, and reflecting, all the while keeping in mind my primary research question. Corroborating data sources was a key part of this process. Eventually, the time came for me to reassemble the data based on the patterns I was noticing in order to decipher what has been revealed through my study.

Human Subject Review Explained

This study has been approved by a Human Subject Committee at Hamline University before moving forward with any form of data gathering. (See Appendix J). I was working with minors so it was important that part of the approval process involved

soliciting informed consent from the participants' parents. (See Appendix K). I also have approval for the study from my school administration, ensured the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, and provided my contact information to all involved so that concerns or questions could be expressed to me. For data based on group results, I included all students because I am able to make references while making sure that students cannot be identified. For the final assessment of my study, only data from students with full parental consent was included.

Conclusion

In Chapter three, I introduced the setting in which the action research took place which included the school, classroom, and students. The tools used during the action research were also introduced in chronological order of execution in the classroom and I provided a framework for the method of data collection. Chapter four, will analyze the data collected regarding the implementation of the changes I made to a Socratic seminar and consequential results.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Overview

As high school learners develop their abilities for higher levels of thought, use evidence to support their ideas, and listen to their peers with authenticity and appropriate response, educators need to create learning opportunities to foster these important skills (Copeland, 2005). Socratic discussion circles provide opportunities for high school students to put these developing skills into action and reflect on areas of improvement. The nature of Socratic circles is to increase understanding of difficult conflicts by respectfully exploring reasons why one holds certain beliefs through questioning and discussion (Overholser, 1992). This research project was designed to explore the research question: *Drawing from the Socratic seminar method, in its fullest form, how does a 10th grade English teacher increase student participation and engagement in the areas of higher order thinking, text dependence, and skills in listening and responding to one another?* The study utilized a qualitative data collection method and took place at a suburban private school in a tenth grade English classroom. The study lasted two weeks from May 1st, 2017 to May 15th, 2017. The students demonstrated at the beginning of the week their level of participation in Socratic discussions throughout the year by completing one Socratic discussion within existing conditions, then over two weeks completed four activities designed to increase their participation in discussion (see Appendix C), and finished the study by participating in another Socratic discussion which included implementations that gave students an opportunity to put their new learning into practice. During the study period, qualitative observations of student engagement,

understanding, and challenges were gathered using teacher observations, videotaping, and student surveys. Finally, after the second Socratic discussion, focus interviews were conducted with four students over the course of two days. In the following chapter, each major component of the data is examined individually with specific results and interpretation. Following this review of the results, a synthesis of the data set is summarized.

First Socratic discussion results

Classroom and video observations results. As a part of my study, I first had students participate in a Socratic discussion in the same format that we have been doing throughout the year. I made observations in relation to each category of my research questions both during the discussion and while watching a video of the Socratic circle.

In regards to higher order thinking, I was surprised by how many perceptive questions were proposed by students and how the conversation went beyond the text as the students created meaning. Multiple students were willing to take a stand on their beliefs related to the tension between following one's personal convictions versus one's duty to follow the law of one's country. One student neatly organized for the rest of the class the crux of the main conflict in the text and then went on to argue that the character helping her brother to escape his rightful punishment is similar to the modern day situation of "trying to break into prison and free a criminal." Twelve of the sixteen students received at least one higher tiered score or more for sharing a response or question that reached the top levels of Bloom's taxonomy. However, logic strayed when

students became heated or the discussion moved at a faster pace. Also, few students checked each other if reasoning was flawed and there were times during the discussion where opportunities were missed to think from multiple perspectives or to counter a classmate with a pushback question.

In the category of using textual evidence, I observed about thirty-five percent of the students referring directly to the text when supporting a point. That said, although students did not directly quote the text, they summarized parts of the text in a manner that indicated that they knew the text well. I also observed two students demonstrate by their usage of text that they had not comprehended what they were reading which is always a helpful observation to make as a teacher and evaluator. Another observation I had was the response to textual evidence being read aloud. Shorter passages were received with interest and built upon. However, when large chunks of text were read aloud students' body language and lack of verbal response seemed to demonstrate that they were checking out. Additionally, one student rattled off line numbers as evidence without reading the actual text, perhaps thinking that peers could fact check if interested, but in reality the numbers without context did little to help the discussion along.

In regards to student levels of listening and responding almost one hundred percent of the students seemed generally attentive, nodding their heads at times to show agreement and support, and all students contributed at least one comment to the discussion. One student was fully engaged half the time but in the other half the student was yawning, staring at graffiti under a bookshelf, and whispering to a neighbor. Three students proposed fantastic questions or startling synthesis and each was ignored as the next student to speak jumped to new topic. As stated earlier, although at times it was

apparent that many students felt comfortable disagreeing with each other, there were also many missed opportunities to push back against strong ideas or to speak up when only one side of an argument was presented. It seemed that the identity of the speaker affected whether students chose to move on to a new subject rather than engage. Students who were forward and vehement in stating their ideas received little pushback while students who seemed willing to listen to opposing ideas met more questions and disagreement.

Results of colleague's observations for first Socratic circle. A colleague videotaped the discussion, made observations, and participated in an interview regarding how the discussion had progressed. Overall my peer observed that the students were highly engaged and speculated that the students “were still talking at lunch about what they discussed in class.” When asked about the topic of higher order thinking my colleague stated that the students analyzed the text well and participated in some connection to today but there were obvious application and counter arguments that the students left uncovered and did not address. My colleague also noticed the lack of challenge when it came to flawed reasoning.

In regards to textual evidence, my colleague estimated that half of the students referred to the text in order to support their ideas, but that students seemed to zone out when hearing large portions of text and would not capitalize on the lengthy text presented.

My colleague’s response to how students were listening and responding was that although the students seemed highly engaged and gave plenty of nonverbals that indicated listening, few students responded verbally in a way that indicated that they were

listening. They did not ask for repeats if confused or paraphrase what was previously said.

Pre-survey results. After the first Socratic circle of my study, students participated in a survey to share their own thoughts on the different categories of my research question. Overwhelming the majority of the students agreed, based upon the Likert scale provided on the survey, that they find themselves participating in the higher order thinking tasks of analyzing the text, evaluating other's ideas, and creating meaning during the discussion. Throughout a discussion, I am limited in my ability to measure levels of thought by that fact that I can only base my evaluation on verbal responses. It was reassuring to read in the surveys that students strongly feel that they are thinking deeply during our discussions. This deep thinking that is hard for me to assess because it is silent reminds me of Susan Cain's (2013) work, *Quiet*, which argues that in cultures that idealize the extrovert it is important to create environments that support introverts in order that they can be celebrated and successful because they have much to contribute to society and the workforce. A silent student does not mean that the student is not thinking and learning. Another recurring theme in the area of higher order thinking was that multiple students shared in the open-ended comment section that sometimes they cannot keep up with the pace of the discussion and that affects their ability to reach higher levels of thought.

According to student responses on the provided Likert scale not a single student disagreed with the statement, "I find that supporting my ideas with textual evidence helps me know and apply the content of the text at a deeper level." Students shared that hearing textual evidence gave them reassurance that ideas were not being pulled from thin air and

textual evidence helps them see other's opinions more clearly, especially if the evidence used is from something everyone has read. These comments supported previous research that evidence is valued more if the text referenced is one that many have read and can verify (Alvermann, 1996). One student pointed out that "the text cannot be changed" while another commented that if the discussion is based upon a text then the discussion does not stray into "relative truth." In the category of textual evidence, the pace of the discussion was once again mentioned. Students shared that at times they feel the pressure not to share textual evidence or they do not bother to look up the evidence that a peer is guiding them to because the conversation is moving quickly and time is limited. It came through in the pre-survey that students value textual evidence so perhaps the pressure of time is partly the answer to my question of why students do not reference textual evidence as much as I would like to see.

Although the majority of the students shared on the pre-survey that their peers listen and understand them during the discussion, a surprising theme that surfaced multiple times was students who took the responsibility upon themselves for why they feel they are not always being understood. Eight students shared a fear that they are confusing, are not clear when they speak, or sound "crazy" to their peers. This confirms research that students are greatly concerned about how they are perceived by their peers and measure their communication skills against those that they deem more fluent (Alvermann, 1996). Perhaps this fear prevents students from sharing their ideas.

Summarized results of the first Socratic discussion. The results that stemmed from my first investigation were both of a confirmation of the problems that I had been seeing over the years and an uncovering of further opportunities for investigation.

Observations and student comments verified that higher order thinking is happening during our Socratic discussions in many key areas. The results of the first discussion also confirmed that students have further ladders to climb when it comes to higher order thinking, particularly in the areas of debate and recognizing flawed reasoning. In regards to textual evidence, an interesting revelation came forward that although students value hearing supporting evidence, perhaps students are not referencing their text because they feel that reading the text aloud is a time waster and that sharing short passages and summaries of a text may stimulate the pace of the discussion. Both my observations and my colleague's observations confirmed that students could do a better job of practicing active listening, acknowledging their peers' good ideas, and asking for clarification when something is confusing. Finally, it was a surprise to discover that a good number of students hold themselves back from participating for fear of not being as articulate as their peers or being disorganized in their communication.

Classroom observation results for research instruments utilized during modifications to practice

In an attempt to increase participation in discussion in a variety of ways and to pursue answers to my research question, the students participated in four activities over the course of two weeks that spearheaded each part of my study. The first activity implemented was focused on higher order thinking. Students examined a chart of Bloom's Taxonomy and discussed with each other what levels of thought they participate in during their school day. There was a general consensus that the students needed to practice higher levels of evaluation and bias detection which the students determined is

underlined by the how many of them have experienced being duped by a site online. I had planned on spending a portion of the hour having the students practice discussing a moral dilemma while parsing what they were hearing and saying into different thought categories. Unfortunately, we ran out of time and I felt badly that we did not get an opportunity to fully practice recognition of critical thinking because I think that the activity would have increased the students' understanding of critical thinking and emphasized to students the value of practicing such thinking on a regular basis.

In the following class period, I prepped students to create open-ended text-dependent questions for upcoming Socratic circle. This was something new for the students since previously I had written all of the questions. The students' homework was to read two short articles on Edward Snowden and then create open-ended questions following instructions on a provided handout. I did not get a lot of time to walk through Costa's Levels of Inquiry, but they are asked to look at the level chart when doing their homework and strive to write questions that fell into Costa's higher levels of inquiry. I also explained to the students that if their submitted prompt questions were selected for the upcoming discussion, points would be added to their discussion score. Once again I was rushed and felt iffy if the students understood and would then follow the instructions because we did not practice creating questions in class.

To close the class hour, I asked the students why the usage of textual reference is frequently emphasized as important in speeches, discussions, debates and the like. I was surprised how many students responded and how strongly they asserted why backing up opinions with research, experts, or authority was important. Students discussed with each other what good and bad things can happen when we are not tied to a text during

discussion as well as what happens to a speaker when the references and evidence he or she puts forward is not spot on. The subject of relative truth came up. One student commented, “If someone claims that the main character in a book is a unicorn but cannot prove it or reference anything within the text that indicates such to be the case, but rather just believes it, what are we do with that? How does one accept or reject that viewpoint?” In response, I mentioned the value of pushing back and stated that when someone makes a claim it is okay to ask for a reference, evidence, or proof in order to accept or reject a viewpoint. My hope was that through the homework and discussion students would see both the value of asking questions that require textual support and coming to the future discussion prepared to state evidence to back up one’s beliefs.

I believe that the best activity implemented was on the day that the students learned and practiced active listening and responding. First, I partnered students with friends, which I rarely do, and had them share a concern with their partner. The peer was to practice the step-by-step process of effective listening, which was outlined on a handout. They then switched roles. By my observations I would say that about 85% of the class was not just engaged, but acutely engaged. I heard students paraphrasing. I heard students sharing big things in their life. I heard them asking great questions of each other. I heard students using the sentence stems provided for them to paraphrase what was heard, go deeper, clarify, and demonstrate understanding.

After the students had practiced listening to each other, I shared with them the expectation that during our next discussion they were to listen to each other not just through non-verbals but through paraphrasing what had been said or asking for a repeat when confused. I explained to the students how the assessment rubric for the discussion

had been revised in order to award points to those who demonstrated active listening. Finally, I asked the class at the end of the period how many of them felt heard throughout the hour. The majority of the students responded in the affirmative. To me, the results and student response to the listening and responding implementation day wholeheartedly support the research that teachers should walk alongside students in order to expose the thought processes needed to become lifelong learners (Bridges, 2013). Listening well is definitely a lifelong skill and will help one be a lifelong learner and the students immediately recognized the importance of what we were learning on this day.

Second Socratic seminar results

Classroom and video observation results. After spending two weeks discussing and questioning the value of different parts of my research question as well as doing activities in order to practice different skills that may increase engagement in a discussion, the students participated in a second Socratic circle. Once again I noted anything of interest related to my research question while the discussion was happening and when watching the videorecording of the discussion. I was also looking for changes and differences from the first Socratic circle where students participated at status quo to the second Socratic circle that happened after I had implemented modifications and had asked students for change.

In terms of higher order thinking the second discussion involved a lot of speculation and personal opinion. Students stayed on a surface level or wandered off into some fascinating rabbit trails but did not tackle essential questions or reach to make

connections between the real world story and original text from the first discussion. Very little comparing and contrasting happened between the two stories even though the prompt questions asked for comparing and contrasting. The students floated through the discussion sharing personal stories, making guesses, and putting forward evidence with a lack of substantial textual reference. This was concerning to me because I know it is important for students to evaluate arguments, detect bias, synthesize information, and differentiate between fact and opinion. The research reveals that if students do not address at least some authentic questions with higher order thought and textual evidence there is little academic improvement in the long run (Newell & Durst, 1993). I found myself fighting the urge to facilitate the discussion as it was unusual to have a discussion that hovered in the shallows rather than the depths. As I had encouraged students towards higher thinking within this discussion, I immediately began to assess what had changed from the first Socratic circle to the second circle. I found answers as the discussion progressed and while making observations in relation to the second part of my question regarding textual evidence.

When it came to the usage of textual evidence, there were some interesting results that came out of what seemed to me initially to be a discussion disaster. Just one student cited directly from the articles provided. What unfolded was a demonstration of how a lack of background knowledge and foundational understanding can shape a discussion and draw participants more towards personal opinion and speculation. Throughout the discussion students expressed the need and desire for more evidence, especially the students who were in the listening circle evaluating the way students were discussing. Presumably these critical evaluations surfaced because students could not check to see if

their peers interpretations and ideas were well-constructed and defensible (Newell & Durst, 1993). We had spent considerable time on the text that was used as evidence in the first discussion, but students had just two evenings to independently glean content and support from two provided articles for the second discussion. I considered that the articles had not been stimulating enough. I found myself wondering if the lack of in-depth, whole class study kept the students from providing textual support. I also considered if it was the lack of time to process the information or if it was just that the discussion was falling at the end of busy school year amidst a flurry of activity and burn out. Even more puzzling to me was that support for the discussion questions did exist in provided articles which caused me to speculate if it was the prompt questions themselves that did not demand students to return to the text and therefore pulled them so far from the topic at hand. The students had written the prompt questions rather than I and, although the students strived to write open-ended questions, neither the authors or I had recognized all the loopholes within the prompts that allowed students to not depend upon the text in order to answer. On the positive side, students' scores on the discussion were higher in some areas than the first discussion. Some students participated with greater frequency albeit not as high levels of thought, while others asked great speculative questions. This result definitely is in agreement with the research that open-ended questions tap into a myriad of possibilities that include prior knowledge, personal meaning, and interpretation that go beyond the limits of the original text and can increase the participation levels of a discussion (Probst, 1988). Perhaps being asked to frequently support their ideas with evidence or text is limiting to some students. I found myself wondering if a successful discussion is one in which students feel freedom to say just about anything and go

wherever the discussion leads or if a discussion is more successful if students learn from a text and meet a demand to find evidence to support speculations.

I saw the greatest increase in participation in the category of listening and responding within the second discussion. Not only were there more nonverbal responses like head nodding in agreement but there were three examples of students paraphrasing what others had stated previously and one strong example of students asking a student for further clarification when they could not follow the student's reasoning and support. There were also less examples of students ignoring what a peer had said in order to get to his or her point instead. I was also surprised at how students responded to each other's evaluations from the listening circles. The repetition of comments highlighted for all of us what excellent and poor discussion methods were being utilized which is in agreement with other teachers' findings that repetitiveness of the feedback can be confirming and hit home a point (Copeland, 2005). A majority voiced the need for more textual evidence. A few students were bold enough to mention specific instances of disrespect such as cutting off someone who was speaking or the usage of mocking nonverbals towards a few students. Noticeable positive changes in behavior happened in the group in seemingly direct response to peer critique. The above changes seem to strongly support teachers' findings that peer critique within a Socratic circle is more effective than a teacher's critique and instant feedback is a must (Copeland, 2015).

Colleague's observation results for second Socratic discussion. When making observations in the category of higher order thinking my colleague noticed that students talked around the prompts that asked for higher order thinking partly due to possible lack of preparation or understanding of the topic. My colleague also made the observation

that as students were no longer talking about an ancient piece of literature but rather a current event, the students tended to stray from the focus or articles and “they opine more without always having reasons.”

In regards to textual evidence, it was noted that roughly thirty percent referred to the provided articles and most students definitely had trouble referencing the text or did not reference the text at all.

In regards to listening and responding to each other my colleague commented on the value of the listening circle evaluation sheet and the required response after each circle. My colleague stated, “It forced them to listen as they had to justify their position” and their accurate responses showed that they were listening. It was also observed that students were more apt to voluntarily paraphrase or clarify each other at times or when asked to. My co-worker also commented that it was enjoyable watching students respond and talk to each other who would rarely interact outside of class. This observation underlines the value of a whole class discussion in which students have the opportunity to hear a wider variety of ideas from a wider variety of people (Copeland, 2005).

Results of instruments used post Socratic seminar

Post survey results. Although students still responded that they were analyzing, evaluating, and making meaning in the second discussion there were many more comments bemoaning a lack of preparation as well as the lack of knowledge regarding the subject matter of the discussion and textual evidence to support their ideas.

As far as students supporting their ideas with textual evidence the responses were mixed. Many still agreed that textual evidence was helpful but based upon their actual usage of textual evidence during the second discussion, perhaps it is a good idea in theory for them but was not a part of their practice in this situation. Six students commented that they did not have textual evidence to share, wished they had, and found it difficult to speak to certain points without the textual evidence to back them up.

The student comments in regards to listening were also more informed in the second survey. Although the majority of the students still agreed that they felt listened to and understood during the discussion, students were more exact in their critique. There was an increase in students who reported being cut off or not receiving adequate eye contact. A few students expressed a desire to be questioned about what they were sharing. One student explained that the s/he would feel more heard if students paraphrased what the student had stated. Voluntarily four students shared that they appreciated feedback from the listening circle and felt heard even if the feedback was critical. This supports the research that although people feel more socially accepted when they see positive non-verbals projected toward them, what really makes people feel understood is a verbal response, even if it is a critical one (Weger, Castle, and Emmett, 2010).

Results of focus group interviews. After the second discussion was completed, I selected four students to do a follow-up interview based upon their comments on their post-survey. Two students had participated at a high level in the discussion and two had not. All provided comments on the post-survey had warranted further questioning or peaked my curiosity. Based upon the students' availability, I met with two students

individually over a lunch period and after school with two students at the same time which allowed them to build off each other's remarks.

In the focus group interviews, when asked about higher order thinking students revealed more of what motivates them to come prepared with thoughtful answers and why, at times, they do not share them. One student shared that although receiving more points for responses that demonstrate higher order thinking is motivating, it is actually the student's personal interest in finding answers and in the text itself that drives the student to higher levels of thinking and responding. Two students touched on their frustration in that they prepare well for the provided discussion questions and then the actual discussion veers in such a way from the original prompt question that they can no longer see how to bring up their thoughts and questions in a way that is relevant and does not stall the discussion. One stated that when people have strong opinions, fire answers rapidly, or switch quickly to another topic, the student finds it tough to think deeply on one's feet. This is a reminder of the value of wait time, of why not all learning should come from discussion, and that at times carefully facilitated and slower paced lessons are helpful for students. The comment regarding the difficulty of being asked to think well on one's feet confirms the research that many of us need wait time of up to ten seconds or more in order to formulate quality answers (Wasik & Hindman, 2013). This comment also contributed to theme of students expressing that the pace of the discussion was too swift on a variety of fronts and prompted me to think about a whole new problem that I had not anticipated. I began to wonder how I can teach students about wait time or construct a Socratic seminar format that moves at a slower pace.

The four students findings related to textual evidence were in line with their classmates in that they saw the value of the using textual evidence in order to support their ideas. They stated that textual evidence helped convince them to “consider another’s ideas” or it was reassuring to them that the ideas were not “fluff” but could be supported. However, one student shared that sometimes s/he did not like the emphasis on finding support because at times the student was tempted to hint that the text connected with an idea--even if it was a stretch--in hopes more points would be awarded for a supported answer. Another student seconded this, sharing that the s/he fixated on how little textual evidence s/he had to contribute in the second discussion and consequently did not speak as much. One student liked that the preparation notes were collected after the second circle because it forced the student to be more prepared. It was reassuring to this student that I would see that textual evidence had been found for the student’s ideas even if s/he did not share the support during the discussion.

When it came to the subject of listening and responding, all four students were responsive to the new addition of the listening circle’s contributions to the discussion. One shared that the task of evaluating the inner circle’s discussion kept the student more focused and engaged when participating in the listening circle. Another said that it was good to hear peers demonstrate understanding and support of what the student had shared when in the discussion circle. Also, hearing the positive contributions to the discussion repeated by the listening circle kept this student on topic and motivated the student to improve. Perhaps most powerful was the student who shared that after hearing the listening circle’s evaluation that the student’s discussion circle had not given enough textual evidence, s/he had dug deeper and came up with stronger responses complete with

textual evidence. As a teacher, I have a tough time motivating this student and the student's actions confirmed for me that hearing peer feedback empowers students to make changes in ways that teachers often cannot inspire because educators can be perceived as judgmental and grade focused (Copeland, 2005). The final student of the four had the intuition to notice that it is fairly automatic for peers to say "I hear you" but then go on to demonstrate that they were not really listening. This student wanted to see more paraphrasing and clarification questions instead of inattentive knee jerk responses. This final comment was a reminder of Socrates insistence that the only way for the discourse within a Socratic system to work is if the persons involved are honest about their thinking (Seekin, 1987).

Summarized results of second Socratic discussion. One of the strongest results that came through in the data collected from the second Socratic discussion was that it is not enough to ask students to think deeply or to value good thinking but rather students must be well prepared to think at higher levels. This result fully supports the research that although students are encouraged to think from multiple perspectives and recognize such thinking as a good practice, students cannot think critically if their instruction is devoid of factual content or lacks introduction to multiple perspectives (Willingham, 2008). In the first Socratic discussion the text the students were basing their discussion on was one in which they had been studying for four weeks in a variety of ways. In the second Socratic discussion, the textual evidence was drawn from two articles that they read over the course of two days and had not been covered through whole class instruction. It is quite possible that some students had not read the articles for a variety of reasons including but not limited to a week packed with end of school year activities. The lack of

textual knowledge resulted in students sharing more personal opinions and speculation with little analysis, synthesis, evaluation, or application. I can also possibly attribute the lack of higher order thinking to the fact that implementation of this part of my study was poor and we did not get through all I had intended to in the area of teaching students how to think more critically.

Another strong result from the second discussion was that a majority of the students expressed a desire for more textual evidence and time to prepare, which was not a comment that came up frequently after the first discussion. Also, with the lack of textual reference, an interesting result was that some students who spoke less the first round spoke with more frequency in the second round presumably because they were not bound by the text. Others spoke less than they had in the first discussion because they did not want to speak “without evidence to support their ideas.” It is also important to acknowledge that the second Socratic discussion was shorter than the first because on the date of the second discussion a school-wide event happened right before my class period and went twenty minutes overtime. The students and I therefore felt much more rushed during the second discussion and it was quite possible students hesitated to share textual evidence given that a few had relayed to me at the beginning of the study that reading textual evidence aloud to support one’s idea can be a “timewaster.”

Finally, there was an obvious increase in participation between the first discussion and the second in regards to listening and responding to peers. Students were highly engaged during the hour where we learned and practiced active listening skills and a seeming correlation was the noticeable increase in students paraphrasing what others had stated as well as asking for clarification during the second Socratic discussion. There

was also a high level of receptivity to the listening circle evaluating peers on their performance within the inner circle discussion. Results were demonstrated through higher level of attentiveness in the listening circle, behavior change after a critique, and several students commenting that they liked the addition of the listening circle evaluation and were motivated by the comments that were shared.

Summary

In this chapter, pre-surveys and post-surveys, classroom observations, student interviews, and a synthesis of the qualitative data were covered. Data gathered in this study focused on the following question: *Drawing from the Socratic seminar method, in its fullest form, how does a 10th grade English teacher increase student participation and engagement in the areas of higher order thinking, text dependence, and skills in listening and responding to one another?* Throughout a two-week period different methods were practiced in order to implement a Socratic seminar in fullest form. The question was if the implementations would increase student participation in the Socratic discussions. Student interviews were useful in gaining insight on how the students felt about their performance within the Socratic discussions and the reasons for increases and decreases in participation. Overall, students see the value of higher order thinking and textual dependence. However, they shared the limitations in fully participating in these two areas with an emphasis on how the lack of adequate preparation in building a foundational understanding of the content of the discussion affected their ability to participate. The decrease in participation in higher order thinking and textual dependence may not have been a result of the new implementations to the discussion but rather a

discrepancy between the time spent studying and analyzing the provided supporting texts for the first and second discussion. The first discussion was based on a text the students had studied in class for four weeks while the second discussion was based on a text the students had independently covered in two class periods. Another possibility for the decrease in participation in the second discussion was the unexpected time limitation put upon the discussion due to circumstances outside of my control. An additional result of the study was that the students were receptive to the need for better listening and responding and demonstrated a higher participation in this area after the implementation of an active listening skill set. Lastly, the results of this study indicate the positive power of peer critique. In Chapter Five, the learning and limitations from the research study will be explored in detail. The literature from Chapter Two will be revisited with connections and questions being asked, and the future implications of these learnings will be examined. Finally, the researcher will examine any final ideas on how this study is important and useful to education as a whole.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions

Overview

There have been times when I have been struck by a sense of awe as I listen in on the construction of ideas being hammered out by my teenage students as they participate in a Socratic discussion. To watch students facilitate their own learning, search for their own answers, find evidence to support their ideas, and listen intently to their peers is a joy. Over the years many students have expressed how much they value and enjoy participating in Socratic seminars. Of course it is not all students who express these sentiments and it continues to be my goal to draw these particular students into the discussion as well as to keep challenging all of my students to reach higher and learn more than they imagined they could. This desire to see even greater participation within a Socratic discussion was what led me to my action research question: *Drawing from the Socratic seminar method, in its fullest form, how does a 10th grade English teacher increase student participation and engagement in the areas of higher order thinking, text dependence, and skills in listening and responding to one another?* In this chapter, I will explain my major findings and learnings related to my action research question followed by implications for students and educators. I will also address the limitations of my study and possible future applications related to the topic of increasing engagement through Socratic discussions.

Major learnings

My research not only confirmed my deep belief that Socratic seminars produce powerful results but it expanded my knowledge base in how to construct a seminar in variety of ways that could improve participation. Although I did not try all the methods I discovered in my research, I now have a variety of ideas of what to experiment with in the future particularly from the guidance I received reading Copeland's (2005) findings and research.

The results of my study have given me a greater understanding of the acute differences and possible outcomes that will ensue when students discuss ideas based upon a heavily studied text versus discussing ideas based upon a text that has been accessed in a limited fashion. My study, which involved discussions that used a text and open-ended questions, seemed to support the study "From Discourse Communities to Interpretive Communities" conducted by Nystrand and Gamoran (1992) that discovered that asking students more authentic open-ended questions did link directly to higher achievement but only if teachers were asking authentic questions about a text and if a high percentage of the students had done their reading. In the first discussion conducted using a text students were well-versed in, students did noticeably better in reaching for higher levels of thought and using textual support than in the second discussion where students continued to address authentic, open-ended questions but had only minimally studied the text the discussion was based upon. It is also highly possible that some students had not completed their reading for the second discussion. An unexpected finding for me was when I realized that the results of the second discussion were not necessarily negative but rather a demonstration of students versatility to learn in different ways. I had wanted

students to participate in the discussion using greater levels of higher order thinking and textual evidence and they did not, but they still came to their own conclusions and learnings. I did not have to tell the students that the discussion faltered because of their lack of knowledge, the students came to this conclusion themselves. Without answers, students speculated, wondered, guessed, and told personal stories. Making personal connections to the text did not press students to exhibit anything beyond a surface level of understanding of the content (Fisher, Frey, Anderson, & Thayre, 2015); however, if allowed or encouraged, it would not surprise me if some students would have pulled out their phones and found the evidence they were looking for to support their speculations. I eventually realized that what the students were demonstrating was not the anticipated results of the study but the students were still participating in the Socratic method in that although the students did not understand the difficult topics presented to them, they did understand how to ponder and wrestle with a difficult topic. As a demonstration of their ability to be lifelong learners, the students grappled with the topic, identified why the topic was difficult for them, and verbalized that their first step in solving the problem was to find more evidence to bolster up their ideas.

Another key learning I had was in regards to peer critique and instant feedback. Although I had observed for years the impact that peer conferences and editing has on students' writing, I did not transfer this knowledge to my practice of Socratic seminars. In the past, I gave students feedback and assessed students performance throughout the discussion, at times giving the students their assessment days after the discussion had finished. I feared that taking time for student-to-student evaluation would draw time away from the actual discussion. The fullest form of an educational Socratic discussion

includes the listening circle sharing an evaluation of how the talking circle is doing not in content but in exhibiting effective discussion practices (Copeland, 2005). I was surprised, although perhaps I should not have been, that part of the answer to my question of how to increase participation in multiple areas was to incorporate student critique. Although it did take time for the listening circle participants to share their evaluations aloud, it was apparent in a variety of ways that students listened to their peers' critique and increased their participation in all three areas but particularly in striving to give more textual support and utilizing the listening and responding skills they had gleaned. These positive results definitely seemed worth the time.

An additional key finding was how receptive students were to practicing becoming better listeners and how quickly they utilized their newfound skills. Active listening was apparent in the second discussion of the study, and on the post-survey many students commented how either they liked the listening skills they were practicing or their comments were much more articulate in voicing what needed to change in the area of listening and responding. The day we practiced how to listen to each other more effectively was such a positive experience for me, fostered by the attentiveness and hum of interest coming from the students, that my resolve has increased to incorporate more learning of lifelong skills into my classroom. This resolve is supported by the findings of Tredway (1995) who argued that students can be powerfully influenced for the long-term if teachers and administrators demonstrate an interest in incorporating character building and fostering of lifelong skills as part of a student's education.

Finally, as an English teacher who frequently assigns papers that require skill in using researched support and proper formatting, writing my Capstone was a good

learning experience for me. I have never written a piece as long as this Capstone nor have I had to use APA formatting before my graduate studies. Writing a Capstone was a fresh reminder of everything that writing a paper entails: the anxiety of meeting deadlines, overcoming writer's block, the difficulty of learning new things, the motivation encouragement from others brings, and the feelings of success and pride at the finish. Throughout the school year, because of my struggle to complete such a large project, I found myself more connected and sympathetic of my students' difficulties as they wrote papers, as well as noticed an increase in encouragement of my students because I was being reminded regularly by my support team of the power of a kind word or quick check-in.

Implications

One major implication that arises from my study is the importance of gathering student feedback, being continually observant, and making an effort to refine one's craft based upon the comments received. I have been conducting Socratic seminars for over fifteen years but after receiving feedback from student surveys and focus group interviews, I realize there is much that I did not recognize could be improved. I now have plenty of areas to work on in the next few years particularly in the areas of finding methods of helping students overcome their fear of not being articulate as their peers, finding a way to share textual evidence in a more efficient manner, and structuring the pace of the discussion in such a way that all students have time to think through and share responses.

A second implication is that implicitly teaching and practicing desired skills has a greater impact than simply requiring that students produce certain skills. In my study, I

ran out of time the day that I was hoping to implement understanding and practice of higher order thinking within a discussion. The students were going to participate in an activity that had required them to push back, evaluate, and find and ask for multiple perspectives on an issue. We did not accomplish learning in this area and there was no obvious increase of these skills in the second discussion even though the students knew that it was a requirement. On the other hand, we had plenty of time on the day that I implemented understanding and practice of active listening skills. Students tackled this new learning with vigor, put in plenty of practice, and met the objective of the day. During the second discussion not only did the students know there was an expectation for better listening, but students had the knowledge and skills to meet the requirements and as a result there was an increase in active listening and responding. This implication supports Willingham's (2008) research that indicates that students gain little from being encouraged in good practices but must rather delve deep into utilizing and testing the practices in order find ownership and determine on their own if a practice is one they will incorporate into their own lives.

A third implication is that participation and learning will increase if students are given opportunities to evaluate each other, particularly if they evaluate each other in the area of behavior rather than understanding of content. High school students are at different levels when it comes to understanding content and it may be embarrassing to have a peer point out successes and inadequacies, but when it comes to skill in the areas of respect, listening well, giving evidence, speaking clearly, facilitation, preparation, and avoiding hostile exchanges almost all students already understand deeply the hows, whys, and expectations that come with these lifelong skills. They are very capable of critiquing

and encouraging each other in these areas and studies show that high school students are more willing to hear and respond to feedback from peers than from teachers (Copeland, 2005). Within my own study, I found that the factor that increased student participation the most in the areas of higher order thinking, using textual evidence, and listening and responding to each other was not having students write their own questions, my changes to the rubric, or my directions to think at higher levels but instead it was allowing students to evaluate and encourage each other in these areas.

Another implication is that making space in a classroom for students to learn lifelong skills rather than just the content of a single discipline will increase students ability to be better learners in all areas (Tredway, 1995). At the beginning of my study, I did not anticipate that increasing students ability to listen to each other would be such a highlight, but once I delved into the research I began to realize that listening actively is a key skill that will serve students throughout their education, in their careers, and in their relationships. As I shared the results of my study in regards to listening, the students' interest was palpable and they were willing to put their learning into practice. They seemed to recognize almost instantaneously and unanimously that this was a skill that they needed to learn. I would argue that this lifelong skill does not seem to pertain directly to the discipline of English, but once the students acquired the skill they were more capable English students who were better able to learn from each other now that they were listening, paraphrasing, and asking for clarification. The acquirement of lifelong skills such as listening actively may be overlooked when writing curriculum for a high school classroom and perhaps policy makers could evaluate if we are making space

within our educational structures to teach students essential skills that will last them a lifetime and make them better learners across all disciplines.

A final implication is that the research and strategies used to increase participation within a Socratic circle could be used not just in a tenth grade English classroom but in classrooms of all ages and disciplines. If given the tools to build instruction around Socratic seminars that include higher order thinking, writing text-dependent questions, student evaluation, and listening actively all teachers could increase student participation in discussion and deepen the level of interaction with their content. Socratic seminars could be used in health, social studies, science, language, or any number of disciplines and is an approach to learning that offers a number of positive outcomes.

Limitations

Three limitations of my study were the timing of the study within the school year, the length of the action research, and the number of participants. Due to scheduling my study at the very end of the school year, I found myself hard pressed to squeeze in my action research on top of the content that had to happen before the end of the year. These restraints limited the study to two weeks and affected my ability to implement the Socratic seminar in its fullest form in a well-paced manner. If I had had more time we would have focused more on learning and practicing the desired expectations for the upcoming Socratic discussion as well as studying the text for the discussion using various methods of whole class instruction. Because this did not happen, students entered the second discussion with limited practice of the skills expected of them and limited knowledge of the text they were being asked to think deeply about. Not only did the

students feel pressed in their preparation time for the second discussion, but they also were burned out by a long year filled with many expectations as well as rushed through the second discussion because an end-of-the-year school wide event unexpectedly went twenty minutes over time and cut into our class period. Time is often a key to success and quite frequently is something both teachers and students never seem to have enough of. I think that both the students and I would have benefitted from doing the study in the middle of the year rather than the very end, benefitted from being able to prepare for the new form of Socratic seminar for a longer period of time, and benefitted from a full class period to practice the new implementations during the second discussion.

Secondly, the action research was limited to one classroom of seventeen students. While the class represented a variety of backgrounds and ability levels, it is still a small sample size from a private academy and does not represent the broader educational context.

Future action

In the future I would like to continue to pursue ways to increase participation in Socratic seminars by applying many of my learnings from this study. First, I would like to try again at motivating students to reach for the highest levels of thinking during a discussion. I recognize now that I should expect different kinds of thinking depending upon whether students are discussing a text they understand and have studied well versus discussing newly introduced material. I plan on adjusting my assessments, rubrics, and scoring accordingly. With more time, I would like to implement the direct instruction

and practice of higher order thinking that I had planned originally and see if students' thinking changes as a result during a Socratic discussion.

Secondly, in recognition that the success of a discussion depends heavily on the quality of the questions posed, I would like to do further research and challenge the students and myself to write questions that have a stronger dependence upon a text. I would like to also experiment with different requirements regarding sharing textual support during a Socratic discussion in an effort to curb some exasperation expressed at the time it takes to guide the class to look up and read passages of text. Also, I think it is important for me to continue to explore the idea that in order for a Socratic seminar to find the perfect balance between engagement and learning, a delicate balance needs to be struck between fostering the freedom that comes with accepting perspectives free of textual support and still insisting that participants deeply understand the content on the class. I plan on continuing to strike this perfect balance by posing some discussion questions in a seminar that encourage all students to share no matter if they understand and have fully grappled with the text and some questions that insist students read to understand in order to respond.

Thirdly, based upon the results found within my study, I plan on making peer critiques a fixture during our Socratic circles, particularly at the beginning of the year as students are learning the structure and overall objectives of the discussion format. I would like to experiment with a variety of ways of sharing student evaluations in order for the critiques to be time efficient and continually impacting. I also will continue to implement activities that help students be more active listeners as well as intend on seeking other opportunities to incorporate lifelong skills into my daily lessons.

More research should be conducted to further explore topics that arose as result of this study. Possible research questions might include:

- How does one slow the pace and wait time of a discussion so that all students are able to think deeply and respond adequately? There is plenty of research covering what a teacher should do at the front of the class in order to steady a pace so all can be involved, but I am curious how one could train students to manage time without a teacher's facilitation in order to move at a pace during a discussion that would include all of their peers.
- Do students participate at a higher level during a Socratic discussion when they are assessed only upon their performance during the discussion or when they receive an assessment based just upon their preparation notes and post discussion reflection assignments? Through the feedback that I received it was apparent that some students have anxiety speaking because they are grade conscious. I would like to see a comparison of the percentage of participation when students have the relief of not being graded versus when students have the pressure to participate because a lack of participation affects their grade.
- How valuable is it for a speaker to feel liked versus understood and what actions produce both perceptions during a discussion? High school students care a lot about being liked but they also have a longing to be understood. I would be curious to delve into how both of these emotions affect students' desire to participate and respond to each other as well as

how these two emotions control each other. For instance, will a student not ask for clarification for fear of not being liked or being perceived as not liking an idea? Or, are students able to like their peers who seem to misunderstand them? Can one feel liked if he or she feels misunderstood? How often do students not share their ideas because the ideas are different and therefore they fear both being disliked and misunderstood?

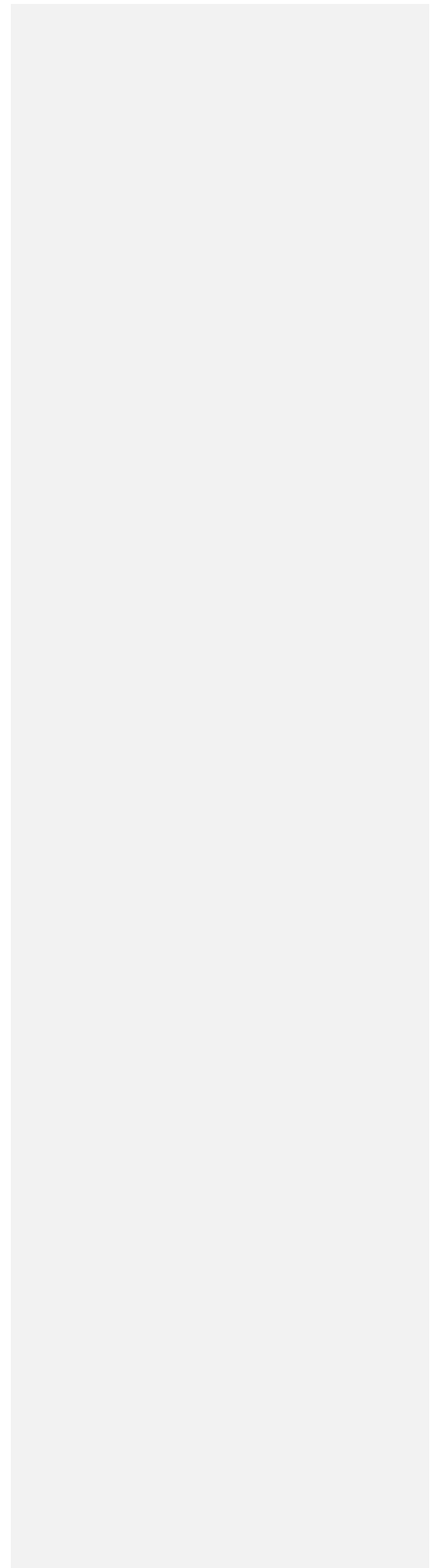
Moving forward, I plan to share a presentation with my co-workers on increasing participation through the usage of Socratic seminars. In the presentation, I will include a handout that outlines my key learnings and top tips in regards to conducting Socratic seminars. (See Appendix L). I hope to help them apply to their content areas some of the strategies that I learned when implementing a Socratic seminar in its fullest form.

Summary

In this chapter, the outcomes of this action research project were closely examined. The expected and unexpected outcomes of the research plan, data, observations, and key learnings were focused on while identifying some of the limitations that impacted the outcomes of this study. Connections were drawn between the literature and the results of the research project. Lastly, implications in regards to future study areas and how useful this study proved to be were considered.

Through this process, I am reminded of my role as an educator to be continually searching for new ways to impact, teach, and inspire. I have also been reminded how very exciting it is observe students engaging in high levels of learning, challenge, and listening with respect. My hope is that in my classroom and beyond, my students

continue to ask tough questions, learn life skills, and reach for the highest levels of thought and participation in order to find answers.



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APPENDIX A STUDENT PRE-SURVEY

Instructions: Answer the following statements by circling one response on the scale. Explain your response further by writing in complete sentences.

Participation

1. I come to our Socratic seminars well prepared--having read my text closely and having noted thoughtful answers to the prompt questions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Comment: Explain why your level of preparation is where it is at and what would help you be more prepared.

Higher Order Thinking

3. During our Socratic discussions I find myself analyzing the text, evaluating other's ideas, and creating meaning.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. I would think more deeply during our discussions if:

Text Dependence

5. I find that supporting my ideas with textual evidence helps me know and apply the content of the text at a deeper level.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6. Explain why you do or do not find textual evidence to support your ideas:

Listening Skills

7. My peers listen and understand me during our discussions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

8. What would help you feel even more heard and understood in our Socratic circles?

9. Is there anything else that I need to know about our Inner Outer Discussion Circles?
Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

APPENDIX B
OUTSIDE OBSERVER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK FOR
FIRST SOCRATIC CIRCLE

Instructions: After observing the first Socratic circle, answer the following statements by circling one response on the scale. Prepare to explain your response further by responding to the interview question listed after each scale.

Participation

1. The students participating in the Socratic seminars are well prepared--having read the text closely and providing thoughtful answers to the prompt questions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Comment: What preparations levels were you noticing during the discussion?

Higher Order Thinking

3. During the Socratic discussions the students analyzed the text, evaluated other's ideas, created meaning, and applied the text to life.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. How could I get students to go deeper with higher order thinking in the areas listed above?

Text Dependence

5. The students frequently supported their ideas with textual evidence.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6. At what percentage did the students refer to their text when responding? Was the textual support helpful?

Listening Skills

7. The students listened and understood each other during the discussions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

8. In the area of listening, what were the students' strengths and weaknesses?

9. Is there anything else that you observed about our Inner Outer Discussion Circles and would like to share? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

APPENDIX C
Student Handout for Sharing and Discussing the Results of My Literature Study

Improving Our Socratic Discussion:

Thinking Critically
Asking Authentic Questions
Textual Reference
Listening Effectively

Definition of a Socratic Seminar: a formal discussion utilizing a text and open-ended questions that relies heavily on participants listening closely, thinking critically, and responding to the thoughts of others. A Socratic seminar is based upon an ancient form of dialog in which, through doubt and a system of questioning a person, one reaches truth or an adequate general understanding.

Socrates and His Requirements:

- Socrates, born 470 BC, was a classical Greek philosopher credited as one of the founders of Western philosophy.
- Socratic questions should not be derogatory or express criticism but should respectfully explore the reasons why one holds certain beliefs (“Socrates in the Classroom,” 1992).
- Socrates insisted that the only way for the discourse and Socratic system to work is if the persons involved are honest about their thinking (Seekin, 1987).

Mrs. Vincent’s Study

The Problem:

The Question: *Drawing from the Socratic seminar method, in its fullest form, how does a 10th grade English teacher increase student participation and engagement in the areas of higher order thinking, text dependence, and skills in listening and responding to one another?*

A Few Snippets From My Capstone Paper:

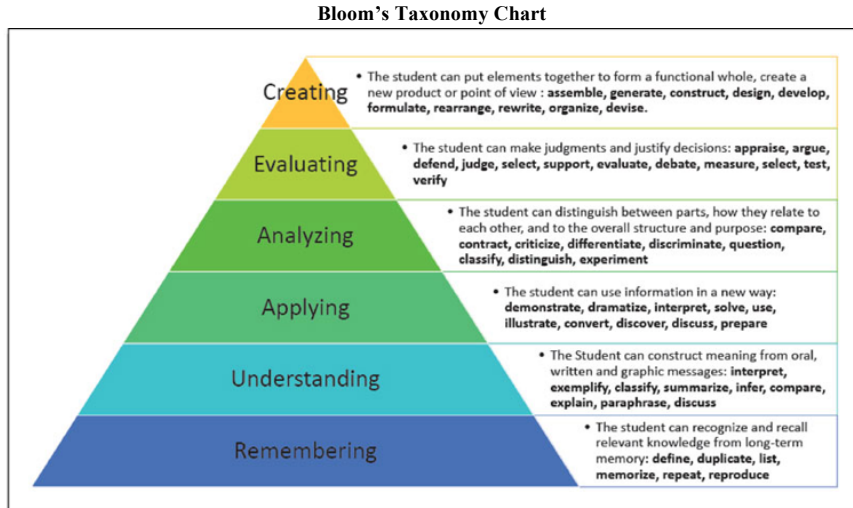
- In comparison to small literature circles, Socratic circles give students an opportunity to hear a range of opinions because of the greater number of students participating in one sitting.
- Participants’ understandings should be tentative--always subject to change--especially when the discussion comes to the examination of literature because such a study involves an ever-changing horizon of possibilities. If new understandings and change are not possible than learning new things is limited.
- Studies have shown that students speak more in class if they learn that their unique perspectives matter to their peers and teacher.
- According to studies, “students who trust their own reasoning test better” and students whose education is connected to their personal lives are more compelled to participate in their learning and development (Tredway, 1995).
- The heart and soul of Socratic seminars is discussing challenging texts and asking big life questions. Students’ involvement in such a discussion encourages them to build thoughtful

habits of mind and heart that will impact their world--a powerful and necessary objective of every classroom.

- If a teacher does participate in the Socratic circle and shares his or her opinion, it is important that the students are to accept it as such “understanding that there are multiple perspectives they can take and that the teacher’s view, although valid, is not necessarily the one they must take, and certainly not out of hand, without more thought and exploration” (Langer as cited in Newell & Durst, 1993 p. 41).
- In relation to improving the quality of a discussion, Copeland (2015) argues that the instant feedback is a must. One suggestion is that at the end of every discussion round the students from the listening circle give quick feedback on the quality and behavior of their inner circle peers participation in the discussion rather than the content of the dialogue. Calling out specific students is encouraged and then balancing praise with specific suggestions to correct a problem.

Underline two lines from my paper that peak your interest, you disagree with, or you have something to say in connection to the quotation.

Thinking Critically



Of the six levels of thinking, place the numeral one next to the kind of thinking you recognize you do the most in school and a two next to the type of thinking that you do the least in school.

Why Think Critically:

- When we think critically we become aware of the diversity of values, behaviors, social structures, and artistic forms in the world. Through realizing this diversity, our commitments to our values, actions, and social structures are informed by a sense of humility; we gain an awareness that others in the world have the same sense of certainty we do--but about ideas, values, and actions that are completely contrary to our own (Brookfield 1987).
- It is impossible to teach students all the content available to us in our great world, but we have started to recognize that it is possible to give students the skills to approach their entire world critically.
- The vast amount of information available on the Internet requires a young person to be able to navigate the Web with well-developed critical thinking skills. As teens spend hours each day sifting through information online it necessary for them to be able to
 - evaluate the credibility of a source
 - evaluate arguments
 - detect bias
 - recognize the difference between facts and opinions

Can you give an example of someone, perhaps yourself, being duped when reading something on the Internet? What would need to change for this experience to not happen again?

How to Think Critically:

- See both sides of an issue
- Be open to new evidence that disconfirms your ideas
- Reason dispassionately
- Demand that claims be backed by evidence
- Deduce and infer conclusions based upon available facts
- Solve problems

(Willingham, 2008)

Respond to the following statement in one sentence: One cannot think from multiple perspectives unless one is introduced to multiple perspectives.

Practicing Thinking Critically

The Overcrowded Lifeboat

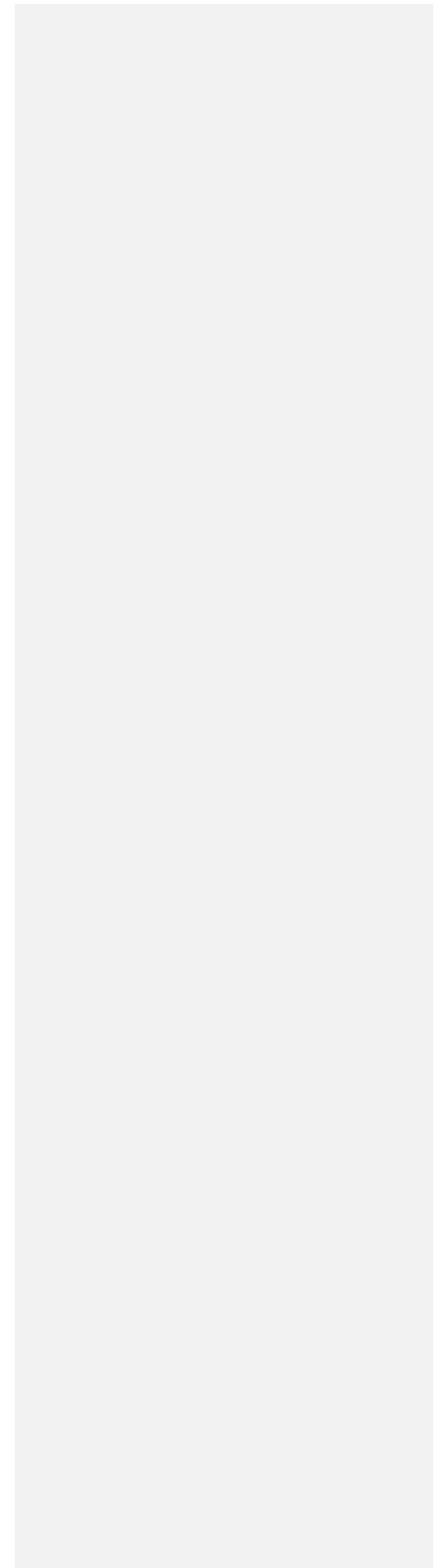
In 1842, a ship struck an iceberg and more than 30 survivors were crowded into a lifeboat intended to hold 7. As a storm threatened, it became obvious that the lifeboat would have to be lightened if anyone were to survive. The captain reasoned that the right thing to do in this situation was to force some individuals to go over the side and drown. Such an action, he reasoned, was not unjust to those thrown overboard, for they would have drowned anyway. If he did nothing, however, he would be responsible for the deaths of those whom he could have saved. Some people opposed the captain's decision. They claimed that if nothing were done and everyone died as a result, no one would be responsible for these deaths. On the other hand, if the captain attempted to save some, he could do so only by killing others and their deaths would be his responsibility; this would be worse than doing nothing and letting all die. The captain rejected this reasoning. Since the only possibility for rescue required great efforts of rowing, the captain decided that the weakest would have to be sacrificed. In this situation it would be absurd, he thought, to decide by drawing lots who should be thrown overboard. As it turned out, after days of hard rowing, the survivors were rescued and the captain was tried for his action. If you had been on the jury, how would you have decided?

Fold on a subject: Moral Dilemma--The Overcrowded Lifeboat

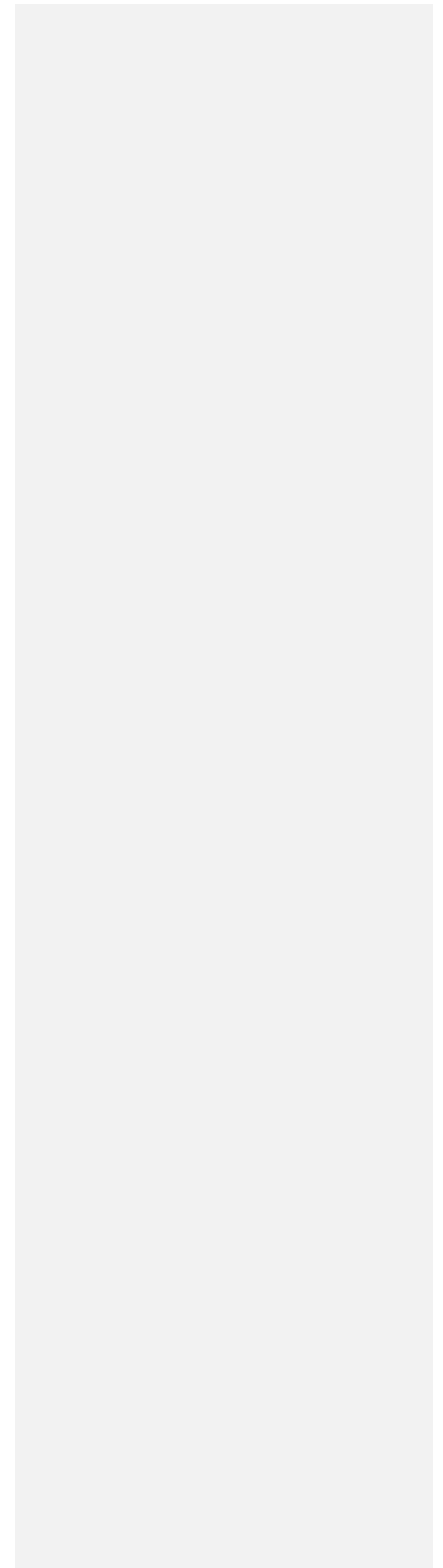
Have students in the middle of the fold (guilty but not a harsh punishment) be the third person in each pair of differing ideas

Students take notes while listening to the "other side"

The other side of the issue is.....	This disconfirms what I think.....	This claim needs more evidence.....	This problem could be solved by.....



I detect bias in the following area....	Opinion rather than fact....	I would like the credibility of this source explained further....	A question I have is.....



More Sentence Stems--How to Contribute to Discussion Meaningfully

Instructions: Use a highlighter to underline five sentence stems you would like to use in our next discussion.

1. **Elaborating:** Extending a previous comment or question by adding further detail
 - "I want to add to the comment about..."
 - "I have more evidence for..."
2. **Clarifying:** Increasing clarity by making distinctions
 - "That is true in two different senses..."
3. **Reinforcing/Supporting:** Agreeing with another's thoughts or ideas
 - "I agree with that because..."
 - "I found that comment interesting because..."
4. **Challenging:** Using a question or statement to suggest an alternative view or position
 - "I understand your point, but I disagree because..."
 - "What about...?"
 - "An alternative hypothesis would be..."
5. **Conjecturing:** Suggesting tentative explanations or possible outcomes; trying out a line of reasoning that you're not sure of yet
 - "How about a different reading of that passage..."
 - "Maybe..."
6. **Admitting Difficulty:** Acknowledging one's own lack of understanding to the rest of the group.
 - "I'm still trying to figure out..."
 - "I'm struggling to understand..."
7. **Initiating:** Instituting a new direction in the learning conversation.
 - "If I may move the conversation in a slightly different direction..."
 - "This passage is particularly interesting because..."
8. **Noting Relationship Among Tasks & Texts:** Making explicit connections between previous conversations, texts and/or learning activities and the ideas of the present conversation
 - "I want to connect that comment to our earlier discussion of..."
9. **Activating Background Knowledge:** Making explicit connections with prior knowledge an/or experiences outside of the classroom.
 - "This scene/character reminds me of a time when..."
 - "This (theme) still happens today..."

Asking Authentic Questions

Definition of an Open Ended Question:

Thoughts on Asking Open-Ended Questions

- Because open-ended questions demand more complex answers, they often make a way for several ideas to be put forward so that students can then compare and contrast (Wasik and Hindman, 2013).
- Asking open-ended questions are an important component of Socratic seminars because the possibilities of what could be said in response are far beyond the limits of the original text and the conversations can become more authentic because they delve into prior knowledge, personal meaning, and interpretation (Probst, 1988).
- Asking open-ended questions that elicit a variety of responses can change the participation percentage in a discussion.
- A series of open-ended questions may be exhausting for students who are used to being asked for prescribed answers because the expectations for success do not appear to be clear cut (Probst, 1988).

Costa's Levels of Questioning

STUDENT HANDOUT



Costa's Levels of Thinking

Costa's Level	Cognitive Functions	Sample Questions
Level 3: Applying Information Demonstrates mastering of knowledge learned (OUTPUT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply • Create • Evaluate • Generate • Hypothesize • Imagine • Judge • Modify • Predict • Speculate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What would happen to ____ if ____? • What would it be like to live ...? • Pretend you are a character in the story and... • What do you think will happen to ____? Why? • Could this story have really happened? Why or why not? • How would you solve this problem in your life? • How does the author's claim hold up under these circumstances: ____? • What if the situation changed to ____; how would that impact the outcome?
Level 2: Processing Information Practice knowledge learned (PROCESS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze • Categorize • Compare • Contrast • Demonstrate • Develop • Group • Infer • Organize • Relate • Sequence • Synthesize 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would you have done the same thing as...? • How are ____ and ____ alike and different? • What was important about...? • What other ways could ____ be interpreted? • What is the main idea of the story (event)? • What information supports your explanation? • What does ____ mean? • What does _____ suggest about _____'s character? • What lines of the poem express the poet's feelings about _____? • What is the author trying to prove?
Level 1: Gathering Information Introduction of knowledge (INPUT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define • Describe • Find • Identify • List • Locate • Name • Observe • Recite • Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What information is given? • Where does ____ happen? • When did the event take place? • What are...? • Where did...? • What is...? • Who was/were...? • What part of the story shows...? • What is the origin of the word _____? • What events led to _____?

Making Questions Assignment:

1. Ask as many questions as you can about:
2. Don't stop to judge, discuss, or answer any questions.
3. Write down every question exactly how you thought it.

1. Once you have a series of thoughts and questions go back to change any statements to questions
2. Star three questions that you have the greatest interest in finding the answer.
3. Rewrite the questions in order to make the question open-ended and a level two or three question.
4. Write your three questions on a separate sheet of paper and submit to Mrs. Vincent for 10 points. Be prepared for your questions to be one of the provided discussion questions for our Socratic Circle.

Textual Reference

Thoughts on why teachers ask for textual references:

- Students learn less when the well crafted voice--the voice of the one who arguably spent the most time and thought on the subject--is missing from the conversation.
- Examining the written word provides students needed practice in the areas of assessing the credibility of a source, using another's idea to support their current worldview, or deeply considering well constructed new perspectives in order to embrace or reject them (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).
- Students should be using evidence from a text in order to make inferences, establish bias, or to understand the purpose of the piece, as well as using parts of the text to create whole meaning.
- The reader must return to the text to “determine if the reading is sound and defensible” (as cited in Newell & Durst, 1995, p. 269).

Response: Underline two lines from my paper that peak your interest, you disagree with, or you have something to say in connection to the quotation.

Response: Many responses in a discussion based upon a text are appropriate, but not all. Is this true? Why or why not?

Response: What could happen in a discussion if we talked about the Declaration of Independence, Malcolm X's autobiography, or the Bible but did not reference the text?

Active Listening Skills

Thoughts on Listening:

- People retain just twenty-five percent of what they hear, yet eighty percent of what they know comes through listening (Jalongo, 1995).

- Active listeners do a variety of nonverbal behaviors that communicate to speakers that they are giving a speaker their full attention like maintaining eye contact or leaning slightly toward the speaker.

- Responses that demonstrate good listening build on the ideas of others, emphasize connections between statements, reference information that all have accessed, and challenge a speaker when evidence is lacking (Alexandar, 2010).

- Active listeners restate a speaker's message without judgment in a paraphrase that communicates what the listener thinks the speaker is communicating. This restatement gives the speaker the opportunity to check to see if he or she was understood.

- The following sentence stems can be used to initiate paraphrasing (Palmer, 2014):
 - So you're suggesting . . .
 - You think that . . .
 - Your plan is to . . .
 - What you are asking is . . .
 - If I am hearing you right, you believe . . .
 - You feel that . . .
 - You disagree with the statement . . .
 - As I understand it, you want to . . .
 - According to you, a good reason to
 - If you had your way, we would . . .

Put into Practice: Effective Listening Activity

“This means not just listening with your ears, but also more importantly, listening with your eyes and your heart, listening for feeling, for meaning.” Stephen Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*

1. Ask your peer to tell you about something that is concerning them. Listen carefully.
2. Reflect back to them what they have said, particularly about their feelings, to show that you have understood. Perhaps use one of the sentence stems listed above. If you did not understand, your peer should tell you again.
3. Then ask, “What’s concerning you the most about what you’ve told me?”
4. Again reflect back what they say.
5. Then ask, “Is there anything you could do (or, if appropriate, you’d like me or us to do) about what you’ve just said?”
6. Again reflect back what they say.
7. Finally ask, “Is there anything else you would like to say?”

Then swap roles.

APPENDIX D

PROMPTS FOR SOCRATIC SEMINAR AND PREPARATION SHEET

The Rescue and Happy Endings: Realism vs. Romanticism, Reality vs. Imagination

1. **Evaluate:** Who is the hero of this novel, Huck or Jim? List ways in which each has proven his heroism.

One quote I will bring up:

2. **Analyze:** How are the heart and conscience in conflict in Huck's seeing Jim as his friend and family, and as a slave? What details of their trip down the Mississippi does Huck recall that soften him towards Jim? How has Jim helped helped Huck be a better person?

One quote I will bring up:

3. **Life Application:** Several characters have kept secrets from others in the novel. Is keeping a secret the same as a lie in these cases?

One quote I will bring up:

4. **Evaluate:** What is the significance of this quote?: "I knowed he was white inside, and I reckoned he'd say what he did say—so it was all right now, and I told Tom I was a-going for a doctor" Page 261

An additional quote I will bring up:

5. **Synthesis:** What is the significance of this quote?: “But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can’t stand it. I been there before.” Page 276

An additional quote I will bring up:

6. **Synthesis and Life Application:** In what ways is Huck and Jim’s story also the story of America?

A quote I will bring up:

7. One goal I have for this discussion:

8. One additional open-ended question I would like to pose:

9. What is one question or discussion point that I could relate to my life and the world around me? How so?

APPENDIX E
RUBRIC FOR SCORING SOCRATIC SEMINAR

1 point	2 points	4 points	5 points
<p>MINOR PARTICIPATION</p> <p>“Said Something”</p>	<p>HELPFUL PARTICIPATION</p> <p>“Leadership”</p> <p>“Added”</p>	<p>GOOD PARTICIPATION: Higher order thinking and participation</p> <p>“Unique”</p> <p>“Really Gets It!”</p> <p>“Counter Argument”</p>	<p>EXCELLENT PARTICIPATION: Higher order thinking and use of textual support</p> <p>“References <u>Related</u> Textual Evidence”</p> <p>“Proposes Powerful Question”</p>
<p>Agreed with another classmate</p> <p>Contributed a thought</p> <p>Shared an opinion</p>	<p>Agreed with another and expanded or elaborated upon the thought</p> <p>Guided/Facilitated the discussion with grace and respect</p>	<p>Contributes an idea not mentioned previously</p> <p>Presents a unique and stimulating idea</p> <p>Refutes or challenges an idea with grace and good reasoning</p> <p>Helped to clarify a part of the text that was confusing to most</p> <p>Demonstrates quality listening skills by responding to someone’s question or building upon/acknowledging someone else’s idea.</p>	<p>Contributes an idea or not mentioned previously using textual support</p> <p>Refutes or challenges an idea using grace, good reasoning, and textual support</p> <p>Presents an unique idea using textual support</p> <p>Proposes a unique, thoughtful question.</p>

Point Losses (-1 point each time): Treating someone with a lack of a respect, throwing in discussion “bombs” that kill the conversation, fishing for points rather than genuinely participating, reading prepared answers rather than participating in genuine response and interaction with others, skipping over a new idea that has just been proposed in order to move to your idea, possibly having to be frozen

Good Discussion Phrases:

- *I agree with you because...
- *I would like to expand on....
- *I disagree with you because...
- *I noticed....
- *I appreciate what you had to say about.....
- *What if....
- *My favorite part is....

OVERALL SCORE POSSIBILITY:

25 points in a day=100%

20 points in a day=95%

15 points in a day=85%

10 points in a day=75%

5 points in a day=60%

Total Score out of _____//25 points

Person Scored Response:

Were you scored fairly? Explain.

What grade do you think you deserve? Explain?

APPENDIX F
Student Inner Circle Feedback Form

Name _____

Part 1: *Rate the inner circle's performance on the following criteria: (circle the appropriate number)*

Did the participants.....	Poor		Average		Excellent	
*Dig below the surface meaning?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Speak loudly and clearly?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Cite reasons and evidence for their statements?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Use the text to find support?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Listen to others respectfully?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Stick with the subject?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Talk to each other, not just the leader?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Paraphrase accurately?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Avoid inappropriate language?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Ask for help to clear up confusion?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Support each other?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Avoid hostile exchanges?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Question others in a civil manner?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Seem prepared?	1	2	3	4	5	
*Make sure questions were understood?	1	2	3	4	5	

APPENDIX G
POST SURVEY FOR STUDENTS

Instructions: Answer the following statements by circling one response on the scale. Explain your response further by writing in complete sentences.

Participation

1. I came to our second Socratic seminar well prepared--having read my text closely and having noted thoughtful answers to the prompt questions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Comment: Explain why your level of preparation is where it is at and what would help you be even more prepared.

Higher Order Thinking

3. During our second Socratic discussion I found myself analyzing the text, evaluating other's ideas, and creating meaning.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. I would think more deeply during our discussions if:

Text Dependence

5. I found that supporting my ideas with textual evidence helped me know and apply the content of the text at a deeper level.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6. Explain why you do or do not find textual evidence to support your ideas:

Listening Skills

7. My peers listened and understood me during our discussion.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

8. What would help you feel even more heard and understood in our Socratic circles?

9. What did you like or dislike in regards to the changes that I made to our Inner Outer Discussion circles?

10. Is there anything else that I need to know about our recent Inner Outer Discussion Circles? Do you have any further suggestions for improvement?

APPENDIX H

OUTSIDE OBSERVER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND FEEDBACK FOR SECOND SOCRATIC CIRCLE

Instructions: After observing the first Socratic circle, answer the following statements by circling one response on the scale. Prepare to explain your response further by responding to the interview question listed after each scale.

Participation

1. The students participating in the Socratic seminars are well prepared--having read the text closely and providing thoughtful answers to the prompt questions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

2. Comment: What preparations levels were you noticing during the discussion?

Higher Order Thinking

3. During the Socratic discussions the students analyzed the text, evaluated other's ideas, created meaning, and applied the text to life.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

4. How could I get students to go deeper with higher order thinking in the areas listed above?

Text Dependence

5. The students frequently supported their ideas with textual evidence.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

6. At what percentage did the students refer to their text when responding? Was the textual support helpful?

Listening Skills

7. The students listened and understood each other during the discussions.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

8. In the area of listening, what were the students' strengths and weaknesses?

9. Is there anything else that you observed about our Inner Outer Discussion Circles and would like to share? Do you have any suggestions for improvement?

APPENDIX I
STUDENT FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Participant One:

1. Textual Evidence: Could you elaborate on your comment that “sometimes [textual evidence] draws away from the actual question”?
2. Participation: You mentioned that you kept all of your responses in your head instead of writing notes in preparation for the discussion. Could you explain further what prevented you from writing your thoughts down?
3. Higher Order Thinking: What is your motivation for wanting to go deeper and more than one example for a discussion prompt? Grades? Interest? Classmate approval? Something else?
4. Textual Evidence: You mentioned that at the end of the second discussion your points were stronger because you used textual evidence. Why did you decide to use more textual evidence at the end of the discussion?

Participant Two:

1. Participation: You mentioned that you read the article and googled for more information about Edward Snowden. What motivated you to go beyond the provided articles?
2. Higher Order Thinking: You commented that you would think more deeply during our discussions if you had a better knowledge on the topic of discussion. Could you elaborate on that comment?

Follow Up: Do you have any suggestions of how we could make this happen?

3. Listening Skills: You stated that you liked the survey we used during the listening circle. Why did you like it?

Participant Three:

1. Higher Order Thinking: You stated that you would think more deeply during our discussions “if you asked more questions about the topic.” Could you elaborate on this comment?

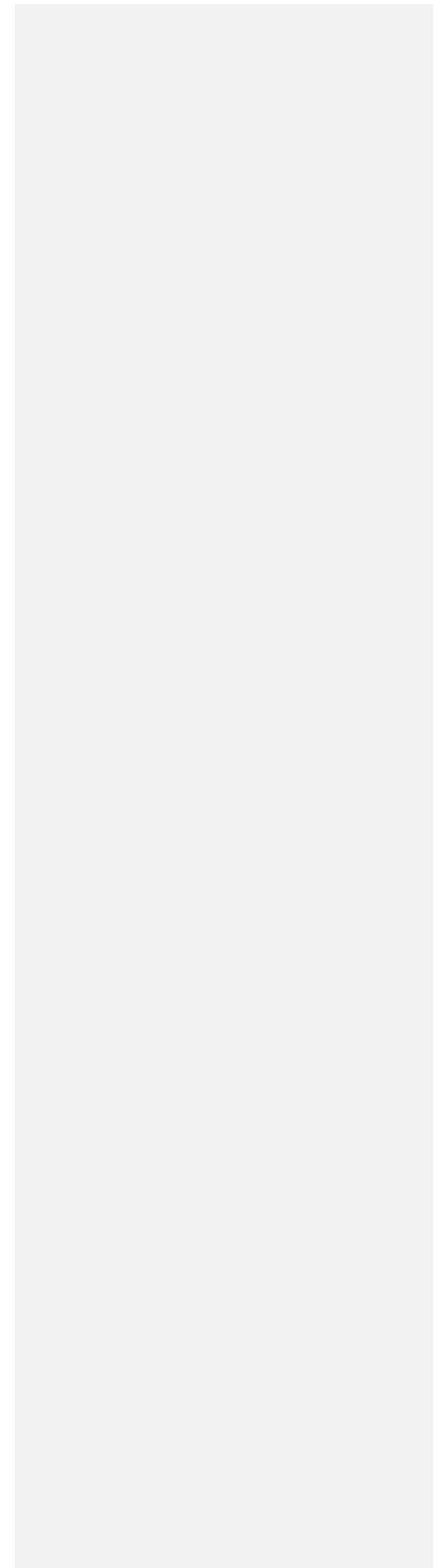
Follow Up: How comfortable are you in asking questions during the discussion or in front of your peers?

2. Listening Skills: You commented that you liked the change we made to the discussion in regards to immediate feedback. Why did you like the immediacy?
3. Open Question: Is there anything else that you would like to share regarding our Inner Outer Discussion circles?

Participant Four:

1. Higher Order Thinking: You made the comment that you would think more deeply if “people’s comments fit better with what the text was saying.” This is really interesting to me--could you explain that comment further?
2. Participation: You shared that you did not really understand the texts that we based our second discussion off of. Could you help me understand what was confusing about the texts?
3. Listening Skills: You shared that everyone listened during the circle, but you had conflicting opinions with most of the group. Did you feel heard and understood in this area of conflict? Why or why not?

4. Open Question: One comment you made on the survey was that the second discussion “felt stiff.” Could you elaborate? What is “stiff” for you or did you notice everyone feeling the same way?



APPENDIX J
Human Subject Committee Approval

TO: Rebekah M. Vincent Hogshead
FROM: HAMLIN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB)
RE: IRB APPROVAL (4/12/2017)

Your proposal entitled “HOW AN ENGLISH TEACHER MAY DRAW FROM THE SOCRATIC SEMINAR METHOD IN ORDER TO FURTHER ENGAGE TENTH GRADE STUDENTS DURING DISCUSSION ” is approved. The proposal requires no further modification or review.

Good Luck with your project.

APPENDIX K
Parent Consent Form

April 18, 2017

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am your teen's English teacher and a graduate student working on an advanced degree in education at Hamline University, St. Paul, Minnesota. As part of my graduate work, I plan to conduct research in my classroom from May 15 through May 26. The purpose of this letter is to ask your permission for your child to take part in my research. This research is public scholarship. The abstract and final product will be cataloged in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository so that it may be published or used in other ways.

I want to study how drawing from the Socratic seminar discussion in its fullest form can further engage students in the areas of participation, text dependence, higher order thinking, and response to each other. I have used Socratic circle discussions throughout my fifteen years of teaching and now want to collect information about the discussions for my study. I plan to have students participate in these seminars twice in the course of two weeks. The first step in the Socratic circle process is that students receive prompt questions beforehand in order to have time to prepare responses. They also receive a rubric that explains how they will be graded during the discussion. The students discuss a variety of topics related to the text they are reading. During the Socratic discussion, students participate for a period of time and then rotate out of the discussion to take the position of listening to the conversation and giving feedback to the group on how the process is going. My plan is to have these graded discussions as a part of the unit no matter if I am conducting a graduate study on the process or not. This year, for the purpose of my study, I will be recording information about the behaviors I see in the discussion groups.

There is little to no risk for your child to participate. All results will be confidential and anonymous. I will not record information about individual students, such as their names, nor report identifying information or characteristics in my thesis. Participation is voluntary and you may decide at any time and without negative consequences that information about your child will not be included in the capstone.

I have received approval for my study from the School of Education at Hamline University and from Tim Berner, principal of Concordia Academy. The capstone will be catalogued in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository. My results might also be included in an article for publication in a professional journal or in a report at a professional conference. In all cases, your child's identity and participation in this study will be confidential.

If you agree that your child may participate, keep this page. Fill out the duplicate agreement to participate on page two and return to me by mail or through the hands of your teen. If you have any questions, please email or call me at school.

Sincerely,

Mrs. Rebekah Vincent Hogshead
2400 North Dale Street, Roseville, MN, 55113. 651-796-2683.
rebekah.vincent@concordiaacademy.com

-Page Two-

Informed Consent to Participate in Qualitative Interview

Keep the full page (page 1) for your records.
Please return this signed page (page 2) by mail or through the hands of your teen.

I have received your letter about the study you plan to conduct in which you will be observing students' behavior in groups. I understand there is little to no risk involved for my child, that his/her confidentiality will be protected, and that I may withdraw or my child may withdraw from the project at any time.

Signature Date

Parent/Guardian

APPENDIX L

Top Tips for Implementing a Socratic Seminar

Definition of a Socratic Seminar: A Socratic seminar is based upon an ancient form of dialog in which, through doubt and a system of questioning another, one reaches truth or an adequate general understanding. Socratic seminars are formal discussions that utilize open-ended questions and sometimes rely on textual evidence in order to support ideas.

Objective of a Socratic Seminar:

- Participants listen closely, think critically, and respond to the thoughts of others. Cooperative learning and respect are practiced.
- Understanding of difficult concepts is increased.
- Questioning explores the reasons why one holds certain beliefs.

Socratic Seminar Format: Participants are divided with half of the participants discussing in the inner circle and half listening in the outer circle. At a facilitator's direction, the participants trade places--switching from the discussion circle to the listening circle multiple times throughout the hour. If the discussion is being assessed, many evaluators remove themselves from the discussion and instead listen in order to assess participants on their levels of involvement, facilitation, references to a text, and respect demonstrated for each other. Some facilitators choose to give participants prompt questions beforehand in order to prepare for the discussion.

Top Tips for Implementing a Socratic Seminar in an Educational Setting

PREPARE: If the students are expected to address content during the discussion, make sure the students are well versed in the material. Give students adequate time to digest the content and utilize whole class instruction to deepen the students' understanding. Consider providing students preparation sheets for the upcoming discussion. Knowledgeable, prepared students discuss at higher levels of thought.

PRACTICE: Before the discussion, practice life-long skills such as active listening and responding well to others. Have students practice using non-verbals to indicate attention, paraphrasing what was said, and asking for clarification when necessary.

PARTICIPATION: Use well-constructed open-ended questions that prompt students to speak from a variety of perspectives. If using the discussion to evaluate students' interaction with a text, provide a way for all students to participate by balancing questions that provide opportunities to share perspectives free of textual support with questions that demand a close read of the material in order to fully engage.

PURPOSE: Rather than overwhelm students with requirements at the beginning of the year, have students focus on one skill during the discussion, grade accordingly, and scaffold the expected skills throughout the rest of the course.

PEERS: Utilize peer evaluation—especially when first introducing Socratic seminars. Consider at the end of every discussion round having students from the listening circle give quick feedback on the quality and behavior of their inner circle peers participation rather than the content of their dialogue. Students listen and respond to peer feedback and encouragement!

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT: Differentiate assessment so that all students can succeed. At times, assess students not on their performance within the discussion but their preparation beforehand or post reflections on their learning from the discussion.