

Running head: LITERATURE CIRCLES IN THE CLASSROOM

Literature Circle Modules in the High School Classroom and Their Effect on Student
Engagement

Sara C. Kraiter

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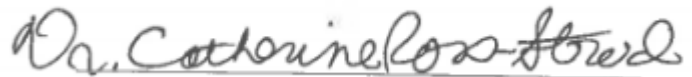
Southwest Minnesota State University
Education Department
Marshall, Minnesota 56258

Action Research Committee

The members of the committee appointed to examine the research of Sara C. Kraiter find it satisfactory and recommend that it be approved.



Dr. Debbie VanOverbeke, Chair



Dr. Catherine Ross-Stroud, Committee Member



Dr. Kathleen Hunzer, Committee Member



Mrs. Shannon Betancourt, Committee Member

Section One

Project Introduction

One of the most common discussion techniques in the English classroom is the literature circle, which was first brought into the realm of education by Harvey Daniels in the 1980s; many English teachers have utilized it, making it a highly common practice. In addition to enhancing student engagement, theorists such as Tony Wagner (2008) suggested it as a 21st century learning tool, as it requires students to collaborate to achieve a common goal. As a whole, literature circles have proven to be highly useful when used in a workable context; however, this discussion technique has also failed miserably, as it puts so much emphasis on student completion. Furthermore, the small group discussion does not always reach the depth expected of a high school discussion, as students have a tendency to rush their way through the discussion just to “get it done” and move on. Consequently, further exploration of the different literature circle variations was necessary to provide English teachers with a module that is consistently successful in encouraging student collaboration and analytical strength.

Section One of this project provided the following elements of the action research: a) the project’s focus and intentions, b) the project’s significance to the researcher and field of secondary education, c) the project’s overarching goal, d) the project’s necessary objectives required to accomplish the goal, and e) the study’s organization.

Project Focus

As an English teacher, text-based discussion is the most important technique for student success in textual analysis. However, the education world seems to be limited in what types of discussion are available; literature circles, fish bowls, Socratic Seminars, and the basic teacher-led discussion were the most common in our repertoire. Upon leaving college with fresh degrees, new teachers have been determined to attempt these modules and achieve high amounts of student learning due to their implementation; incidentally, many of these implementations failed miserably. For classroom activities that are as popular and widely used as the literature circle, implementation and success should have been simple; sadly, this was not the case. So, why have they failed on Monday, and succeeded on Tuesday? Upon further inspection, the literature circle was revealed to be the most bipolar of methods; it was either incredibly perfect or it crashed and burned with disastrous results. Conversely, there has been no research presented that explains this lack of consistency and how to avoid it. Due to the English classroom's dependency on a student-led discussion module, a quest began to find the perfect technique that was powerful in its success rates so that teachers would feel comfortable relying on it in their text-based curriculum.

Project Significance

While the literature circle module has been popular for over 30 years, very few updates been made since the original template was proposed. While students in the 1980s probably found the circle to be a nice break from the traditional lecture-style classroom, engagement today looks vastly different. As the original module has not

changed, the circle itself is no longer the successful “new and different” technique that it used to be. Dozens of researchers have looked at the circle in general, yet few have proposed any ideas for fitting it into the modern classroom without simply suggesting the module be put online rather than the traditional face-to-face option. Unfortunately, in addition to the lack of new proposals for the literature circle, there has also been a lack of suggestions for new student-led discussion techniques. English teachers, then, are therefore limited in what discussion methods we can utilize today. Of the eight teachers in the researched department, all had attempted the literature circle, in addition to the Socratic Seminar, fishbowl, and teacher-led discussion; sadly, all found the circle to simply be a filler option, which is hardly the level of power suggested by many researchers over the decades.

Unfortunately, a dilemma had emerged since the initial literature circle module was released: English teachers were highly limited in what discussion techniques were viable in the classroom, yet a rising demand of engagement and quality learning in that same classroom made new modules necessary for student success. A student-led discussion that was capable of producing student engagement, quality learning, and in-depth analysis would have been highly beneficial to any teacher who needed a handy tool in their textual-discussion toolbox. Many teachers using text-based, student-led discussion knew the weaknesses behind the discussion options they had, rather than having an option where the strengths outweighed those weaknesses. Thus, while recreating the wheel was unnecessary, a compilation of these methods, with some new

revisions that inspired a new module entirely, was a highly desired tool in the realm of English Education.

Project Goal

Throughout the course of this action research, an established framework for a consistently successful student-led discussion in the secondary English classroom was determined. Many teachers are constantly on the lookout for new ways to encourage student discussion in their classrooms; at the beginning of this research, the few options available included literature circles, Socratic Seminars, and fish bowls. Of the three, literature circles were the most commonly used discussion in the classroom, but were far from perfect. Instead, as aforementioned, literature circles were highly inconsistent in terms of success in promoting student learning.

Through research, implementation, and data collection, different styles of literature circles were executed in the classroom to determine the most successful of small group discussion modules. Available literature circle modules were garnered through extensive research focused on discussion techniques within the last thirty years; the selected modules were examined and modified to fit into participating classrooms. Additionally, new modules were developed through the collaboration of participating teachers, along with the extensive study of prior research and data. The goal in this study was to find a literature circle module that consistently met the following criteria: the discussion needed to inspire students to a high level of discussion and analysis, and the discussion could not depend on the traditional literature circle roles that enabled student completion to hinder the circle's success.

Project Objectives

In order to achieve the goal of discovering a successful literature circle module, certain objectives needed to be met accordingly. The following are the objectives that were required to accomplish the goal:

- Determined the classes used to implement the study.
- Obtained written consent of administration and participating students' parents.
- Through research and collaboration, five modules were selected to attempt in the study.
- Applied the traditional literature circle in researching teacher's classroom and the classrooms of three participating teachers to gather baseline data.
- Implemented the new literature circles in the classroom and gathered data to assess their comparative success.
- Gathered data by executing each new module in the three participating teachers' classrooms.
- Selected the two most successful modules and made adaptations to further success.
- Implemented revised modules in initial classroom and gathered data.
- Made further revisions based on data collection and further research.
- Implemented final module in different classrooms and gathered data to compare with baseline module.

By utilizing the aforementioned objectives, the study collected data from multiple sources to garner the most accurate research. These data provided the opportunity to determine

the most successful circle module for multiple secondary classroom settings, guaranteeing a final student-led literature circle technique that is consistent in its effectiveness and engagement.

Study Organization

This action research paper was divided into the following sections. The project and its goal were outlined in Section One, and Section Two reviewed the research collected for this project. The timeline and plan for the implementation of the project was outlined in Section Three. Section Four provided a synopsis of the product of this research study, as well as a list of each module attempted in each classroom. Section Five contained the results of the overall study and implications for future applications. Reviews of the literature circle research available to date, and examinations of the data still lacking for new modules to be adapted, was included in the following section, Section Two.

Section Two

Review of Selected Literature and Research

Literature Circle Modules in the High School Classroom and Their Effect on Student Engagement: A Literature Review provided an extensive review of the literature and research related to the utilization of literature circles in schools, focusing specifically on how certain literature circle modules in the high school classroom can improve student engagement, leading to stronger student success. The review analyzes literature circles being used in English, Science, and Social Studies curriculum, and the circle's future in secondary education. While some information on elementary implementation has been provided, the focus of this research was on secondary-level literature circle discussions. The studies discussed in this research vary in nature; some are teacher responses to usage in their classroom, while others are an external party analyzing data collected from multiple classrooms. Section 2 is divided into subsections that include (a) the background of literature circles and student engagement, (b) the different literature circle modules available, (c) literature circles and student engagement in the classroom, (d) the flaws of literature circles, and (e) the future of literature circles.

The Background of Literature Circles and Student Engagement

Batchelor (2012), a teacher who implemented literature circles in her middle school classroom in 2002, defined the pedagogical method as “small, peer-led groups of students engaging in conversations around the same text” (p. 27) and further ascertained that the teacher assigning the literature circle can choose any text available to them, ranging from poems, to articles, or novels. Daniels and Steineke (2004), two teachers

who have been instrumental in the creation and evolution of the literature circle in education today, provided the origins for Batchelor's (2012) claims by stating that a literature circle is comprised of three to four students who are reading a book of their choosing and talking about it. Students within that small group are then given an individual role to complete that allows them to look at the text through an additional lens; roles include discussion director, connector, literary luminary, illustrator, or vocabulary enricher (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). However, as Batchelor (2012) stated: "Once students have stopped using their role sheets as a necessary component of great group discussions, role sheets are no longer required for them" (p. 30). Furthermore, Moeller and Moeller (2007), two teachers who have been implementing literature circles in their middle and high school classrooms for over 30 collective years, made the argument that literature circles are designed to assist students in developing independent and critical thinking skills, as well as increasing their understanding and enjoyment of literature.

As opposed to other methods of discussion used in the secondary classroom, the literature circle is entirely peer-led with little interruption or direction from the teacher.

As Thein, et al. (2011) wrote:

The widespread enthusiasm for literature circles as an instructional strategy is not surprising given empirical studies confirming that they can lead to increased academic achievement. For instance, Almasi (1995) found that higher level cognitive growth occurs in interpretive, student-led literature discussions to a greater extent than in teacher-led discussions. Likewise, Sweigart (1991) established that participation in literature circles improves comprehension. Furthermore, Blum,

Lipsett, and Yocom (2002) determined that literature circles bolster students' academic problem-solving and practical decision-making skills. (p. 15)

This structure leads students to be highly engaged in a meaningful text-centered discourse with their peers that creates in them a love of reading that the original school of teaching did not (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Moreover, according to Moeller and Moeller (2007), "Traditional school reading programs are virtually designed to ensure that kids never voluntarily pick up a book once they graduate" (p. 1). Literature circles juxtapose the old-school way of teaching literature, as they engender an engagement and an enjoyment of reading through the relationships and discussions students have with their peers (Batchelor, 2012). Furthermore, in addition to literature circles increasing that engagement and enjoyment, they also move students out of the passive learning style of the classroom and into the active learning style, which encourages students' critical thinking skills (Moeller & Moeller, 2007). The circle also assists them with illustrating ideas from the text using their own examples and making connections between prior and new knowledge (Moeller & Moeller, 2007).

In contrast to the Fishbowl and Socratic Seminar methods of discussion, literature circles encourage all students to actively participate in classroom discourse, rather than passively listening to others' thoughts and opinions in a large-class setting (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Finally, Daniels and Steineke (2004) made the assertion that while the traditional method of teaching literature, where students read the text and complete study guides and worksheets before participating in a teacher-led discussion, was successful in teaching content behind a text, it did not lead students to the skills enhanced through

literature circle discussion, such as collaboration, critical thinking, and independent analysis.

The Background of Literature Circles

While the amount of research discussing the origins of the literature circle is minimal, the original ideal can be dated back to Jean Jacques Rousseau and John Dewey's efforts to reform adolescent education in the late nineteenth century; Dewey, in fact, "called for the interaction of knowledge and social experience with the goal of social action," and encouraged his students to work in the "school garden," where they collaborated with peers to discuss problems and find solutions (Jenkins, 1997, p. 72). The literature circle did not fully emerge in the world of education, however, until the 1980s, after the landmark study of Durkin (Jenkins, 1997). Durkin established that literature is essential to the acquisition and development of literacy and that children who engage in interactive analysis of books experience a greater degree of success in learning (Jenkins, 1997).

Durkin's theory caused English teachers nationwide to begin incorporating a collaborative small-group discussion into their curriculum (Jenkins, 1997). According to Jenkins (1997), a professor at Boston University who has been working on incorporating literature circles into her college classroom and has been recording her experiences since her initial study in 1997, the literature circle was widely adopted into the classroom by the 1980s, and "at the core of these literature-based programs was the conviction that literature evokes an emotional response from readers and that this emotional response needs to be acknowledged, explored and extended" (p. 73). In juxtaposition, Daniels and

Steineke (2004) theorized that the original literature circle was aimed more toward creating a collaborative effort in the teacher-led classroom with the goal of promoting student ownership of their learning. While Jenkins (1997), and Daniels and Steineke (2004), cited little evidence to corroborate either of these theories, it remains clear that through the extensive research, implementation, and reflection of Jenkins (1997), Daniels and Steineke (2004), Moeller and Moeller (2007), and other educators, the literature circle has evolved into the current module of individual roles completed to discuss with a small group about a chosen text, designed to improve student engagement and comprehension (Batchelor, 2012).

The most significant event in the evolution of the literature circle, however, was the implementation of the role, which created a more structured student-led discourse that remained text-centered, and it also encouraged participating students to “generate higher-level questions during these discussions than they do when engaged in individual learning opportunities” (Batchelor, 2012, p. 27). The literature circle role has allowed students to provide their personal insights on one specific task, or role, such as discussion director, connector, literary luminary, etc., but then has also given them the opportunity to discuss their findings with the others in their circle (Batchelor, 2012). In the elementary setting, the individual role has been instrumental in creating a successful literature circle, as it has helped maintain an on-task discussion, while also keeping the discussion moving. In contrast, middle and high school students have been allowed a certain degree of freedom in their circles, as they can begin with roles but then progress into a general reflective analysis with no specific role toward the end of the unit (Batchelor, 2012).

King (2001), an elementary teacher who researched and implemented guided reading paired with literature circles in her elementary classroom, determined that the roles in elementary literature circles allow students “to articulate affective responses to their reading which would otherwise remain dormant, yet which contribute to a richer understanding both of the texts they read and themselves as readers” (p. 32). Daniels and Steineke (2004) furthered that declaration, stating that the use of the role in the secondary literature circle assists students in looking outside the box of their normal thought, provoking them to a new level of thinking unheard of in the original English classroom. In 2014, Lenters, a professor at the University of Calgary, discussed the concept of the role as well in her case study of a fifth grade classroom; however, Lenters (2014) argued that the role, while instrumental in the development and nationwide implementation of the literature circle, has become so all-encompassing that teachers hide behind its power; therefore, while a successful modern-day literature circle begins with the role, it needs to grow and expand into a complete student-led discussion with little to no prompting from the teacher.

The History of Student Engagement

While the concept of the literature circle emerged nearly 200 years ago, research has suggested the term “student engagement” did not enter educator vocabulary until the 1980s, coined to help disengaged and disadvantaged students achieve and participate, to assist in classroom management, and to engage students in learning about learning (Parsons & Taylor, 2011). Unfortunately, there is no set definition of student engagement, as there are several types of engagement that can be achieved in the

classroom: academic, cognitive, intellectual, institutional, emotional, behavioral, social, and psychological (Parsons & Taylor, 2011; “The Condition of Education,” 2015).

Student engagement first became essential to teachers as it assisted them in classroom management and behavior management, as opposed to the learning tool it is considered to be today, a theory that was furthered by Parsons and Taylor (2011), two leaders in researching and analyzing the power of student engagement in the middle and high school classrooms. Parsons and Taylor (2011) asserted that while student engagement began as a tool for improving student achievement and attendance, it evolved into a tool used by teachers to improve the learners’ abilities to learn. Furthermore, they claimed “student engagement also has moved from a place of being a reactive response to negative behaviors to being a preferred proactive strategy to enhance positive classroom learning environments” (Parsons & Taylor, 2011, p. 9). Student engagement is, therefore, no longer discussed as a classroom management technique so much as a method of helping all students become lifelong learners in a knowledge-based society (Parsons & Taylor, 2011).

The Literature Circle Modules Available

There are few literature circle techniques available to teachers today, and the ones that have been attempted are remarkably similar in their nature. Each module consisted of a small group of three to five students, a required pre-circle homework assignment, and minimal teacher interaction. The main differences to be seen are shown more significantly in the type of discussion, the required student/teacher roles, and the intended outcomes of the circle.

Traditional Circle

More than three decades ago, Harvey Daniels proposed the literature circle to the world of secondary education, and with it came an individual role for each student (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Those roles included a discussion leader, a literary luminary, and other less-advanced concepts of Bloom's Taxonomy. As this circle requires roles, it is aligned closely with teacher-led discussion, as the teacher has influence over where the student discussion goes and also how it gets there. However, "the roles are not intended to limit students' thinking to one particular cognitive strategy at a time," as a role completion would suggest, "but instead are simply intended to mirror the thinking that readers truly do (or should do) while reading a text"; consequently, it can be concluded that "each [role] gives students a purpose with which to approach the reading, and research has proven that reading with a purpose helps students comprehend and remember text more easily" (Marchiando, 2013, p. 15).

The premise of this circle was founded on the concept that students complete the same reading outside of class, each complete a different role outside of class, and then spend given class time sharing their roles with the group. This circle was intended as a tool to further curriculum depth, encouraging students to engage in high-level analysis, so many teachers have used it to supplement a novel unit, rather than as an external project.

Forum Circle

Contrary to the original format, a new version of the literature circle emerged in the early 2000s, and was identified and analyzed by Thein, et al. in 2011: the forum circle. They write, "they are used as forums for engaging students in discussion of

multicultural or political texts” (p. 15). In this technique, students are not dependent on the role, but instead are using the circle as a method of bridging social stigmas and stereotypes, giving students a more forgiving and welcoming method of discussing difficult topics. However, this circle used the role sheets as a baseline for student discussion, giving them a starting point with the hope of pushing them into a higher realm of discussion. “The literature circle unit aimed to engage students in discussions of current, relevant political and multicultural texts. Literature circles seemed a logical space for this instruction ... because they are designed to provide students with greater interpretive freedom” (Thein, et al. 2011 p. 20). This circle is intended to help students use the roles to dive into more significant and subjective topics, such as racism, sexism, classism, etcetera, and can be used both internal and external to curriculum.

Independent Circle

The final literature circle method currently being utilized is the independent literature circle, which is mainly used to encourage students to form a “book club” circle, external to the required curriculum texts. As Marchiando (2013) wrote, “They have the opportunity to choose what books their groups will read, how much of the text will be read between group meetings, and what will be discussed during each conversation” (p. 14). Consequently, students participating in this particular module have complete autonomy over the level of their learning, with the teacher acting more as a guide or coach than as a discussion-leader. This circle engenders power for students and is held external to curriculum.

Literature Circles and Student Engagement in the Classroom

Literature circles have become so widely known and touted due to the research claiming them to have a strong influence on both student success and student engagement in the classroom (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Not only does this form of discussion increase student comprehension of complex texts, it also leads to student ownership and responsibility, causing students to hold each other accountable for their participation in the literature circle (Marchiando, 2013). Research has suggested that middle and high school classrooms that have implemented literature circles in place of traditional teacher-led instruction have had a stronger success ratio in regards to student success, which is primarily due to their enhancement of modern-day skills that have been proven necessary for students to thrive in today's world (Daniels & Steineke, 2004; Falter Thomas, 2014; Wagner, 2008). However, the potential of the literature circle is not limited to the language arts; it is also applicable and beneficial in other content area classrooms, such as social studies and science (Devick-Fry & LeSage, 2010; Straits & Nichols, 2006; Straits, 2007). Lastly, literature circles have also garnered a new level of student interaction, as there is no mediation from the teacher, so students are able to reach a new level of ownership of their education.

Effect on Student Success

Since their application in the secondary classroom, literature circles have been highly analyzed in studies as tools for fostering 21st century skills in secondary students, as they enhance critical thinking, collaboration, communication, and creativity in each participating student (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Falter Thomas (2014) completed a

study regarding the impact of literature circles on student learning through an online format, and she determined that collaborative learning “is a vehicle for students to reevaluate their own thoughts and beliefs about the world. In this context, students are provided with alternate viewpoints and conceptions that they may not have considered individually as they collaborate with their peers” (p. 45). Furthermore, research has suggested that the literature circle encourages stronger 21st century skills than the traditional large-class discussions, as its use of collaboration is key to its success in developing critical thinking skills (Daniels & Steineke, 2004).

Wagner (2008), a revolutionary in the world of 21st century skills, furthers this argument when he claims that critical thinking can be defined as “taking issues and situations and problems and going to the root components; understanding how the problems evolved—looking at it from a systemic perspective and not accepting things at face value” (p. 53). Using literature circles can therefore lead students to “develop the skills and habits of reading analytically, listening carefully, citing evidence, disagreeing respectfully, and being open-minded” (Hale & City, 2006, p. 4), and when practiced, literature circles can lead to an overall development of “oral language, discussion, reasoning, critical thinking, and reading” (Hale & City, 2006, p. 4). Sanacore (2013) substantiated this theory when he researched the power of the literature circle on student reflection and thinking; he established that literature circles promote the “central features of inquiry, reflection and reflexivity, so that students learn to study themselves so they can outgrow themselves as individuals and as a community of learners” (p. 116).

The English Classroom

In the middle school English classroom today, literature circles are often being used to support students in their class novel units, or to support students in their novel of choice (Moeller & Moeller, 2007). Furthermore, teachers are constantly trying to find new ways to engage their students and help them to achieve those 21st century skills about which the education world is so concerned. Moeller and Moeller (2007) asserted that the new literature circle methodology revolves around “active learning,” which requires students to actively engage in the content about which they are learning: “Today, parents, students, administrators, and teachers have become increasingly aware of the importance of active learning because passive learning too often results in no learning” (p. 9).

Barone and Barone conducted a study in 2012 that analyzed the implementation of literature circles in the English classroom as a tool for garnering background knowledge. The two women took the stance that while literature circles are usually discussed with the focus on process, conversation, and assessment, their true strength lies in developing background knowledge, “because for many students in intermediate grades, background knowledge is the sticking point in their development of text understanding” (Barone & Barone, 2012, p. 10). Barone and Barone then discovered that literature circles are highly beneficial in garnering interest in research among their middle school students, in addition to being a good tool for studying literature. Furthermore, Stien and Beed (2004) argued that literature circles can foster in students a love and understanding of nonfiction texts, as well as the more traditional fictional texts. The women

implemented a study in a class of 22 students, placing them in different literature circles based on their interest in different research topics after two months of the students participating in fiction-centered circles. They established after this study that “literature circles are an appropriate instructional practice to help students learn about and enjoy nonfiction” (p. 518).

Literature circles in the high school English classroom are very similar in format to those of the middle school classroom; however, the expected responses from students are much more advanced, as are the texts that students are discussing. Stien and Beed (2004) began this discussion by analyzing the role of the teacher in the high school English classroom, and established that the teacher is no more than a “floating facilitator” who does not join or lead any group; instead the teacher’s role is to simply drift from group to group to ask a question or make a comment that challenges or redirects student thinking and leads to an expanded conversation. With the role of the teacher in a literature circle setting established, Hale and City (2006) conducted a study focused on student-led discussions in their classrooms; they discovered that “using a text anchors a discussion, improves students’ reading and interpreting skills, and gives students the opportunity to engage deeply with important texts across disciplines” (p. 5). Moreover, Barone and Barone (2012) asserted, “When members of a literature circle participate in their various roles, a rich, multifaceted discussion of text can result” (p. 10), establishing the concept of group talk within a literature circle. Barone and Barone (2012) then studied how group talk can lead to both individual and group interpretations of complex stories, allowing students to analyze a text through multiple viewpoints.

Barone and Barone's claim (2012) was substantiated in 2013 by Coles-Ritchie of Westminster College, who argued that literature circles are valuable because students need their classmates to help clarify material and discuss difficult issues prominent in complex and multicultural texts. Coles-Ritchie (2013) expanded Barone and Barone's (2012) claims of literature circles broadening student viewpoints by claiming that using ethnographies within a literature circle can help learners develop a wider understanding of complex groups of people, especially those of different cultures than those participating in the circle. Coles-Ritchie (2013) determined, "Students read ethnographies that may challenge them academically because they contain complex theories and writing style, rather than reading books for adolescents that are less difficult academically" (p. 2).

Literature Circles in Different Content Areas

While literature circles are predominantly used in a text-centered classroom, typically English or Language Arts, they are also applicable in other content areas as well. For instance, Devick-Fry and LeSage (2010) analyzed the use of literature circles in the middle school science classroom, leading to the discovery that "using literature circles has led to increased comprehension and higher order cognition" (p. 35). For these women, the science literature circle had three components: science notebook organization, science literature circle roles, and the student-generated artifacts and big ideas chart, leading toward the goal that all students grasp big ideas about science concepts within both an independent and social learning community (Devick-Fry & LeSage, 2010). Furthermore, the chosen text does "not always have to be nonfiction.

Some fiction books with science themes make good springboards to science learning because narrative texts encourage students to form deep connections with the text as they vicariously step into character roles” (Straits & Nichols, 2006, p. 54). Straits and Nichols (2006), two teachers who analyzed and studied the use of literature circles in a middle school science classroom, speculated that literature circles can easily be applied to inquiry science, as they are designed to encourage student skills with asking open-ended questions, incorporating student thought into classroom discourse, and using student response to further discussion.

Straits and Nichols (2006) asserted that literature circles are also beneficial in the science classroom as a means of differentiation: “A major benefit of topic-focused discussions is that the books, like the students who choose them, do not have to be on the same reading level” (p. 53). Students can then lead a science inquiry specific to their skillset, working with other students at the same reading level (Straits & Nichols, 2006). In 2007, Straits furthered this discussion of literature circles as a methodology for scientific discovery; he discovered that literature circles could act as a bridge between historical nonfiction and the sciences, helping students to make personal connections between a historical nonfiction text and “science as a human endeavor interdependent with culture, society, and history” (p. 32). Therefore, while literature circles are famous as a method in the English-Language Arts classroom, roles have been created with the purpose of focusing student attention on science, allowing students to make connections between their reading and their studies.

In addition to enhancing science-centered classrooms, literature circles can also be applied to the social studies curriculum, as seen in the study completed by McCall (2010), a member of the Curriculum and Instruction Department at the University of Wisconsin in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. McCall (2010) developed a study where she practiced using literature circles to develop social studies ideas on pre-service educators, with the plans of using these plans in the elementary classroom. As McCall (2010) asserted, “Typical social studies teaching has been consistent for much of the twentieth century and includes teacher-centered instruction, a focus on coverage of the textbook supplemented with teacher lectures and the occasional use of films and videos” (p. 153). In addition, she took the stance that integrating literature circles into the social studies classroom makes the classroom more democratic, as it allows students to share power over their learning, increasing student engagement and success (McCall, 2010). To apply literature circles to the content, McCall (2010) stated that this pedagogical method can be used to analyze primary and secondary sources, critique the credibility of various sources, and to analyze the authors’ completed research, while also being given the opportunity to “note the sources used, and identify the author’s goals in writing the text. Then students can weigh this evidence to decide if the text is a credible interpretation of a current or historical event” (p. 153).

Literature Circles’ Effect on Student Interaction

Literature circles do not just impact student learning; they impact student interaction as well, predominantly regarding gender roles and class hierarchies. In 2011, Thein, Guise, and Sloan studied Sloan’s classroom implementation of literature circles to

read *Bastard Out of Carolina*, and discovered literature circles, when done correctly, provided “egalitarian, student-centered spaces for ‘grand conversations’ that contrasted sharply with traditional teacher-led recitations, or ‘gentle inquisitions,’ that forwarded authoritative interpretations of texts’ meanings” (p. 15). Thein et al. (2012) furthered their research, claiming that literature circles have given teachers valuable insight into the social class identity of their students, and that the peer discussion format of a literature circle can foster further understanding of a text through the eyes of someone from a different social class. Thein et al. (2012) centered their study on a focal group, and established that students within a literature circle position themselves in ways consistent with their class identity in larger settings, such as school, community, and family worlds; in addition, this background also affected “their positioning of their own stances relative to their peers and to a text about a working-class family” (p. 234).

In 2013, Marchiando studied peer interaction in literature circles, and she asserted that learning is a social process and develops through interaction with others, especially when students have developed an enthusiasm for the discussion and are expected to support their thoughts and opinions with evidence from the text under discussion. Additionally, Clarke (2006), a professor in the Department of Education at Northern Kentucky University, theorized that “gender, as it intersects with social class, influences the way students discuss texts in literature circles” (p. 54), a hypothesis that was grounded on data collected in her study of a fifth grade classroom in an urban setting. Clarke (2006) hypothesized that literature circles further our study of student interaction

because they provide us with the opportunity to investigate sociocultural influences in their classrooms where there is no mediation from the teacher.

Effect on Student Engagement

While literature circles are powerful in their effects on student learning and growth, they also have a strong impact on student engagement in the classroom (Batchelor, 2012; Clarke, 2006; Copeland, 2005). Clarke (2006) conducted a study of fifth grade students and their success within the literature circle; she asserted that literature circles gained their original momentum in the classroom as an instructional practice that “facilitated a transactional experience, moved away from teacher-centered discourse, and increased substantive engagement” (p. 57). Barone and Barone (2012) explained the simplicity of this increase, claiming: “They certainly were active, they created a goal (to solve their time puzzle), and they reread and investigated when they were confused” (p. 15). In addition, Batchelor (2012) maintained that students enjoy literature circles, as they are required to remain active and engaged the entire time, but they also provide students with the support and camaraderie they desire from their peers.

Stien and Beed (2004) discussed this impact, claiming that literature circles help students to feel ownership and to take responsibility for his or her own learning. As Marchiando (2013) asserted, “Cooperative learning not only fosters academic growth but also builds better work habits and attitudes and increases students’ motivation for reading and engagement in the classroom (p. 17). Alwood (2000), a teacher who analyzed the role of the instructor in a middle school literature circle, evaluated student engagement within the literature circle and concluded that a student-centered discussion involved

more “conflicts with self,” meaning students were able to identify and discuss their misconceptions, causing them to think more reflectively. Consequently, “students were more engaged in the reading and there were higher level responses documented in student centered discussion groups as compared to teacher led groups” (Alwood, 2000, p. 19). Additionally, Marchiando (2013) asserted that when kids are given the chance to have authentic reading opportunities and discuss their reading “their curiosity explodes and their questions come fast and furiously. The more kids learn, the more they wonder. And it is those questions that propel learners on, that get them excited and engaged in the world around them” (p. 19).

A typical literature circle discussion. There are 12 principles associated with the modern literature circle being used today: students choose their own reading, groups are formed, different groups read different books, groups meet according to their developed schedule, members use written notes to guide their reading and discussion, discussion is developed by the students, meetings strive to be natural conversations about books, students rotate tasks, teacher serves as a facilitator, evaluation is both teacher observation and student reflection, a spirit of fun is created, and groups share with other groups once completed (Moeller & Moeller, 2007).

With that said, the typical literature circle follows the same module. On the day of discussion, the teacher begins with a miniature lesson to promote student critical thinking in regards to the text, as well as to indicate specific moments that students may want to discuss (Daniels & Steineke, 2004). Within their teacher-assigned groups, students share their individual roles that they completed prior to discussing with their

group. Role sheets help students to keep the discussion on track, but also allow them to explore the text through a new viewpoint, whether they are the discussion director, connector, literary luminary, illustrator, or vocabulary enricher (Batchelor, 2012). On the scheduled discussion date, students share their role with their group members and try to create a discussion that analyzes the text in a conversation-like manner (Batchelor, 2012). Daniels and Steineke (2004) alleged that the module is “closely patterned after adult reading groups, those circles of friends who meet regularly in each other’s living rooms, in church basements, or in the back rooms of bookstores to discuss a book they have chosen and read” (p. 3). Finally, at the end of each literature circle, the teacher leads a recap that goes over each group discussion as a whole class; students then do an individual self-assessment of their contribution to the group that day (Batchelor, 2012).

Student ownership. No matter how much preparation a teacher puts into a lesson, the key to a successful outcome is students’ ownership of their own learning. Barone and Barone (2012) asserted that in literature circles, students are encouraged by their peers to take ownership not only over their work, but also their learning, claiming that they “put the responsibility on students for developing necessary knowledge” (p. 11). Furthermore, literature circles also enhance accountability in their members, allowing students to participate in a discussion of varied student interpretations, and multiple contributions to enhance student comprehension, and individual and collective accountability (Barone & Barone, 2012). Because all students are responsible for their own role of the meeting, their peers are therefore dependent on them to complete their work ahead of time so everyone’s learning can benefit from the discussion (Alwood,

2000). As Marchiando (2013) asserted, “Because each student has prepared his own discussion material, this division of responsibility in preparation for the meeting requires each student to make a contribution during the meeting” (p. 17).

Due to each role being different, each student has a different perspective to add to the discussion; Vijayarajoo, of the Universiti Teknologi MARA in Malaysia, and Samuel, of the University of Malaya (2013), discovered this power of the role in their study of literature circles as teacher learning communities for in-service teachers in a Malaysian secondary school in 2013; they claimed that one role can better the understanding of the rest of the group, helping them to make personal connections to their own lives and to better understand the text as a whole through new perspectives. However, the student ownership of a literature circle far outstretches the student role; in fact, students have ownership over every aspect of the circle, including what book their group reads, how much they read between meetings, and what is discussed during each conversation (Marchiando, 2013). Therefore, “when teachers allow students the opportunity to freely wonder about what they are reading and truly explore these questions, students are granted a great deal of ownership over their learning” (Marchiando, 2013, p. 16).

Effects on student behavior. In addition to enhancing student ownership over his or her own learning, literature circles can also positively impact the student behavior in a classroom, lessening the amount of classroom management and increasing the amount of student freedoms (Daniels & Steineke, 2004; Pearson, 2010). However, the literature circle is only successful in improving student behavior when implemented correctly; Marchiando (2013) argued that because lessons do not always run as smoothly

as necessary, the teacher needs to take on the role of both coach and facilitator during a literature circle activity to truly promote student productivity and engagement.

Furthermore, for a literature circle to be successful, they need a teacher who uses mini-lessons beforehand, debriefings afterward, and constant proximity with groups to truly help students grow in their skills as active listeners, questioners, agreeable arguers, collaborators, and more (Marchiando, 2013, p. 19). Sanacore (2013) added to this practice by claiming that literature circles also need a strong reflective practice to truly enhance student behavior, as students need to have strong open-type questions to actively discuss to remain engaged in a meaningful, student-led discussion, rather than acting out or misbehaving. However, because literature circles have such a strong impact on student ownership, create a relationship of respect and trust between teacher and student, and increase student need for accountability among peers, they can positively enhance a classroom climate if launched correctly by the teacher (Marchiando, 2013; Sanacore, 2013).

The Flaws of Literature Circles

While the literature circle has been prominent in the classroom for over 30 years, there has been surprisingly little research discussing the flaws prevalent in this discussion technique. However, research has established that certain elements of the literature circle are problematic for the future classroom (Alwood, 2000; King, 2001; Lenters, 2014; Moeller & Moeller, 2013; Sanacore, 2013; Thein, et al., 2011; Tobin, 2012; Whittingham, 2013). For instance, Alwood (2000), along with Moeller and Moeller (2013), has contended that because the literature circle is entirely student-led, the issue

then arises that the loss of teacher control over said discussion can lead to a negative impact on the depth of student comprehension of that text. Lenters (2014) corroborated their hypothesis by stating that while students must find the book they are reading interesting in order to remain engaged, there are three other explanations for the failure of the literature circle in the classroom: “social relations amongst group members, the role of the teacher in literature circles and the use of defined student roles” (p. 56). King (2001), Sanacore (2013), and Thein et al. (2011) verified their findings and furthered them by arguing that the depth of student discussion within the circle is sometimes mediocre at best, leading to a divide among students: those who participated in an in-depth discussion and those who did not. Furthermore, Moeller and Moeller (2013), along with Whittingham (2013), a college professor at the University of Central Arkansas, have studied the power of student completion over the success of the literature circle. Lastly, researchers including Tatum Tobin (2012) have looked at all of these flaws and added to them by looking at what literature circles lack as a whole.

Loss of Teacher Control on Student Learning

One deficiency of the literature circle that has been researched the most is the loss of teacher control on student learning in that particular unit. The role of the teacher in the literature circle is under constant scrutiny, as researchers want to decipher the best way for a teacher to interact with students during the activity so as to prevent reducing the student self-sufficiency engendered through the instructional method (Alwood, 2000; Hale & City, 2006). However, as Alwood (2000) argued, without the influence of the teacher on student discussion, the students would not reach a level of cognitive discussion

necessary to produce the benefits of student-led autonomy. Alwood (2000) concluded that “teacher demonstration and modeling of strategies in meaningful contexts are crucial for successful student led discussions” and that teachers need to act as a facilitator, mentor, participant, mediator, and active listener for a literature circle to meet with any success in the classroom (p. 20-21). In 2006, Hale and City conducted a research study of the role of the teacher in student-led discussion, and found that the success of any student-led discussion module lies solely on the expertise of the teacher, whether it is the literature circle or a different format. They validated Alwood’s (2000) findings, stating that while the teacher is not active in the student-led dialogue, he or she still needs to support students in reaching the goals of the day. Furthermore, Moeller and Moeller (2013) took the stance that teachers are necessary during any activity, including the literature circle, to prevent students from straying too far from the subject matter; moreover, while students on their own can create in each other a strong discussion of a text, the teacher still needs to lead some dialogue to ensure each student in the classroom meets with the same level of success. However, as Daniels and Steineke (2004) asserted, teachers that lead a mini lesson before each literature circle meeting and a debriefing after each literature circle meeting can prevent many of the deficiencies associated with the lack of teacher-led dialogue from happening in the classroom.

Student Completion and How It Affects the Circle

One of the most important elements of the literature circle is the individual student contribution to the discussion; however, student completion rates, when low, can have a strongly negative impact on the circle’s success. As Moeller and Moeller (2013)

stressed, student learning is focused solely on the effort of said student: if the student chooses to not complete their preparations for the literature circle and actively take charge of his or her education, but instead chooses to be a passive learner who does not put forth the time and effort of his or her peers, success will suffer. Whittingham (2013) furthered their theory, claiming that the role causes students to be active learners and helps foster in them a deeper understanding and a more complex prior knowledge, causing them to delve more in-depth in their preparation for class, and that each role plays such a significant part in both that individual's learning and the group's learning, that an incomplete role severely hinders the success of the group for that meeting. Pate-Moulton, Klages, Erickson, and Conforti, Jr. (2004) teamed up to research the email literature circle, and established that the most successful way to engender student completion rates is to incorporate a distance learning partner module into the traditional literature circle format, so students are not just responsible for their group's learning, but another's as well. Pate-Moulton et al. (2004) determined that while student completion will always have negative effects on a collaborative project like the literature circle, peer accountability is the best way to diminish these effects as much as possible.

Depth of Student-Centered Discussion

In addition to the lack of student work completion, literature circles can also be negatively impacted by the depth, or lack thereof, of the discussion that takes place. Sanacore (2013) took the stance that literature circles that are productive and successful are due entirely to the group members listening attentively to one another as they

analyzed the text, rather than being a direct reflection on the teacher's implementation of the activity. Furthermore, Sanacore claimed:

Other peer-led discussions were mediocre because group members either wasted time, 'bullied' their point of view, focused on tangents rather than on pertinent aspects of the text, or held on to their preconceived notions of meaning instead of considering other perspectives generated in the text (2013, p. 117).

King (2001), on the other hand, argued that given the chance, students could reach a deeper level of inquiry with practice, but that the teacher cannot intervene to lead them there. Instead, King (2001) determined that the more teacher interaction prevalent in the classroom dynamic, the more students are led to depend on the teacher for their deeper-level thinking. Pearson (2010) created a bridge between these two polarized theories; she claimed that all student-led conversation, as long as it is text-related, is good discussion, as they are using their skills of inquiry to create that dialogue: "Cumulative talk, the telling of anecdotes and the performing of different characters' voices all have a useful function in deliberating of books: they can encourage engagement, be helpful in bringing texts to life and advance children's thinking about literature" (p. 3). However, Pearson (2010) averred that teachers are still required to assist students in reaching the levels of analysis the teacher desires from that literature circle, particularly in the middle school setting. Thein et al. (2012) contended that literature circles, while beneficial for engendering student dialogue, could also be limited, as students sometimes develop a theme of discussion that can turn into a rut, making it difficult for them to see other pertinent details that could be analyzed. For example, in their study of a focal group, the

students fixated only on a theme of social class within the group's chosen text, rather than analyzing a collection of themes that were even more prominent than the example on which they focused.

What Literature Circles Lack: The New Module

According to Tobin (2012), literature circles are quickly becoming obsolete due to their lack of 21st century requirements: specifically, technology. Tobin (2012) theorized that a successful literature circle needs to implement a group project, an outcome they are working toward, to fully enhance the student learning; she proposes reinventing the literature circle to instead be a Digital Storytelling Circle, as this new module supports transactional theory and allows for both an in-depth analysis of the text and an active engagement with said text to create meaning. Tobin (2012) argued that the original literature circle role is limiting for student thought, that it decreases their cognitive requirements instead of increasing them, and that projects that fit into the digital storytelling format better engender 21st century learning into the original literature circle. Ferguson and Kern conducted a study of literature circles in a middle school Rhode Island classroom in 2012, and the two women corroborated Tobin's (2012) findings that the traditional literature circle is not living up to its original potential. Ferguson and Kern (2012) took the stance, however, that a literature circle needed additional comprehension strategies incorporated to promote the highest level of student learning. Their reasoning behind this theory is that many students do not even complete the reading to quickly complete their assigned roles; therefore, explicitly teaching comprehension strategies and

implementing research-based inquiry into the literature circle is necessary to improve student success (Ferguson & Kern, 2012).

The Future of Literature Circles

Maintaining steady student engagement is a daily battle for educators in the 21st century; the same can be said for literature circles. While the original premise was highly successful in promoting student engagement, research indicates that slight changes need to be made to maintain that level of engagement in today's classrooms (Ferguson & Kern, 2012; Tobin, 2012). Data collected within the last decade indicate that the literature circle role is becoming obsolete, the Socratic method of questioning is more successful at garnering student inquiry skills, and that the online literature circle is imminent.

The Role of the Role

Although the role is found to be necessary by multiple researchers, such as Daniels and Steineke (2004), along with Moeller and Moeller (2007), many studies are beginning to dispute this claim, stating that the role in the current literature circle module is insufficient to garner the levels of student engagement that used to be prominent. As Lenters (2014) argued, "the role sheet accumulated an increasing status or power, along with a peculiar resistance to critique" (p. 53), leading teachers to believe that the role sheet is necessary for a true literature circle to even take place. However, this reliance on the role sheet worked to radically alter educators' initial pedagogical purpose that led to the spread of literature circles in the first place (Lenters, 2014, p. 53). Lenters (2014) postulated that the literature circle role, and educators' reliance on it, should be much less

recognizable in the classroom today, based on the amount of time and geographical distance it has gone through, in addition to the renditions it has been taken through in the literacy pedagogy community and classroom. Furthermore, Lenters (2014) argued that the role's main and only true purpose in this dialogue module is to give students something to replace the teacher, something to help guide their discussion in a similar format to that of a traditional teacher-led discussion, allowing the teacher to enact a deep pedagogical analysis with 60 students without truly interacting with any of them. However, "the role sheet most clearly mediated their reading of the novels, displacing aesthetically oriented practices in which they either normally engaged or could have engaged and, instead, involving them in a highly artificial form of novel reading" (Lenters, 2014, p. 65).

Despite the evidence, this stance directly opposed that of Vijayarajoo and Samuel (2013), who affirmed that students "shared their experiences and their interpretations of the new literature text through the roles they played in the process of making sense of the text" (p. 28), and that the role is highly beneficial in assisting students in reaching a deeper level of cognitive theory than a dialogue with no role present. Falter Thomas (2014) advanced Vijayarajoo and Samuel's (2013) assertions by stating that the literature circle role is also necessary in that it encourages all members to actively participate and engage in the discussion of the day. Contrarily, Falter Thomas (2014) also argued that the literature circle has become limited by the overuse of the role sheet, and that the predominance of the role sheets in classrooms nationwide has hindered the true success

of the literature circle. Consequently, the traditional role, as it was originally created, no longer meets the needs of students today (Falter Thomas, 2014; Lenters, 2014).

Socratic Questioning

While the literature circle has remained stagnant for the better part of 20 years, the method of Socratic Questioning in the classroom has been on the rise, leading teachers to instruct students in a large group setting, in a teacher-guided Socratic Questioning circle that requires students to actively participate, engage in, and discuss a text (Copeland, 2005). In the last decade, language arts teachers are consistently moving from the literature circle to the Socratic Circle, declaring the new circle to be more beneficial to their students' success in the classroom (Wilberding, 2014). Furthermore, literature circle pioneers such as Moeller and Moeller (2007; 2013) have been switching the majority of their instruction to that of Socrates, arguing that this methodology requires a deeper level of critical thinking in their students than that found through the literature circle role sheet. However, Copeland (2005), one of the strongest critics of literature circles, articulated that the true success in either method lies not in choosing one or the other, but in creating an even blend between the two. He contended that interspersing the two pedagogical methods in his classes was rewarding for both his students and him, and he found it to be an effective method to enhance their skills within each strategy; moreover, the Socratic Circle helped teach the students mutual inquiry, thought, and analysis, while the literature circle helped students develop their voice, sharing abilities, and comfort with discussing in a group setting (Copeland, 2005).

Online Discussion and the Distance Learning Partner

As the literature circle continues on into the future, researchers are acknowledging some of the researched flaws and promoting some solutions, such as the online format and the distance-learning partner. As Pate-Moulton et al. (2004) asserted, the literature circle gives students autonomy, one of the primary benefits of student-led collaboration is the variation in perspectives; however, the traditional literature circle does not reach the potential it should in terms of reaching that depth. Instead, the literature circle, online or face-to-face, should be supplemented by a distance-learning partner to further the collaborative goals of the group (Pate-Moulton et al., 2004). The team's findings were substantiated in 2007 by one of the team, Klages, along with Pate and Conforti, Jr. This new team established that the literature circle is truly effective when moved online, as the accountability of each student is raised substantially, as their voice cannot be hidden under those of their group members (Klages et al., 2007). Whittingham (2013) concurred with Klages et al. (2007), as he made the argument that the literature circle is highly successful in an online format, particularly if each student has a role to complete for each virtual meeting. Additionally, Whittingham (2013) stated that the online literature circle module is preferable both to students and teachers: "Students praised the literature circle experience because it provided a more social and collaborative environment than they had previously encountered with discussion boards and created a sense of community" (p. 56).

Summary

The purpose of this literature review was to analyze the effects of the literature circle on student engagement and how the literature circle fits into the 21st century classroom. The literature circle has been a pedagogical tool for the better part of 40 years, spreading in classrooms for elementary all the way to adult learners (Batchelor, 2012; Daniels & Steineke, 2004; Moeller & Moeller, 2007). The implementation of the literature circle was initially pioneered by Daniels and Steineke (2004) and research shows that this application led to extreme increases in the levels of student engagement in the participatory classrooms. Research and reflection also demonstrated that the use of the literature circle role within the literature circle module led to higher levels of student ownership and accountability, giving students a new autonomy over their studies and furthering the amount of responsibility students place on one another (Alwood, 2000; Barone & Barone, 2012; Marchiando, 2013). However, while the literature circle and its role have become highly common in today's classroom, some find the method to be nearly outdated and that the role in itself is what is pushing it to become obsolete (Lenters, 2014).

Implications

If the literature circle is to maintain its high levels of student engagement and ownership in the classroom, teachers need to begin reformatting the practice, creating an updated pedagogical module that places the literature circle further in the 21st century classroom with a strong emphasis on student inquiry and responsibility (Thein et al., 2012; Tobin, 2012). To fully make this transition, some researchers suggest an

implementation of the distance-learning partner into the traditional literature circle format; others suggest the entire module needs to be made virtual to maintain levels of student accountability (Klages et al., 2007; Pate-Moulton et al., 2004). Taking this research into consideration, the literature circle is clearly a highly versatile and useful tool in any classroom, but teachers will need to extend themselves beyond the role to fully garner the full benefits of what, if no changes are made, may become an outdated practice (Lenters, 2014).

Conclusions

In conclusion, the literature circle is one of the most versatile tools in the teacher toolkit today, as it creates in students a new level of accountability and engagement that is not seen in any format of teacher-led discussion. With the use of the role, the literature circle can assist students in a peer-led dialogue that reaches a depth of analysis previously unseen in students. Furthermore, the literature circle gives students autonomy over their learning, increasing their engagement due to pure interest and respect for the content. However, without some updates and variations, the literature circle may become an obsolete tool, as more and more teachers are using the original module without any modifications. With the simple inclusion of comprehension strategies, Socratic questioning, virtual tools, and the distance-learning partner, the literature circle can remain an engaging and efficient pedagogical practice for years to come.

The following section will discuss the overall project plan. Section Three will encompass details regarding the intended audience, the description for the project, the implementation of data and research, and the timeline.

Section Three

Project Plan

As curriculum constantly fluxes and changes, teachers remain on stagnant techniques to get them from one preparatory class to the next. One such technique is the module of the literature circle, a technique that requires the teacher to place students in small groups, assign them roles, and encourage them to discuss a text autonomously. However, much like big hair and fish nets, the literature circle that took the education world by storm in the 1980s has become antiquated and outdated, as it has not changed at all since its origination.

Project Plan

For this study, different modules of the literature circle were examined and the research team determined their efficacy in the modern classroom; additionally, the team evaluated the effectiveness of the literature circle when paired with the less common Socratic Seminar module. The goal was to find a small-group, student-led discussion module that maintained applicability and viability in the 21st century classrooms. In Section Three, is an outline of the subjects, population, and sample specific to the study, followed by the description, project implementation, and timeline goals. Lastly, a summary of the data collection and overall project will be presented.

Subjects

This study was implemented in six separate sections of an English 10 classroom and two separate sections of an English 9 classroom in a predominantly white middle class district. These classes were part of the general education track, which indicates that

the majority of students met the benchmark score for their grade level on the MCA or MAP exams. Each class held approximately 25 students. Students had minimal prior experience with the modules utilized, providing a stronger baseline and the most data in terms of effectiveness and engagement.

Population

The school district in which the study was conducted had a student body of approximately 1,100 that was 96% Caucasian. Approximately 8% of the student population was from a low-income household, 89% from a middle-class household, and 3% from an upper-class home. Furthermore, approximately 95% of the 25 students in each section came from a Christian background, with the other 5% varied throughout Atheism, Buddhism, and Agnostic (Ertl, 2013).

Sample

English 10 consisted of two individual quarters of nine weeks that held 25 students each, but 50% of students switched out of their initial classroom after the first quarter, to be replaced by 50% of another teacher's section, which also participated in the study. These students' last English class was English 9, which they had taken the previous year. These students were external of the upper and lower tracks, so their MAP and MCA scores were close to the Minnesota benchmark for 10th grade students of 236. Of those 25 students, 10% were in 11th grade, and required to retake the course due to prior failure, while the other 90% were in 10th grade, 15 to 16 years of age.

Additionally, two English 9 classes were sampled in this study, one with 24 and one with 28 students, in which all students were freshmen. The participating teachers

selected one sample group from each section of English 9 and English 10 on which the study then focused its analysis and data. Before beginning the study, permission was obtained both from the students and their parents, so some students in each class were excluded from the final results (See Appendix A for permission letters).

The English 9 and English 10 classrooms chosen for this study were ideal because they were compiled of general education students, rather than those in the Response to Intervention (RTI) or advanced tracks. These students ranged from “Does Not Meet” to “Exceeds Expectations” on the Minnesota state exam (the MCA), and many were far from enthusiastic about text-based discussion; consequently, according to “The Condition of Education” (2015), these students more accurately portrayed the general populace of high school students in the United States.

In addition to the four English classrooms that participated in the study, one Social Studies teacher and one Science teacher participated as well. The Science classroom consisted of Advanced Biology students in tenth grade, and used the varied techniques to apply to their textbook reading and theorist studies. The 21 students in this class all met the “Exceeds Expectations” benchmark on the MCA Reading exam, and all scored above the tenth grade benchmark for the MCA Science. The Social Studies teacher implemented these circles in her freshmen U.S. History course, as a way to study primary documents. Her class held 31 students, ranging from RTI level scores to Advanced.

Project Description

To begin the study, the participating teachers selected one group of four to five students from each participating class at random to be the sample studies for the data collection. All classes then participated in the Daniels' circle format with the traditional role sheets outlined by Alwood (2000), Barone and Barone (2012), and Devick-Fry and LeSage (2010). Sample group discussions were analyzed by participating teachers and then assigned scores through the Discussion Depth Rubric found in Appendix B, which analyzed critical thinking, strong analysis, and general recall of the circle dialogue. Those data scores were then recorded on a spreadsheet. A reflection (Appendix C) from each participating student was collected, in which students identified how they felt the discussion went, how engaged they were, and how much they learned. Teachers also completed a reflection rubric following the activity for use during our meetings to discuss the study's progression. These reflections were also tabulated in the spreadsheet. The other five modules were then implemented following the same process, until each module's strengths and weaknesses in these particular classrooms could be identified.

Project Implementation and Timeline

The study officially began on September 5, 2016, and lasted until May 6, 2017, with prior research and building approval completed in August of 2016. Table 1 outlines the teachers who participated in the study, their experience, and their content area.

Table 1

Demographics of Teachers Participating in Study

Teacher	Gender	Grade level	Subject taught	Years of experience
Teacher #1*	F	High School	English	4
Teacher #2	F	High School	English	3
Teacher #3	F	High School	English	11
Teacher #4	M	High School	English	21
Teacher #5	F	High School	Social Studies	4
Teacher #6	M	High School	Science	9

*Note: Teacher #1 is the implementer of the study.

Once the six participating teachers were established, the researcher completed the following steps throughout the course of her research.

- Step 1: Approval was obtained from the building principal to conduct a data research project with student work and participation.
- Step 2: Five new small group “literature circle” modules were determined and modified by participating teachers.
- Step 3: The researcher created a discussion rubric that gauged discussion depth through the evaluation of critical thinking, textual analysis, and general recall.
- Step 4: Participating teachers selected a sample group from each class randomly. To achieve the indiscriminate selection, pre-assigned student groups were blindly selected by drawing sticks.

- Step 5: Participating classes were given a detailed outline of the study, as well as permission slips (Appendix A). These permission slips were then collected, and students who had opted out were removed from the data.
- Step 6: Each teacher implemented the original literature circle (Appendix D) outlined by Daniels (2004), and sample group discussions were recorded for data collection.
 - The researcher analyzed sample group discussion as per the Depth of Discussion Rubric (Appendix B).
 - Using this same discussion, the researcher quantified how often each student was actively participating in the dialogue and calculated an average percentage of student engagement in each sample group.
 - Participating students completed a post-discussion reflection (Appendix C), which was then collected by the researcher. Teachers completed a reflection for use during discussion meetings.
 - Rubric, engagement, and reflection data were entered into a Google Spreadsheet for further study and analysis.
 - Participating teachers met and discussed the strengths and weaknesses they had observed during the activity.
- Step 7: Participating teachers implemented the first new module, the Modified Original Literature Circle (Appendix E), in each class. Data were collected following the same methodology listed in Step 6.

- Step 8: Participating teachers implemented the next new module, the Miniature Socratic Seminar (Appendix F), in each class. Data were collected following the same methodology listed in Step 6.
- Step 9: Participating teachers implemented the Pinwheel Discussion module (Appendix H) in each class. Data were collected following the same methodology listed in Step 6.
- Step 10: Participating teachers implemented the New Teacher Discussion module (Appendix I) in each class. Data were collected following the same methodology listed in Step 6.
- Step 11: Participating teachers implemented the Totally Ten Discussion module (Appendix J) in each class. Data were collected following the same methodology listed in Step 6.
- Step 12: Teachers met and discussed each module's overall strengths and weaknesses, as determined through the teacher observations, reflections, data, and individual notes.
- Step 13: Each module's effectiveness as determined by this study was finalized.

Data Collection

To track the results of each individual circle, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and organized on a Google Spreadsheet. Baseline data were obtained by implementing the original literature circle modules, and participating teachers qualitatively assessed the depth of the conversation for the sample groups by recording the circle as it progressed. This recording was also used to collect quantitative data

regarding the type of discussion used, including critical thinking, analysis, or recall, through the use of the Depth of Discussion rubric (Appendix B). The researcher collected qualitative data regarding the roles that were used in the circle by analyzing their effects on the discussion that took place. Student engagement was assessed through obtaining percentages of student participation throughout discussion, and teacher and student reflections were collected after the activity was complete. Each participating teacher collected these same data points for each executed module in the study, and results were tabulated in a spreadsheet.

Summary

In summary, the researcher worked with five other high school teachers to assess the effectiveness of six total literature circle modules by analyzing three original modules and three newly studied modules in the high school English, Social Studies, and Science classrooms. Data were collected regarding the depth of conversation, the effectiveness of the selected roles, student engagement, and the overall learning of the sample groups studied. The overall research study's organization and product will be outlined and reviewed in Section Four.

Section Four

Project Product

As the literature circle is such a widely used tool in the language arts classroom, its ineffectiveness in 50% of applications is unacceptable. To that end, this study was implemented with the intention of researching and testing literature circle modules, hoping to create a new literature circle module that sustains consistent effectiveness and student engagement. To find a module that negates the necessity of the role and student completion, three traditional and three research modules were implemented in six teachers' classes. Data were collected to determine each module's effectiveness and engagement, and the depth of discussion it engendered. Listed below is the list of applied modules and their aligned assignment sheets with student samples.

Selected Modules

For this study to work as successfully as possible, six different circle discussion modules were selected and tested by the researcher and five colleagues within the same high school. Each module required groups of four to five students, and a set of class time with little teacher interaction in their discussion. The first module selected was the baseline module, as it was one of the original literature circle formats designed and promoted by Harvey Daniels in the 1980s. Listed here are the designs of the modules executed for this study.

The Baseline: Daniels' Literature Circle Module (2004)

In the early 1980s, Harvey Daniels broke from tradition and suggested that the teacher take a step back from the literary discussion, and instead let the students teach

themselves. While the concept itself was unremarkable, dating back to the teachings in Athens, it was still considered remarkable for the time. This circle calls for four to five students, with each student completing a separate role outside of the circle in preparation. The teacher's role is to distribute a literature circle packet to each discussion director, who then is tasked with assigning the group their aligned roles. See Appendix D to examine the formatting and methodology of this module.

The Discussion Director. Students who were responsible for this role in their literature circle were responsible for preparing a series of open-ended questions regarding the reading for the group. Their goal was to determine questions that required deep thought from their group members, and were largely accountable for the amount of critical thinking and analysis completed during circle discussion. This role was also instrumental to group success, as these students were responsible for carrying group discussion when it dwindled, and calling their peers to task when engagement faltered. Much of the literature circle's overall achievement was dependent on this student.

The Vocabulary Enricher. As one of the primary standards for middle and high school language arts references students' abilities to use context clues to build an extensive vocabulary, this role was essential in meeting core standards. Students who were the vocabulary enricher in their circle were responsible for identifying key terms from the reading that needed further clarification and analysis. The role was designed to encourage students to not only look for complex words, but to analyze author choice in selecting these key terms, and help their group to better understand the text concretely.

The Literary Luminary. The student with the title of “Literary Luminary” was responsible for identifying key passages from the assigned reading that were considered to be important enough to discuss. This role was largely dependent on student comprehension, as he needed to understand the story enough to select strong sections for analysis to present to his group. Moreover, the luminary needed to understand the text enough to draw their group into a critical discussion of each quotation selected.

The Bridge Builder. As many teachers will attest, it is extremely difficult to convince students that the material they are learning is relevant to their lives. In this literature circle, the Bridge Builders were responsible for leading that connection. Their goal was to find those universal ideas prominent in the text that transcend time and place, so that they could discover how the text reflected their own lives and experiences. This role was dependent on not only student understanding of text, but also student ability to understand and identify abstract concepts from a story. Furthermore, if this student were unsuccessful at completing their role, the group would undoubtedly fail to reach a high level of analysis, as this is the only role that relies entirely on abstract analysis.

The Artist. The final role used in this literature circle module was The Artist, as they were responsible for taking the major settings and/or characters from the text and making them come to life for their group members. Many students completed this role by creating a map of the setting from the text, or drawing each character’s face for further discussion. Of the roles used for this module, this particular job required the least amount of analysis, and the most amount of recall; therefore, this role was predominantly used for differentiation as necessary for groups.

The Modified Literature Circle Module

The second step of the study involved the participating teachers determining the weaknesses of the roles found in Daniels' literature circle module, and the limitations of the module itself. The most distinctive issue noted was the lack of analysis required in each role, which led to different students being expected to achieve different levels of rigor for the same activity. To correct this limitation, participating teachers determined each student in the circle should be equally responsible for the depth of the discussion, and therefore each role should require equal amounts of analysis. Furthermore, one major hindrance of the baseline module was the lack of student completion and how that impacted discussion; consequently, the two-day activity was changed to a full class period, where students jig-sawed with others completing the same role before working with their literature circle for final analysis. The following are the roles determined to be a more equal variation of Daniels' module selection, which is also outlined in Appendix D.

The Discussion Leader. For the modified circle, the original module's discussion director was maintained, but rather than giving students questioning freedom, teachers provided more direction in terms of what type of questions were required for the group discussion, such as requiring a question about symbolism or irony. Each teacher also provided discussion leaders with sample questions, so that leaders had a baseline of how to formulate their questions to maintain that open-ended requirement. Questions could range from symbolism or themes to scientific theory or politics.

The Quotation Annotator. Rather than maintain the original module's Literary Luminary, the modified Quotation Annotator was created, requiring students to be more meaningful in the passages that they provide their group. With that transition, students switched from choosing a few passages they found to be important, which sometimes generated nonsensical responses, to being given direction into which types of passages they needed to find for deeper analysis. For example, participating students were asked to find a passage that provided the symbolism of the fireman uniform in *Fahrenheit 451*, which they would then use to lead a short discussion of said symbolism in their group and how it enhanced a theme in the text.

The Literary Element Expert. For this role, the Artist role of the original module was completely discarded and replaced by a role focused on literary elements, such as figurative language, irony, social commentary, etc. Students with this role were responsible for identifying and analyzing the author's use of literary elements and authorial purpose in using those elements in the text. The group could then discuss that usage and how it enhanced plot, style, characterization, or theme in the text, and how author's choice could have impacted that affectation.

The Characterizer. In addition to discarding the Artist role of the original module, the Vocabulary Enricher was also rejected for a role that analyzed the characters found in the text. Students with this role were in charge of analyzing character roles in the story, identifying important characteristics, and leading discussion regarding character contribution to the conflict, themes, and social commentary.

The Theme Champion. The final stage of the modification involved strengthening the Bridge Builder role into more of an analysis-based role, rather than basic abstract thinking practice. Students were required to not only identify universal themes in the text, but also lead discussion regarding these themes' development throughout the story, and how the theme development reflected authorial style and choice.

The Mini Socratic Seminar Module

The Mini Socratic Seminar module was the first implemented with no individual student roles; instead, this module issued discussion question tasks that students were encouraged to achieve through Socratic discussion modeling similar to that of a large class Socratic Seminar. In this literature circle, students prepared for discussion by answering a series of opinion-based questions independently immediately prior to the discussion. These questions, listed in Appendix F, were open-ended, and were designed to help students grasp the more abstract concepts outlined by the individual roles in the traditional module. After completing these questions, students met in a miniature "Socratic Seminar" (Appendix F), sharing and discussing their responses to the questions in the Socratic method outlined by Copeland (2005), Moeller and Moeller (2013), and Wilberding (2014). Note the student sample in Appendix G. Unlike the large class Seminar, this module did not require a student to act as "leader," as the group was inspired to be responsible for their own discussion, and were expected to request further information and evidence of each other throughout the dialogue.

The Pinwheel Discussion Module

The Pinwheel Discussion was very similar to the traditional module in that each student had an individual role to complete, but that is where the similarities ended. Rather than having each student have their “job” for the circle, they instead needed to prepare an argument as if they were a character or author from the unit, following the directions in Appendix H. In this module, students then met in a fishbowl circle format – four or five students meet in a circle in the middle (the fish), while an external circle of the class watches and listens (the fishbowl) – and discussed concepts from the text through the perspective of a major or minor character.

The New Teachers: Breaking from Roles Module

The New Teacher module was designed with the intention of making the entire activity 100% student-centered, to the extent that the teacher played no role in the activity’s implementation at all, bar the initial assignment. In this discussion, the students actually created a literature circle of their own design, assigning roles and activities to their classmates that they developed on their own. The exact assignment is detailed in Appendix I. The teacher then participated in this discussion, as if they were truly the student, rather than the instructor, and the student “leaders” instead taught the class important concepts and analysis in a module of their own design.

The “Totally 10” Module

The final literature circle implementation consisted of daily assigned tasks to be completed within the literature circle dynamic, inspired by the “Totally 10” differentiation strategy promoted by Diane Heacox (2012). Students were given a series

of options – note the list in Appendix J – and they needed to select options so that they added up to at least 10 points. Options include the variety of learning style applications, allowing students to choose their own roles that ensured they could benefit the group the most with their skillset. Note the student sample in Appendix K.

Results and Data Selected

After implementing this assortment of student-led discussions in our classrooms, the researcher met with the group of participating teachers several times to analyze the discussions recorded from the sample groups. A rubric (Appendix B) was compiled to assess what constituted critical thinking, analysis, and recall; discussions were then tabulated by the percentage of each sample group's inclusion of those three categories. The percentage of each student in the sample group's engagement throughout the course of the discussion was also evaluating, calculating the minutes engaged versus the minutes of the overall circle. These results were compiled onto a spreadsheet, which was then organized into tables and graphs to represent the collection of the final data accumulated throughout the course of the research.

The following section, Section Five, will outline the data collected throughout the course of this study: the teacher and student reflections collected, the tables displaying collected data for each module, and the figures that demonstrate the module data comparisons.

Section Five

Project Summary and Results

To begin, this study originated with the realization that the original literature circle was still being used in the Language Arts classroom with little modification, yet it was not garnering the levels of success found in past studies. The researcher determined to research the circle, beginning with its history, working through its newfound limitations, and finishing with new modules being developed at the time of the research. However, after the original literature circle was created, newer modules became less and less popular as teachers simply settled on the original circle. With that in mind, the researcher combined research summarized in Section Two with experience and teacher collaboration to determine five new or improved modules to implement, with the intention of juxtaposing those new versions with the baseline module initiated by Daniels (2004) in the 1980s. Participating teachers agreed to execute these modules in their classrooms, and the discussions of a sample group for each teacher were evaluated using the rubric found in Appendix B, which analyzed critical thinking, analysis, and simple recall percentages in the discussion. Throughout the course of the research study, data were collected by each participating teacher and organized on a spreadsheet. The modules found in the spreadsheet are identified as such:

- Module #1: Data Baseline - Daniels' Literature Circle
- Module #2: Modified Literature Circle
- Module #3: Miniature Socratic Seminar
- Module #4: Pinwheel Discussion

- Module #5: New Teachers Discussion
- Module #6: Totally Ten Discussion

After implementation, the researcher evaluated recorded discussions of each sample group using the Depth of Discussion Rubric (Appendix B), and then inserted the collected data in the spreadsheet for further study. Additionally, she had participating teachers also analyze student discussions to determine that her evaluation was consistent with overall expectations, ensuring the highest level of accuracy possible.

Implementation Results

First, student reflections regarding each module were recorded and tabulated on Table 2. Student reactions to each module were collected by the implementing teacher and were entered onto the spreadsheet. These evaluations were not mandatory, and they were anonymous. In each post-discussion reflection, students were asked 10 questions that tabulated their thoughts on the circle's impact on their learning, their engagement, their discussion, and their collaboration. Each teacher collected these reflections after each module completed, and the results are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2

Average Student Reflection Responses Per Module

Paraphrased Reflection Question	Average Rating Scaled 1-5					
	M #1	M #2	M #3	M #4	M #5	M #6
Q 1: This discussion increased my understanding of the assigned reading.	2.9	3.0	4.2	3.6	4.3	2.9
Q 2: This discussion kept me fully engaged for the entire time allotted.	2.7	2.6	3.7	3.0	3.7	3.1
Q 3: I enjoyed being a part of this discussion.	3.4	2.9	4.6	4.8	4.0	3.0
Q 4: My group did a good job at discussing each point in detail.	3.3	3.1	3.3	2.9	3.5	4.2
Q 5: My group did a good job at building off each other's thoughts and opinions.	3.6	3.3	3.9	4.0	3.7	3.7
Q 6: I feel prepared for the assessment due to this discussion.	3.0	3.6	3.7	3.0	3.3	3.6
Q 7: All of my group members actively participated in this discussion.	3.0	2.9	3.8	2.9	3.5	3.8
Q 8: My group did not get off topic during today's discussion.	2.6	2.8	3.1	3.8	2.9	3.3
Q 9: My group was well prepared for this discussion.	2.9	3.9	4.1	4.2	2.9	3.8
Q 10: My overall grade for this discussion technique is...	2.8	3.2	3.9	3.7	3.3	3.2

Note. M#1 = Traditional Literature Circle; M#2 = Modified Literature Circle; M#3 = Miniature Socratic Seminar; M#4 = Pinwheel Discussion; M#5 = New Teacher; M#6 = Totally Ten Discussion

In Table 2, students revealed their true feelings regarding the literature circle modules implemented. According to the students who participated in the reflection, it is clear that Module #3, the Miniature Socratic Seminar, achieved the highest overall grade,

as per the results of Question #10 in the Student Reflection outlined in Table 2.

However, there were a few categories in which it was consistent with other module reflections. For example, the Miniature Socratic Seminar tied with the New Teacher module for student engagement, both scoring an average of 3.7 on a scale of one to five.

It also tied with the Totally Ten module when asked if all group members actively participated in the circle. The module's only lower score was obtained in students staying on topic for the entire discussion; the Miniature Socratic Seminar averaged a score of 3.1, while the Pinwheel Discussion scored a 3.8 and the Totally Ten a 3.3.

Overall, it is safe to say that the Miniature Socratic Seminar was considered a helpful discussion tool for students, as they claimed this module was the best practice in preparing them for an assessment.

In contrast to the student results outlined in Table 2, Table 3 reflects the teacher reactions to each implemented literature circle in their classes.

Table 3: *Average Teacher Reflection Responses Per Module*

Paraphrased Reflection Question	Average Rating Scaled 1-5					
	M #1	M #2	M #3	M #4	M #5	M #6
Q 1: How engaged were the students in the sample group throughout the discussion?	2.7	3.3	3.7	4.7	3.4	3.4
Q 2: How well did the students in the sample group demonstrate critical thinking in this discussion?	3.0	3.1	3.9	3.2	3.0	3.6
Q 3: How well prepared were students in the sample group for this discussion?	2.6	3.5	3.5	3.2	2.9	3.6

Table 3 Continues

Table 3 Continued

Paraphrased Reflection Question	Average Rating Scaled 1-5					
	M #1	M #2	M #3	M #4	M #5	M #6
Q 4: How well did this discussion do at increasing student understanding?	3.5	3.7	3.8	2.9	3.2	3.7
Q 5: Overall, what rating would you give this discussion?	3.1	3.3	3.6	2.9	3.1	3.8

Note. M#1 = Traditional Literature Circle; M#2 = Modified Literature Circle; M#3 = Miniature Socratic Seminar; M#4 = Pinwheel Discussion; M#5 = New Teacher; M#6 = Totally Ten Discussion

Interestingly enough, Table 3 indicates that the participating teachers found the most success in the Totally Ten discussion module, giving that technique an overall score of 3.8 (The Miniature Socratic Seminar followed with a score of 3.6). The Totally Ten remained in the upper 3.0 scoring range for the entire questionnaire, indicating that while it is not as engaging as the Pinwheel Discussion, scoring a 3.4 to the Pinwheel's 4.7, it is still consistent in engaging students while also holding them to high academic standards. The Pinwheel Discussion, on the other hand, scored an overwhelming 4.7 in engagement, yet it also accrued a 2.9 for both student understanding and an overall grade, indicating that teachers found it lacking in encouraging students to use analytical skills during the discussion.

Implementing Module #1: Daniels' Literature Circle

In addition to collecting data through participating student and teacher reflections, data were also collected through concept tabulations using the rubric found in Appendix D. Participating teachers recorded student conversations within the sample group's discussion, and used those conversations to determine levels of critical thinking, analysis, recall, and engagement found in that module. To collect baseline data, students first participated in the Daniels' literature circle module, as that was the initial model most commonly discussed in research. The module took one day for instructions and assigning roles, and then part of the following class period for actual implementation. The results of this implementation are found in Table 4 and are separated by participating teacher.

Table 4

Module #1: Daniels' Literature Circle Module Statistics Separated by Teacher

Paraphrased Discussion Analysis Rubric Category (Appendix B)	Percent* Demonstrated by Sample Group						
	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	Avg
Critical thinking demonstrated in discussion	18.9	32.6	33.3	8.1	12.4	9.7	19.2
Analysis skills demonstrated in discussion	9.5	17.4	10.7	9.1	6.7	11.5	10.8
Simple Recall demonstrated in discussion	71.5	51.2	57.1	82.7	80.9	78.7	80.8
Average student engagement shown during discussion	88.8	85	74	81	84	72	80.8

Note: Percent noted is the percentage of discussion each student in the sample group demonstrated throughout the discussion.

Table 4 clearly demonstrates that the research found in Section Two was correct in that the literature circle can engender levels of analysis and critical thinking; however, implementation in the classroom showed that, on average, only 19.2% of the sample groups' discussions contained elements of critical thinking, per the evaluating rubric. Furthermore, only 10.8% of their discussion demonstrated analysis skills. In this implementation, discussion criteria actually showed that the sample groups averaged 80.8% of their discussion to be simple recall statements and questions, with no deeper thinking involved. Contrarily, it remained clear that while students were not reaching depths in this discussion module, nor were they thinking abstractly for more than 20% of their discussion, they did in fact remain engaged the majority of time. After tabulating data, it was determined that student engagement in this discussion module averaged at about 80.8%, which is a successful percentage for student engagement in a literature circle discussion. Upon final discussion of this circle's overall achievements, it was determined that one major pitfall of this discussion module is its reliance on student completion for circle success; if a student did not complete their role prior to class discussion, the discussion inevitably would lose critical thinking and analysis for the group. Additionally, the lack of critical thinking and analysis required for some of the roles also caused the researcher to determine that this circle was not pushing students into a deeper discussion as much as it could.

Executing Module #2: The Modified Literature Circle

Once the baseline data for literature circle discussions were established, teachers then implemented the first new module technique: The Modified Literature Circle. As this module was very similar to Daniels' circle, it was expected that the results would remain consistent throughout each rubric criteria. However, the researcher and participating teachers made the aforementioned modifications listed in Section Four to assist students in reaching deeper levels of analysis, including role changes and instructional changes. Once each teacher had led this circle in his/her classroom, data were collected and organized in the spreadsheet to compare this circle's success with the baseline discussion data from Daniels' model. This comparison is shown in Figure 1, where the averages of the baseline data are compared to the averages of the first module's tabulations.

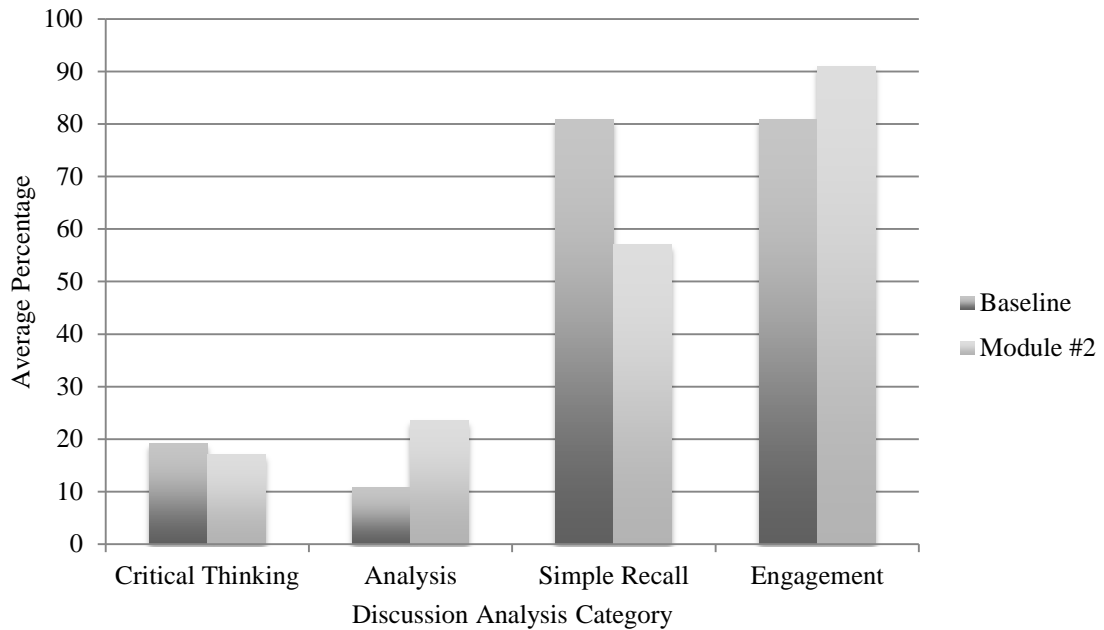


Figure 1. Average Baseline Data (Module #1) Compared with The Modified Literature Circle’s Average Statistics.

As shown in Figure 1, the Modified Literature Circle Module remained consistent with Daniels’ model, as was predicted, particularly in critical thinking and engagement. Contrarily, the Modified Circle did show more success by lessening the percentage of discussion that involved simple recall statements, rather than critical or analytical thinking. However, there were some fluctuations worth noting in its overall success. First and foremost, there were discrepancies between the circle’s success in Teacher #2’s classroom and the others’, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Module #2: Modified Literature Circle Statistics Per Teacher

Paraphrased Discussion Analysis Rubric Category (Appendix B)	Percent* Demonstrated by Sample Group						
	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	Avg
Critical thinking demonstrated in discussion	9.9	27.7	16.3	11.3	19.2	18.1	17.1
Analysis skills demonstrated in discussion	6.3	29.2	36.3	19.6	20.2	29.2	23.5
Simple Recall demonstrated in discussion	34	43.1	47.5	69.1	60.6	87.5	57
Average student engagement shown during discussion	95	85.5	93.8	93.7	84	93.6	90.9

Note: Percent noted is the percentage of discussion each student in the sample group demonstrated throughout the discussion.

Students in Teacher #2's sample group achieved significantly higher success in critical thinking than the other participating sample groups, as 27.7% of the discussion was critical thinking, which compared to the next highest percentage of 19.2% in Teacher #5's classroom. This inconsistency suggested that implementation was key for this circle to maintain the success rate it attained by this group, as the other five teachers demonstrated similar results to those found in Daniels' model. It was also noted that the new formatting of this circle, which involved students completing their roles in "role groups" prior to circle discussion, helped in the overall critical thinking and analysis as it removed the necessity for student completion. Nevertheless, the engagement that occurred in this module was noticeably higher and the simple recall discussion was significantly lower; consequently, the modifications made to the original module by the researcher and her colleagues demonstrated a higher success rating overall, indicating that the Modified Literature Circle was, in fact, stronger than Daniels' suggested format.

Adding Module #3 – The Miniature Socratic Seminar – to the Data

After it was established that the Modified Literature Circle did indeed correct some of the limitations of Daniels' model, the participating teachers set out to compare it to the third proposed module for the study: The Miniature Socratic Seminar. This circle format completely negated the role, providing the study with a collection of data that removed student completion from the discussion results. The following data therefore were entirely dependent on student discussion in class, rather than having any dependency whatsoever on student homework completion. Note the findings of the Miniature Socratic Seminar in Table 6.

Table 6: *Module #3: Miniature Socratic Seminar Statistics Per Teacher*

Paraphrased Discussion Analysis Rubric Category (Appendix B)	Percent* Demonstrated by Sample Group						
	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	Avg
Critical thinking demonstrated in discussion	23.5	31.8	26.7	13.8	18	24.7	23.1
Analysis skills demonstrated in discussion	20	21.2	30	20.7	23.6	27.2	23.8
Simple Recall demonstrated in discussion	56.5	46.9	43.3	65.5	58.4	48.1	53.1
Average student engagement shown during discussion	100	88.2	86.3	88	91	95	91.4

Note. Percent noted is the percentage of discussion each student in the sample group demonstrated throughout the discussion.

After participating teachers implemented this new module, its data were juxtaposed with that of Daniels' baseline and the Modified Literature Circle to ascertain the strengths and weaknesses of each module prior to further study steps taking place. Figure 2 shows the overall findings of the baseline data (Daniels' Circle), Module #2

(Modified Circle), and Module #3 (Miniature Socratic Seminar), as it contains the average percentage of critical thinking, analysis, and recall of each sample group's discussion and commentary, and it contains the average levels of engagement for each sample group as well.

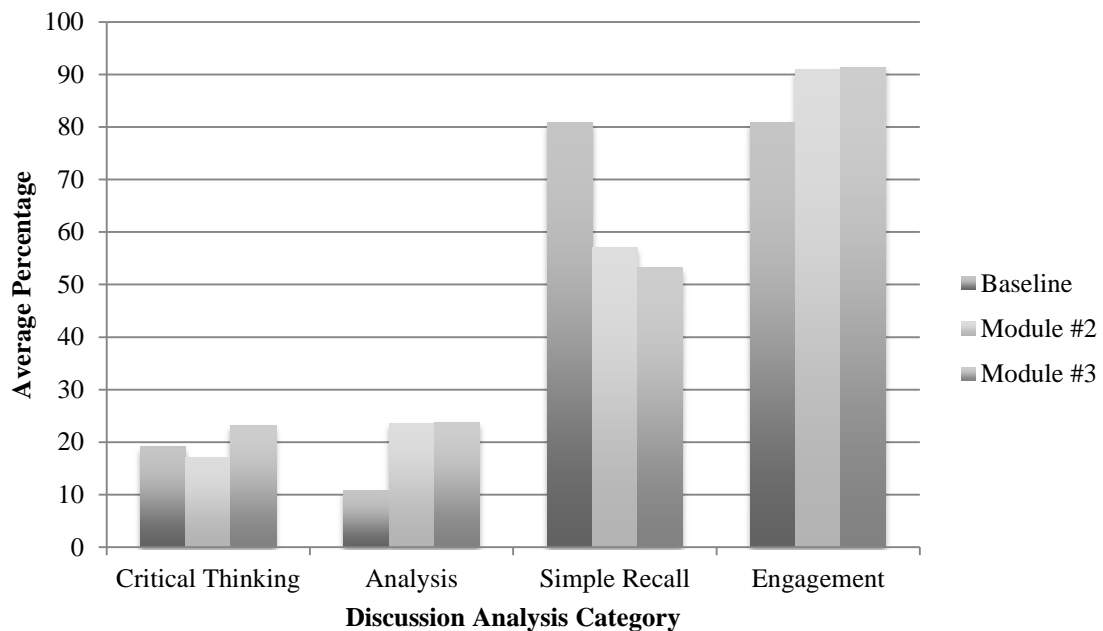


Figure 2. Comparing the Miniature Socratic Seminar to the Two Literature Circles.

After concluding the Miniature Socratic Seminar, it quickly became evident that while the role was no longer a factor of the discussion, no critical thinking or analysis was lost, demonstrating that the role is not truly necessary for student discussion to have depth and relevance. Teachers noted that the percentage of sample group discussion that was devoted to critical thinking increased from the baseline of 19.2% to the new seminar's percentage of 23.1% of discussion. Additionally, the new seminar averaged

23.8% of student discussion was analytical, while the baseline only obtained 10.8% and the modified obtained 23.5%. However, while this module remained semi-consistent with the original circle and modified circle with critical thinking and analysis percentages, it also showed a significant drop in recall discussion, reducing the percentage from 80.8% to 53.2%, indicating that while students did not have a lot to say in contribution to the discussion, what they said contained a higher amount of critical thinking and analysis than the previous role-centered modules. Additionally, this module saw a higher percentage of student engagement throughout the entire discussion, averaging at 91.4%, compared to the baseline of 80.8% and Module #2's 90.9% of the discussion. At this stage in the research, participating teachers discussed at length why these circles were engendering similar levels of student discussion depths, and determined that the next module, the Pinwheel Discussion, would be a deciding factor in whether or not the circle was even capable of strong student analysis in collaboration.

The Pinwheel Discussion: Remaking the Circle

Due to the extremely similar percentages of critical thinking and analysis in Module #1 (baseline – Daniels' model), Module #2 (Modified Literature Circle), and Module #3 (Miniature Socratic Seminar), the next implemented format was entirely different than its predecessors. The Pinwheel Discussion, instead of asking questions about the text and discussion of possible answers, required students to role play as characters from the story and form their own questions. In the aforementioned teacher reflections summarized in Table 3, teachers indicated that while this module was highly engaging and hooked several students, they did not find it to be the most successful in

setting high academic standards for students. Note the data for the Pinwheel Discussion's implementation in each class is outlined in Table 7.

Table 7

Module #4: The Pinwheel Discussion Statistics Per Teacher

Paraphrased Discussion Analysis Rubric Category (Appendix B)	Percent* Demonstrated by Sample Group						
	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	Avg
Critical thinking demonstrated in discussion	28	26	22	22	21	31	25
Analysis skills demonstrated in discussion	23	29	26	26	28	19	25.2
Simple Recall demonstrated in discussion	32	12	27	31	29	13	24
Average student engagement shown during discussion	100	87.3	93	100	100	100	96.7

Note. Percent noted is the percentage of discussion each student in the sample group demonstrated throughout the discussion.

The discussion produced in this module was a “staged” conversation between characters from the text, regarding significant details from the text, and therefore demonstrated a high amount of student understanding. Each participating teacher incorporated this circle into their current text in the classroom; two chose to have students personify authors of nonfiction texts about a similar event, and four chose to focus the Pinwheel on a novel unit. While all participating teachers collected similar results, it is notable that Teacher #2 and Teacher #6 recorded the smallest amount of general recall discussion in their sample groups, with 12% and 13% respectively, and Teacher #2 and Teacher #5 received recorded averages of 29% and 28% of sample group discussion that

fell into the analysis portion of the Discussion Analysis Rubric. The overall results of the Pinwheel Discussion as compared to the previous three modules are outlined in Figure 3.

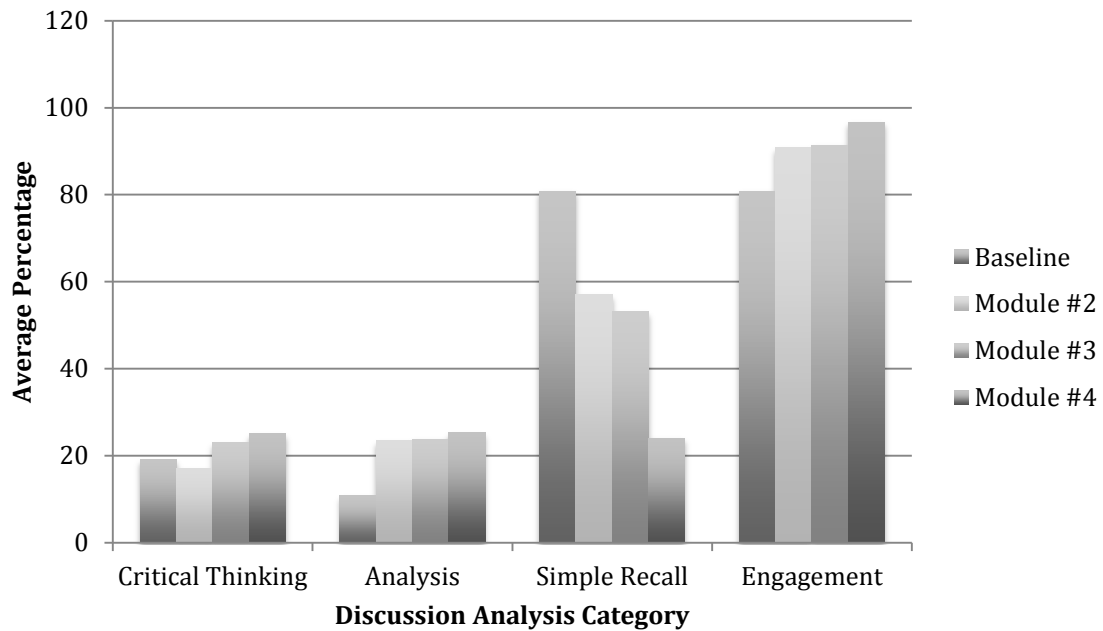


Figure 3. Comparing the Pinwheel Discussion with the Previous Modules

While the critical thinking (25%) and analysis (25.2%) of the sample discussions in the Pinwheel Discussion were highly similar to those of the previous executed modules, the average percentage of simple recall in each discussion dropped so significantly, from 53.2% to 24%, that one can only conclude that this discussion pushed participating students to higher levels of thinking than the previous modules. As the contributing teachers and students reflected on this module, it was noted that the engagement and analysis required for this discussion to take place, let alone be successful, automatically put it at a higher level than the previous role-centered formats,

as well as the Miniature Socratic Seminar due to its text-based nature. One detail that was discussed at length, however, was this discussion module's implementation.

Teachers found that this discussion required more organization and structure than its counterparts to have any chance at success. In fact, Teacher #2 reflected that this discussion had to be attempted three times before any data could even be collected, which echoes back on the module's scores in the reflection data that were collected.

The New Teacher Module – Taking a Step Back

Once it was noted that breaking from traditional discussion modules altogether was incredibly successful, the New Teacher Module inspired high hopes for a highly effective implementation in each classroom. As data were collected and recorded on the spreadsheet, it quickly became clear that those hopes would be realized. The New Teacher Module showed yet another rise in analysis and critical thinking, but this module required absolutely no teacher assistance in helping students to reach those percentages. Additionally, because this module handed the power to the students, it also showed an increase in student engagement, as students chose discussion activities that worked the best for them. See Table 8 for the exact findings for this module's success.

Table 8

Module #5: The New Teacher Statistics Per Teacher

Paraphrased Discussion Analysis Rubric Category (Appendix B)	Percent* Demonstrated by Sample Group						
	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	Avg
Critical thinking demonstrated in discussion	15.2	38.1	29.6	21.6	28.2	36.2	28.2
Analysis skills demonstrated in discussion	32.9	20.6	26.7	26.1	24.4	32.8	27.3
Simple Recall demonstrated in discussion	51.9	41.3	43.7	52.3	47.4	31	44.6
Average student engagement shown during discussion	100	96	93	100	100	100	98.2

**Note:* Percent noted is the percentage of discussion each student in the sample group demonstrated throughout the discussion.

As shown in Table 8, nearly every teacher noticed 100% in student engagement during this module's implementation, which is a significant rise from the original baseline average of 80.8% student engagement. Furthermore, this module demonstrated a lower average of simple recall, averaging 44.6%, than found in Daniels' Circle (Module #1) and the Modified Circle (Module #2), which scored 80.8% and 57% respectively; however, there was an increase in recall from the Pinwheel Discussion's average of 24%, which teachers believed was due to the discussion's need for high comprehension for full success. In Figure 4, the data collected for Module #2 (The Modified Circle), Module #3 (Miniature Socratic Seminar), Module #4 (The Pinwheel Discussion), and Module #5 (The New Teacher Module) are indicated; note that Daniels' circle, Module #1, is not listed in this figure as its results were significantly less successful than the other implemented models in the study.

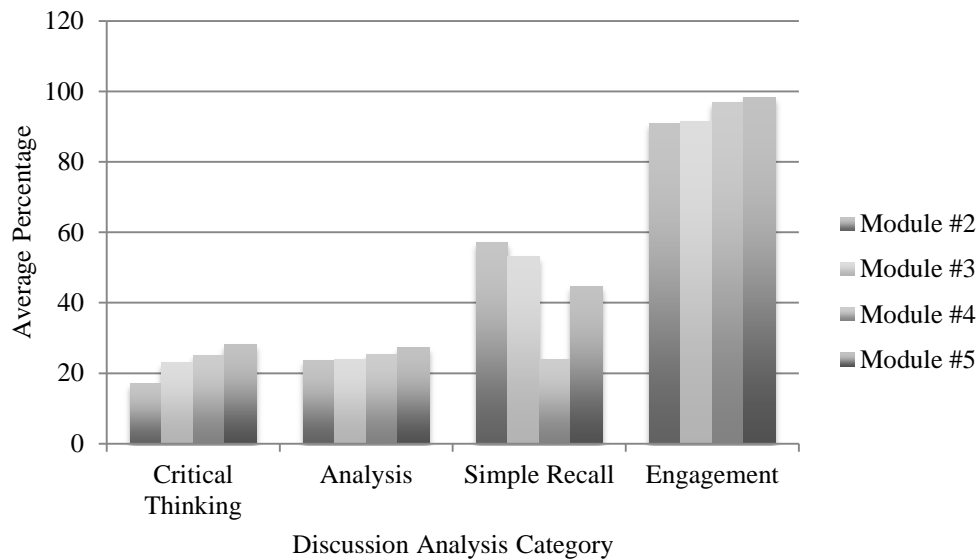


Figure 4. Comparing The New Teacher with Modules #2, #3, and #4.

As the research continued, and more modules were implemented, it quickly became apparent that the results were steadily improving as the study ventured further and further from the traditional circle module. The techniques utilized that included the traditional role formatting, Module #1 (Daniels' Model) and Module #2 (Modified Literature Circle), engendered similar results that were average for a classroom; nevertheless, those results are nowhere near those created by Module #4 (Pinwheel Discussion) and Module #5 (New Teacher), both of which contained absolutely no traditional role structure. Specifically, the traditional role modules achieved 19.2% and 17.1% critical thinking present in student sample discussion, while the newer modules that negated the role scored in a range from 23.1% to 28.2% in the same category. Module #3, the Miniature Socratic Seminar, seemed to be the median of the results, as it engendered similar results to the original module, but with a decrease in simple recall

from 80.8% to 53.2%. However, one important element to note as the study progressed is the increase of student skill in student-led discussion techniques as the project progressed. When implementing the final module, the Totally Ten, participating teachers elected to pay special attention to critical thinking and analysis, as those were the categories that remained more consistent than any other throughout the study.

The Final Module: Totally Ten Discussion

For the Totally Ten Discussion module to incur the most accurate results, teachers met before implementation to determine what options would be available in each value category. The nature of the Totally Ten is to provide students with a plethora of options to choose for their discussion, which is not always transferrable between content. Since a cross-curricular format was necessary to the study, those options had to be vague enough to transfer curricula, but specific enough to ensure accurate data collection. Participating teachers therefore formed question “sets” for each value using Bloom’s Taxonomy scale to indicate level of difficulty, abstract versus concrete, and other purposeful questioning strategies. Once those question sets were established, each teacher executed the final discussion in their classroom with questions specific to their curriculum, and recorded data from their corresponding sample groups. Note the student sample for the Totally Ten discussion found in Appendix K. For this module, teachers were especially curious to see how the Totally Ten module would impact critical thinking and analysis, as it follows the differentiated classroom guidelines to promote those characteristics, giving students an option to choose less difficulty levels that are less abstract and that require less critical thinking. Results are listed in Table 9.

Table 9

Module #6: Totally Ten Discussion Statistics Per Teacher

Paraphrased Discussion Analysis Rubric Category (Appendix B)	Percent* Demonstrated by Sample Group						
	T1	T2	T3	T4	T5	T6	Avg
Critical thinking demonstrated in discussion	21.3	22.5	13.4	30.6	13.3	28.4	21.6
Analysis skills demonstrated in discussion	26.7	18.3	17.1	17.7	16.9	13.5	18.4
Simple Recall demonstrated in discussion	52	59.2	69.5	51.6	69.9	58.1	60.1
Average student engagement shown during discussion	91.3	83.7	82.1	89	81.3	89.6	86.2

**Note:* Percent noted is the percentage of discussion each student in the sample group demonstrated throughout the discussion.

Table 9 clearly indicates that while teachers were hopeful for the Totally Ten module to show the same results as its predecessors in the study, those results were not achieved. Firstly, this module was the first to have less than 90% student engagement since the baseline discussion by Daniels was implemented, signifying that students did not have to focus, nor did they feel the need to participate as much, in this discussion. Furthermore, this module concluded with lower averages of critical thinking and analysis, which suggested that students chose to do the easier options than the harder ones listed. Specifically, this module incurred the highest amount of simple recall than all but the baseline circle, and did not make up for that statistic in any other category. See Figure 5 for the specific percentages of Module #6 (The Totally Ten) compared with its competitors.

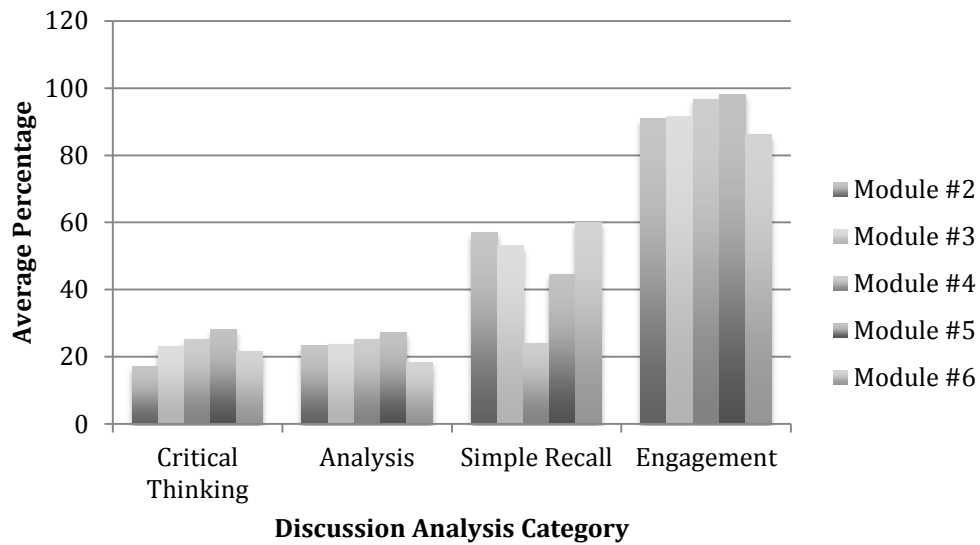


Figure 5: Comparing the Totally Ten with the Previous Modules.

As results for Module #6 were juxtaposed with the previously gathered data, the researcher quickly determined that its success in the classroom was limited, particularly in regards to maintaining high student expectations. In fact, the Totally Ten module scored the lowest in every category of the new modules, with the single exception of scoring higher than Module #2 (The Modified Circle) in critical thinking. However, that does not indicate that it is pointless; instead, the results from each teacher were so inconsistent that it is clear that this module depends on the teacher and students more than other methods of its kind.

Reflections

As this study progressed from goals, through research, through implementation, and through reflection, the most important takeaway quickly became clear: the original literature circle module is not necessarily the best discussion technique for classrooms in

general. Instead, having two or three highly successful discussion modules to choose from can be an important tool for student success. Additionally, students enjoy change in the classroom, so a variety of methods may be helpful in maintaining high levels of student engagement. As each teacher is different, and every student is incredibly different from his or her counterpart, multiple discussion choices are necessary for that student to succeed in that teacher's room to achieve a modicum of success, demonstrating King's (2001) findings regarding teacher-student interaction in discussion. King (2001) asserted that students could reach a deeper level of discussion with practice, but that the teacher cannot intervene to lead them there, as that would actually hamper their discussion's success. Instead, King (2001) determined that the teacher needs to release the reins of instruction as often as possible so as to guarantee students are not dependent on him or her for their learning. In this study, King's findings are specifically echoed in the Pinwheel Discussion and the New Teacher modules, as these two modules have the lowest levels of teacher interaction, yet they also garnered impressive percentages of critical thinking and analysis. Overall, this study provides information that indicates some discussion modules are stronger than others in certain areas; for example, the Pinwheel Discussion was a highly engaging discussion technique in each participating classroom, while the Totally Ten and Daniels' Circle were both struggling in that category.

This study also provided interesting insights regarding the necessity of the original "role" found in both Daniels' Circle and the Modified Circle that echoed earlier findings of similar studies. For example, Lenters (2014) argued that the literature circle

role has become outdated in today's classroom, and teachers should therefore break their reliance on its use, which is demonstrated in this study's determination that the role is not necessary for student discussion to find depth and meaning. Falter Thomas (2014) also determined that the role is not the useful tool it used to be, specifically due to the role sheet itself. Instead, the role has reached the point where it can hinder the success of a circle discussion and its participating students, rather than enhance the learning being sought (Falter Thomas, 2014; Lenters, 2014). In this study, Falter Thomas and Lenters' initial findings outlined in Section Two were corroborated, as this project displayed data indicating that the role was actually the least successful methodology for creating in-depth, analytical dialogue for students.

Limitations

As this project is one of the first of its kind, based on the literature review summarized in Section Two, it is evident that studying six sample groups of students does not garner nearly enough evidence to fully substantiate the aforementioned findings. Moreover, this study only included the high school classroom, and three fields of curriculum, so the results are not applicable to the middle and elementary school classes, nor are they fully applicable to the post-secondary classroom. Another limitation to the data collection was the growth of student skill as the project progressed, as students developed strong discussion skills with every new module. This development of skill hindered data collection, as the results could not remain consistent. Finally, while this study involved multiple subject curriculums, it did not collect enough data regarding cross-curriculum uses to provide substantial evidence for those teachers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is evident that the role of the traditional literature circle is no longer the only student-led discussion option to attain student success in the classroom, and may not always be the best option for obtaining high levels of student engagement and discussion depth. Additionally, consistent use of the role in student-led discussions is no longer necessary for students to be able to analyze and think critically, an opinion clearly stated by Lentners in 2014, and in some classroom dynamics could even be considered obsolete for learning. However, that does not mean this study found the traditional and modified circles' use of the role to be harmful to student success; instead, it hindered their ability to reach levels of analysis and critical thinking they may have been able to in a different module. Furthermore, the literature circle modules involving the roles also include more teacher interaction than the other options, demonstrating King's (2001) findings regarding the teacher's involvement in class being a deterrent to student dialogue. In fact, the two most successful modules found in this study were the Pinwheel Discussion and the New Teacher Module, both of which removed both the role *and* the teacher from the student discussion. These two modules garnered the highest levels of critical thinking (25% and 28.2%) and in-depth analysis (25.2% and 27.3%), yet also maintained an engagement rate of at least 96% of the participating sample groups. Consequently, this study conclusively determined that these two modules are strong contenders to use when the literature circle is not garnering the success desired, as they demonstrated the highest levels of student critical thinking and analysis, while also lessening the amount of general recall and student distraction.

While the Pinwheel and New Teacher were found to be the most successful modules in overall data obtained, that does not mean that the other four modules were found to be unsuccessful. Each module demonstrated a modicum of student success in certain areas of criteria, even if the results were underwhelming. For instance, the original circle module proposed by Daniels is a simplistic structure that can be used to involve students. It obtained a student engagement percentage of 80.8%, and also demonstrated some discussion devoted to critical thinking skills and analysis, indicating that this module did, in fact, enhance student learning. The Modified Circle module had similar results to the original, but with a higher percentage of analysis and engagement; teachers found that having the roles completed in class with others in that role helped to raise student engagement by taking away the requirement of student homework completion. The Miniature Socratic Seminar demonstrated clearly that the role is not always necessary for students to be involved in analytical dialogue, as it succeeded in dropping the student recall percentage to 53.2%, indicating that nearly half of the entire student discussion was at higher level thinking than previous modules. The Pinwheel Discussion is a successful module for teachers trying to incur stronger student engagement, as students participating were actively engaged in conversation approximately 96% of the time allotted.

In contrast, the New Teacher module was successful in all areas of the criteria consistently, yet it, like the original module, could be negatively impacted by student completion rates. Finally, the Totally Ten has the potential to incite strong, analytical discussion, but it is dependent on the options provided to students and the groups

participating in the activity. Regardless, teachers can modify these modules as needed to fit their classrooms best, as that is where the weaknesses of these modules lay: student differentiation. The individual teacher data obtained indicated that for some teachers and classes, one module was more successful than another, but the opposite is true for another teacher. For example, when Teacher #1 implemented the Totally Ten module, her results indicated that this role is one of the stronger options for student analysis and critical thinking, with 21.3% and 26.7% of discussion being aligned with those criteria; contrarily, Teacher #5 obtained a 13.3% and 16.9% in the same criteria for the same module. Consequently, one teacher would see that module as incredibly successful while another would opt for a different module entirely.

Conclusions

In order for student-led discussion modules to continue advancing and progressing with the requirements of today's students, new modules need to be executed and reflected by many teachers to garner the data needed to claim one module is "successful" while another is not, or that one is better than another. Unfortunately, while this study provides baseline data regarding these six options for student-led discussion, the data collected was too limited to garner the most accurate and universal of results. Rather than indicating that the literature circle and its role-aligned formatting is obsolete and hindering to student learning, teachers should instead analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the different modules available and align them with their student needs to achieve success.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent Forms: Parents of Participating High School Students

Research Parent Permission Form

Southwest Minnesota State University, Marshall, Minnesota

Master's in Education, English Emphasis

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am currently a student at Southwest Minnesota State University, Marshall completing the Master's in Education program. One requirement for the completion of this program is a research study conducted in my classroom, which will help to improve myself in the educational field. My research project will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of six different student-led discussion techniques and how they enhance student learning and understanding of a text, specifically *Fahrenheit 451*.

Your child has the opportunity to be a part of this research study to help improve their reading comprehension and analysis skills. The research will be conducted throughout Terms 1, 2, and 3 in my English 10 classes.

All data collected from this research study along with the students' identification will be kept confidential and no names will be used throughout my research results. I am asking for your signature below so that I am able to have your child participate in this research study and collect research findings.

Sincerely,

Sara C. Kraitler
English Teacher
Chisago Lakes High School

Statement of Consent:

I have read this form and decided that I will give permission for my child to participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and benefits have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw my child at any time.

Print student's name: _____

Signature of parent or guardian: _____ Date: _____

Print the name of the Principal Researcher: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Research Parent Permission Form

Southwest Minnesota State University, Marshall, Minnesota

Master's in Education, English Emphasis

Dear Parent or Guardian,

My colleague, Sara Kraiter, is currently a student at Southwest Minnesota State University, Marshall completing the Master's in Education program. One requirement for the completion of this program is a research study conducted in her classroom, along with the classrooms of five other teachers, which will help to improve our educational practices. Her research project will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of six different student-led discussion techniques and how they enhance student learning and understanding of a text.

Your child has the opportunity to be a part of this research study to help improve their reading comprehension and analysis skills. The research will be conducted throughout the school year in a variety of English classes being offered.

All data collected from this research study along with the students' identification will be kept confidential and no names will be used throughout Mrs. Kraiter's research results. I am asking for your signature below so that I am able to have your child participate in this research study and collect research findings.

Sincerely,

English Teacher

Chisago Lakes High School

Statement of Consent:

I have read this form and decided that I will give permission for my child to participate in the project described above. Its general purposes, the particulars of involvement, and possible risks and benefits have been explained to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw my child at any time.

Print student's name: _____

Signature of parent or guardian: _____ Date: _____

Print the name of the Principal Researcher: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B

Depth of Discussion Rubric

Student: _____ Discussion Module: _____ Teacher: _____

Action Research Project: Discussion Evaluation Rubric

	<u>High Levels (5)</u>	<u>Average Levels (3)</u>	<u>Simple Recall (1)</u>
Initiated Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluates arguments for possible answers to the driving question by assessing whether reasoning is valid and evidence is relevant and sufficient Can clearly explain new understanding gained in the discussion and how it might transcend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognizes the need for valid reasoning and strong evidence, but does not evaluate it carefully when developing answers to the driving question Recognizes that the topic may transcend the discussion, but does not pursue the idea 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepts arguments for possible answers to the driving question without question Does not make an attempt to recognize topic transcendence
Discussion Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thoroughly assesses the quality of information (considers usefulness, accuracy, and credibility) Asks follow-up questions to gain understanding and seeks ways to broaden or focus inquiry and discussion Supports initial discussion statement with evidence and justification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understands the quality of information should be considered, but does not do so thoroughly Asks some follow-up questions about the topic Recognizes the need to broaden/focus the discussion, but does not attempt Provides some evidence or justification for initial discussion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accepts information at face value Cannot give valid reasons or evidence to defend initial discussion

Student's Average Score: _____		
Average (5): High levels of critical thinking present in discussion	Average (4): Above average levels of critical thinking present in the discussion	Average (3): Slight levels of critical thinking present in the discussion
		Average (2): Slight levels of critical thinking present in the discussion
		Average (1): Critical thinking not present in the discussion

Literary Analysis

	<u>High Levels (5)</u>	<u>Moderate Levels (4)</u>	<u>Average Levels (3)</u>	<u>Slight Levels (2)</u>	<u>Simple Recall (1)</u>
Initiated Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excellent ability of grasping inner relationships of abstract concepts and relating them to multiple mediums Outstanding use of relevant and ample evidence and justification in support of drawn conclusions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates talent in understanding, synthesizing, and analyzing abstract concepts Successful at selecting comprehensive, relevant support to justify conclusions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides informed discussion with some evidence of genuine analysis Some relevant support provided to demonstrate justification, but lacking in depth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows a limited capacity to understand and synthesize abstract concepts Struggled with selecting relevant evidence Discussion appeared superficial and shallow 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lacks the ability to understand and discuss abstract concepts Most of the discussion remained highly concrete and shallow
Discussion Responses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates an exceptional ability to analyze and synthesize peer comments, asks meaningful extending questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates good ability to analyze other student work, and ask meaningful extending questions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some ability to meaningfully comment on other student work and ask bridging questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of ability to comment on other students work and ask meaningful questions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demonstrates poor ability to comment on other student work, asks no meaningful questions

Student's Average Score: _____		
---------------------------------------	--	--

Student Engagement Tracker

(5) Student-to-student talk is highly intellectual and demonstrates high levels of thinking. Students actively discuss the topic and go above and beyond basic requirements.	(4) Student-to-student talk reflects knowledge and ways of thinking. Students provide evidence for discussion and stretch beyond basic requirements.	(3) Student-to-student talk reflects knowledge and ways of thinking associated with the content. Students rarely stray from topic.	(2) Small amount of student-to-student talk. Talk associated with content occurs between students, but students are simply going through the motions.	(1) Student talk is nonexistent or is unrelated to content or is limited to single word responses or incomplete sentences directed to teacher.
--	--	--	---	--

Student's Average Score: _____

Discussion Module Statistics

Module: _____ Date of Implementation: _____

Teacher: _____ Topic of Discussion: _____

	<u>Critical Thinking Average</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Analysis Average</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Engagement Average</u>	<u>%</u>
Student 1						
Student 2						
Student 3						
Student 4						
Student 5						
	Total Student Average		Total Student Average		Total Student Average	

Appendix C

Reflection Handouts – Participating Students

Post-Discussion Reflection

Circle the number that best describes your opinions on today's small group discussion.

with 1 as the worst and 5 as the best

This discussion increased my understanding of the assigned reading.	1	2	3	4	5
This discussion kept me fully engaged for the entire time allotted.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoyed being a part of this discussion.	1	2	3	4	5
My group did a good job at discussing each point in detail.	1	2	3	4	5
My group did a good job at building off each other's thoughts and opinions.	1	2	3	4	5
I feel prepared for the assessment due to this discussion.	1	2	3	4	5
All of my group members actively participated in this discussion.	1	2	3	4	5
My group did not get off topic during today's discussion.	1	2	3	4	5
My group was well prepared for this discussion.	1	2	3	4	5
My overall grade for this discussion technique is...	F	D	C	B	A

Appendix D

Daniels' Original Literature Circle Module

Literature Circle - Discussion Director

Name: _____ Chapters: _____

Other Group Members:

Directions:

First Job: Take apart this packet and distribute a role to each person in your group. You may need to double up on a role...preferably one of the more difficult roles. Next, have each member read EVERYTHING on their role sheet. Points will be deducted for carelessness due to not fulfilling all the directions. Lastly, see *Order for Leading Your Group Discussion* below and do as it says.

Second Job: Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group can discuss about this part of the novel. Your questions should require *thought* and get everyone *talking and sharing their opinions and reactions*. The best discussion questions come from your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns as you read. Do NOT write questions that call for a simple "yes" or "no" answer or a factual detail! See the example questions below to help you form your own questions.

Order for Leading Your Group Discussion

1. Distribute roles
 - a. Give your group about 25ish minutes to fulfill their role. Keep track of time and keep your group on task...your grade depends on efficiency and quality.
2. After 30 minutes, lead a small group discussion. Take your time and make sure everything is covered in detail. At the same time, be conscientious of time. Proceed in the following order:
 - a. Call on the Vocabulary Enricher to read the study new words and terms.
 - b. Call on the Literary Luminary to share their selected passages.
 - c. Call on the Bridge Builder to share their concepts.
 - d. Call on the Artist to share their artwork.
 - e. Lastly, pose each one of your questions to your group, and record the main ideas that are discussed. Spend time on each question and host a quality small group discussion.

Example Questions:

What did you think about.....? (name a specific event, action, or character's action)

Why do you think that.....?

What do you think will happen.....? (ask for predictions of events and characters' actions)

What is happening at the part where.....?

What do you think _____ (event/incident) means?

*Note: Discussion Director of the circle distributes assignment directions to the group.

Vocabulary Enricher

Name: _____ Chapters: _____

Other Group Members:

Directions: Your job is to look for a few important words in your reading. If you find words that are puzzling or unfamiliar, mark them down on this page while you are reading. Later, you can look them up in a dictionary and write down their definitions. You may also find words in the reading that are significant to the story. Mark these words too, and be ready to point them out to the group. When your circle meets, help members find and discuss the words.

Words and Definitions

<u>Page & Paragraph</u>	<u>Word</u>	<u>Definition</u>

Group Discussion: Analyze why the author may have chosen that particular word, or how that word impacts understanding and themes of the story.

Literary Luminary

Name: _____ Chapters: _____

Other Group Members:

Directions: Locate 5 passages of the story that your group should reread, discuss, and think about. Pick passages that use irony.

- ✓ Passages should be *important things for everyone to notice, remember, or think about.*
- ✓ Choose a *variety* of passages, not all the same type--here are suggestions:
 - surprising/startling
 - confusing (something you wonder if other people "got")
 - descriptive writing: figurative language, strong verbs, etc. (identify literary devices)
 - important (maybe a clue? foreshadowing? Satirical?)
 - controversial event (elicits different opinions from group members)
- ✓ When you're called upon at your group meeting, do the Following:
 1. Make sure everyone opens to the right page and help them find where the passage begins.
 2. Either read it aloud yourself, or ask someone to read it.
 3. Tell your reasons for selecting each passage; ask for comments. Do they agree with your choices? Record your groups' comments.

<u>Location</u>	<u>Quotation</u>	<u>Why I Chose It</u>	<u>Group Analysis</u>

Bridge Builder

Name: _____ Chapters: _____

Other Group Members:

Directions: Your job is to build bridges between the events of the book and other people, places, or events in school, the community, or your own life. Look for connections between the text, yourself, other texts, and the world. Also, make connections between what has happened before and what might happen as the narrative continues. Look for the character's internal and external conflicts and the ways that these conflicts influence his or her actions.

	My Connection	Group Analysis
Connection #1		
Connection #2		
Connection #3		
Connection #4		
Connection #5		

Artist

Name: _____ Chapters: _____

Other Group Members:

Directions: Your job is to create an illustration of the most important passage in the story. Beneath your picture you must record the quote that inspired your work of art . It must be detailed and drawn to the best of your ability.

Draw your picture here:

When you're called upon at your group meeting, do the Following:

1. Share your illustration, read your quote and explain why chose it.
2. My group agreed that my picture is accurate and that I worked hard on it. _____yes _____no (if no, add what is missing to your picture)

Appendix E

Modified Original Literature Circle Module

Literature Circles Agenda

<u>Member 1</u>	<u>Member 2</u>	<u>Member 3</u>	<u>Member 4</u>	<u>Member 5</u>

As a group, complete the following charts regarding your literature circle plans for this unit.

Book Title	
Author	
Type of Nonfiction	

Assign your reading for each literature circle meeting. When you each sign this contract, you are agreeing to meet on these days and have the reading completed for these days.

Meeting Dates	Reading Completed for Meeting
Meeting #1:	
Meeting #2:	
Meeting #3:	
Meeting #4:	
Final Meeting:	

Role Schedule

	<u>Member 1</u>	<u>Member 2</u>	<u>Member 3</u>	<u>Member 4</u>	<u>Member 5</u>
Meeting 1					
Meeting 2					
Meeting 3					
Meeting 4					
Meeting 5					

Fahrenheit 451* Literature Circle*Role #1: Discussion Leader**

Your job is to develop a list of questions that your group can discuss about this part of the novel. Your questions should require *thought* and get everyone *talking and sharing their opinions and reactions*. The best discussion questions come from your own thoughts, feelings, and concerns as you read. Do NOT write questions that call for a simple "yes" or "no" answer or a factual detail!

	<u>Write your question here:</u>
Question #1	
Question #2	
Question #3	
Question #4	
Question #5	
Question #6	
Question #7	
Question #8	
Question #9	
Question #10	
Mrs. Kraiter's Question #1	What does the existence of the mechanical hound and its purpose say about this society?
Mrs. Kraiter's Question #2	What do people talk about in this society? How is this different from our own society? Why do you think Clarisse has such a problem with everything being "abstract"?

Fahrenheit 451 Literature Circle**Role #2: Important Quotations Explained**

Locate 5 passages of the story that your group should reread, discuss, and think about. Pick passages that use figurative language, literary devices, or irony. Passages should be important things for everyone to notice, remember, or think about. You will be choosing passages that enhance the following criteria, and then developing comments or questions for group analysis.

	Quotation	Comments/Questions on Quotation
Mrs. Kraitler's Page 4	"What--the smell of kerosene? ... You never wash it off completely."	During their conversation Montag says this to Clarisse, regarding the kerosene. What could this mean symbolically?
Mrs. Kraitler's Page 38	"He could feel the poison working up his wrists and into his elbows and his shoulders, and then the jump-over from shoulder blade to should blade like a spark leaping a gap. His hands were ravenous. And his eyes were beginning to feel hunger."	What is happening to Montag in this scene? What about him has changed, and why is that change occurring?
Symbolism Page _____		
Irony Page _____		
Irony Page _____		
Text-to-Self Page _____		
Plot Builder Page _____		

Fahrenheit 451 Literature Circle

Role #3: Literary Element Expert

As we discovered in the Short Story Unit, Bradbury uses quite a few examples of figurative language. For your role, locate a minimum of 5 examples of figurative language used, such as similes, metaphors, personification, symbolism, allusion, etc.

Type	Quote it!	Quote the Passage	Discuss the Passage!
Similes + Metaphors	<u>Page 9</u> <u>Paragraph 6</u>	"The little mosquito-delicate dancing hum in the air, the electric murmur of a hidden wasp snug in its special pink warm nest."	In this passage, Bradbury is describing Mildred's "seashells." Why does he compare them to insects? What message is he trying to convey?
Simile	<u>Page 34</u> <u>Paragraph 3</u>	"A book lit, almost obediently, like a white pigeon, in his hands, wings fluttering."	Why would Bradbury compare a book to a bird? What message could he be trying to portray?

Fahrenheit 451 Literature Circle

Role #4: Characterizer

In Part 1 of *Fahrenheit 451*, we meet several characters. For this role, discuss the characteristics of each one, determining if they are dynamic or static, if they have any foils, and some of their personality traits. Finally, find a quote that demonstrates who they are as a character in the novel. As a group, discuss what role they play in the novel and/or in Montag's life.

Define These Terms:

Dynamic

Character: _____

Static Character: _____

Character Foil: _____

<u>Character Name</u>	<u>Dynamic/Static</u>	<u>Any Foils?</u>	<u>Characteristics</u>	<u>Quote</u>
Montag				
Clarisse				
Captain Beatty				
Mildred				

***Fahrenheit 451* Literature Circle**

Role #5: Theme Champion

Your job is to identify and explain 3 major themes within the story. On the provided chart, I provided you with the major motifs you should be using to find theme. Your job is find a quote to support them, determine what message about them Bradbury is presenting, and present those elements to your group. Your group is then responsible for fully defending that theme's presence in the novel.

<u>Motif</u>	<u>Quote</u>	<u>Message</u>
Knowledge vs. Ignorance		
Distraction vs. Happiness		
Technology Applied to Human Relationships		

Appendix F

Miniature “Socratic Seminar” Module

Miniature Socratic Seminar – Current Nonfiction

For this Friday, do extensive research regarding the controversy happening with the University of MN Mens' Football Team by using nonfiction sources. Make sure your choices are legitimate, meaning they are written and published through a licensed, reliable source. In addition, please include one source that is not an article. For this source, you could use a news segment, a YouTube video, a letter, an interview, etc. In the following sections, form 3 opinions regarding the football team's boycott, and support your opinions WITH FACTS from legitimate sources. Be sure to cite your sources below.

Discussion Topic: Did the U of M have the right to suspend the players for their actions? Did the U of M football players have the right to stand up against their suspension?

Start by identifying 3 opinions you have regarding this topic.

Opinion #1	Opinion #2	Opinion #3

Now provide factual evidence for each of your opinions. If you can't find any, then you need to choose a different opinion.

	Fact #1	Fact #2
Opinion #1		
Opinion #2		
Opinion #3		

Cite your sources:

	Title	Author	News Source/Company
Source 1			
Source 2			
Source 3			
Source 4			
Source 5			

Miniature Socratic Seminar – Individual Reflection

In the box below, write a minimum of one paragraph discussing the circle conversation regarding the U of M football team, and our class discussion of the topic. Reflect on what you learned versus what you originally believed, and how the class discussion affected your viewpoints.

My Reflection

Appendix G

Miniature Socratic Seminar Module

Fahrenheit 451 Discussion Student Sample

Note: Student Sample is an anonymous selection from all participating teachers' classes.

“The Hearth and the Salamander” Mini Socratic Seminar

Individual Response

Answer FIVE of the following questions using extensive evidence from the text, and your own opinions. Your answers should all be detailed and well thought out. Please provide at least one quotation for each response. If you have extra time, continue answering other questions please. **Please write your responses in a different color AND font.**

1. What about Montag's marriage differs from our expectations of marriage today?
It seems like marriage in the book is more like roommates in college than marriage. The only thing they do together is sleep everything else they don't do together at all. They seem very distant.

2. Defend Montag's sickness as physical, emotional, or both.
I think Montag's sickness is emotional but it is so emotionally overwhelming for him that it becomes physical with him throwing up and such.

3. How would you describe Captain Beatty?
Pretty chill dude. He didn't seem upset about him calling in sick he actually expected it. He knows it's hard to watch somebody burn but he also knows it's part of the job.

4. What are features of this society that should frighten a reader if they came true in a society today?
You couldn't read books. Teenagers and probably adults kill each other without much law. Being social and normal nowadays would get you jailed.

5. If it is against the law to have books, why would a law-enforcing person like Montag break the law?
Because Clarisse and the women who died really sparked his interested on why someone would die for some ink on paper.

6. During his conversation with his neighbor Clarisse McClellan, Montag says that "You never wash it off completely" referring to the kerosene. What could this mean symbolically?
It could mean you never wash all the scenes you see in the field of work. People burning alive and peoples homes burning.

7. Mildred's earpieces have been described as “electronic bees,” “mosquito hums,” and “hidden wasps.” Why do you think Bradbury compares these devices to insects?

Because we are in Montag’s perspective and if you have ever been around someone with earbuds in and they are really loud you hear a little buzz.

8. Why do you think the woman stays in her house while it is burning?

Because who would want to live in that society. Also her books seemed to be all she had and a part of her.

9. How do you feel about Bradbury’s predictions of school? Are there any truths to this assessment?

It depends. Technology in school is supposed to make people more social and easier to ask questions. But also it could lead to what Bradbury described.

10. What does the existence of the mechanical hound & its purpose say about the society that Montag lives in?

It seems that people just expect people to be good because when Montag questions about somebody programing it to attack him all of his coworkers just laughed and said who would do that?.

“The Hearth and the Salamander” Mini Socratic Seminar

****Group Discussion Notes****

As your group discusses the responses for each question, have one person take notes. Please discuss as many of the questions as possible in the time allotted.

- Today’s Discussion Leader:
- Today’s Note Taker:

<u>Question</u>	<u>Group Discussion Notes</u>
What about Montag's marriage differs from our expectations of marriage today?	They are more like college roommates, they aren't very invested into each other.
Defend Montag's sickness as physical, emotional, or both.	Both, because his emotional health isn't good, and he's so unhappy, it'll affect his physical health as well.
How would you describe Captain Beatty?	We think that Captain Beatty is controlling, and a rule follower.

What are features of this society that should frighten a reader if they came true in a society today?	We couldn't read, or go outside without raising suspicion. You can't really be yourself anymore.
If it is against the law to have books, why would a law-enforcing person like Montag break the law?	Just because he has that job doesn't mean he enjoys the job but because his father and grandpa worked in it he was forced into it. He is influenced by Clarisse.
During his conversation with his neighbor Clarisse McClellan, Montag says that "You never wash it off completely" referring to the kerosene. What could this mean symbolically?	He won't ever really forget what he's done to the people's things.
Mildred's earpieces have been described as "electronic bees," "mosquito hums," and "hidden wasps." Why do you think Bradbury compares these devices to insects?	Montag finds that the earpieces are very annoying, so Bradbury wants us to too.
Why do you think the woman stays in her house while it is burning?	She lost everything she loved. She also said in the book that she would rather be dead than live in the society.
How do you feel about Bradbury's predictions of school? Are there any truths to this assessment?	We feel as if the predictions he made are pretty accurate because we already have computers in school and technology is already a big part of our life.
What does the existence of the mechanical hound & its purpose say about the society that Montag lives in?	People are becoming so bored that the only thing that they really find interesting is doing destructive things.

Appendix H

Pinwheel Discussion Module

Pinwheel Discussions – Talk it Out!

Directions: You have been placed in a small group of my choosing. This was done intentionally, so you may not switch. Please don't move the desks.

So far in this unit, we have read four different nonfiction stories, written by different authors. Each person in your small group will receive a card with a name on it. They will then step into the shoes of that author for this discussion.

One member of your group will also be assigned the “Provocateur.” Your job is to keep the discussion moving, play Devil’s Advocate, and keep each group member actively participating. To start us out, you will determine a list of questions or discussion topics that each “author” could talk about. Think themes, characterization, morals, motifs, overarching problems, etc. These questions should be written using the active questioning we have discussed, like this:

In author name's story, he/she active verb, ... Question?

During prep time, you provocateurs can work together to develop your questions!!!!

You will have 10 minutes to prepare for your role in the pinwheel. Go through your individual story and do a quick additional close reading, where you note any opinions and viewpoints that are significant. You can use those in the discussion!

During the Discussion

The provocateur has a list of guiding questions they have developed for you. Start off with one of those questions.

Group members will answer and discuss as if they are their assigned author. YOU AREN'T YOU!!!

Your responses to every question and statement need to be supported somehow, using your story. Remember, you are answering as if you ARE that person, so back it up!

Once all of the provocateur questions have been discussed, if there is more time, you should ask each other questions about the other’s stories. If your author would disagree or support something that another author said, talk about it. Hash it out. Argue. Agree. Debate. Defend. TALK!!!

Appendix I

New Teacher Module

To Kill a Mockingbird – New Teacher **Discussion**

For this discussion, your literature circle will be leading the class in a discussion technique of your choosing. On your assigned day, you will, in fact, be the teachers, and you will help your classmates analyze and discuss the assigned reading up to that point. You have extensive options for discussion techniques and plans, but your overall discussion must last a minimum of 30 minutes of true teaching time. Since these discussions cannot be rescheduled, at least one group member **MUST** be present on the assigned day, or the group will not receive credit. There are no makeups, re-dos, or rain checks on this assignment.

Some discussion options are...

- Tic-Tac-Toe Questions
- BINGO
- Kahoot!
- Socratic
- Memory
- Your version of a Lit Circle
- Be creative! Mix it up and help your classmates have an awesome class!

Please note that not a single option or direction included the words “Presentation” or “PowerPoint.” This discussion activity should be interactive, fun, and creative. However, do **NOT** forget its main purpose: you need to demonstrate your analysis skills, and you need to help your classmates demonstrate theirs.

Appendix J

“Totally 10” Discussion Module

Group Names: _____

Literature Circle – “Totally Ten” Analysis

As a circle, choose from the following prompts, so that your total scores is at least 10 points. Be sure to respond with extensive detail and support with each answer. Please remember that this is a group activity. Choosing an option for each member to complete individually does not count!

Note Taker: Make sure you type your answers in a different color and a different font.

2 Point Options:

- **Society Listings:** List and explain the differences between this society and ours. Justify.
- **Protagonist ID:** Give a detailed rundown of the protagonist. Include relationships, influences, and motivations.
- **Setting Details:** Identify the setting of the story and discuss its overall influence on the plot. Be sure to consider why the author chose this for his setting.

4 Point Options:

- **New Theme:** What is a possible theme for the story that we haven't discussed? Be sure to discuss your theme's transcendent traits by connecting it to the human condition.
- **Theme Tracker:** Choose one of our class-discussed themes and track its development throughout the novel. What choices did the author make in this theme's development?
- **Diary Entry:** Write a diary entry through the eyes of one of the minor or supporting characters regarding the protagonist. Be ready to explain the entry with the rest of us!

6 Point Options:

- **Figurative Language ID:** Identify several examples of figurative language used throughout the story. Analyze the author's choice in these examples, and then discuss why these examples were used (Does it enhance a theme? Characterization? Plot?).

- **Cause & Effect:** Create a cause and effect map of at least 10 major plot moments in the novel.

8 Point Options:

- **Social Warnings:** Identify social commentary present in the novel. Track this social commentary's development by analyzing the author's use of at least three examples of figurative language.

10 Point Options:

- **Author's Purpose:** Consider the situations that led to the creation of this text. Do you believe the author is justified in his concerns for society? Were any of his predictions accurate? Justify in detail.
- **Storyboarding:** Create a storyboard or written chapter to add to the end of the book. This chapter should change the official ending, and change things for the protagonist. However, that does not mean that this chapter shouldn't make sense!

Time to Choose! Be sure that your choices add up to at least 10 points. Your group should complete all of the choices you list here together.

Option 1: _____ Points: _____

Option 2: _____ Points: _____

Option 3: _____ Points: _____

Option 4: _____ Points: _____

Appendix K

“Totally 10” Discussion Module – Cause/Effect Chart

Student Samples

Cause and Effect Chart

<u>Cause</u>	<u>Montag's Action</u>	<u>Effect</u>
Beatty makes him burn it down.	Montag burns his house, including his books. (Page 110)	Montag becomes very unstable
Beatty keeps provoking him.	Montag burns Beatty with the flamethrower. (Page 112)	He becomes a fugitive
Montag is fully against this society	Montag hid books in Mrs. Black's house. (Page 123)	He calls in firemen to burn their house
Montag goes to Faber for help, sees on TV that the Hound is after him	Montag took a valise full of Faber's clothes, doused in whiskey. (Pages 129-130)	Montag runs to the river
While running to the river new calls out for everyone to look out their doors	Montag put Faber's clothes on and jumped in the river. (Page 133)	Montag is now floating down the river
He sees helicopters and the hound way down the river	Montag chose to follow the railroad tracks. (Page 138)	He comes close to a deer but is scared because he thought it was the hound
Montag sees a fire and is very intrigued	He snuck up on the men at the fire. (Page 139)	Montag sees they're using fire as a productive thing not destructive
Men at the fire see him and he comes out	He tells Granger about his book. (Page 144)	Granger tells him about their "society" of a bunch of people who just remember books
Granger tells Montag that when someone dies they leave something behind	He watched what happened to the city. (Page 152-153)	Granger suggests to build a mirror factory and Montag remembers