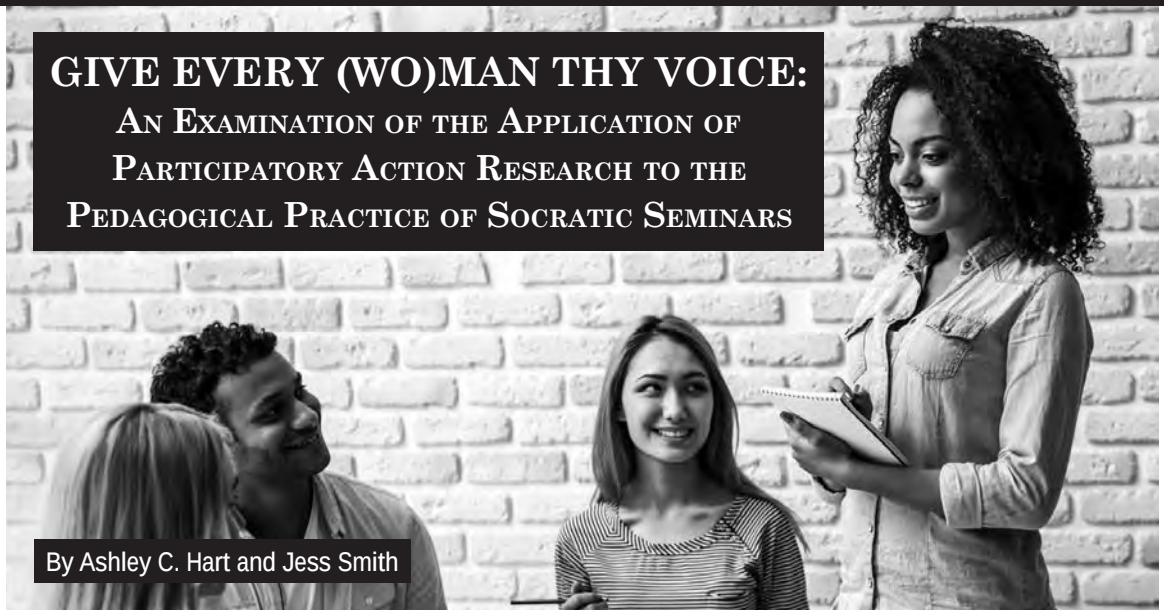

GIVE EVERY (WO)MAN THY VOICE:

An Examination of the Application of Participatory Action Research to the Pedagogical Practice of Socratic Seminars

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Abstract: In envisioning the future of literacy, students' voices are paramount. Students' engagement in classroom talk increases their learning and communication skills, but without intentional implementation, classroom talk can perpetuate hegemony in contemporary classrooms. To better explore this phenomenon, we developed a study in a southeast Texas high school to examine the experiences of lower socioeconomic status female students. The study used a Participatory Action Research (PAR) method, thus encouraging student voice. The findings indicated that female students respond well to Socratic seminar, which can encourage students to take ownership of their learning and be more engaged in classroom conversations. The key themes included (1) establishing space, (2) teacher impact and influence, and (3) teacher progression. The article ends with recommendations and suggestions for teachers to cultivate gender-inclusive and equitable classroom environments, such as honoring student perspectives, encouraging critical feedback, engaging in self-reflection, and transitioning to more student-led activities.

Keywords: Socratic seminar, participatory action research, classroom talk, secondary literacy

As the authors of this study, we believe that the future of literacy hinges on student voice and identity. We have long believed in flipping hegemonic narratives and each used Socratic seminar and other intentional student-centered classroom talk strategies to engage students in deep thinking and sharing of their ideas and connections to ideas and texts. To better understand students' experiences with classroom talk and representation, we examined Socratic seminar through a Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology (Herr & Anderson, 2015). This study centers the experiences and engagement of lower socioeconomic status (SES) female students within a Dual Credit English class at southeast Texas high school. We selected a PAR methodology to utilize student voice and refine the pedagogical practice to create a more equitable and engaging learning experience.

Socratic seminars allow students to develop a sense of agency within the classroom and have an impact on their learning (Griswold et al., 2017; Magill & Harrelson Magill, 2023; Shumilina et al., 2022). For lower SES female students, the intersection of gender and socioeconomic identity can affect their willingness to speak in a discussion-based classroom activity (Goudeau et al., 2023; Howard et al., 2009; Mertzman, 2008; Sedova & Navratilova, 2020). Knowing this, we designed this study to explore how the first author's former students perceived the use of Socratic seminar in her classroom and brought these alumnae back to contribute to transforming her use of the strategy and increasing its effectiveness for the current and future students.

Both authors value classroom talk and believe that practicing these literacy skills prepares students for their futures, whatever the students identify as their goal. Our use of Socratic seminars conveys this belief that student voice is an essential literacy skill worth developing. The first author utilized Socratic seminars in her English courses over the years and noticed that female students thrived in group settings but was also curious as to other factors impacting participation. Some students in the class mentioned that they felt Socratic seminars seemed "fake" in previous classes and as one participant, Participant 3, stated, "It is like [they] are repeating what the teacher wants us to say." We determined that we could examine the phenomenon of how female student participation appeared in Socratic seminars while also examining how socioeconomic status may also contribute to their engagement. This intersectionality of identities presented an opportunity to identify how Socratic seminars can provide an equitable pedagogical practice within the secondary classroom. In our case, we used PAR to collect comprehensive data about student experiences within Socratic seminars. Then, we worked with the PAR participants to develop a Socratic seminar that was appropriate to their needs and those of their peers.

Background and Relevant Literature

It has long been argued that girls talk less than boys in classrooms (Aukrust, 2008; Bousted, 1989; Furberg & Silseth, 2022; Lee & McCabe, 2021; Sedova & Navratilova, 2020; Spender, 1982; Sunderland, 2000; Swann & Graddol, 1988). For a variety of reasons, boys often monopolize classroom discourse while female students are left without the same time or attention to their thoughts and ideas (Brophy, 1985; Eliasson et al., 2016; Mamnoun & Nfissi, 2023; Nosrati, 2015). Some of this difference in speaking time might be because boys tend to make more comments not explicitly invited by the teacher (Aukrust, 2008) or because they answer teacher questions even when not called on by the teacher (Swann & Graddol, 1988). Other studies suggest that teachers privilege voices of their male students (Lee & McCabe, 2021; Mamnoun & Nfissi, 2023).

Classroom talk benefits students in various ways. Teacher professional development in productive dialogue positively impacts students' learning processes and cognitive strategies (Pehmer et al., 2015). Classroom discussion enhances the learning environment, promotes student participation, and helps students to develop higher-level cognitive skills (McKee, 2015). Implementing constructivist, student-centered approaches to learning can enrich student discourse and enhance learning (Gillies, 2014).

Socratic seminars benefit student learning. Using Socratic seminars with data can improve students' ability to analyze and interpret complex information (Griswold et al., 2017). Socratic seminars promote higher order thinking, conflict resolution, and interest in learning (Polite & Adams, 1997) and encourages engagement (Robinson, 2022). Enacting Socratic seminars involves intentionally choosing a text, preparing students and questions, establishing student expectations and the role of the teacher, and assessing effectiveness (Israel, 2002). In this study, we implemented Socratic seminars by providing students with an assigned text for discussion and then separating the class periods into an inner and outer circle formed by desks. The inner circle would discuss the first day while the outer circle observed and provided written feedback. The circles would switch the second day.

Methods

Participatory action research (PAR) offers a collaborative approach to examine and refine the Socratic seminar pedagogical practice. PAR addresses inequity by actively involving participants throughout the study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018) and creates opportunities for research participants to have an active voice in what is studied and how it is studied. PAR research provides ample opportunities to reflect on classroom practices while providing opportunities for participants to speak up and challenge the researcher (Esposito & Evans-Winters, 2021). Since we reflected on one classroom practice, we wanted to utilize participant input to alter Socratic seminars into an equitable and relevant format to student needs. Mockler and Groundwater-Smith (2015) argue that teachers can utilize PAR in education to remove the classroom's structural hierarchy. We used PAR in this manner to elicit student feedback about Socratic seminars and seek student input about improving this practice for future iterations. Participatory action research allowed us to collect comprehensive data about student experiences within Socratic seminars. PAR provides an in-depth investigation of personal and group perspectives to develop practices that are better suited for the population being served (Kemmis et al., 2013). The PAR research design allowed us to utilize student and participant experiences across class periods and sociocultural backgrounds to understand their perceptions regarding Socratic seminars.

We used PAR to help us examine the pedagogical practice of Socratic seminar as a means of self-critique and self-evaluation (Herr & Anderson, 2015).

The study is guided by the following research question: How can educators use student voice within PAR to help reshape the Socratic seminar process for better classroom practices? Within this study, we concentrated on female participants from low socioeconomic backgrounds who were enrolled in the first author's Dual Credit English 1301/1302 course. The Dual Credit course is offered by a local community college but located at the high school campus. A total of 50 students, 22 male and 28 female, volunteered to participate in the study, and we collected feedback from them after each round of Socratic seminars to promote reflection on how to adapt Socratic seminars as a more equitable practice (Kemmis et al., 2013). We used PAR to iteratively refine our pedagogical practice to create a more equitable and engaging learning experience. Among the 50 students, we selected four female low-SES students as PAR participants. The courses were roughly equal in terms of male and female students.

Before starting this PAR study, we wanted to gather an initial understanding of the student experience with Socratic seminars. Therefore, the first author reached out to several former students who were low SES females to learn about their experiences from class. The four alumnae who participated shared their enthusiasm for Socratic seminars and were excited for the opportunity to support Socratic seminars in class. To protect these alumnae identities, we assigned pseudonyms.

Our research employed a PAR format to gain insights into students' experiences with Socratic seminars. PAR fosters collaboration and actively involves participants, allowing them to have a say in what is studied and how that study is done (Baines et al., 2023; Bell & Aldridge, 2014; Halliday et al., 2019; Kemmis et al., 2013). Our aim was to adapt Socratic seminars to better align with student needs. PAR harnesses participants' experiential knowledge to address educational issues and create more equitable educational opportunities and seeks to dismantle the classroom hierarchy.

The PAR process we followed encompassed four stages: reflection, modification, implementation, and observation. First, we collected written feedback from all students to gauge the overall quality and effectiveness of the Socratic seminar. We then conducted interviews with the four chosen PAR participants to gain insight into how to improve engagement among low-SES female students. The data from these interviews informed our reflections and the participants helped create modifications to the Socratic seminar practice.

Subsequently, the first author used the feedback from both students and PAR participants to modify the Socratic seminar. After implementing the changes, we observed and interviewed participants, including ourselves, to design further improvements. Throughout this process, we maintained an active record of personal reflections and observations. We employed three distinct participant groups: "alumnae" (female former students from low SES backgrounds), "students" (current participants), and "PAR participants" (four selected low-SES female students). The selection of PAR participants was purposeful, based on their socioeconomic status and willingness to provide candid critiques. We secured assent from participants and consent from their legal guardians.

Enacting the four stages (reflection, modification, implementation, and observation), we collected data through multiple sources over eight distinct phases of the study. The data sources included observation field notes, a survey with students after each seminar, and interviews and focus groups with PAR participants. We then conducted semistructured interviews, totaling five rounds, with the PAR participants. These interviews were a critical source of data, guiding our efforts to refine the Socratic seminar. We also considered written student feedback, student voices from the PAR interviews, and field notes from seminar observations. The findings from this study are not presented within each of these eight phases because just as the Socratic seminars relied on the iterative feedback of data collection, the themes in this study represent the key elements present throughout data collection.

During data analysis, we employed constant comparative analysis to look for emergent themes across data sources (Creswell & Poth, 2018). We enacted three-stage coding, beginning with open coding, moving to axial coding, and ending with selective coding (Saldaña, 2015). This process allowed us to explore the findings throughout the phases of data collection and view the implications for other classroom environments.

Findings

Over the course of an academic semester, we focused on the use of female student voice within PAR to help reshape the Socratic seminar process for better classroom practices. The PAR process encompassed reflection, modification, implementation, and observation. Our findings revealed three key themes: establishing space, teacher impact and influence, and teacher and student progression.

Establishing Space

All alumnae shared how they felt within their advanced courses as women from lower socioeconomic status. Their concerns centered on the behaviors of teachers and students who made them feel unwelcome and uncertain. As Alumna 1 explained, "It can be really hard to feel like you're able to speak when most of the class is better off than you." Alumna 2 expressed a similar sentiment, explaining that her experiences in most classes had her

feeling like she was always fighting to make a space within the classroom. Alumna 3 explained that she "felt self-conscious" and that she "had to be more cautious of the decisions that I made." Finally, Alumna 4 shared that she often would stay quiet in class because of several bad experiences and said, "I found it hard to share my opinions." The alumnae explained that they relied on the teacher to make the space available for them to participate. The students shared that the classes they had taken with the instructor were roughly equal in terms of male/female demographics but that without teacher interference, the male students tended to dominate conversations even when they were not in the majority in class.

Often, the alumnae felt that when they were "not a part of the perceived majority in the classroom," they would avoid speaking up for fear of being seen as an outsider. However, when the alumnae felt that their voice held space within a class, it changed their perceptions. The alumnae explained that listening to their classmates helped them understand that different points of view were meant to be respected and appreciated. Participation in Socratic seminars was inherently necessary to the alumnae.

When asked about partaking in Socratic seminars, the alumnae explained how the classroom practice made it easier to participate. Alumna 1, Alumna 3, and Alumna 4 initially hated Socratic seminars. They explained that they felt the strategy was disorganized and, as Alumna 3 stated, "it was the same kids being loud and wrong over and over again." The first author noted that while she was defensive at first towards this remark, upon reflection, she realized they were right. Early Socratic seminars are often a trial run where students define their roles in the circle. They explained that the initial Socratic seminars were difficult to participate in. As the school year progressed, they began to look forward to Socratic seminars.

When asked what changed their opinion, the alumnae explained that different aspects of the Socratic seminar made participating easier. Alumna 1 explained that listening to other perspectives within the seminar made it easier to engage with people from different socioeconomic backgrounds since Socratic seminars "pushed [her] to engage with others." Alumna 3 explained that as the class participated in multiple Socratic seminars, she felt that she had the opportunity to speak. Alumna 3 said, "Because this is my opinion on the topic, and they had to listen. It's like power." Alumna 4 agreed with Alumna 3's point, saying, "You realize that you do have an opinion and you do have a voice, and this is a part of your education." The Socratic seminar gave a designated and open platform for student opinions. The teacher's role within Socratic seminars seemed to vary depending on the needs of individual students. Facilitating Socratic seminars requires a lot of energy and planning on the part of the teacher. The alumnae explained that it was important for the teacher to not focus too heavily on one student's participation but rather the entire group. The alumnae expressed that their primary goal during Socratic seminars was to establish that they belonged in the class.

The 50 students, including the four PAR participants, were asked if they had any concerns about the first Socratic seminar. After sharing their concerns about the more outspoken students, they shared their mixed feelings about the classroom activity. Participant 1 and Participant 2 anticipated a productive conversation, but, at the same time, Participant 3 worried that the class would not "get to go into those deeper questions that help us understand the world." Participant 4 shared a similar concern and thought the discussion would end. She noted, "I'm always nervous to counter people because I worry they think I'm insulting them. I just want to argue; it's not always personal." The first author attempted to reassure her by explaining that the teacher usually diffuses those types of misunderstandings. Instead, Participant 4 paused and looked off to the side. She then continued, "I know you're saying that, but I don't know. I've had a few very bad experiences where the teacher jumping in made it worse." The first author asked how that could be remedied, and Participant 4 expressed that she was not entirely sure but looked forward to the seminar.

Teacher Impact and Influence

During the PAR participant interviews, we noticed that the participants were more open to critiquing the teacher's involvement within the Socratic seminar, so the first author requested that they explain how the teacher impacts a student's involvement. Participant 1 quickly explained that "kids do have their own opinions most of the time. But if the teacher is not objective, kids will just adopt [the teacher's] opinions as their own and not try to make their own opinion." The first author asked if she was objective during the discussion, and Participant 1 said it was hard to determine. She explained that when assignments are being graded, students will look to the teacher to ensure their responses correlate with the topic or the question. "I know you tell us to talk to our peers and not you, but you're the one grading us; your opinion matters," Participant 1 said. Participant 4 said she was more inclined to focus on a teacher's approval in an academic setting than her peers' approval. Participant 3 agreed and explained that teacher influence on students' opinions could be outside of their control. She elaborated, "If the teacher corrects an opinion, the student can feel shut down, and their opinion is shut down." She said that sometimes teachers' reactions to student opinions damage the teacher-student relationship.

When asked, Participant 3 clarified what she meant by "correcting an opinion." She explained that some teachers have been highly critical of her in the past. Participant 2 shared a similar concern and said that "some teachers are just not open to different opinions, and they can be very critical with students. Socratic seminars make it

easier for us to not worry about a teacher hating us." The participants mentioned several instances where they felt a teacher had targeted one student for their opinion for the academic year.

The PAR participants were asked about their thoughts on the teacher's role in Socratic seminars. Despite the first author's best attempts to limit intervention during the second Socratic seminar, Participant 3 felt that the teacher's influence was invariably a concern. Participant 1 agreed by saying, "When the teacher steps in, most people are very likely to cater to what you want to hear for either a grade or to avoid stepping on toes." Participant 2 and Participant 3 explained the students would pander to the teacher's perspectives because the teacher held authority in the classroom that many students were scared to challenge. The PAR participants explained that previous experiences with teachers impacted how they spoke in class. They told the first author that they found speaking in her class to be easier than in some others. The first author asked the participants whether that ease was due to the nature of the course or something she had done personally before the first Socratic seminar. Participant 4 jumped in and clarified that her participation depended greatly on the teacher's gender. She explained, "[In some teacher's] class, I feel intimidated because they have different views than me. I feel like they encourage students to judge everything I say."

Participant 3 shared her experiences and explained that she had to make the space for herself. She sympathized with Participant 2 and Participant 4 but mentioned that since she was one of the few Asian American students in her classes, she had to make herself seem hardened. She explained, "It's hard to vocalize your opinion in a class where you feel like it won't be validated, or that the teacher will completely obliterate a child for disagreeing with them." Participant 1 laughed dryly and said, "You can sometimes stand up to them because you earned your spot in that room. But there are always going to be just enough instances where you don't feel like you belong, and you shut down." The participants were mostly enrolled in all Dual Credit and Advanced Placement courses, which according to Participant 4, made it more difficult to establish oneself since "most of us are competing with each other for rankings or grades. There's always a bell curve in high school." Participant 4 continued to explain that she had a hard time dealing with the idea of having to fight to learn in a classroom. The participants agreed and disclosed that they did not feel the need to "fight" when the teacher had a fair set of rules for classroom behaviors. They said they were willing to be more engaged and speak up more if it was clear that the teachers did not allow any one student or group of students "to lead the room," as Participant 3 explained.

The participants and the first author discussed the positive qualities of teachers, regardless of gender, and how those qualities can be used to help students feel welcome and included in the class. They agreed that this culture of welcome starts primarily in the first week of courses when classroom rules are established. The participants also mentioned that they appreciated when teachers were clear, consistent, and fair with all students, no matter their backgrounds. The PAR participants said that they felt comfortable when they knew that everyone in a classroom was receiving the same attention from the teacher.

Teacher and Student Progression

As participants became comfortable, they favored student-led discussions with teacher mediation only for behavioral issues. As the seminars progressed, the role of the teacher became even less obvious. After one seminar, Alumna 2 shared, "you kind of forgot the teacher was there a bit because we were all in our little, shared-idea bubble." The participants saw the teacher's role as providing a safe environment for free expression and for addressing implicit biases without dominating the seminar with their presence.

When talking more about how they felt about the teacher's role within the Socratic seminar, Alumna 1 said she appreciated how the teacher kept people in line after establishing the groundwork but stayed hands-off overall. Alumna 4 said that when teachers "go out of their way to make everyone feel involved, and when a teacher can do that in a group setting, it can benefit everyone." The alumnae explained that their experiences with Socratic seminars improved over the school year because they understood the purpose of the approach. Additionally, they knew that their classmates would be respectful of different points of view; it was a teacher-established expectation of all students.

Over the course of the study, the first author progressed and grew more comfortable and more skilled in facilitating Socratic seminars. Student feedback revealed that preparation was crucial for successful Socratic seminars. Despite initial challenges, student-led seminars showed potential. Participant 3 explained, "Everyone is capable of understanding someone from a different background, but you need someone to make it okay first." As the study went on, the first author was able to more clearly articulate how a teacher can "make it okay" through classroom culture and Socratic seminar practices like stepping in when students are exhibiting inappropriate behaviors. The PAR study helped develop clear expectations for future seminars, with participants valuing experimentation and learning from mistakes. Encouraging student voice and feedback allowed the first author to adapt teaching practices, making assignments more meaningful and enjoyable. Materials needed to be accessible for different reading levels and cultural experiences to meet student needs.

Discussion

On the whole, these findings support existing literature on Socratic seminars. As PAR participants became more comfortable within the classroom, they felt the teacher's role was unnecessary for a successful Socratic seminar. Instead, they preferred a student-led discussion with the use of a teacher to mediate behavioral issues or clarify unclear points: "Like an expert witness," Participant 4 explained. Establishing a consistent approach to all students allowed female students from different socioeconomic backgrounds to feel comfortable sharing personal experiences and unique perspectives on the seminar topic (Reyes et al., 2012). Teacher behaviors can determine the rate of engagement and students' ability to feel included in their learning. The role of the teacher is to provide a safe classroom environment that can encourage free expression without negative consequences (Parker, 2023; Reed Marshall, 2023; Shi & Tan, 2020). Teachers must also address their implicit biases to encourage objectivity among students (Baines et al., 2023; Protivínský & Münich, 2018; Reed Marshall, 2023). To address this, teachers can educate themselves on the specific needs of each student group and avoid using one student as an example for an entire community (Houser & Frymier, 2009; Reed Marshall, 2023). As Alumna 3 explained, "As one of the few Black students in my advanced classes, I don't want to represent a whole group. I'm not the voice of all Black women. I'm just another student in the class." Teachers' consistency with their classroom rules and expectations can help avoid favoritism or the appearance of favoritism towards students who share their sociocultural backgrounds and political views (Mitra, 2005). The PAR participants explained that they felt female teachers were often more likely to encourage different opinions and not be as biased towards students.

The combination of student feedback and PAR participant interviews helped the authors realize that the critical elements of Socratic seminars depended on the preparation of both the materials and the students. If students did not adequately prepare, even if the teacher had set up the seminar well, the conversation could get off track. The PAR participants felt the chance to alter the design of the class's Socratic seminars made the practice more engaging (Baines et al., 2023; Kulkarni et al., 2020; Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015; Schneider, 2010). While the student-led Socratic seminar was not received as well as they had hoped, the PAR participants saw the potential for using student-led seminars in the future. We realized instructors could alter other classroom practices through student voice to ensure it was beneficial to most students.

The PAR design of the study helped the first author to develop clear expectations for future implementations of Socratic seminars. We found that with each stage, the PAR participants said they enjoyed the level of experimentation in the design of the seminar. When things went unexpectedly during a Socratic seminar, the PAR participants saw these mistakes as learning opportunities. Students shared that they felt each stage was another chance to see how they could address a new topic and challenge as a class. Encouraging student voice and feedback helped the first author adapt her teaching practices and made challenging assignments more enjoyable.

In addition, we developed a better understanding of how to ask students for their input. The first author worked with students to make sure they were learning the required information in a way that held more meaning for them. We discovered that materials for class needed to be more accessible for different reading levels and cultural experiences (Baines et al., 2023; Barnard-Brak et al., 2011; Parker, 2023; Reed Marshall, 2023). Students would start questioning lessons and approaches by offering alternatives and developing new strategies for assignments. Collaborative learning extended beyond Socratic seminars and impacted the overall classroom dynamic. Future research can examine the application of PAR to teaching practices throughout the school year to determine whether the method can apply to classroom activities beyond Socratic seminars.

Implications

The study carries with it several implications for preservice and in-service teachers. Recognizing and addressing gender bias in the classroom is of paramount importance. The study highlights inequity in class discussions due to a combination of both conscious and unconscious teacher biases perceived by students. To rectify this, educators can proactively acknowledge this bias and take deliberate actions to ensure that every student, regardless of their gender, enjoys equal opportunities to contribute to classroom conversations. This may entail consciously encouraging and calling on female students to share their thoughts and ideas. Moreover, this can facilitate the creation of a truly inclusive environment where every student's voice is not just tolerated but genuinely valued.

Additionally, teachers can actively incorporate student feedback and perspectives into their teaching practices. This study used PAR to engage students in the process of refining pedagogical approaches, but teachers can follow suit by actively seeking feedback from their students and involving them in decisions about classroom activities and instructional strategies outside of an explicit research study. Encouraging students to provide critical feedback can enrich the educational experience of students and teachers. Teachers can use feedback to develop lessons that meet student needs and address potential shortcomings. Involving students in decision making and problem solving can lead to more meaningful and enriching learning experiences and creates a more engaging classroom dynamic.

Moreover, rather than avoiding classroom talk in light of the existing research, teachers can consider embracing student-led discussions as an effective pedagogical approach. The study reveals that students highly appreciate the opportunity to take the reins in classroom discussions. Educators can progressively transition to more student-led activities such as Socratic seminars, which empower students to take ownership of their learning journey. This not only enhances student engagement but also engages critical thinking skills and a deeper understanding of the subject matter. In fostering an inclusive classroom environment, creating a safe and welcoming space—where all students, regardless of their backgrounds, feel comfortable sharing their opinions—can be challenging. The study underscores that teacher behaviors significantly influence student engagement. To this end, educators working to strive for fairness, consistency, and impartiality in their interactions with students, can implement some of the strategies like checking their biases in calling on students, soliciting student feedback, and managing classroom behaviors toward this goal. The findings suggest that tailoring the curriculum to reflect the diversity of students' backgrounds and experiences can significantly enhance their engagement in classroom discussions. By selecting materials that resonate with students on a cultural level rather than relying on legacy practices and canonical texts, teachers can create a more meaningful and relatable learning experience. Additionally, teachers can ensure that their teaching materials are accessible to students with varying reading levels and cultural backgrounds. Differentiating instruction to meet the diverse needs of students promotes inclusivity and equity in the classroom (Tomlinson, 2022).

Engaging in continuous professional development and self-reflection is a hallmark of effective teaching. The study underscores the significance of a teacher's learning from mistakes, reflecting on teaching practices, showing openness to constructive feedback, and seeking opportunities for improvement. The findings emphasize the importance of being adaptable and open to change based on student feedback and evolving needs. Making necessary adjustments, as we did throughout the study, can substantially improve student engagement. Teachers can cultivate flexibility and a willingness to modify their approaches to better cater to the unique needs of their students. Furthermore, to avoid appearing to show favoritism based on sociocultural backgrounds or political views, teachers can check their own biases and intentionally monitor what they say and what they permit their students to say to one another.

Conclusion

This study underscores the transformative potential of integrating female student voices through Socratic seminars, leading to more inclusive and engaging classroom environments. By establishing the classroom as a safe space, recognizing teacher impact and influence, and encouraging teacher and student progression, the study highlights the importance of actively involving students in the educational process. The alumnae's experiences revealed the critical role of teacher behavior in fostering a sense of belonging and participation, particularly for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The findings emphasize the necessity for teachers to address their implicit biases, maintain objectivity, and create consistent, fair classroom rules to ensure all students feel valued. Furthermore, the study advocates for the adoption of student-led discussions, such as Socratic seminars, which empower students to take ownership of their learning and engage deeply with diverse perspectives. Incorporating student feedback and adapting teaching practices to meet students' cultural and academic needs can significantly enhance the learning experience. We recommend continuous professional development and self-reflection among educators, promoting flexibility and a willingness to adapt to evolving student needs. By fostering an inclusive, respectful, and student-centered classroom environment, educators can support the holistic development of all students, ensuring their voices are heard and valued. The implications of this research extend beyond Socratic seminars, offering valuable insights for broader pedagogical practices that prioritize equity, inclusion, and student agency.

"By fostering an inclusive, respectful, and student-centered classroom environment, educators can support the holistic development of all students, ensuring their voices are heard and valued."

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