

A Community of Learners:  
Implementing Student-Centered Discussion Strategies into Urban School Settings

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### Abstract:

The purpose of my research is to investigate the use of discussion strategies that can effectively engage students in urban settings. Education for the urban child today is very much the same as it was for the urban child 20 years ago. The traditional pedagogy consists of a teacher-centered classroom. Students for years have been conditioned to believe that learning takes place only when material is delivered by the teacher. No teacher, no learning.

Paulo Freire (1970) in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* makes the comparison of the teacher-student relationship to narration. He writes that:

...this relationship involves a narrating subject (the teacher) and patient listening objects (the students). The contents whether values or empirical dimensions of reality, tend in the process of being narrated to become lifeless and petrified. Education is suffering from narration sickness...his task is to “fill” the students with the contents of his narration (¶ 1).

An education such as the one described by Freire, simply *tells* students information. The teacher is the narrator and the students act as “containers” or “receptacles” to be “filled” by the teacher. The idea here is that the better “filled” the students’ heads are, the better the teacher. Freire refers to this notion of narration, as the “banking” concept of education. Paulo Freire published his seminal writings nearly forty years ago and in the past four decades, research about student-centered learning has really blossomed and changed classrooms around the nation and the world. Yet, for a majority of urban children in the U.S., a student-centered learning environment remains nonexistent.

## Introduction:

In urban settings (schools serving low-income and minority communities), schools have failed to provide students with stimulating learning environments that cater to the urban child's needs. It is especially critical in these areas to engage students in relevant material where connections can be developed. Where there is engagement, motivation develops, and as a result of this, the learning experience begins. So it would seem logical that a majority of urban schools would be developing, selecting, and implementing successful learning strategies in an effort to capture and convert the urban child into a young scholar. Sadly, this is a false assumption; and what the urban child needs, the urban child rarely receives. Martin Haberman (1991) writes in his article "Pedagogy of Poverty" that many educators find it difficult to incorporate new forms of pedagogy for children of poverty. The reason this is difficult for many is that educators have fallen victim to the core functions of urban teaching. Haberman (¶ 3) describes the actions of an urban teacher of the 90's as:

- Giving information
- Asking questions
- Giving directions
- Making assignments
- Reviewing assignments
- Monitoring seatwork
- Giving tests
- Reviewing tests
- Assigning homework
- Reviewing homework
- Settling disputes
- Punishing non-compliance
- Marking papers
- Giving grades

The core functions of urban teachers of the 90's as described by Haberman vary very little if any from those of a present day urban educator. These actions are what Haberman refers to as the "pedagogy of poverty." However, there is nothing wrong with these activities (i.e., any one of these could be found to produce beneficial effects from time to time); it is only that these actions

are combined and “performed to the systematic exclusion of other acts and they have become the pedagogical coin of the realm in urban schools” (Haberman, 1991, ¶ 4).

From my experience in working with adolescents, I have learned that students have a lot to say; they are willing to share their thoughts and opinions. However, we have to learn to listen. My experience has been that students are very opinionated when comfortable with the subject matter or environment; and everyday obstacles require that they act as problem solvers. In a nutshell, *all* students possess skills that can be utilized in an academic setting; it is just a matter of knowledge about your students, building on their prior knowledge and practice. My experience has shown me that these are the seedlings to planting student-centered strategies in the classroom.

The idea of having a student-centered classroom is grounded in the constructivist approach. Student-centered learning is really a compilation of research conducted by the great minds of education: Dewey, Vygotsky, and Piaget. The work of Dewey rejected the idea that learning should take the form of rote memorization and repetition. Instead he proposed that learning take a practical, real-world approach in which students demonstrate their knowledge through collaboration. This constructivist approach would provide students with opportunities to think for themselves and share their ideas. In the research conducted by Vygotsky he proposed that students needed to demonstrate their knowledge through explanation of their thought process to others. Vygotsky’s research emphasizes that students take an active role in their learning.

According to Vygotsky, teachers served as facilitators who encourage and coach their students to formulate their own levels of understanding. Each student has a base level of knowledge and it can increase by practicing what they know well and adding to it. This is

accomplished through collaboration between the teacher, the student, and other students (Vygotsky, 1978). The social interaction will lead into an increase of knowledge better known in Vygotskian terms as an increase in *Zonal Proximal Development* or their *ZPD*. As children explore their worlds, they form and reform ideas in their minds. The more actively involved children are, the more knowledge is gained; this ideal is at the core of Piaget's research regarding constructivism. Piaget believed that individuals need to construct their own meanings through various interacting processes (i.e., assimilation, adaptation, accommodation, equilibrium, and schema building). It is through these processes that learners are able to build upon their schemas and internalize the new knowledge gained from their experiences (McGraw-Hill, 2008).

The shift from a teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered environment means that the focus and power that belongs to the teacher will be shared with the students. This shift in power allows the teacher to collaborate and to help facilitate meaning construction in students. One result of having a student-centered classroom is that learning then becomes a reciprocal experience for teachers and students. Students continue to learn from their teachers; however teachers begin to learn more about their students' thoughts and ideas. The idea of students assuming the role of teacher through collaborative work has been coined as *reciprocal teaching*. Based on both cognitive and developmental theories, in a pilot study conducted by Palincsar and Brown (1982) they developed a procedure called reciprocal teaching that improved reading comprehension.

By definition reciprocal teaching refers to an instructional activity where "...teacher and student take turns leading a dialogue concerning sections of a text...teachers and students take turns generating summaries, predictions, and in questioning and clarifying misleading or complex sections" (Palincsar and Brown, 1986, p. 124). A benefit to practicing reciprocal

teaching is that it influences natural dialogue between teacher and student, where the teacher and student provide each other with feedback. Reciprocal teaching illustrates a number of powerful ideas in teaching and learning and is only one student-centered discussion strategy that should be implemented into urban settings.

For a majority of urban students innovative learning environments are absent. Traditional teaching rules the urban/ inner-city schools. The traditional classroom is all about playing the game- “get the right answer.” Teachers in these traditional classrooms require that students memorize facts and practice skills where there is only one right answer. This training of students to produce the correct answer is especially detrimental to the education of the urban child. Those students who feel incapable of producing the right answers find themselves at a total loss. They feel inadequate and respond by showing a lack of motivation and disengagement. In Alfie Kohn’s book *The Schools Our Children Deserve*, he writes that “we’ve been conditioned to accept as an obvious truth the idea that learning is a process of getting things right, and thus that the “good” students get more right than the “bad ones”” (Kohn, 1999, p. 56). If this is the case then traditional teaching in urban schools has created the “bad” students.

Moreover, if this is the school the urban child has then what kind of schools does the urban child need. Ed Hirsch Jr. explains in *The Schools We Need*, the irony of the American education system. Our nation has some of the greatest universities in the world but horrible public schools for our children. He refers to this discrepancy as the “learning gap” (Hirsch, 1996, p.25). One plausible explanation for the condition of our public schools is the fact that there is a lack of academic commonality in American classrooms. What some students receive as background knowledge from home, other children (i.e., the urban child) depend mainly on what they receive sporadically in school. However, what if public schools, urban schools in particular

began to mimic the structure of a university classroom? At the university level, discussions provide students with opportunities to go into depth and clarify content matter. Yet the very things we revere at the university level are disparaged or ignored at the secondary level.

*Context:*

The high school that I am currently working with serves a student body of approximately 2,500 students and it is a Title 1 school. The student demographics are as follows: 80% are Latina/o, 12% are Filipino, 3.5% are Black, and 4.5% are “other (non-Hispanic).” Of the 2,500 students, 34% of the school’s student population are English language learners (ELL) and 9% of the population are students with disabilities. In the community of which the school serves, 20% of the resident incomes are *below* the poverty level; in an effort to remedy that situation for students- 60% of the student population qualifies for the free/reduced lunch program (based on applications submitted indicating needed assistance).

The high school has made tremendous progress in regards to its Academic Performance Index (API) score (a measurement of accountability for public schools in California in regards to academic performance (i.e., test scores) and progress). In 2000, the school had an API score of 498 and has presently (2008) advanced to an API score of 706. It was also one of only 2 schools statewide to exit program improvement (P.I. occurs when a Title I schools fails to meet its Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) for 2 consecutive years). It is important to mention the school’s API score because they have achieved success by closely following the state content standards when designing units and teaching content (it is a standards-based school). At my site the school describes being a standards-based school as aligning the curriculum and assessments with



California content standards. In doing so, the school is preparing their students for success on the standardized tests administered statewide. Since the focus of teachers is on covering the standards and testing, little time is dedicated to developing and implementing new teaching/learning strategies in the classroom.

*Personal Connections:*

My focus on student-centered discussion strategies in urban settings was prompted by my own secondary educational experience. I am a product of the same district in which I now work; I actually conducting my action research at the same high school in which I graduated from six years ago. Looking back to my high school experiences in the classroom, “learning” was achieved through repetition and the material closely resembled our textbooks. If the teacher was absent then there was a substitute and it was a free day or movie day. Classrooms were teacher-centered and not learner friendly according to educational pedagogy today.

In a majority of my classes (aside from P.E.) the teacher stood at the front of the class and lectured while we sat in individual desks that were organized in straight rows. In most cases we worked individually and completed worksheets and worked on projects that related to the content. And in English, it was vocabulary, grammar exercises, and papers on the literature read in class. It was only after entering college, in my first English course that I was introduced to a class discussion on literature. It was then that I realized that I had been cheated in high school. The “discussions” that took place in my classroom were like video clips taken from a Charlie Brown cartoon. Either a dialogue occurred between the teacher and a couple of “good” students or the teacher was met with the deafening sound of silence and answered her own questions.

Now, years later after observations, it is apparent that nothing has changed. In ninth grade you read Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* and Mrs. ----- makes everyone memorize lines from the play. In tenth grade you read Elie Wiesel's *Night*, write a paper and watch many movies. In eleventh grade you read this and do that and senior year, although a different year, the topics and projects seem the same: meaningless and predictable. The point is that nothing has really changed; and nothing has changed because for the majority of the teachers who have been there, the mentality is: "if it ain't broke, don't fix it." However what many have failed to see is that it is broken; classrooms have fallen into a rut and need fixing. Things need to change and educators need to be implementing new teaching and learning strategies, so that our urban students feel prepared and not cheated. The same educational experience that inspired my action research inspired me to pursue a career as an educator.

As a novice teacher I am aware of the fact that I have a lot to learn from my colleagues. Those that I called my teachers are now my mentors and they have shared the wisdom that accompanies years of experience with me. Unfortunately, the downside to having years of experience can be an attitude of indifference to changing the classroom routine by trying new teaching strategies. In juxtaposition to teachers with years of experience (15+), is the teacher who has been at that school for awhile (5-10 years). The teacher who has been at that school site for awhile is comfortable with the school, its students, and their pedagogy.

At the beginning of the year I had a conversation with a colleague who fell into the comfortable category on the topic of- what I was planning to do in my class with my students. I explained that I was making changes and veering from a teacher-led class to a classroom driven by the students. I went into detail about the strategies I was planning to implement that would result in a student-centered learning environment. Her response was one of bewilderment, she

asked “why?” And my response was “why not?” My colleague explained that it would be too difficult to try something like that with the type of kids we have; since it is hard enough trying to have them learn the curriculum. She then wished me good luck and I learned at that moment that the fear of failure permeates in the mind of many teachers: in the mind of the novice teacher, the comfortable teacher, and the experienced teacher.

I took the good luck wished upon me by my colleagues and I began the transition process from traditional, teacher-centered classroom to creating a student-centered learning environment. I found solace in the fact that even if my student-centered discussion strategies failed, that did not make me nor my students failures. A professor of mine shared that early on in her teaching career, her mentor explained that it was best to try new things and fail, than never try anything at all. I took this to heart and decided that my philosophy on teaching would be about risk, faith, patience and practice. And in my class, near my desk I posted the following quotation: *“Risks must be taken because...the person who risks nothing...cannot learn, change, or grow.”* Teachers can learn just as much from their students as their students can learn from them. We just need to be willing to take risks, have faith in ourselves as teachers as well as in our students, be patient and be willing to practice new teaching/learning strategies. It is only then that the reciprocal experience for both the students and teacher can begin.

In addition to myself, I had 79 of my sophomores from my English class participate in a new classroom experience. I conducted my action research with one class in a morning session and one class in the afternoon. I began teaching at my site in January which was the second semester of the students’ sophomore year. When I arrived the students were already accustomed to a routine that proved to be a challenge for me in the beginning. The students did not receive homework and were able to submit assignments of their choosing because grades were not

weighted (i.e., essay 20 points or quiz 20 points versus essay 20 points but weighted 40% of grade or quiz 20 points but only weighted 20% of grade). Since the class was also centered on the teacher at the front of the room, many of the students took advantage of this and would fail to focus in class. I saw the beginning of the new semester as an opportunity to try new things, including new expectations. My action research would require that students grow accountable for completing homework and assignments and remaining focused on learning tasks.

*Research Question:*

My action research question analyzes whether particular student-centered discussion strategies will improve the engagement of the urban student. How effective are these particular strategies in engaging and motivating the urban child into accepting the role of an active learner? My inquiry was prompted by my personal experiences in a traditional, teacher-centered atmosphere, first as a student and years later as teacher. I have learned that many students have grown accustomed to being given the answers. They have learned that regurgitating what the teacher says or responding with an “I don’t know” is acceptable. My observations of this and my experiences at my site led me to design learning segments where students are able to showcase what they know as well as work on areas in which they need more development. I decided to implement student-centered discussion strategies such as: Socratic seminars, fishbowl discussions, and reciprocal teaching circles.

According to Peter Smagorinsky (2008) discussions need to make the transition from teacher-led to student-led. During the transition process from traditional “discussions” to student-

centered discussions, the students seemed uneasy because it took them out of their comfort zones. For many of them “discussions” went as follows:

Teacher- *Can anyone tell me who the main characters are in the story?*

A student responds.

Teacher- *Good! And what do we know about these characters?*

A couple of students respond.

Teacher- *Well that is a good start...however we know that these characters...* Teacher answers her own question.

From an observer’s point of view, one may wonder if learning is taking place. A couple of questions to consider are: How many of those students who are not participating are actually engaged in the discussion taking place? And whether students are being challenged to think or rely on the fact that they can repeat what has been said by the teacher? These are valid questions to think about and for many of my students they had been conditioned to think that this was a discussion. I then felt compelled to introduce my students to a constructivist approach. In order for my students to learn about learning, I had to push them to take initiative for their own learning.

There are certain characteristics that define constructivist learning. Smagorinsky (2008, p. 37) writes that “the learners should be actively involved, activities should be interactive and student centered, the environment should be democratic, and the teacher should facilitate a process of learning in which students are encouraged to be responsible and autonomous.” The learning that takes place using student-centered techniques is interactive and dynamic. It provides students with opportunities to use their communication/ social skills to effectively collaborate and exchange ideas about the text. The findings from this study have implications for teacher education and support in urban settings. A focus of my action research is about how best

to implement student-centered discussion strategies in an urban context. In using various phases of implementation three sub-questions stemmed from my major research question:

- Does use of these strategies encourage greater participation?
- Does use of these strategies support more thoughtful discussion?
- What is the impact of these strategies on student self-image and attitude toward learning?

### Literature Review:

Before implementing student-centered discussion strategies into the classroom, one must understand what is lacking in urban schools today. Major areas of concern that plague urban campuses across the nation include: lack of qualified teachers (i.e., emergency credentialed teachers), low funding, testing and API scores, as well as a lack of parent and community involvement. Unfortunately the issues of concern for the school create a domino effect and have a negative impact on the education of the urban child. The urban child refers essentially to the children of the urban poor—largely meaning Latino, Black, and other minority children. Due to the lack of resources (i.e., books, computers, qualified teachers, etc.) and support, a disparity exists between the education of the urban child and the suburban child.

In Frank Riessman book entitled *The Inner-City Child* he writes that it is easy enough to assume that a majority of urban children are “...essentially nonverbal or verbally deficient” because they lag behind on state verbal performance and reading tests (Riessman, 1976, p. 9). However the truth is that these urban children need support; they need teachers that won’t quit on them. The urban child needs teachers that are prepared to handle the challenges of children in urban schools. And the truth is that teacher education for novice teachers who find themselves in urban settings falls short. Teachers who have failed or quit were not prepared to deal with what

dysfunctional teacher education has coined the “exceptional” or “special” urban youth (Haberman, 1995, p. 51).

As a teacher I would like to understand how to bring that level of college discussion into an urban classroom setting. In suggestions provided by *Ways We Want Our Class To Be*, the text describes steps that should be taken to ease the transition from teacher-centered to student-centered. One point of emphasis was the physical set-up of a classroom. Although a simple enough idea, the classroom setting is often overlooked. Since discussions are key in ones approach to constructivism, the students must feel connected to each other. The point is that no one wants to have a conversation with someone across the room from them. One suggestion is to have the students organize themselves into a circle. In this way they can see each other, make eye-to-eye contact, and converse without having to shout. In to the students’ placement, teachers should also consider their own placement. One piece of advice for teachers is to place themselves within the circle as a participant rather than a focal point in the front of the classroom (Child Development Project, 1996, p. 26). Most importantly, students need to understand that they can speak directly with each other in class discussions; it does not need to be channeled through the teacher.

The goal of a student-centered classroom is that they act as a community of learners. The result is that both students and teachers work together to construct meaning out of the subject matter. In order to incorporate student-centered discussions into the classroom, a comfortable learning environment needs to be created. In John Bushman’s *Teaching English Creatively*, he writes that “...establishing an atmosphere that is conducive to effective group interaction is often a problem in secondary school classes... and as a result, students will feel hesitant to share their ideas/feelings until specific classroom conditions are met” (Bushman, 2001, p.9). Student-

centered discussion strategies require that teachers deliver the curriculum creatively and for some teachers this could be an issue. Thomas M. McCann writes that the first step to planning for a sustained discussion is that the curriculum be coherent for the students. Teachers need to know their students and how they can deliver the curriculum at a level where all students can gain an understanding regardless of reading levels. For a majority of teachers in a traditional setting, the focus is on activities and/or a sequence of lessons resembling a textbook. McCann writes “teachers need to plan strategically...think beyond the immediate lesson and build toward deep understanding...look to long term goals and big projects and plan backwards (1996, p. 118). The backward designing of the lessons/units will require that students refer and/ or build upon their prior knowledge, which will result in deep, thoughtful, and well sustained discussions amongst students.

As a novice teacher I wanted to experiment with my English class. I wanted honest collaborative work in my classroom (not just seat work in pairs or groups). The effectiveness of student-centered discussion based learning lies in the benefits it brings to the classroom. Students are able to build on strengths and interests as well as act as experts. The focus of my research is on the effectiveness (i.e., increase in engagement and self-efficacy) of Socratic seminars, fishbowl discussions, and reciprocal teaching in the urban classroom. My hope in transitioning from a traditional, teacher-centered classroom to a student-centered classroom is that students will be better prepared for the work world and discussion-based university classes. Student discussions set up for success are extremely powerful learning tools. For many of us as high school students we usually sat passively while the teacher expounded on the meaning of a text. Samway and Whang describe that the “...teacher’s role as the source of knowledge was sometimes disguised through a discourse style that seemed open-ended. The teacher would ask



leading questions and the students would then try to come up with the ‘correct’ answer”  
(Samway and Whang, 1996, p.59).

### *What are Student-centered Discussion Strategies?*

It is my opinion that student-centered discussion strategies can act as solutions to issues of: variation of abilities among students, boredom, lack of critical thought, as well as lack of engagement. In an effort to nurture meaningful discussion in the classroom I utilized Socratic seminars, fishbowl discussions, and reciprocal teaching circles. Socratic seminars involve both students and teacher reading and discussing text. The discussion takes place in a larger group (usually whole class) and there are no specific roles. The reason for this is to seek a more diverse range of opinions and perspectives during discussion. In Matt Copeland’s *Socratic Circles* (aka Socratic seminars), the majority of the conversation and ownership of material is turned over to the students. As a result of this students are more motivated and involved in what is taking place in the classroom (Copeland, 2005, p. 7).

The fishbowl method requires that the students divide into two circles, an inner circle and an outer circle. The inner circle takes on the discussion role, while the outer circle observes the discussion taking place (similar to people watching fish in a clear glass bowl). After an allotted amount of time the roles are reversed. The inner circle now becomes the outer circle and observes; while those students who were observers have switched roles and have become the inner circle, and are responsible for discussion. Although the teacher is not a part of the inner or outer circles, the teacher is responsible for orchestrating the discussion. The teacher will provide a possible topic for the students to focus on (e.g. a specific chapter of a text) and clarify

questions at times; however the specifics of the discussion is left to the students in the inner circles.

Reciprocal teaching circles allow teachers and students to take turns leading a dialogue concerning sections of a text (Palincsar and Brown, 1982). The teacher assumes the role of an observer during student dialogue and vice-versa. The procedure developed as a method to improve reading comprehension for lower performing readers. Reciprocal teaching as developed by Palincsar and Brown requires that students utilize the four comprehension strategies of: summarizing, question generating, clarifying, and predicting. Students must have a strong understanding of these strategies in order to create successful dialogue. An increase in comprehension of a text is only one result of reciprocal teaching. Reciprocal teaching circles also provides students with opportunities for social interaction and collaboration by having students assume the role of “teacher” and work together to help peers construct meaning of a text.

The role of the teacher who participates in student-centered discussions is very different, and it requires practice. Both teachers and students need to learn how to share opinions, experiences, and reactions to a text without dominating discussion. Student-centered discussions only occur when there is a gradual release of responsibility. This requires that teachers take a supporting role and learn to follow the lead of the students. As teachers we need to learn to trust that students have intelligent and interesting insights to share about literature.

In Maria Nichols’ *Talking About Text: Guiding Students to Increase Comprehension Through Purposeful Talk (2008)*, Nichols writes about how “purposeful talk” is a tool for constructing meaning. “Purposeful talk” matters because it involves students “understanding the importance of considering other’s thinking, listening with intent, and ultimately discovering an

overall sense of power and enthusiasm for the learning process” (Nichols, 2008, p.11). The goal in using student-centered discussion strategies is that students take on the role of orchestrating “purposeful” or meaningful discussions. In order to accomplish this, teachers need to create norms and practice discussion skills in the classroom because meaningful discussions do not just occur over night. Meaningful discussions occur when purposeful talk is “...modeled by the teacher in her interactions with students and taught, nurtured, and expected” (2008, p.14). The goal in using student-centered discussion strategies is that students will have opportunities to engage in meaningful discussions. This can be accomplished using backward lesson designs that include thoughtful selection of texts and planning for differentiation.

The term student-centered discussion is synonymous with: Socratic seminars, Socratic circles, self-directed discussions, open-forums, fishbowl discussions, fishbowl conversations, literature groups or literature circles, etc. Regardless of which term is used, the purpose is to actively engage students in constructing meaning of a text for themselves (as a class or as a community of young scholars). Harvey Daniels explains that this type of student-centered learning follows John Dewey’s ideology’ that learning should take the form of doing. Daniels writes that student-centered discussions “...create a real learning-living community of kids taking responsibility and making choices...teachers serve as guides and coaches who watch self-regulating, growth-seeking students get empowered, rather than controlled” (Daniels, 1994, p.45). Student-centered discussions are grounded in constructivist principles. The theory holds that students are not passive vessels for receiving knowledge but active participants who are capable of constructing knowledge for themselves. Rather than simply tell students what they should know about a specific text, student-centered discussions allow students to explore and discuss a text through peer discussion rather than lecture.

## Methodology:

In order to understand how student-centered discussion strategies such as: Socratic seminars, fishbowl discussions and reciprocal teaching sessions can be implemented to effectively engage the urban child; I had to develop a process that would prepare the students as well as allow them to practice these strategies. In order to support student learning during my implementation I created materials to guide them through the various discussions. In the fishbowl, the students had a discussion notes sheet to help them document what they learned and what questions they still had [Appendix A]. The notes sheet was also an alternative form of engagement. During my implementations of the reciprocal teaching circles, the students received guidelines [Appendix B] to assist them in developing meaningful discussions. Each student was required to complete a reciprocal teaching notes (RTN) sheet as a way to support students in engaging in academic dialogue [Appendix C]. The focus of my action research is to assess whether urban students' engagement and self-efficacy will improve after a successful implementation of student-centered discussion strategies with a case study focused on the reciprocal teaching circles.

### *Description and Rationale for Action:*

In order to transition from traditional teacher-led discussions to student-led discussions, the process used to enable the shift incorporated Socratic seminars, fishbowl discussions, and reciprocal teaching. I decided to begin the student-led transition by beginning with Socratic seminars. Socratic seminars require that the teacher facilitate discussion by asking questions and introducing concepts. The Socratic seminars were similar to traditional class discussions because

of the role of the teacher. I decided to use this particular strategy because it did not require a great amount of change in terms of the roles of teacher and students.

Following the Socratic seminars were the fishbowl discussions. I decided to have fishbowl discussions follow the Socratic seminars because they are similar in structure. The Socratic seminars and fishbowl discussions require that the class create discussion circles. However in the fishbowl discussions there is a gradual release of control from teacher to students. In the fishbowl the students ask questions and decide what topics or concepts should be discussed and the teacher orchestrates the sessions of the fishbowl (i.e., inner circle to outer circle, vice-versa, round robin, and rebuttal session). I chose this strategy because there is more student control of the discussion and yet the teacher maintains a supportive presence. The Socratic seminar and fishbowl discussions were particular strategies that would help students transition into reciprocal teaching circles successfully. I felt that by the time I chose to implement reciprocal teaching, the students would have grown familiar with working together to construct meaning of a text. The students needed to be comfortable with discussion at the point of implementation for reciprocal teaching because the teacher is absent in student discussions. In reciprocal teaching the control of discussion that usually belongs to the teacher has been entrusted to the students. The various accountability strategies (i.e., Socratic seminars, fishbowls, and reciprocal teaching circles) supported the gradual shift of power from teacher to student.

I decided to implement three phases of discussion because I became aware that my students were unfamiliar with academic dialogue after my first week of teaching. As a class we read short selections and when it came to questions about interpretations, there was a lack of participation. The students seemed to be under the impression that discussion needed to be channeled through the teacher. Aside from the students who will always participate, the “good”

students that dominate the classroom, I needed a way to invite more student voices into literature discussions. If I was bored with the question and answer routine, I could only imagine how the majority of my other students felt during “discussions.” I began using Socratic seminars at the beginning of the year during a CAHSEE preparation unit. I felt that I could use Socratic seminars as an introductory vehicle for involving students in academic discussion.

In Socratic seminars the teacher’s role is essential. The teacher is functioning as a model, a listener, and a facilitator. During Socratic seminars, there is more participation from the teacher in the discussion as compared to other discussion methods such as fishbowls and reciprocal teaching circles. Socratic seminars were the best way to transition from teacher-led discussions to student-led discussions about literature. I felt that a change in the physical set-up of the classroom would help create a comfortable learning environment. Instead of having the teacher and students separated by eye level and positions in the classroom, we rearranged the desks into a circle. This way everyone could feel included and a part of the class if not part of the discussion. And as a class I felt that it was important to create norms for classroom discussions. My role was to act as a model and show students how to be accepting of their peers’ ideas and feelings. I had to explain that unlike math, when discussing literature one right answer does not exist. In order to draw them into discussions I asked students to utilize a key skill- their ability to converse with each other. The benefits of using Socratic seminars are that they provide students with an opportunity to share opinions, to learn of various perspectives, to respond to each other, and to reflect or extend on their own thoughts.

In literature provided by the Child Development Project, the authors articulate the importance of question and response strategies to help facilitate discussions. They write that the questioning and response style used should consistently reinforce that you are not looking for the

*right* answer, but for *their* answers. Some suggestions provided to encourage participation require that teachers ask students to: make personal connections, compare and contrast, and think of cause and effect. My purpose in using Socratic seminars was to encourage student-to-student discussion and wean them away from the idea that discussion must take place through the teacher (Child Development Project, 1996, p. 31). While Socratic seminars are a type of student-led activity, the presence of the teacher in discussion is evident. I am assisting the students in discussing the text by asking questions that require them to extend the discussion and make connections. The teacher's role in Socratic seminars is present but relatively passive with monitoring the proceedings and perhaps elaborating on key concepts. The use of Socratic seminars as a starter point for student-centered discussions led to a smooth transition into fishbowl discussions, which designate a different role upon teachers.

After completing the Socratic seminar phase, I felt that my students were then prepared for the transition into fishbowl discussions. The idea of fishbowl discussions is very similar to that of Socratic seminars, "...with each strategy students are discussing a work that they have read and experienced and are combining their own ideas with the ideas of their peers to create new learning and understanding" (Copeland, 2005, p. 10). The difference lies in the physical arrangement of the discussion and in the supporting role of the teacher. A fishbowl discussion divides the students into inner and outer circles, where each circle has an opportunity to take on the discussion role and observer role. When the outer circle takes on the role of an observer, they are focusing on the behavior of someone in the inner circle (who is assuming the discussion role) and must provide feedback on the inner circle's behavior. The major difference between Socratic seminars and fishbowl discussions is that the students take on more responsibility for producing the content of discussion. In the fishbowl discussions the teacher is not an active participant, nor

is the teacher absent. The teacher in the fishbowl takes the role of a coach, supporting the students and encouraging them to work at the level of synthesis.

The last of the student-centered discussion strategies I implemented in my English class was reciprocal teaching. Although when developed by Palincsar and Brown (1982) reciprocal teaching entailed both teacher and students taking turns leading a dialogue concerning sections of a text. This meant that the teacher and students would take turns in clarifying misleading or complex sections of the text, generating summaries, predictions, and questions. However, in the reciprocal teaching method used in my classroom, the role of the teacher is absent. I explained to my students that reciprocal teaching for them meant they earned my trust and their freedom. Since each student is provided with reciprocal teaching guidelines, discussion question guidelines, and reciprocal teaching notes [Appendices B, C, D], a sufficient amount of scaffolding is provided to generate good discussion.

Although the participation of the teacher in discussion is absent, reciprocal teaching continues to take place. The students are placed in small groups of 5 to 6 people and together they bring meaning to the text by sharing ideas and opinions. Given that each student is sharing their ideas or asking questions, the students are learning from each other, and reciprocal teaching is taking place. Even though the teacher refrains from the role of participator in discussions, the teacher takes on the role of an observer. The teacher visits different discussion groups and listens in on the conversation taking place between the students. As an observer, the teacher's role is not as a judge, but as a learner. It is when the teacher takes on the role of an observer that the reciprocal experience for the teacher occurs. The teacher is able to learn the ideas and opinions of the students and in my experience in this role I am exposed to interpretations that I failed to think of. Yet, the difficulty lies in the fact that the teacher cannot observe all the discussion



groups at once. This is where the teacher's rapport with the students comes into play; if there is mutual respect between the teacher and students than the students will not take advantage of the trust and freedom granted (at least for a majority of the time).

*Description of Data Collection Methods:*

In order to assess whether the action taken in implementing the student-centered discussion strategies increased engagement and students' self-efficacy, four data collection methods were implemented in conjunction with notes from my student teaching journal. Those methods are: (1.) Tally sheets of student engagement (both informal and formal), (2.) Student feedback reports and feedback assessments, (3.) Student reflections and (4.) Student grades after each phase of implementation. For purposes of assessing student engagement (which encompasses meaningful discussion, and participation), I will keep track of participation in the Socratic seminars and fishbowls by using tally marks for students' contribution to discussions. The formal tally sheet used for the reciprocal teaching circles is elaborate and has the following categories: participation, off task, interrupts another, restates/credits a peer, and type of contribution. I will be tallying how the discussion is taking place, who is participating, what type of participation is taking place, and what specific questions are being asked that are engaging the group members [Appendix F].

My students will also act as research assistants for the case study of phase III of reciprocal teaching. The students will complete individual feedback reports and take on the roles of mapmaker and surveyor during the sub-phases of b and c in phase III. At the end of each sub-phase, the students will complete an individual feedback report. This will require students to rate themselves in terms of engagement and cooperation from 1(low) to 6 (high) [Appendix H]. The

students then need to explain why they chose to rate themselves as they did. In addition to the rate scale, the feedback reports ask students to explain whether their groups' discussion was beneficial and if not, to explain why. This question provides students with an opportunity to describe whether greater participation and thoughtful discussion occurred.

In the reciprocal teaching case study, mapmaker and surveyor roles were assigned in sub-phases b and c. The student who is designated as the mapmaker is required to jot down the names of group members in the order they are sitting (a small circle) and map out (using lines) how the discussion took place [Appendix E]. The student who takes on the role of the surveyor is required to complete a rating scale on engagement and cooperation, as well as answer a couple questions about the group's participation [Appendix G]. The information will provide insight into whether the urban students found certain sub-phases of reciprocal teaching engaging.

My third data collection method focused on the effectiveness of the three phases of discussion in terms of their impact on student attitude and self-efficacy. In order to determine what affect these discussion strategies had on student self-efficacy, students reflected on the following questions at the end of each phase:

1. What kind of student do you think your peers and/or teachers perceive you as...
2. Describe yourself as a learner? Have you changed as a learner why/why not?
3. What did you find beneficial in class? What did you dislike?
4. Think about your grade in class...is it the same your last progress report? Explain why there is a difference or why your grade has not changed.
5. If you were a new teacher what would you do to prepare your students for either work or college?

The student reflections would provide insight about how students (if at all) were impacted by the implementation of student-centered discussion strategies such as Socratic seminars, fishbowl discussions, and reciprocal teaching circles. In conjunction with notes from my student teaching

journal and the data collection materials created, my grade book will serve as an indicator about whether these accountable discussion strategies impact student attitude and improve grades. The students' grades will be recorded after the implementation of each student-centered discussion method.

### *Rationale for Data Collection Methods:*

In syllogistic terms, if there is an increase in engagement then participation in meaningful discussion should occur and students should develop a positive self-image and attitude towards learning. Therefore, student achievement should improve, resulting in better scholarship grades. I decided to use tally sheets and student feedback reports to monitor participation during discussions. The student reflections and student assessment sheets (i.e., surveyor sheet and mapmaker diagram) were used to help me determine how effective the introduced discussion strategies were in engaging and motivating students. And my grade book served as my last source of data. The grades of the students would be a strong indicator about whether the implementation of discussion activities had an impact on student self-image and attitude towards learning.

### *Tally Sheets [ Appendix F]-*

**Description:** The tally sheets (both in/formal) record the participation that takes place during discussions. The teacher can keep track of the number of times each student participates in whole-class discussions and in the reciprocal teaching sessions. The formal tally sheet for the reciprocal teaching case study also has an area to record the types of contribution each student makes to create a meaningful discussion. In order to assess engagement in academic

conversations, the tally sheet has an area to record the amount of time the group spends in addressing each group members' question.

**Rationale:** The purpose for the tally sheets is to assess whether the various discussion methods are effective in improving engagement among urban students. In the implementation of phases I and II, I was focused on the number of students who participated. As we progressed to phase III of reciprocal teaching which required all students to participate in some form, I saw a need for a close assessment of this particular strategy. In the case study of phase III, I began to note the types of contributions being made. I kept a record of how many students were engaged and how each student participated in discussion: which students are asking questions, answering questions and which students are making connections or references to the text. In addition to students' contributions to discussions, I also kept track of how long the students focused on a specific topic or question.

#### *Student Feedback Reports and assessments-*

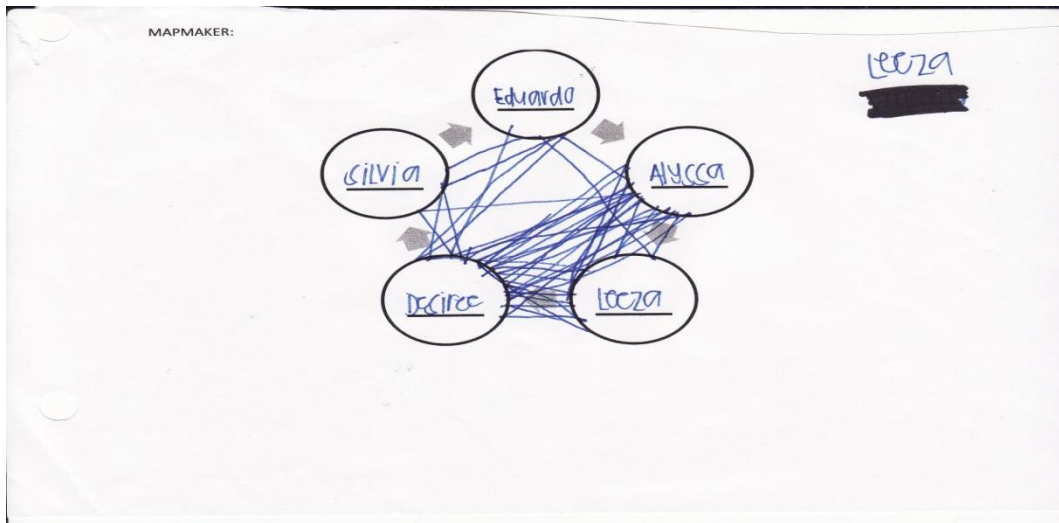
**Description:** The student feedback reports [Appendix H] require that students honestly rate themselves in terms of engagement and cooperation. The students do this on a scale from 1 to 6, with a 1 being the lowest meaning that the student did nothing and a 6, meaning that the student was highly engaged and on task. The cooperation scale refers to how the individual student participated in discussion. If the student failed to participate they could rate themselves as a 1 and if the student participated as a leader in the discussion, they could rate themselves a 6. The feedback reports also ask students to explain their ratings and describe whether their discussion was beneficial.

The assessment reports completed by the students included a surveyor sheet [Appendix G] and a mapmaker diagram [Appendix E]. The surveyor sheet similar to the individual feedback reports requires that the student surveyor rate the entire group in terms of engagement and cooperation. After provided ratings, the surveyor responds to questions about the group dynamics. The surveyor elaborates on the discussion, their role in discussion, as well as the role of uncooperative group members. The last student assessment is the mapmaker diagram. The students fill out the mapmaker diagram according to the way they are seated. The student who is assigned the task of mapmaker draws lines that indicate how the discussion took place in their group.

**Rationale:** The feedback reports allow students to explain whether the reciprocal teaching technique was engaging for them. Although I collected data on student engagement using the tally reports, the students are given the opportunity to evaluate *their* participation and their group's discussion. This method of data collection will provide insight as to whether student-centered discussion strategies have any effect on engagement and self-image for urban students? In the case study for reciprocal teaching circles, the students describe how discussion took place in their groups. The surveyor has the responsibility of rating the engagement and participation of each group member. They then reflect on whether the discussion as a whole was successful in terms of engagement, participation, and meaningful discussion and describe why.

During phase III one of the roles assigned to students is the role of the mapmaker. The mapmaker will provide me with a visual of how many of the students are actively engaged in discussion. The names of the members in the discussion group are written down according to how the members are arranged in the circle [see figure 1-below]. The mapmaker will keep track of the interactions that occur during the discussion between group members. The map completed

will document the flow of the conversation. It will convey who dominated the conversation as well as who did not participate in the discussion. My goal with keeping record of the reciprocal teaching groups is that over time all students will participate equally in the flow of the discussion and this will reflect the amount of engagement in discussion.



**Figure 1**

### *Student Reflections-*

Description: The student reflections were a group of five questions that I wrote on the board and asked students to answer. The questions were:

1. What kind of student do you think your peers and/or teachers perceive you as...
2. Describe yourself as a learner? Have you changed as a learner why/why not?
3. What did you find beneficial in class? What did you dislike?
4. Think about your grade in class...is it the same as your last progress report? Explain why there is a difference or why your grade has not changed.
5. If you were a new teacher what would you do to prepare your students for either work or college?

The students responded and submitted their answers on a sheet of notebook paper. I presented the students with these questions at the end of each phase of implementation.

**Rationale:** The student reflections provided students with an opportunity to think of themselves as learners. I wanted the students to share their thoughts on the learning that took place in the classroom. The data collected from these reflections provided me with evidence as to how students' attitude and self-efficacy were influenced by discussion methods such as Socratic seminars, fishbowl discussions, and reciprocal teaching circles.

*Grade book-*

**Description:** A student's scholarship grade represents a composite of scores from: essays, summative assessments, vocabulary, and class work/homework. The English grades are weighted as follows: writing 30%, class work/homework 30%, summative assessments 20%, and vocabulary 20%. Since the class will be centered on students engaging in academic discourse through various accountable talk strategies, the points earned during discussions will count towards the class work/ homework category for 30%. After the implementation of each discussion strategy the grades will be recorded to determine whether "student talk" improves student image and attitude towards learning.

**Rationale:** The general understanding of student grades is that they represent students' mastery of the standards/material. In addition to that fact, grades are also a strong indicator of student attitude towards learning (e.g., A=cares about school versus F=does not care about school). My purpose in recording students' grades is that they would reflect students' attitudes about the implementations. I forced students to participate in discussions by making participation in discussions a part of students' scholarship grade rather than citizenship grade. I explained that since students were discussing literature as scholars than the points they receive for participation

should be included into their scholarship grade. I expected that the implementation of various discussion techniques would improve student image and attitude towards learning, which would result in improved grades. The data collection methods used in my research investigates the effectiveness of student-centered discussion strategies for the urban child.

#### Implementation/Recursive Design:

The lessons in the units I designed revolved around discussion. In order to introduce students to real discussions, I gave students an analogy about the two different ways people approach a pool. The first way to approach a pool is to slowly allow your body to adjust to the temperature- you dip your toe, then your foot, then an ankle and so on and so forth. The second approach to a pool is to just jump in- a cannonball. Since my students had not previously experienced substantive discussions in this class, the idea of our class being centered on discussions raised affective filters for some. I realized that students would be hesitant at first to participate but I felt confident that sooner or later the majority of them would warm up to the idea (that was my hope at least).



*Summary Chart-*

PHASES:	TIMING / TEXT:	KEY ACTIVITIES:	DATA COLLECTION:
Phase I: Socratic seminars	2.5 weeks / Holt Literature & Language Arts text	Intro. to/ & Socratic seminars; CAHSEE practice test	Reflections, student grades, my student teaching journal & CAHSEE scores
Phase II: Fishbowl discussions	4 weeks / George Orwell's <i>Animal Farm</i>	Intro. to/ & fishbowl discussions; AF final exam	Reflections, student grades; my journal notes
Phase III: Reciprocal teaching + 3 sub phases	6 weeks / Elie Wiesel's <i>Night</i> & primary source docs	Intro. to/ & Reciprocal Teaching circles and notes	Reflections, tally sht. Mapmaker, surveyor, feedback report

Phase I: Socratic seminars (2.5 weeks)-

Implementation: Socratic seminars in my classroom served as a beginning point for student-centered discussions because they did not require *too much change* for the students. The physical setting of the room is really what changed the most. Instead of having the teacher standing at the front of the classroom and the students looking up in that direction, Socratic seminars required that we form a circle. The new seating included everyone in the classroom, all situated at eye level. I explained to the students that we would read and discuss text using the large group circle. The circle really diminished the separation between teacher and students and I hoped that it would feel less intimidating for the quiet students.

The Socratic seminars were a quick and easy implementation because they resemble the traditional I.R.E. pattern. Peter Smagorinsky describes this pattern best as when a "... teacher *initiates* a question or remark, a student *responds* briefly, and the teacher then *explains* or *elaborates* a preferred answer in much greater detail" (2007, p. 32). In the Socratic seminar I used a variation of the I.R.E. pattern because I was active in the discussion through my prepared

questions. I used the implementation of Socratic seminars to emphasize the importance of explaining and justifying answers using textual support. During this phase of implementation the students were preparing for the CAHSEE (California High School Exit Exam) and so we were working with our Holt *Literature and Language Arts* textbook. Since the CAHSEE focuses on reading short text and analysis, the focus of each class was to read and analyze.

I selected short stories and poems that students would find interesting and that I hoped would result in an open class discussion. My selections were based on my learning goals for the students. I wanted students to be able to read a text and evaluate the aesthetic qualities of style and their impact. In each class we got into our Socratic seminar formation and read the text as a class. My reason for this was that in the circle I could see all the students and so the students were forced to be on task rather than on their cell phones texting. After our reading I would initiate discussion by asking for volunteers to respond to my questions about the text. The students would then have an opportunity to pose other questions and get clarification from myself or their peers. I kept a tally sheet of the students who participated in the Socratic seminars and those students that chose not to discuss needed to take notes on the discussion to receive partial participation points (full participation points included 20 for the discussion and 10 for the notes). After two weeks of focusing on literary response and analysis using the Socratic seminars, the final activity for the students was to take a practice CAHSEE in preparation for the real one.

**Results:** The shift from the traditional I.R.E. pattern to Socratic seminars resulted in an increase of discussants. The change in the physical set up of the class resulted in students gaining exposure. Since the circle removed students' ability to hide from discussion I noticed that new discussants emerged. Although the implementation of Socratic seminars did improve the number

of participants in whole-class discussions, the whole-class did not participate. Some students participated in discussions while others chose to take notes about what was being said. The number of students who participated each day varied. In the last week of implementation the discussions had a low of 25 students and a high of 45 students who contributed to the Socratic seminars. The number of students who gained participation points (either full or partial) through taking notes had a low of 62 students and a high of 70 students. The amount of students that were actually engaged in discussion varied during the 2.5 weeks of implementation, however there was improvement. The notes taken in my student teaching journal indicate that:

	# of participants in Socratic seminar (S.S.) (class of 79)	Avg. % of participants in Socratic seminars (S.S.)	Avg. % of students who took notes for participation=TTL participation in S.S.
<i>Before</i> Socratic seminars .5 wk [student teaching observations]	15 -20 students	18%-25%	Not applicable
<i>Intro</i> to Socratic seminars 1 wk	20-30 students	25%-38%	65%-76%
<i>After</i> implementation 1 wk	25-45 students	32%-54%	78%-88%

Although there was not full participation in discussion from all the students, progress was made in terms of increasing student engagement and participation in meaningful discourse.

However, during my implementation of Socratic seminars, student grades did not improve. For a majority of students who were reluctant to participate in any form, their grades suffered. All the students began the semester with an A and after the implementation of Socratic seminars (and homework), the grades went as follows: Out of 79 students- A: 21 B: 30 C: 7 D: 9 F: 12. Even though there was decline in the number of A's after the implementation of Socratic

seminars, the results of using this method to prepare for the CAHSEE was successful. All 79 students in my English class passed their CAHSEE on the first try.

At the end of my implementation I had the students complete a reflection. The student responses received were not very detailed and very surface level reflections. For the question "...have you changed as a learner?" I received many yes or no answers. Some of the more interesting answers included- *"yes I've changed. I pay more attention to whats going on in class instead of talking to ----- "* [name omitted]. Another student replied with, *"I've have changed because before I use to text a lot in class and now I don't because I know you will take my phone away and keep me after school."* In terms of why the students' grades may have changed, I received comments that it was a result of homework and the fact that they were being forced to "talk in class." Many of the reflections indicated that the students disliked participating in class discussions; regardless of that fact Socratic seminars resulted in an increase in student engagement and participation.

**Observations and Analysis:** In reviewing the data collected, the implementation of Socratic seminars was an improvement. This method did increase student engagement but it did not engage all the students. Nor did it require that all the students participate in an academic discourse with one another. In the first week of the semester, I used one week of possible instruction time to make observations of my soon to be community of learners. My observations of the class conveyed a need to implement various accountable talk strategies and the Socratic seminars was a suitable starting point. The greatest challenge that I was faced with was the fact that the students were accustomed to the I.R.E. pattern. I was able to determine that a majority of the class was disengaged and involved in other activities (i.e., napping, having side-conversation, texting, listening to IPODs, etc.).

The challenge I experienced in trying to incorporate a student-centered discussion strategy such as Socratic seminars was the resistance from the students. Many of the students disliked the change and were reluctant to participate in the discussions. They disliked the fact that they had to do more in class besides just show up. In one reflection a student wrote: *“I disliked all the work we had to do because we had more things to learn and study.”* The students’ unenthusiastic attitude towards my implementation resulted in the discussions being part of the students’ scholarship grade.

Since there was an improvement in student engagement (students participated in some form-either purposeful talk or notes) at the end of phase I, I decided to challenge the students and introduce them to fishbowl discussions. The fishbowl discussions differ from the Socratic seminars because there is a greater potential to shift responsibility for interpretation from teacher to the students. The level of thinking and the role of the students are greater than what is required in the Socratic seminars. In summary, the Socratic seminars sufficiently prepared the students for the second implementation of a student-centered discussion strategy- the fishbowl discussion method.

### Phase II: Fishbowl discussions (4 weeks)-

**Implementation:** I introduced the fishbowl method of discussion as a challenge to my students. I explained that “this is something that students elsewhere do at other schools (insinuating suburban schools) but we don’t do these types of discussions here because the belief is that students in this area can’t. But I think you can do it, can we give it a try.” The students accepted the challenge and I introduced them to fishbowl discussions. When designing my

implementation of phase II, I thought back to my pool people analogy. I had toe dippers, cannonballers, and sun tanners (who like to take everything in without participating in the action). For those students who fear public speaking or having all eyes on them, I had to create multiple opportunities for participation in the fishbowl discussions. For my students I designed discussion resources such as the discussion note sheet to aid students in initiating conversation.

The fishbowl discussion version we used in my classroom was actually divided into rounds (i.e., four rounds). The inner circle discussed their chapter and the circles were reversed and the new inner circle discussed their chapter in an open discussion. Now the folks who find themselves on the outer circle are in the observer's role and are taking notes on the discussion taking place (fishbowl discussion notes) in the inner circle. They make note of: ideas/opinions I agree with, ideas/opinions I disagree with, questions I'd like to ask, and discussion notes (they are not judging anyone's inner circle performance). Although other authors argue that the observers' role is critical in aiding discussion because it provides constructive criticism which is a strong part of the learning process; I disagree. The truth is the role of the observer only works if it works for *your* students. For my students, who are the urban children, "feedback on inner circle behavior" is a euphemism for "judging" or "criticizing." I decided to avoid the traditional observers' role because I wanted to ease affective filters and anxiety, rather than add to them. The role of the teacher in my version of fishbowl discussions took a supporting role and acted as a note taker. Since the students were generating some really great ideas and opinions, I decided to write them down on the board, and students had the option of jotting down those notes in addition to their own.

After each inner circle's discussion comes to an end, we hold a round robin. The purpose of the round robin is to provide an opportunity for those students who struggle with finding the

right moment to participate. During the round robin, students are asked to refer to their notes for items of discussion. The last round is the rebuttal session (an open class discussion) where students from either circle can voice their opinions about what was said during the fishbowl discussions. The purpose for having four different rounds is to encourage multiple voices to participate in the conversation. The fishbowl discussions provide a sufficient amount of scaffolding (graphic organizer (notes) and 4 rounds of discussion) which supports the students in assuming the role of scholar. The students can then be referred to as scholars because they are sitting with their peers, discussing and analyzing aspects of literature they deem relevant (rather than just recalling information that the teacher thinks is important).

**Results:** The fishbowl method encouraged the students to accept more of the responsibility and control of the discussions. The students were successful in generating thoughtful content for whole-class discussions, which indicated an improvement in student engagement. Since the students took on more ownership of the discussions, my role was more as an observer than a participator in the fishbowl phase. I was able to monitor student engagement and participation. I kept record in my grade book of the number of times a student chose to participate in the discussions. I also kept note of the students who chose to pass during the round robin sessions of the discussions. At the end of the implementation of the fishbowl discussions the student grades were as follows: A: 17 B: 32 C: 15 D: 5 F: 9. However the grades do not reflect the great gain in student engagement and participation. This strategy encouraged thoughtful discussion and had an impact on students' self-image and attitude towards learning. One student wrote in their reflection: *"I learned how to discuss literature. I learned how to participate in group discussions and to convey my thoughts and opinions."*

Many of the students gained confidence in sharing their thoughts and opinions with their peers. In reflections I noticed students writing about how the fishbowl was a positive experience for them. One student wrote about how s/he changed as a learner: *“I believe that I’ve become more eager and more open-minded to learning new techniques. I enjoyed the fishbowl very much. It was very successful and a fun way to analyze a novel.”* Another student’s reflection explained why they enjoyed class, *“I really liked the fact that we actually work. We were able to think outside the box and I liked how the students led the teaching.”* At the end of phase II, the student reflections conveyed that a majority of the students’ had a stronger sense of self-efficacy and a positive attitude about learning and discussions. Although the fishbowls made a positive impact for many, I had “sun tanners” who refused to discuss the text aloud and preferred to soak up discussions with their notes. The data collected through my notes, my grade book, and the students’ reflections indicate that students responded well to the phase II implementation of fishbowl discussions. In the following table the data from the last week of the Socratic seminars implementation is compared to the results for the last week of implementation for phase II: the fishbowl discussions. The numerical data was calculated using the weeks’ lowest number and highest number of students who participated in the class discussions.

*The last implementation- Phase I: Socratic seminars *versus* Phase II: Fishbowl discussions*

	Phase I- Socratic seminars	Phase II- Fishbowls
% of participating students in discussions	32% - 54%	76% - 86%
% of participation with notes- (for full & partial credit)	78% - 88%	100%
% of non-engaged students	* 12%	** 11% - 15%



**\*Phase I-** (class #- 79 students) The % of non-engaged students includes those students that did not participate in discussion nor submit notes. In order for students to receive the full 30 participation points they must participate and submit notes. If notes alone are submitted students receive partial credit depending on thoroughness.

**\*\*Phase II-** (Class #- 78 students) The % of non-engaged students includes those students that did not participate in discussion but that did submit notes for partial credit. In the first 2 rounds of the fishbowl (inner & outer circles) students can earn between 20-30 points. In the round robin and rebuttal session they can earn between 10-19 points. However if the students choose to pass, the notes are worth 5-10 participation points depending on thoroughness. The students are required to submit notes in order to receive their participation points for the day.

### Observations and Analysis:

The implementation of fishbowl discussions was successful in increasing student engagement and participation in whole-class discussion. I observed how students were challenged because they were required to work at a level of synthesis rather than simple recall. The fishbowl discussions were a success because the students were engaged in synthesizing the knowledge through discussion or note taking (both productive and receptive modalities). I noticed that after developing a routine of having fishbowl discussions, the knowledge and concepts discussed in one discussion were built upon in other discussions. The learning that took place during these discussions provided students with a strong content knowledge that carried over into their work.

The quality of work turned in and the results of the final assessments were impressive. When analyzing students' written responses to comprehension questions, answers were long and thoughtful. I think this occurred because students felt confident and knowledgeable about what they were being asked on assessments. The constructivist approach used in the unit on *Animal Farm* was a success because my students were able to transfer what they had learned in discussion and apply it. One student expressed in their reflection that they: "... *changed a lot as*

*a learner. I have learned a good quantity of information throughout the time that Ms. Robledo has been here. I enjoyed the fishbowl because it helped me understand the book better.”*

Although there were many successes in implementing fishbowl discussions, I also experienced some challenges. One of the challenges I observed was that the fishbowl method made it easier for certain students to dominate discussion (e.g., during inner and outer circle sessions). The remedy to this issue was that all the students had an opportunity to participate during the round robin session. One student shared, *“I like the fishbowl because they give everyone the chance to speak and not only the same people always get the chance to speak.”* In juxtaposition to the students who dominate discussion, I had a few remaining students that refused to participate in the whole-class discussion. In one reflection a student explained, *“I disliked the fishbowls we did with Animal Farm mainly because I get shy when it comes to saying my opinions and for not speaking up, I didn’t get very many points.”* Although the students took notes on the discussion that took place around them; there was not full participation since they were not involved in the process of constructing meaning of the text with their peers.

In an effort to engage and involve all students in academic discussions, the discussion vehicle for phase III was reciprocal teaching. Similar to the fishbowls, the conversation and ownership of material is turned over to the students. The difference in my implementation of reciprocal teaching is that the students dialogue in small groups without the presence of the teacher. The phase III implementation of reciprocal teaching is the final discussion strategy that grants the students total control of discussion. In terms of collecting data on engagement and participation, a formal tally sheet was created to keep record of the students’ types of contributions. The shift from whole-class to small-group discussion will require that at some point all students will participate. In phase III of the implementation of student-centered

discussion strategies, I conducted a case study for reciprocal teaching circles. I decided to conduct a close assessment of this strategy because I was unaware of how to effectively expose students to reciprocal teaching without a trial and error process. The implementation of reciprocal teaching circles are phase III; but in order to determine the effectiveness of this strategy in terms of engagement and student attitudes, the execution of this phase was carried out in sub-phases a, b, and c.

Phase III: Reciprocal teaching circles (6 weeks)-

During the implementation of reciprocal teaching (the most challenging of student-centered discussion strategies), phase III resulted in a case study to investigate the best possible method of implementation for my “urban” students.

**Case study: Sub-phases of reciprocal teaching:**

SUB-PHASES:	TIMING / TEXT:	KEY ACTIVITIES:	DATA COLLECTION:
Sub a: Random grouping & no roles assigned	2 weeks / Elie Wiesel's <i>Night</i>	Intro. Reciprocal teaching; guidelines, RTN; Reciprocal teaching circles	My tally sheet, mapmaker, feedback report
Sub b: Student selected groups & assigned roles	2 weeks / Elie Wiesel's <i>Night</i>	Reciprocal Teaching Notes (RTN) & Reciprocal teaching circles (RTC)	My tally sheet, roles: mapmaker & surveyor, feedback report
Sub C: Assigned groups by mixed ability with roles	2 weeks / primary source documents	Reciprocal Teaching Notes (RTN) & RTC	Reflections, tally sht. Mapmaker, surveyor, feedback report

In my implementation of reciprocal teaching, students worked in their reciprocal teaching circles (for 15-20 minutes) and then each leader shared with the class important concepts that were discussed in their group. The share outs then ignited whole-class discussion and all the students had an opportunity to respond and share their perspectives on the topic. During this time, the teacher can partake in the whole-class discussion by sharing thoughts or asking questions. Since reciprocal teaching is the most difficult of the student-centered discussion strategies (because the teacher is virtually absent in small group discussions), I had to use the process of trial and error to discover how to best implement this strategy to fit my students' needs. In three sub-phases of reciprocal teaching, the results indicated what implementation worked best for an increase in participation, meaningful discussion, and self-efficacy.

*Phase III: Sub-phase a- Reciprocal Teaching Session- randomized groups without group roles (2 weeks)*

*Phase III: Sub-phase a Implementation-*

In my initial implementation I explained that we would be discussing Elie Wiesel's book *Night* using a method called reciprocal teaching. Before we could begin I handed students the reciprocal teaching guidelines [Appendix B] and explained the 4 different comprehension strategies. We then read the prologue and introduction to *Night*. After our quick read the students received the reciprocal teaching notes (RTN) [Appendix C] assignment. The students would be required to complete their RTN along with the assigned reading as homework. I emphasized that the RTN needed to be completed in order to be prepared for class discussions.

The key activity in class for our first day of reciprocal teaching was to allow students to complete a RTN for the prologue and introduction to *Night*. I wanted the students to practice applying the new guidelines introduced in class before they would be required to do so for

homework. After the students worked in pairs to complete the RTN, a class RTN sheet was completed with a compilation of student questions using a document camera. After the guided practice activity, I handed out a guide for the different types of discussion questions. The discussion questions guideline sheet [Appendix D] provided students with even more examples of the different types of questions (i.e., questions of fact, interpretation, open-ended) that they would be responsible for doing for homework. After my introduction session on reciprocal teaching the students were assigned reading and expected to complete an RTN sheet for homework in preparation for the next class.

In the first phase of the reciprocal teaching circles I numbered students off one thru six (in a random order) and all the one's met in a group, then the two's in another area, and so on and so forth. I would randomly number students off each round for the first sub-phase; this meant that the circles always had different group members. In addition to having different group members each round, there were no students roles assigned such as: a leader, a note taker, etc. The only expectation required for the reciprocal teaching circles was that the groups remained on task and had their reciprocal teaching notes (RTN) sheet completed. The RTN would serve as a guide if the students fell into silence.

### *Phase III: Sub-phase a Results-*

After my implementation of sub-phase a, the students in terms of achievement (grades) ranged from 40% of students scoring in the high achievement range (A to B), 40% of students scoring in the middle achievement range (B- to C-), and 20% of the class fell in the low achievement range (D to F) [Appendix I]. The implementation of the reciprocal teaching phases influenced the students' scholarship grades because the RTN sheets were counted as part of their

homework grade and the discussions held were included for a grade in the class work section (so if students were absent or failed to participate they did not receive any credit). In terms of the discussion experience for students during phase I, 63% of students found their discussions in the reciprocal teaching circles a positive experience. One student (average achievement) wrote: *“I liked the fact that we were allowed to work in groups. Being able to work in groups helps me learn.”* Another student who rarely participated in phases I and II wrote: *“I disliked the fishbowls last quarter, so these small groups had me open up and participate more.”* Some students (22%) found that their discussions were okay; they were not great but there was some good discussion. And 15% of the students described the discussion experience for sub-phase a as a negative experience because:

*“Some students didn’t do their homework and could not contribute to the discussion”*

*“Not all my group members would be prepared”*

In order to collect data I coded the individual feedback reports at the end of the first sub-phase of implementation. I read through the ratings and comments and coded each report. The reports were coded in terms of: student achievement (HA, MA, LA), students’ description of the discussion experience (positive, between, negative), and their rating of themselves in terms of engagement in discussion (low, medium, and high) all at the end of sub-phase a. The data collected conveys that in terms of engagement, 56% of the students considered themselves highly engaged during the discussions, 21% of students a medium amount of engagement and 23% of students had a low amount of engagement during the reciprocal teaching circles [Appendix K]. In addition to using the student feedback reports, I read over the student reflections to gain an understanding of the students’ self-image and attitude towards learning.

Some of the variables that could have affected the results would include the time frame of the implementation. The students were introduced to the reciprocal teaching technique the week they returned from intersession break. As a result, students may have needed more time to adjust back into the school mode. This may have affected some students' willingness to complete assignments such as the reading or RTN sheets. Also since the groups were random, some students may have had difficulty working with certain students (shy students, lazy students, etc.). However, something worth mentioning is that during my sub-phase a of my phase III implementation, I noticed that many of the students that were reluctant to participate in the Socratic seminars or fishbowls were contributing to the reciprocal teaching discussions. One student explained in their reflection that the reciprocal teaching circles were, "... *better for people who are shy. The fishbowls get everyone involved but only when they have to.*"

#### *Phase III: Sub-phase a Observations and Analysis-*

Although the discussions observed were good and the students were on task; I noticed that there was a lack of full participation from all group members. The reason for this is that it may take more than two weeks for certain students to warm up to reciprocal teaching method. The challenge for me during phase III is the difficulty in observing all the groups. So if I was conducting research on group three's discussion, I had no idea about whether the other five groups were on task. In order to remedy this situation in the next sub-phase I assigned roles to each member: a discussion leader, task manager (also keeps time), recorder, a mapmaker (keeps track of who participates), and a surveyor (answers questions about group dynamics, rates group members on participation). I felt that in assigning roles all the students would be participating in the success of their discussion somehow. Also three members of the groups (i.e., mapmaker, surveyor, and note taker) would serve as my research assistants and provide me with information

about what took place in their reciprocal teaching circles. I felt overwhelmed in trying to keep track of the discussion on my tally sheet and act as a mapmaker. I felt that in assigning roles all the students would be responsible for contributing to a sound discussion about the text.

*Phase III: Sub-phase b- Reciprocal Teaching Session-groups selected by students & roles assigned (2 weeks)*

*Phase III: Sub-phase b Implementation-*

At the conclusion of sub-phase a, I asked students to request peers that they would like to have in their reciprocal teaching circles and list down peers that they felt they could not productively work with (this was kept confidential). Before the implementation of sub-phase b, I posted the reciprocal teaching circles and the students seemed excited to begin their discussions. However, based on the analysis of sub-phase a, I concluded that students needed to be assigned group roles. The key activity during sub-phase b was introducing and explaining the assigned roles to the students. I asked the students to form their reciprocal teaching circles and I passed out the mapmaker diagram with hand written numbers on the sheet.

Each number had a corresponding role: 1- leader, 2- mapmaker, 3- surveyor, 4- note taker, 5- timekeeper. These roles were rotated during each reciprocal teaching session that took place during sub-phase b. The leader was responsible for keeping the flow of discussion going and reporting during whole class discussion. The mapmaker provided a depiction of how the conversation flowed during the session. The surveyor rated the group members in terms of engagement and cooperation during the reciprocal teaching sessions. The note taker took notes on who discussed what during the groups' session. And the timekeeper made sure the group was



on task and utilizing the discussion time wisely. After the students learned the assigned roles, sub-phase b went into action.

### *Phase III: Sub-phase b Results-*

After the implementation of sub-phase b, the results indicated that there was a slight change in terms of student achievement. The number of high achieving students increased to 42%, the number of average achievers decreased to 36%, while the number of low achievers increased to 22% [Appendix I]. The results of the discussion experience for students during the second session of reciprocal teaching showed improvement with an increase in positive experiences and a decrease in negative experiences. The data collected from the feedback reports indicated that 74% of the students found their discussions with their self-chosen circles to be a positive experience. The results also indicated that the same amount of students found their discussions somewhere in between and only 5% [Appendix J] of the students considered their reciprocal teaching discussions to be a negative experience. Those students explained that they found it a negative experience in comparison to the fishbowls, “...*the fishbowls are better because they allow us to engage with more people.*” The feedback report completed at the end of sub-phase b provided me with student input about whether the students found their discussion beneficial. One student wrote: “*I think that today’s discussion was beneficial because it was really fun and insightful cooperating with my group members. Also it made me feel at ease and helped me actually discuss and analyze the book.*”

After analyzing the data for the engagement of students during the reciprocal teaching sessions of sub-phase b, there was a great increase from low engagement to medium engagement. The number remained the same for highly engaged students (56%), whereas the number of students who felt they fell somewhere in between increased to 38% (medium engagement). This meant that the number of students in the category of low engagement dropped to 6% [Appendix K]. During the reciprocal teaching circles, the noise volume was louder than other class sessions but this was a good thing because the students were engaged in discussions about the text. The results indicate that the discussion was more meaningful and engaging in comparison to sub-phase a of the reciprocal teaching circles. The students both high and low achieving seemed more productive when having a choice of who they would like to work with (i.e., their friends). In terms of variables that may have had an effect on my data, the student sample taken during the first sub-phase included only 68 of my students (due to absences). In the feedback reports I received for my implementation of sub-phase b, 73 of my students submitted data.

### *Phase III: Sub-phase b Observations and Analysis-*

During sub-phase b of my implementation, I observed an increase in the amount of meaningful discussion and participation. The data collection materials that proved most helpful were my tally sheets, the mapmaker sheets, and the surveyor sheets [Appendices E, F, and G]. In the observations made during sub-phase b, I noticed that the group members I observed contributed equally. Many of the groups were utilizing their reciprocal teaching note (RTN) sheets to guide their discussions. I also noticed that many of the group members were taking turns in having their questions addressed. The questions themselves were great; some required that the students revisit the text and others asked the students to make connections to themselves.

The average amount of discussion for a question was about a minute. And interestingly enough the mapmaker sheets submitted reflected the flow of discussion that I had observed. The mapmaker sheets provided a visual of who contributed and which members dominated the discussion.

After my analysis of the data it seemed that many of the students found working with their friends to be a positive experience. After comparing the surveyor sheets to my tally sheets, and the mapmaker sheets, I was impressed with the students' execution of their roles. My observation notes (tally sheet) paralleled with the data collection materials submitted by the students (feedback reports, mapmaker, and surveyor sheet). The students' ratings of themselves were honest and the data collection materials were helpful tools to in measuring meaningful discussion and engagement. The comments received at the end of sub-phase b conveyed that many of the students enjoyed the reciprocal teaching discussions because they were able to gain different points of views. One student shared that the discussions were successful because of the group size: *"I prefer the small group discussions because all of us get a chance to talk and listen to what everyone has on their mind. I feel less intimidated in the small groups."* In summary, sub-phase b was successful because the students were able to pose thoughtful questions that resulted in the students working together to develop clarification and answers for each other. Although sub-phase b was a successful way to implement reciprocal teaching, sub-phase c incorporates Vygotsky's Zonal Proximal Development theory. The modification made in sub-phase c is that the students are placed in reciprocal teaching circles with students of mixed ability (high + medium + low achievers). The purpose behind this third sub-phase is to see whether this implementation will result in engaging even more students in "meaningful talk" with their peers.

*Phase III: Sub-phase C-Reciprocal Teaching Session-mixed ability groups with assigned roles*  
*(2 weeks)-*

*Phase III: sub-phase C Implementation-*

In the third sub-phase of my implementation I created reciprocal teaching circles that included students from various achievement levels. I made sure that each circle included at least one high achiever, one average achiever, and a low achieving student. When creating these new groups I resorted back to the information provided by my students in regards to who they *could not* work with. Since each reciprocal teaching circle had five members, some of the groups varied in that one circle had one high achiever, two middle and low achievers or vice versa. The reason in having a third sub-phase of implementation was to put Vygotsky's *Zone of Proximal Development* into practice.

The reciprocal teaching circles encourage students' use of private speech and collaboration. However, since sub-phases a and b had groups that were not assigned in any particular order, I wanted a more skilled peer in each circle for phase III. In using skilled peers as teachers, the desired result is that an even greater increase should appear in terms of engaging more students in meaningful discussion. Another important change that occurred during sub-phase c is that we were no longer using Wiesel's *Night* in our reciprocal teaching sessions. In addition to introducing the students to new groups, the students had new readings and would be discussing primary source documents in their reciprocal teaching circles. I assigned readings from the text "*The Good Old Days*" *The Holocaust as Seen by Its Perpetrators and Bystanders* (ed. Klee, Dressen, and Riess). Although we were using a different text in sub-phase c, the

students were still required to read at home and complete RTN sheets for the reciprocal teaching circles.

*Phase III: sub-phase C Results-*

In the last implementation of the sub-phases of reciprocal teaching, sub-phase c proved to be the most successful in terms of engagement of students and thoughtful discussion. The data collection materials used to gather the information included: student reflections, my tally sheets, the surveyor sheets and the feedback reports. In terms of achievement, sub-phase c illustrated a considerable gain in high achievement and a decrease in low achievement. The data showed (included all 77 students) that: 64% of students now fell into the category of high achievement; 27% of students in average achievement, and only 9% were in the low achievement category [Appendix I]. There was an improvement in grades because in order for reciprocal teaching to work and be successful, the students had to be prepared and ready to work. The reciprocal teaching circles hold students accountable and require that each group member do their part.

After reading over the students' feedback reports and reflections, many of the comments I received about sub-phase c as a whole conveyed a change in student self-image. One student wrote- *"I feel like I was a developing type of student. I was pushed to do what I needed to do, like participate in discussions. And I found the discussion beneficial when I finally cooperated with my group."* For this specific student (who was reluctant to participate in discussions) he needed the push from his group members to finally get him to share his ideas and opinions. Other students explained that they found the reciprocal teaching circles beneficial because:

- *"...it helps with you discussion skills and makes you more at ease about talking"*
- *"I love talking and being involved in talking, so talking about what we're reading in a group is fun"*

- *“...I was able to share my thoughts within my small group (I want to do this kind of activity again-for some reason, I don't know why)”*

The input I received from the students provided me with insight about how it was possible to successfully implement reciprocal teaching circles in an urban classroom. I learned through the student comments that the small group discussions were beneficial because they felt more at ease in sharing their points of view.

In sub-phase c the feedback reports indicated that 86% of students found the reciprocal teaching circles a positive experience. Only 6% of the students fell somewhere in between and 8% of the students still preferred the fishbowl method in comparison to the reciprocal teaching circles [Appendix J]. The reasoning behind 8% of the students considering the reciprocal teaching circles to be a negative experience explained:

- *“I only got to share my ideas with 5 other people but in the fishbowl everyone listens”*
- *“I felt that we were limited to the points of view of our group members”*
- *“I just think that I probably missed out on something good that someone said in another group. Although we hear the main ideas of all the groups at the end, I still think the fishbowls are better”*

The most intriguing part of sub-phase c is that of the engagement of students during my implementation of reciprocal teaching. The data collected from the surveyor sheets and the feedback reports indicated that 68% of the students found their discussions during sub-phase c to be highly engaging. And 32% of the students found themselves participating and having good conversations (medium engagement) in their circles. However, sub-phase c of Phase III was the most successful implementation because there were no students not engaged in discussion (0% low) [Appendix K].

In reciprocal teaching the teacher is absent, but all the students cooperate to teach one another about important concepts in the text. I feel that sub-phase c was most successful because there was a higher achieving student taking on the role of “teacher.” In terms of engagement, the reciprocal teaching circles allowed those students who were uncomfortable with speaking in front of the class to have a voice. One quiet student explained that, “*The discussions were very beneficial because we were able to express our opinions in a small group. Discussions like this are also great because they allow even the shyest person to voice their opinions.*” Many of the quiet students preferred the small groups to the fishbowls or Socratic seminars because they were able to ask as many questions as they needed to get clarification; and they were aware that someone in their group would help.

### *Phase III: Sub-phase C Observations and Analysis-*

I found the third sub-phase of implementation very impressive because of the conversations I overheard between the students. The students were helping each other understand the details of what they read and were activating their prior knowledge. During my observations I would hear the students making connections to *Night* or to some of the films we watched in class. I feel that the discussions went so smoothly because the students had grown accustomed to their roles in the reciprocal teaching circles. The students were asking great questions and were really utilizing their time together by sharing what they felt after reading the articles. I also observed that in some groups the students assumed additional roles. After reviewing my tally reports, I noticed that certain students would summarize the articles and others would clarify questions. I feel that these roles occurred naturally because of the mix in student abilities in each group.

During the implementation of sub-phase c of reciprocal teaching I did not encounter any challenges. The students were active in participating in meaningful discussion and this was achieved by having students work towards their ZPD. In creating reciprocal teaching circles where there were higher-skilled peers in each group, many of the lower achieving students' self-image and attitude improved. Although they were being challenged, the encouragement and support from peers resulted in greater self-efficacy. Sub-phase c ran smoothly and I feel that the factors that contributed to its success were due in part to the students being familiar with reciprocal teaching after four weeks of practice. The data might also have been affected because it was the end of the year and students were working their hardest to earn good grades. I also noticed a change in some of students and I learned that they noticed a change in themselves as learners after reading the student reflections. After an analysis of the data, the results indicate that reciprocal teaching circles are best implemented using groups that vary in student ability and that have assigned student roles.

The following chart summarizes the data collected across the three phases of implementation. The results show an increase in meaningful discussion and engagement at the end of each phase of implementation:

	SUB-PHASE A:	SUB-PHASE B:	SUB-PHASE C:
<b>DISCUSSION-</b>			
Positive	63%	74%	86%
Between (“alright”)	22%	21%	6%
Negative	15%	5%	8%
<b>ENGAGEMENT-</b>			
High	56%	56%	68%
Medium	21%	38%	32%
Low	23%	6%	0%



## Results:

### *Data Summary-*

After the implementation of Socratic seminars in phase I, the data illustrated an improvement in the engagement of the urban student in discussion. Although there was a considerable number of discussants in the Socratic seminars in comparison to the traditional I.R.E. (teacher initiates, responds, and explains or elaborates) pattern. A majority of my students refrained from engaging in whole-class discussion. At this point of implementation few students felt motivated to engage; a majority of students exhibited a nonchalant attitude about their involvement in class. Phase I proved to be a nice introduction to a different approach to learning. The students were forced into either getting involved or taking notice of what was occurring in the classroom. However, in terms of engagement in discussions, there was not full participation from all students. I noticed that certain students dominated the discussions and certain others were adamant in refusing to participate in academic discourse.

In phase II, the fishbowl implementation increased the amount of students who engaged in whole-class discussions even more so than the Socratic seminars. One possible explanation could be the change in the format of the discussions. In the fishbowls, four rounds were intentionally designed to encourage multiple voices in purposeful talk about a text; the goal was to reduce dominance and increase discussion opportunities for timid students. Even though the fishbowl method increased the amount of responsibility the students had in discussion, there was great improvement in terms of the quality of discussion and engagement. At this point of implementation, the students found discussions to be both stimulating and motivating because they were aware of the fact that I was looking for their answers and not one right answer. The students were active in developing connections between the text and history. They were engaged

and focused because they were acting as experts throughout the learning segment. The students responded well to this type of learning because their voices were heard and their contributions were recognized and valued. I feel that this learning strategy was conducive because the students were able to learn from each other. They acted as scholars during discussions because they were analyzing a piece of literature which led them to see themselves through a different lens. The data collected and the observations made indicate that there was an improvement in student self-efficacy and attitude about learning.

The implementation of phase III allowed me to investigate the different methods of reciprocal teaching. I was able to discover which method would be most effective in engaging my “urban” students. Although the reciprocal teaching method is the most difficult of student-centered discussion strategies it was *successful in engaging all students*. In my case study of phase III, sub-phase c proved to be the most effective implementation. The possible reasons for this would include that students were comfortable and accustomed to the reciprocal teaching circles. Another variable would be that there was more accountability in this phase because of the assigned student roles.

After the implementation of phase III and the success of sub-phase c, there was an increase in the number of students who found the reciprocal teaching circles a positive and engaging experience. The implementation of phase III proved to be the most successful in terms of how well the students worked together to create “meaningful talk.” In sub-phase c the students were assigned to groups where each group was mixed in terms of student ability. Each group was comprised of at least one high, middle, and lower ability student. In every sub-phase of reciprocal teaching in phase III, a gradual increase in engagement and thoughtful discussion occurred. Another improvement that occurred during phase III was a positive change in many

students' self-image. Those students who were shy or quiet gained their confidence and learned to use their voices. At the conclusion of phase III, the majority of students found the reciprocal teaching circles in the third phase to be both a positive and engaging experience. In summary, every phase of implementation introduced my students to a greater shift in responsibility for the interpretation of a text. As a result, there was a gradual improvement in engagement and self-efficacy after the implementation of each phase.

### Analysis and Discussion:

The focus of my action research was on investigating the use of student-centered discussion strategies and their effects on urban students. I wanted to explore three strategies in particular: Socratic seminars, fishbowl discussions, and reciprocal teaching circles. I decided to measure their effectiveness in improving the self efficacy and engagement of urban students.

### *Findings-*

Although it may be difficult to incorporate new forms of pedagogy such as student-centered discussion strategies, I learned that implementation is possible. I first transitioned from the I.R.E. (initiates, responds, explains/expands) technique to Socratic seminars. After familiarizing students with Socratic seminars, I introduced them to fishbowl discussions. This then provided me with a solid foundation to begin my implementation phases of reciprocal teaching circles. After each phase of implementation, I learned to make adjustments. And the results of these implementations indicate that *these students, "urban kids" can have substantive conversations*. After my analysis of the data, I recognized how the student-centered discussion strategies had positive effects on the self-efficacy and engagement of the urban student.

*Positive Effect on Students' Self-efficacy:* The accountable talk strategies in my study that impacted students' self-efficacy were the Socratic seminars, the fishbowl discussions, and the reciprocal teaching circles. These strategies improved students' grades, work ethic, and attitude about learning. The Socratic seminar had the least amount of effect on self-efficacy; however it did expose students to accepting a new role in the classroom- the role of a scholar. During the fishbowl discussions the students learned how to hold a discussion on literature. This built up students' confidence in the classroom and resulted in students accepting more responsibility and ownership over class discussions. The fishbowl discussions also exposed students to the importance of their ideas and opinions. During the fishbowls the students learned that all points of view are valid and important; and this resulted in more students participating in class discussions. The students began to believe that they were capable of making valuable contributions and lost their fear of "being wrong."

The implementation of the reciprocal teaching circles also improved self-efficacy because those students who had great ideas but were afraid to speak up found their opportunities in the small groups. The student-centered strategies also showed an improvement in the students' grades. As the students grew accustomed to discussing text and working in reciprocal teaching circles, work ethic improved. The data collected to support my assertions were the student reflections, my observation notes, and student work. I had the students reflect on themselves as learners or on class as a whole and one student wrote: *"Well the discussions were beneficial like the fishbowl, however I didn't like them because I had to talk. I did like listening to the different perspectives - I heard things that I hadn't thought about. But I did discuss things in the small groups so I changed because before I never discussed anything in any of my classes."* Many of the students

that believed they changed shared that they found participating in discussions beneficial for various reasons (e.g. different points of view, clarification, etc.).

The implementation of student-centered discussion strategies also influenced the quality of work submitted by students. Many of the written assignments or responses turned in for a grade were thoughtful and surpassed minimum requirements (e.g. minimum one paragraph response and would usually receive a page and half response). The student-centered discussions had a domino effect on student work. For me it seemed that the students wanted to share what they discussed or their thoughts on paper; and so this improved the quality of work submitted, which impacted student grades.

#### *Increase in Student Engagement:*

My second key finding was that after the implementation of each phase, the number of students who were disengaged decreased dramatically. The Socratic seminars conveyed a slight improvement because they changed the classroom environment. During the Socratic seminars the students could no longer hide in the back of the classroom, they had to be a part of the class and in the circle. The students were also engaged in negotiating and solving questions the questions that I posed during the seminars. The questions asked during Socratic seminars shifted from the knowledge-based to comprehension and application types of questions (Bloom, et al., 1956).

During the fishbowl discussions many more students chose to engage in discussion in comparison to the Socratic seminars. The fishbowl discussions provided many opportunities for struggling students to find their voice and jump into conversation (the 4 rounds). In this phase the students assumed more control of the discussions and were responsible for creating the content of the discussion. This resulted in student preparing thoughtful questions and sharing

their points of view which increased student engagement. Although the fishbowl discussions were a success in increasing the number of students who participated in discussion, I still had a number of students who chose to remain silent. In order to engage the reluctant students into academic discourse, I implement the reciprocal teaching circles. In sub-phase c, since the students were in groups of various achievement levels, conversations were engaging. The phase III implementation of reciprocal teaching resulted full engagement of students. The reason for this was that shy students preferred the small groups and all students were assigned roles during the discussions. The implementation of all the accountable talk strategies had a positive effect; and there was no child left behind in terms of engagement.

The data I collected to support my assertion came from the surveyor sheets (Phase III- which rated each group member in terms of engagement), my tally report and observation notes, and the weekly student feedback reports. The surveyor sheets were data collection materials that focused specifically on student engagement. Each surveyor rated everyone in the group and explained how the discussion was a success or a failure, in terms of group cooperation.

I was also able to assess an increase in engagement when I observed the reciprocal teaching circles in action. I took notes and used my tally report to keep track of group members' participation and contributions to the discussion. I even recorded the length in time that a group discussed certain topics or questions. Another method used to measure student engagement was the student feedback reports. Each week the students rated themselves in terms of engagement and cooperation in their groups. After each rating the students had to explain why they chose to give themselves that specific number.

The major trend that I noticed each week after reviewing the reports was that the students were very honest. When I noted a student's lack of contribution, in many cases it matched up with that particular student's feedback report. Some students would explain how they contributed and others would explain that they failed to contribute because had not completed the reading, etc. Either way, the students were honest in completing their reports and the reason for this may be because they did not receive a grade for the report, they only needed to complete it for credit. In summary, I found the implementation of student-centered discussion strategies to be a success because they improved student grades and attitude as well as increased student engagement.

### *Significance-*

The results of my action research indicate that student-centered discussion strategies such as Socratic seminars, fishbowl discussions, and reciprocal teaching circles are legitimate learning activities for any classroom. Martin Haberman (1991) writes that a pedagogy of poverty exists that is:

*...sufficiently powerful to undermine the implementation of any reform effort because it determines the way pupils spend their time, the nature of the behaviors they practice, and the bases of their self-concepts as learners. Essentially, it is a pedagogy in which learners can "succeed" without becoming either involved or thoughtful (p. 4).*

However, if such a detrimental pedagogy exists than it is necessary to implement new teaching techniques. While conducting my study, I learned that student-centered discussion strategies change urban students' roles as listening objects to active learners. These urban students can become active participants in their learning; they just need to be taught how. Teachers need to adhere to a "lifelong learner oath," just as doctors have their Hippocratic Oath. Educators should embrace the fact that the education system is forever evolving and this means that learning and practicing new pedagogy should be expected. Today in a majority of urban classrooms, student-centered discussion strategies are absent. However, the purpose of my action research is not to lecture, but to present a successful alternative to teacher-led discussions in urban classroom settings.

Student-centered discussion strategies like Socratic seminars, fishbowl discussions and reciprocal teaching matter because they cause change. My research demonstrated that when I used these techniques they had a positive impact on my classroom. The students became active and engaged in real discussions, with and without the teacher. They were active in constructing knowledge and most importantly they improved student attitude and self-image. After my class made the transition to student-centered discussion strategies, I saw an increase in meaningful discussion, improved self-image, and a challenge for my students. The elements that proved successful for implementation of these strategies included student choice and emphasis on the power of their ideas. The students were in control of what they wanted to discuss and worked together to develop meaning for a text.

So the question remains- Why does it matter? Why care? After conducting my action research, I learned that when students were involved in these types of activities, student self-image improved as well as engagement. The fact that classroom learning activities have an effect



on students' attitude towards learning is why implementing new learning techniques matter. If students engage in meaningful discussion and they are sharing their thoughts and ideas, they begin to care and that is why we as teachers should care. In my classroom I learned the importance of creating opportunities for students to use their voices. I saw how urban *students can engage in meaning discussions about literature* instead of just receiving information about the literature. In urban schools students need to become active participants in their learning and this may be achieved by implementing student-centered discussion strategies.

### *Limitations-*

The major limitation of this study was the amount of time dedicated to implementation. In one semester I had to take over a class, make it my own, and then teach the students how to hold a discussion. The caveat here was that I had only read literature about constructivism and student-centered discussion strategies; I had never put any methods to practice. I feel that had I had the students from the beginning, for a year, the data collected would be thorough and more extensive. Another limitation was the lack of available technology. If a class set of laptop computers was available each group could have recorded their discussions. This would have been helpful in two ways: 1) the teacher could hear exactly what was discussed in each group and 2) the discussions could be used as podcasts and posted on the class webpage. This would mean that anyone could hear how discussions about literature took place in our classroom (so effort would have probably increased, so as not to sound foolish). Regardless of the limitations, the data gathered was valid and reliable because it was provided by the students themselves.

My claim that urban students can hold substantive conversations about literature is a valid find. After the students developed an understanding of *our class discussions*, I observed students

working together to discover themes, asking their peers questions, and most importantly, making connections to themselves or other text. My action research was influenced by a real-world classroom concern. I was concerned with the fact that it is easier for teachers to *tell* the students what is important about a text. And it is easier for students to listen and accept what they are told. The concern for me is that educators and students will accept the easy route and strive for nothing else. This method confirms Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Freire describes the roles in the banking process of education, he explains that:

*... knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider know nothing. Projecting an absolute ignorance upon others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, negates education and knowledge as a processes of inquiry. The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance as absolute, he justifies his own existence (¶ 5).*

In many urban classrooms, the “banking process” is teaching. The misconception is that these urban students need teachers to tell them how to think, because they are inept. If teaching is what teachers do and learning is what students do, then students and teachers are on different pages and this is a difficult place to begin. However, in trying to implement student-centered discussion strategies like reciprocal teaching, the students and I were simultaneously learning and teaching in every class. *The point is that I observed urban students constructing meaning of a text for themselves.*

*Implications-*

My teaching: At the beginning of the year, I was overpowered by the silence and disengagement of the classroom. Many of the students were reluctant to participate in discussions because it was new or scary for some of them. However what my students were unaware of was that I had been scared as well. I had been afraid to try something that I had only read about and risk failure. But my students inspired me; as well as my colleagues who saw “my discussion activities” as costs that would outweigh any benefits because of the uncertainty about whether it would work in an urban classroom.

My action research was focused on how to best implement student-centered discussion strategies into an urban setting; and the effects of those implementations. I needed to put the literary research to practice and gain an understanding about why these types of discussions matter. My question was that if student-centered discussion strategies were as beneficial as I had read then why were they not being used by teachers in urban classrooms. In utilizing discussion techniques like: Socratic seminars, fishbowls, or reciprocal teaching circles, both teacher and students in urban classrooms may find themselves out of their comfort zones. The results of my research would help me determine whether student-centered discussion strategies have a place in urban classrooms. After my study I learned that urban students found these types of activities beneficial. Student-centered discussion strategies are one method that urban classroom teachers can use to improve engagement and student attitudes towards learning.

The results of my study have influenced the way I plan to design units and conduct my classroom. During my implementation I focused on one type of discussion at a time. I began with Socratic seminars, transitioned into fishbowl discussions, and in the last quarter I used reciprocal teaching circles. My findings (as well as student responses) suggested to me that it is best to use a combination of these strategies. Some of my students preferred fishbowls over

reciprocal teaching and vice versa. And others explained that they enjoyed Socratic seminars because of the teacher's active role in discussion. In my future teaching assignments I plan to incorporate these various discussion techniques as often as possible.

My determination to continue using student-centered discussion strategies can be understood after reading a journal entry I wrote [we were reading *Animal Farm*] in which I reflect about how the class discussion went:

*23 February 2009 (period 4):*

*I am really impressed with how the fishbowl discussion went today. I allowed the students to discuss topics of their choosing. As a class we had fun, the discussion turned in a debate because students had different opinions concerning Mollie. Although she is a minor character, I enjoyed watching students take charge and have a real discussion about a text. The discussion of Mollie was interesting because students were debating about whether she was a selfish character or not. They proposed real life examples to support their claims, but in the end we had to 'agree to disagree' with the idea that we would find out about Mollie's intentions as we continue reading the story. During the discussion the students hit on something very important, however at this time they are unaware of the connection they have made to a desired understanding of mine. The character of Mollie, although minor, was content with her life with humans and really doesn't want to get involved. Orwell's message in the text is that revolutions fail. The character of Mollie is a perfect example (as well as Benjamin the donkey) because of her ignorance and/or lack of involvement= lack of unity= failure of revolutions.*

I would like to continue planning such discussions because they are intriguing. I had fun listening and watching the light bulbs turn on in class. During my experience the students

introduced me to new and interesting ideas, so discussions were never boring or repetitive. The discussion I observed in one period was different from the next period. And the most vital outcome of the discussions is that the students together were unknowingly collecting information that they would use at a later date (final assessment and response to literature essay).

*Policy:* In schools today the focus is on standards and high stakes testing and teachers are responsible for improving those test scores. And as a result, the teachers feel overwhelmed and lack the energy to practice alternative methods of instruction. So the common belief is that direct instruction is the best way to get results. However in direct instruction the teacher delivers the material and the students have no involvement in their learning. They have passive roles and this could cause disengagement, which makes learning a difficult task.

A major reason why teachers of urban students should pay attention to student-centered strategies is because these techniques close the gap between the knowledgeable teacher and the ignorant urban student. Martin Haberman writes in his *Pedagogy of Poverty* that the general logic behind teaching is incorrect. The belief is that "...teaching is what teachers do. Learning is what students do. Therefore, students and teachers are engaged in different activities" (1991). In my study I was teaching students how to discuss literature, but I was also learning from my students during discussions; I was learning about their ideas and thoughts and therefore we were engaged in the same activity. The work conducted during my study has implications for school-wide or district-level policy. The reason being that student-centered discussion strategies get students to pay attention. They increase the engagement of students and improve students' attitudes towards learning. During my implementation of these discussion methods, the teacher/student relationship was reevaluated and "I" the teacher or "they/them" the students was

replaced with “we.” After the implementation of student-centered discussion strategies, “we” became a community of learners.

**Research:** In future research, some questions that would be interesting to address would be whether implementing the various discussion methods in an alternate order would produce different results. My study would also carry more validity if, through collaboration with colleagues, we conducted research comparing traditional direct instruction with my phases of implementation. And to take it a step further, in addition to student-centered discussion- what if the students had opportunities to get involved in planning their lessons, creating tests or study guides, etc? How would this affect engagement and student attitude towards learning? The nature of this type of research could involve classroom teachers, literacy coaches, as well as university level researchers. If collaboration occurred between these groups of people, than action research would not be so overwhelming for a full-time classroom teacher.

### Conclusion:

After conducting a study on using academic discourse to engage urban students, I encountered both successes and challenges. I felt that my research was a success because it helped me improve my instructional practice. I was able to practice various accountable talk strategies and learn how to make them a part of my classroom. Before my action research, I had been under the misconception that imitating the teachers who taught me when I went to high school was a good thing. They had control of the class and taught us what they thought we should know, and this was considered good teaching. However, I was wrong. It was only one way of teaching, and the urban students in schools today should not be limited to one method,

but exposed various practices. After my action research I learned that urban students are capable of and enjoy engaging in academic discourse. My involvement in the research process has influenced me and helped me develop into a better educator. I feel that now I understand and embrace my role as a lifelong learner. The action research experience has influenced me to constantly work towards improving my practice.

My greatest success while engaging in this study was that the class climate improved drastically. During my observations of the English classes, I noticed that some of the students were restless and not engaged in what was occurring at the front of the classroom. The discussions took place between the teacher and a small amount of students, but not the entire class. I noticed that there was a lack of engagement during the class discussions. These discussions were similar to the ones I had in high school and then the idea for my action research began. I wanted to implement accountable talk in my classroom and gain an understanding of its impact on engaging urban students. Initially, many of the students were reluctant to participate. It was easier for many of them to sit back and say nothing in class. Some of the students were shy and others were lazy; either way at the end of my study all the students were able through various accountable talk strategies to engage in academic discourse. The success was that each student made progress and became active participants in constructing knowledge.

Although I experienced much success during my action research, I did also encounter some challenges. My first challenge was explaining why I was choosing to explore alternative methods in classroom instruction. Since my study was focused on the impact of engaging urban students in academic discourse through student-centered discussion strategies, deductive reasoning would indicate that student engagement was presently lacking in the classroom. The challenge I faced was about how to convey that there was a need for improvement and how to do

so without offending my very traditional and experienced colleagues. I presented my action research plan as a study to see if students engaged in academic discourse could work in my classroom. In urban schools the teacher is the driving force behind students' learning. The challenge is that many teachers do not see this as an issue.

The core functions of urban teaching (e.g. giving information, asking questions, monitoring seatwork, etc.) are performed systematically. This is what teaching is in a majority of urban schools. It has been done for years and so there is this idea that there is no need to incorporate new forms of pedagogy. It was also a challenge to make time to teach the students how to use these strategies while trying to complete department requirements. However, if the students were not engaged then a small amount of learning was taking place anyway. Although it was a challenge to recondition the students and expose traditional teachers to this new method, the study resulted in the students' exposure to a new way of thinking and learning. The students' engagement in class and attitude improved and this was recognized by my colleagues who then began to reflect on their own educational practices. So even though I experienced these challenges, the challenges developed into successes.

After my action research experience I have learned that teachers are researchers. A major concern for teachers is how to balance action research with teaching. However action research is a tool teachers can use to help them teach, rather than detract them from their teaching. For me, I could have been teaching but the majority of students in my class before my action research were not learning. Even though they were in class, they were in their own little worlds. The action research process helped me identify the issue and discover possible methods to improve student engagement. I have learned that action research does not have to be a separate entity; it has to be a part of our teaching so that we can continuously improve our practice.



My action research study improved the way I taught and the way my students learned. I learned that action research is what good teachers do. Good teaching requires that we reflect on our actions and practice. If something in a lesson failed, then good teachers determine why it failed and make the appropriate adjustments. I found the action research process to be beneficial and it is something I plan to continue using in my future classrooms. It helped improve my practice as well as address my students' needs. After this research process I consider myself a lifelong learner, a teacher, and a researcher.

# Appendices: Appendix A

## FISHBOWL DISCUSSION NOTES-

Your Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

Ideas/Opinions I agree with:

Ideas/Opinions I disagree with:

Discussion notes:

Questions I'd like to ask...

**\* At the end of the round, take a few minutes to share your thoughts with a partner nearby. Be sure to respond to what your partner said, but also comment on your reaction to the discussion as a whole!**

# Appendix B

## **Reciprocal Teaching Guidelines:**

Everyone in the classroom takes turns assuming the “teacher” role. Each of you will lead the class discussion at some point. To organize the discussion, we’ll use 4 comprehension strategies: summary, clarify, question, and predict. To prepare for class discussion, you’ll read the text and compose questions in each of the four areas.

### **SUMMARIZING:**

- What happened?
- What is essential to tell?
- What is the outcome?
- Who is involved?
- Why does this happen?
- What is the main point?
- What does the author want me to remember or learn from the passage?

### **CLARIFYING:**

- What was confusing?
- What words or phrases did you need more information on?
- What strategies can you use to clarify your understanding?

### **GENERATING QUESTIONS:** write three kinds of questions-

- Questions of Fact:
  - Focus on details from the text
  - Ask about people, places, and things
  - Choose surface questions for others to answer
- Questions of Interpretation:
  - Focus on meanings that the text communicates
  - Ask about symbols, themes, and underlying messages
  - Choose deeper questions for others to answer
- Questions That Are Open Ended:
  - Focus on moving beyond the text
  - Ask about future effects and implications
  - Choose open-ended questions for others to answer.

### **PREDICTING:**

- What will happen next?
- Why do you think what you do?
- What effect will events in what you have read have on the story or the characters?

# Appendix C

Name: _____
Book Title: _____
Pages Read: _____

**RECIPROCAL TEACHING NOTES:**

Prepare for discussion of the reading each day by completing this sheet. Record the questions you will share with the group in each of the specific areas as well as ideas that come up as a part of the discussion.

1. SUMMARIZING:

2. CLARIFYING:

3. GENERATING QUESTIONS:

a. Questions of Fact-

b. Questions of Interpretation-

c. Questions That Are Open Ended-

4. PREDICTING:

NOTES: [regarding the reading// or elements discussed in your group]

# Appendix D

## Discussion Questions Guidelines:

For our class discussions, you will develop your own questions based upon your reading for the day. During discussion days, you will ask the others in your group your questions and discuss anything that comes from the questions. Once your groups finish, choose 2 questions that sparked discussion within the group to share with the whole class.

Compose 6 questions for each reading section, 2 of each kind. The sample questions below are for the Prologue and Introduction to *Night*.

### **Questions of Fact:**

- Focus on details from the text.
- Ask about people, places, and things.
- Choose surface questions for others to answer.

### **Examples-**

- Why did Wiesel have trouble finding a publisher for *Night*?
- What 2 reasons does Wiesel give for writing this book?
- What does Mauriac say first drew him to Wiesel?

### **Questions of Interpretation:**

- Focus on meanings that the text communicates.
- Ask about symbols, themes, and underlying messages.
- Choose deeper questions for others to answer.

### **Examples-**

- Why did Mauriac find it impossible to imagine what happened to the Jewish children his wife saw?
- Why does Mauriac believe that the dream conceived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century dies with the trainloads of Jewish children?
- How do Wiesel and Mauriac think that reading *Night* can help ensure that the Holocaust will never happen again?

### **Questions That Are Open Ended**

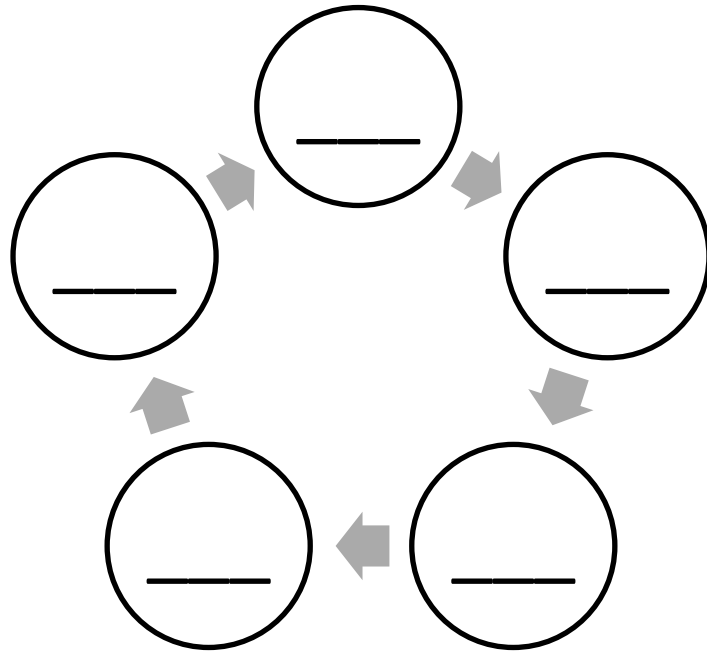
- Focus on moving beyond the text.
- Ask about future effects and implications.
- Choose open-ended questions for others to answer.

### **Examples-**

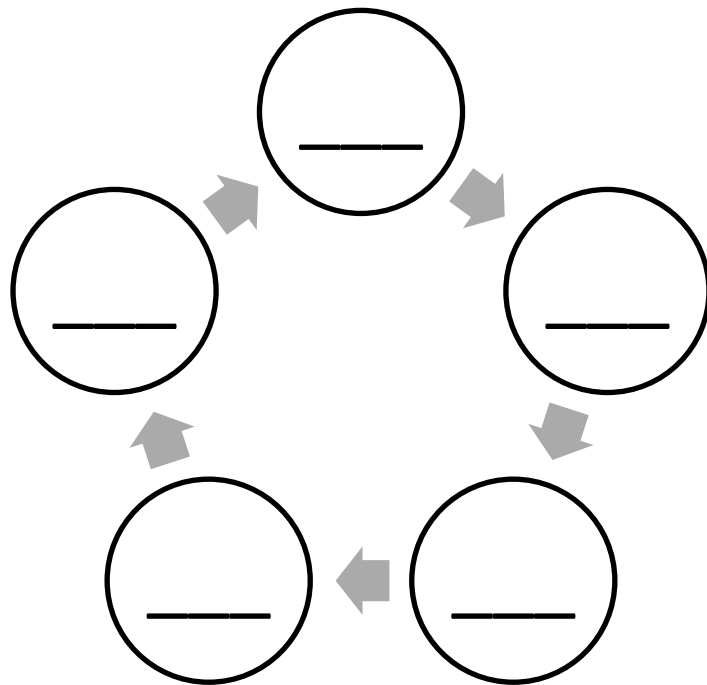
- Why do some people today deny that the Holocaust ever happened?
- Which do you feel is worse- the death of the body or the death of the soul? Why?

MAPMAKER:

# Appendix E



MAPMAKER:



# Appendix F

Reciprocal Teaching Discussion:

How long do students respond to a specific question: Q1- \_\_\_\_// Q2- \_\_\_\_//Q3- \_\_\_\_//Q4- \_\_\_\_//Q5- \_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PARTICIPATION:            OFF TASK:            INTERRUPTS ANOTHER:            CREDITS A PEER:

TYPE OF CONTRIBUTION:

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PARTICIPATION:            OFF TASK:            INTERRUPTS ANOTHER:            CREDITS A PEER:

TYPE OF CONTRIBUTION:

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PARTICIPATION:            OFF TASK:            INTERRUPTS ANOTHER:            CREDITS A PEER:

TYPE OF CONTRIBUTION:

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PARTICIPATION:            OFF TASK:            INTERRUPTS ANOTHER:            CREDITS A PEER:

TYPE OF CONTRIBUTION:

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

PARTICIPATION:            OFF TASK:            INTERRUPTS ANOTHER:            CREDITS A PEER:

TYPE OF CONTRIBUTION:

## Appendix G

SURVEYOR: rate your group members on a scale of 1 to 6 in terms of engagement and cooperation. Then answer the questions that follow.

**ENGAGEMENT:**

Low: 1	Basic: 2	Developing:3	Expectations: 4	Productive: 5	High: 6
The person didn't disrupt or interfere with others' learning	The person did <i>some</i> of the assigned work and was on task for <i>much</i> of the discussion	The person completed <i>most</i> of the assigned work and was on task for <i>most</i> of the discussion	The person completed <i>all</i> of the assigned work and was on task for the <i>whole</i> discussion	The person was on task and completed all assignments and went beyond expectations	Person was on task and put forth maximum effort in keeping the discussion going

**COOPERATION:**

Low: 1	Basic: 2	Developing: 3	Expectations: 4	Productive: 5	High: 6
The person didn't disrupt or interfere with others' learning	When pushed, the person made a contribution	The person contributed to the discussion	The person made a good contributions (that wouldn't have occurred without that person)	The person took initiative to make the discussion successful and showed enthusiasm	The person took initiative, showed enthusiasm, and because of them discussion was engaging

RATE YOUR GROUP MEMBERS:      Engagement-      Cooperation-

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ -      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ -      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ -      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ -      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ -      \_\_\_\_\_      \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR GROUP:**

1. How do you feel your groups' discussion went?
  
2. Do you feel that you did your part in contributing to the discussion? Why?
  
3. Was there anyone in the group that failed to contribute towards the success of the groups' discussion?



## Appendix H

STUDENT FEEDBACK REPORT: remember be honest!

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

### ENGAGEMENT:

Low: 1	Basic: 2	Developing:3	Expectations: 4	Productive: 5	High: 6
The person didn't disrupt or interfere with others' learning	The person did <i>some</i> of the assigned work and was on task for <i>much</i> of the discussion	The person completed <i>most</i> of the assigned work and was on task for <i>most</i> of the discussion	The person completed <i>all</i> of the assigned work and was on task for the <i>whole</i> discussion	The person was on task and completed all assignments and went beyond expectations	Person was on task and put forth maximum effort in keeping the discussion going

### COOPERATION:

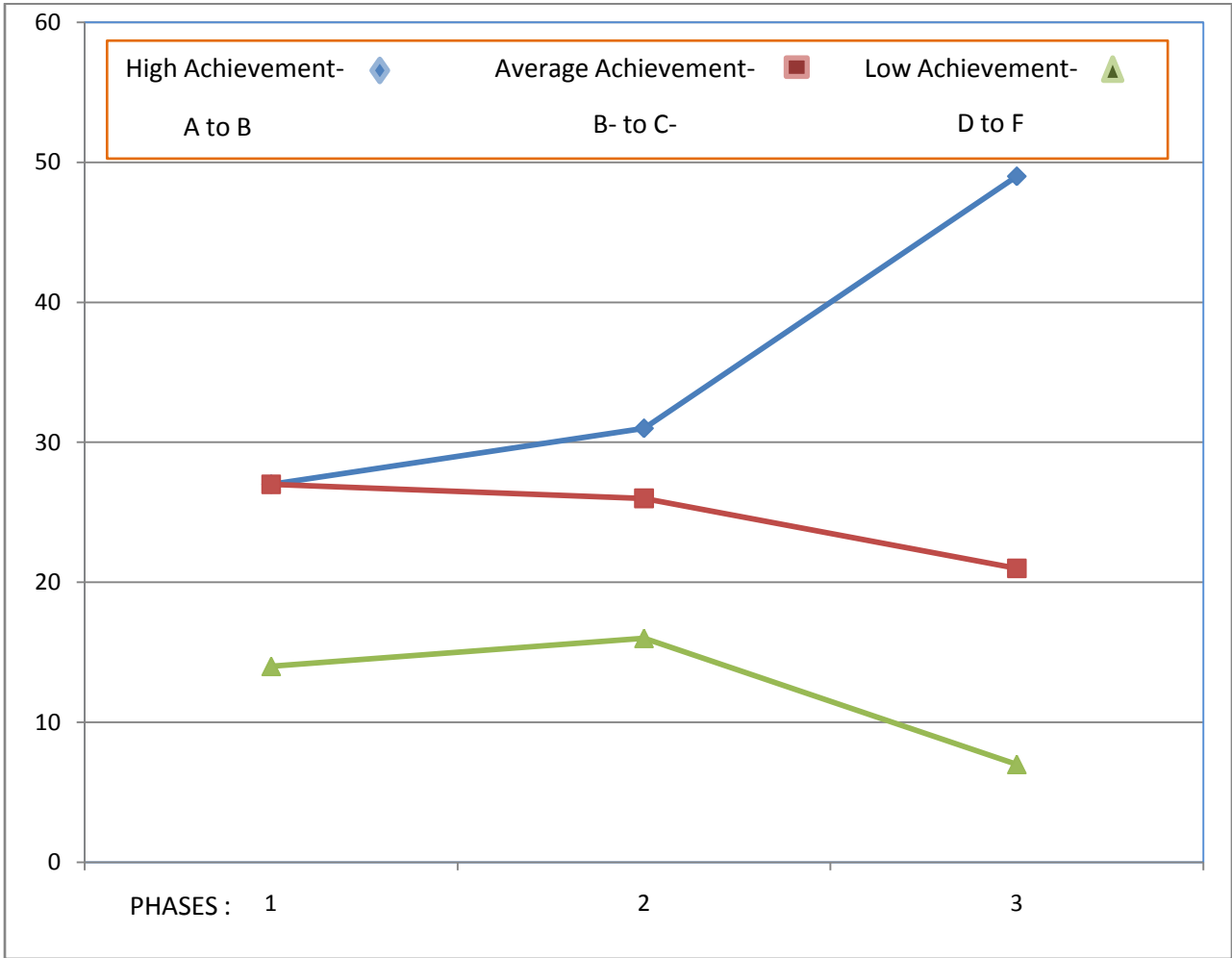
Low: 1	Basic: 2	Developing: 3	Expectations: 4	Productive: 5	High: 6
The person didn't disrupt or interfere with others' learning	When pushed, the person made a contribution	The person contributed to the discussion	The person made a good contributions (that wouldn't have occurred without that person)	The person took initiative to make the discussion successful and showed enthusiasm	The person took initiative, showed enthusiasm, and because of them discussion was engaging

\*In terms of engagement, how would you rate yourself and why?

\*In terms of cooperation, how would you rate yourself and why?

\*Did you find today's discussion beneficial? Why? If not, what would you suggest we do instead?

# Appendix I

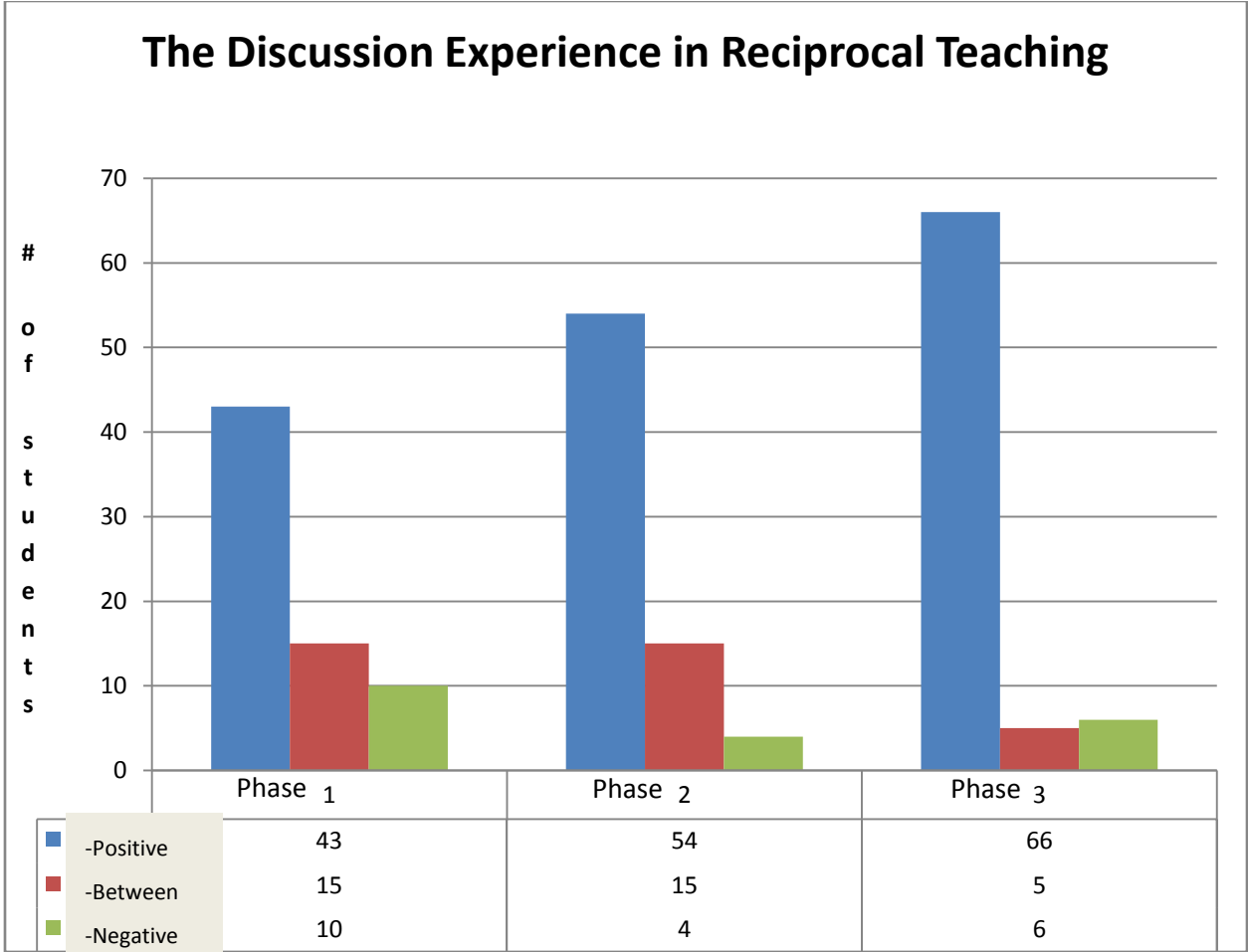


High Achievement= 40%

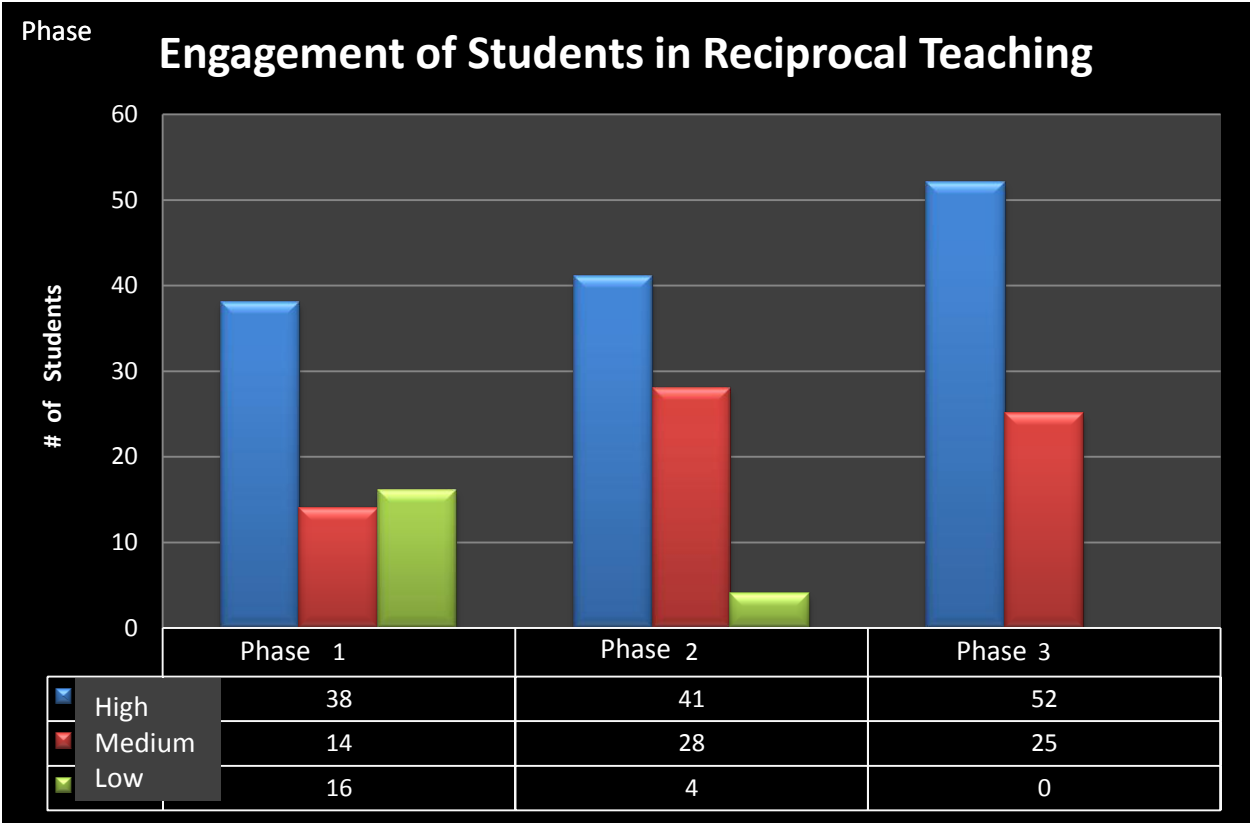
Middle Achievement= 40%

Low Achievement= 20%

Appendix J



Appendix K



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