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STUDENT EXPERIENCE WITH A TEACHER-DESIGNED DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

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STUDENT EXPERIENCE WITH A TEACHER-DESIGNED DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

By

Lacey O'Donnell

THESIS

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SIGNATURE APPROVAL FORM

Student Experience with a Teacher-Designed Discussion Protocol

This thesis by Lacey O'Donnell is recommended for approval by the student's Thesis Committee and Department Head in the School of Education, Leadership and Public Service and by the Dean of Graduate Education and Research.

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ABSTRACT

STUDENT EXPERIENCE WITH A TEACHER-DESIGNED DISCUSSION PROTOCOL

By

Lacey O'Donnell

This phenomenological research study was designed to examine student experience with a teacher-designed literature discussion protocol. The study took place in a dually enrolled high school literature classroom. The class consisted of 21 students, 13 of which were female and 8 of which were male. Throughout the course of the study, the students participated in six literature discussions using the teacher-designed protocol. After the first, third, and sixth protocol, students responded to an open-ended question gauging their experience with the protocol. All data was collected during regular class time. Analysis of student responses revealed student reflections on the intentional structure of the discussion, engagement, and learning.

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INTRODUCTION

As a teacher of literature, I often find myself discussing my content in a passionate manner. Within the course of a given literature class, I may find myself engaged in a whole class discussion as well as multiple small, one-on-one discussions regarding a book or poem. That said, many of the conversations that I participate in I lead, and students often look to me as the expert rather than envisioning themselves as developers and leaders of in-depth conversations about literature.

The goal of student discussion is to increase critical thought, engagement, and learning in the classroom (Brookfield & Preskill, 2012). Within the context of the literature classroom, I consider discussion to be a powerful tool in the formation of critical thought and learning related to the understanding of self and the human circumstance, all the while encouraging student ownership and engagement. However, before this study, I had very little insight into student experience with discussion. Although students appeared to struggle with the creation of meaningful discussion, I had little awareness of my students' thought process. Although I understood that students were experiencing discussion in a way that may differ from my own experience, I did not know their actual perception of experience while engaged in a literature discussion. In an attempt to generate student discussion that emphasizes student responsibility and the construction of thoughts and ideas related to the text, I designed a discussion protocol for use in the English Literature classroom. Although I understood that the use of the discussion protocol could provide the structure necessary for student participation and engagement (Hess & McAvoy, 2015), I had not investigated the actual phenomenon that occurred while students engaged in the process of sharing their thoughts and ideas with peers.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO DISCUSSION PROTOCOL AND PROBLEM

Within the context of the literature classroom, it was my intention to gain understanding of student perception and experience in relation to participation in a teacher-designed literature discussion protocol. The research conducted in this study allowed for a deeper understanding of students' experience as they encounter a structure that attempts to encourage the sharing of thoughts and ideas and promote a critical understanding of text. Furthermore, the investigation into students' actual experience in relation to the teacher-designed protocol helped the researcher to understand the thematic concepts generated through the discussion protocol such as student engagement, student learning, and group dynamics.

Background of the Problem

Although there is a significant amount of research regarding protocols in education, specifically within PLCs (Professional Learning Communities), there is little research in the area of student experience with discussion protocols in the literature classroom. Because my literature class attempts to develop student understanding of text as well as understanding of self in relation to textual discoveries, student experience while participating in small group discussions is particularly important to understanding student construction of knowledge and ideas.

When teaching literary analysis and evaluation, I use the Vladimir Nabokov speech, "Good Readers, Good Writers," (Nabokov & Bowers, 1982) to convey the skill necessary to read literature well. Nabokov establishes an argument for reading in a way that pays homage to the author's work, reading with love. Nabokov's argues in text that readers must possess an intimate knowledge of the details of the text and show an appreciation for the work by noting the intricacies and nuances present in life. However, Nabokov also denotes the importance of a reader having both a logical (scientific) as well as passionate (artistic temperament), for it is both

the scientific and artistic mind that combine to create true understanding. Nabokov's piece frames student understanding of what it means to read in an ethical manner. Once students learn how to read a literary text, I work to help students establish grounds for evaluation. For the past five years, I have used the Laurence Perrine text, "The Nature of Proof in the Interpretation of Poetry" (1962) in which Perrine establishes criteria for the analysis and evaluation of poetry. Perrine suggests that a critic must first account for all of the details of the text. When analyzing poetry a reader must ensure that all details are considered. Once the critic has accounted for all of the details, there is a way in which to determine the best interpretations—the best interpretations are interpretations that are the most efficient and rely on the least assumptions. Thus, evaluations require a reader to be both thorough and efficient. Although students appeared to intuitively relate to the Perrine and Nabokov pieces and utilize the advice of each in their creation of analytical pieces, students often used only their own knowledge and thoughts to inform their understanding.

Statement of the Problem

In my thirteen years of experience as an English Language Arts instructor, I have witnessed students struggle to find meaningful relationships with literature. In the past seven years, I have taught two years of Advanced Placement Literature and Composition and five sections of Modern American Literature, ENG 211, a Gogebic Community College course as well as two sections of ENG 101, Advanced English and Composition. I often find myself questioning what skills are prerequisite to establishing the connections that create universal connectivity and intricate understanding of text. Although students in the Advanced Placement Literature and college courses possess greater general skills in the area of reading and interpreting literature than students in the general English setting, high school students seem to

struggle to generate dynamic, purposeful, and productive discussion regarding literature.

Because I use the Perrine (1962) and Nabokov (1982) texts to emphasize the importance of student collection of detail and generating logical thoughts and conclusions, I expect students to employ the philosophies of the texts to generate discussions that encouraged critical thought and exposure to a variety of details.

The need for discussion is a method of generating meaning from content (Brookfield, 2006). Although I am happy lead discussions of literature and all of the text's connections to the human experience, I wish for my students to possess the ability to share in the understanding and connection that comes from discussing universal human themes within and surrounding the pieces that we read together. There is a need for thoughtful, deliberate discussion that encourages student engagement. When considering the promotion of literacy skills in the literature classroom, I noticed a gap between student ability to write about literary concepts and student ability to discuss concepts within a small group setting. Although discussion is a valued concept in my classroom, student discussion always seemed to be awkward and inorganic. Furthermore, students would often sit in silence, assuring me that they had said all that they could say. However, after implementing a teacher-designed discussion protocol, students appeared to share more thoughts and ideas than ever before. After perceiving said shift in student behavior, I began to wonder what the students' experience was when engaging in the discussion protocol and the implications of said experiences.

Significance of the Study

This study was designed to explore, describe, and better understand student experience with the teacher-designed literature discussion protocol. The students' reflections on their experience with the protocol provide insight into student learning and engagement as well as the

structuring activities within a group setting. The necessity of understanding student experience with the teacher-designed literature discussion protocol is directly relative to the frequency by which the teacher may choose to incorporate discussion, and ultimately, the use of protocol in generating discussion. Because discussion is a valuable tool in both conveying thought and generating new thought, the creation of thoughtful, deliberate discussion is a valuable learning tool. Furthermore, if the protocol encourages students to participate in discussion that is nuanced and complex in the sense that students are able to draw meaningful connections to the human experience, discussion protocols could be a meaningful tool in the creation of a more engaged classroom experience. Ultimately, the goal of teaching English literature transcends the boundaries of studying literature. Effective discussion of literary masterpieces may, in fact, aid students in preparing for life in the sense of possessing a greater understanding of self, others, and experience as a whole.

Theoretical Framework

The theory that providing a structure for student discussion of literature may generate a unique and dynamic student experience is central to the purpose of the research of student experience with a teacher-designed discussion protocols in the literature classroom. In this study, students in the Modern American Literature classroom participated in protocols to discuss works of American literature. The study of student experience with the teacher-designed protocol in the literature classroom may establish a means of understanding the effect of structured discussion on student perceived experience.

This study of student experience with the teacher-designed discussion protocol has its foundation in Constructivist Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Learning Theory. The Constructivist Theory of Learning established that learning is an “active process of constructing

rather than acquiring knowledge” (Mogashoa, 2014, p. 52). Furthermore, the use of the teacher-designed discussion protocol allowed students the opportunity to explain their thoughts in accordance with the facts of the texts. Because “learning, according to cognitive psychology, is concerned not so much with behavioral responses, but rather with what learners know and how they acquire it,” (Jonassen, 1991, p. 6), the structure of the discussion was designed to encourage the construction of knowledge through the discussion of individual perspectives on a common text. Although students began the discussion with individual analysis, through the discussion of the analysis, students had the opportunity to construct knowledge through listening to, commenting on, and connecting with the analysis and comments of other students within the group. The Constructivist theory establishes the necessity of an engaged, and dynamic, responsive learning experience that the practice of student discussion of literature encourages.

The Social Cognitive Theory of Learning supports the idea that individual understanding of the world supports a learner’s understanding within the classroom context. Because a learner’s current level of development is not indicative of the learner’s potential development, guidance in the form of teacher or peer support could allow the learner to develop beyond their individual capacity to develop on their own (Vygotskij & Cole, 1981). Individual understanding presented in the form of analysis within the context of literary discussion provides a means for students to connect individual understanding and meaning to that of their peers. The use of discussion protocols may help students to think in a deliberate manner about the human elements of the experience of reading literature. Furthermore, the use of protocols to encourage continual, focused, and inclusive discussion, allows for a diverse group of answers allowing for universal participation. Discussion that generates meaning and produces a strengthening in student understanding and community identity could create a powerful learning experience.

Research Question:

What is it like for dually enrolled seniors to use a teacher made discussion protocol in an English literature classroom?

Chapter Summary and Brief Overview of the Study

Active participation in the classroom has been linked with learning, critical thinking, and degree completion (Howard, 2004). Yet, educators struggle to incorporate discussion in a manner that produces consistent results. One concern that educators might have in regard to discussion is the likelihood that only parts of a class will engage in actual meaning making. Hence, the understanding of student experience with the teacher-designed discussion protocol could help educators to better construct and implement literature discussion.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview of the Study

The objective of the study is to understand the experience of students using a teacher-designed discussion protocol in an English Literature classroom. The class engaged in discussions using a teacher-designed discussion protocol. This study examined one English Literature classroom and was designed to examine student experience when engaged in a teacher-designed literature discussion protocol.

The concepts related to student experience within the teacher-designed literature protocol that emerged from a review of existing literature are explored in the following section. The concepts explored include discussion as a means of developing student engagement, discussion structure, creating positive classroom culture, and participation in discussion. However, the literature yielded few studies that examine the actual use of structured discussion protocols. The literature also produced few examples of student experience within discussion as well as within the use of a discussion protocol. Furthermore, the review yielded no results in the use of discussion protocols over an extended timeframe in the literature classroom. A gap in the literature exists, and this study seeks to address the need for research regarding student experience using a teacher-designed literature discussion protocol.

Engagement

Student engagement is linked with a variety of positive educational outcomes including academic performance (Lee, 2014). The positive outcomes linked to student engagement make the pursuit of engagement of great concern to classroom teachers. Discussion is a potential method of promoting student engagement. Furthermore, discussion is so fundamental to the

creation of thought, that the lack of discussion in the classroom could create a barrier for the development of critical thought that leads to creation and idea sharing. Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith (1995) argue that “people learn how to think by listening to and participating in the ways in which people around them talk” (p. 7). Thus, the fostering of discussion in an English Literature classroom is a means by which to promote participation and consequently, thought.

The use of discussion in the English literature classroom could allow for a greater appreciation of content and text. According to Brookfield and Preskill (2012) “. . . discussion is a particularly wonderful way to explore supposedly settled questions and to develop a fuller appreciation for the multiplicity of human experience and knowledge” (p. 3). It is within the context of discussion that students can potentially find the ability to denote the nuances and complexities innate within literature presented in the classroom. Brookfield and Preskill further found the argument for discussion as a moral imperative within the claim that discussion’s purpose is to “nurture and promote human growth” (p. 3). Furthermore, discussion has the potential to alternate between playful and serious efforts within group or classroom context. The presence of tension between the serious and playful aspects of discussion can allow for a “reciprocal critique” (p. 4). Such reciprocal critique requires student attention to detail, denotation of conversational cues, and an alert presence; thus, evidence of high quality discussion and engagement as defined by Nystrand, Gaoran, Kachur, and Prendergrast (1996). Such “turn taking among students and teachers” does not force a student to wait for a teacher’s affirmation or response before continuing dialogue or furthering the conversation. In such instances “the teacher, rather than evaluating a student’s response, joins in and becomes a conversant” (p. 16). Such dynamic and spontaneous dialogue can be a cornerstone of engaged discussion.

Discussion is an important technique in creating an active literacy experience that allows students the opportunity to derive meaning from text (Rosenblatt, 2005). In an event-history analysis of 25 Midwestern secondary classrooms, Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, and Long (2003) expand upon previous research that indicates rich interactions associated with student achievement from the use of dialogic discourse. The results of the analysis suggest the importance of authenticity in question construction and the use of student questions functioning as dialogic bids that create meaningful discussion contexts that are linked to authentic situations and sincere purpose.

Authentic questioning can create an environment conducive to discussion. In a study by Christoph and Nystrand (2001) an English language arts classroom was observed. The classroom was characterized as populated by low-income students. The use of the IRE (Initiate, Respond, Evaluate) technique was used to conduct classroom discussions. The success of the resulting discussions was found to coincide with the teacher's ability to use authentic questions and relationships and link student concerns with content in an authentic manner. According to Christoph and Nystrand and , a teacher's role in the discussion process is to guide the students in creating meaning through discussion. The teacher's ability to leverage his or her understanding of the students to connect the students to the topics that the content provides is essential to creating an authentic situation conducive to an engaged student populace. Student discussion has a unique role in the creation of circumstances that promote student engagement. Student discussion allows for an extended interaction with text in a mode other than writing, thereby allowing students to explore meaning in a social and dynamic setting.

Structured Discussion

Discussion in the classroom is a technique that teachers use to promote a learning experience that is student-centered and promotional of critical thinking skills. Nystrand (2006) notes the likelihood that “English language arts teachers and students are generally aware of the instructional potential of discussion” (p. 395). However, discussion practices and frequency vary from classroom to classroom. Furthermore, a teacher’s ability to use discussion effectively is dependent on the skill of the teacher in creating the skills necessary to promote thoughtful discussion. The concept of discussion in the classroom as a means of promoting engagement is widely accepted; however, according to Nystrand, a teacher’s ability to use discussion practices effectively varies. The wide acceptance of discussion as a meaningful practice paired with the sporadic implementation of discussion practices in the classroom might be indicative of the complexities relating to the implementation of discussion.

Structured discussion is at the foundation of this research study. *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education* (Hess & McAvoy, 2015) cites Hess and McAvoy’s 2005, multi-year, longitudinal research that attempted to understand discussion of controversial issues in the classroom. “The primary aim of this research was to examine students’ experiences and learning in courses that engage them in deliberation of political issues” (p. 45). The Best Practice Discussion in this study was structured to accommodate student participation. Hess and McAvoy divided the classes studied into three categories that allowed for an in-depth analysis of discussion’s impact on the students.

1. Best Practice Discussion: Students in these classes engaged in discussion of controversial political issues more than 20% of the time. These discussions also

- involved: students preparing in advance, significant student-to-student talk, and high levels of student participation (p. 47)
2. Discussion: These classes also engaged in discussion 20% or more of the time, but fell short of Best Practice Discussion because most of the talk was student-to-teacher and not student-to-student, students were often not expected to prepare for discussions . . . (p. 47)
 3. Lecture: These classes did not meet the threshold of using some form of discussion at least 20% of the time. The dominant pedagogical strategy was teacher lecture . . . (p. 48)

After examining both teacher and student interviews using a select group of follow-up questions that were asked immediately and in the form of follow-up surveys, Hess and McAvoy arrived at an interesting conclusion. Although Hess and McAvoy discovered that students in lecture classes often perceived themselves to be learning, the student feedback and comment often referenced the teacher's personality and "often sounded as if they appreciated being entertained" (p. 51). Furthermore, students in discussion classes noted having the opportunity to engage with the teacher but did not mention the opportunity to engage with other students. Students in Best Practice Discussion classes noted the importance of preparing for class, which was unique to the Best Practice Discussion group alone, as well as noting the importance of engaging with one another and sharing information to take part in the activities of the classroom. In short, students taking part in Best Practice Discussion experiences felt a greater sense of shared responsibility and ownership in the classroom experience. Although all three classroom groups contained teachers that students responded to in a favorable manner, it was the Best

Practices Discussion classrooms that students responded to in a manner that focused on their own participation and preparation favorably.

Although the use of discussion in this study is specific to small group discussions in which students follow a protocol that encourages equitable and formatted student discussion, research regarding the use of Socratic Seminar informs the discussion process. When employing the Socratic Seminar, the instructor would generate open-ended questions and pose those questions to students. The questions should be created in a way that encourages students to think about and discuss topics relevant to the course including, but not limited to, the text materials of the course. The structured routine of Socratic seminar and Socratic dialogue allows for the creation of a student-centered learning experience that is heavily reliant upon student inquiry and shared meaning making (Tredway, 1995). In an analysis of personal practice, Kipp-Newbold (2010) evaluated the use of “structured partner discussions” and “Socratic seminars” (p. 77) in her secondary English classroom and found structured discussions and Socratic seminar useful in generating opportunities for collaboration, social learning, and “individual growth.” The Socratic seminar was a perceived means of promoting student participation and engagement.

The promotion of individual growth through structured discussion has also been examined within the context of teachers examining personal practice. There is little research citing the use of the term discussion protocols in the classroom, yet discussion protocol is a term often found in teacher examination of personal practice as well as in the area of literary. The book *Leverage* (Many, Sparks-Many, & Dufour, 2015), discusses the use of professional learning community protocols to promote teacher best practices and overall school improvement. The use of protocols within professional learning communities is a common method for the examination of a teacher’s practices and an evaluation of the practice’s merit. The structure of

the protocol allows for a comprehensive assessment of essential questions linked to a teacher's practice. Similarly, the use of discussion protocols might allow for a comprehensive assessment of authentic questions linked to rich literary content. Protocols within the context of meaning making in literacy (Rosenblatt, 2005) could denote a link between routine and structure in the creation of practices linked to critical thinking. Furthermore, the structure inherent in a protocolled classroom discussion might promote the safety needed to positively reinforce future classroom discussions.

Classroom Culture

The culture of a classroom is important to student outcomes; thus, “. . . school improvement requires changing school and classroom culture, beliefs, values, attitudes, and behaviors concerning the learning of students” (Cavanagh & Waugh, 2004, p. 245). Positive classroom environment and a resulting positive culture should consist of an “atmosphere of community and respectful listening” that support “students’ conversational initiations and critical thinking about texts” (Worthy, Chamberlain, Peterson, Sharp, & Shih, 2012, p. 320). A positive classroom environment and culture could be the result of a teacher’s actions that challenge students as learners and engage students in dialogue that positions the students into the role of information seeker.

A positive classroom environment should “provide spaces for students to meaningfully use language; develop and share ideas, opinions and feelings; and learn to listen actively as they develop and appreciation for multiple perspectives” (Author, year, p. 320). The social environment of the classroom may shape individual literacy experiences by promoting “a sense of belonging, identity, ownership, and choice” (Roskos & Neuman, 2011, p. 112). Furthermore, the development of student “participatory skills” is aligned with a positive classroom culture.

Student participatory skills may foster within students the belief that their contribution is important to the success of the class, which may also align with a positive classroom culture. Because effective classroom discussion enables students to create new methods of understanding and connection that demand students to quest toward greater understanding and meaning (Wassermann, 2010), a safe and structured learning environment is important (Fisher, Frey, & Pumpian, 2012). Safety is not inherent in a classroom setting. The creation of a safe learning environment is complex, and an unsafe learning environment may be a deterrent for the promotion of discussion in the classroom. Yet, structure may be at the heart of the promotion of a safe classroom environment. Discussion, as defined by Stephen Brookfield (2012) is “disciplined and focused exploration of mutual concerns but with no end point predetermined in advance” (p. 2). Such “disciplined” and “focused” exploration requires a structure. The promotion of safety, participation, and shared learning are paramount to the creation of discussion activities. Thus, the use of small groups for the research of structured discussion in the literature classroom is important to the creation of what Fox-Cardamone and Rue (2002) noted as the intimacy available in a small group setting. Student preference for small groups was noted in Fox-Cardamone and Rue’s examination of small and whole group discussions. The intimate and safe nature of small groups help to promote a safe and positive classroom culture.

The positive climate surrounding the use of Socratic practices in the English classroom is promising. According to Strong (1994), “Socratic Practice demands high-level social skills as well as high-level reasoning skills. When it is working, students and teachers report an intense sense of classroom community” (p. 13). Beyond the promotion of community, Socratic practices shift the power dynamic of the classroom from the teacher to the student. Although the teacher will scaffold the use of the discussion practice, the carrying out of the discussion will ultimately

rest within the realm of student power. “Just as with developing reasoning, the key to developing community is consistent modeling by the teacher. After setting out clear-cut behavioral boundaries in which the teacher does exercise authority, the teacher then must sincerely allow some scope for student autonomy in the way the group is run” (Strong, 1994, p. 4). The process of Socratic dialogue and seminar is student interaction with content in a purposeful yet human manner that is at once authentic and enriching. “Rather than suffering trade-offs between academic and affective goals, one can use Socratic Practice over time to achieve an intellectual intimacy in the classroom which simultaneously meets both goals” (p. 4). Such intellectual intimacy may create a nexus of shared student learning.

By producing enough positive experiences to counteract the negative experiences, teachers can encourage students to avoid the negative spiral that can lead to negative attitudes in the classroom. The learning environment affects student achievement and enthusiasm. Students who perceive the educational climate favorably achieve higher academic success than those who perceive it negatively (Fredrickson, 2001). The use of structured discussion to create said positive experience might prove to be effective in generating positive student perception of the classroom culture and learning.

Participation in Discussion

The participation of students in literature classroom discussion is a fundamental element of this study. Although one national survey indicated that 95% of teachers value the use of discussion in their classrooms, only 33% of teachers reported using discussion in the classroom (Nystrand, 2006). The complexity of implementing discussion in the classroom is compounded by the dominant role of the teacher within the discussion. Marshall, Smagorinsky, and Smith

(1995) investigated the discussion of literature in high school classrooms and found four general patterns:

1. Teachers directed most group discussions and after a student shared, the power to speak returned to the teacher.
2. Teachers were able to use their turns to talk for a number of purposes to guide the conversation while students used their turn to answer the teacher's question.
3. Students statements regarding the question asked showed a definitive connection to the way in which the teacher posed the question. In short, the students were responsive to the limitations and ques established by the question.
4. Teachers bore the responsibility of synthesizing student responses and generating overall themes and take-aways from the discussion. (p.)

Overall, Marshall, Smagorinsky and Smith (1995) found that even when teachers utilized discussion practices in the classroom, the conversation ultimately relied upon the teacher's feedback and guidance to sustain it. Furthermore, the students' role in the conversations rarely demanded that the individual create a unique point, interpretation, or defense.

The connection of personal experience's role in the creation of classroom discussion could compel students to better focus on and understand the literature that they read (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001). The use of student knowledge and experience in an organized classroom discussion could aid in the transition from students as consumers of information to students working to create and construct knowledge and understanding. Although many studies seek to understand the role of the teacher in the discussion, the studies rarely examine student-lead discussion and instead examine discussions that include the teacher's input and guidance.

Furthermore, there is a gap in the research in the area of student discussion of literature through protocol.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This examination of student experience using a teacher-designed discussion protocol was conducted through a qualitative, phenomenological approach. Creswell (2003) defines phenomenology as the type of research “in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in the study” (p. 15). The purpose of the phenomenological approach is to “seek reality from individuals’ narratives of their experiences and feelings, and to produce in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon” (Yüksel, & Yıldırım, 2015, p. 1). In this study, the researcher attempted to mark the “lived experiences” (Creswell, 2003, p. 15) of the subjects through “studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships of meaning” (p. 15). The phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to understand student reality as explained by students’ marking their lived experiences in the form of narrative response.

In an attempt to recognize the experience that students encountered while participating in discussion protocols in the literature classroom, students provided written narrative answers in response to survey questions they receive on three separate occasions. The phenomenological method includes the transcendental philosophy, which allows one to step outside the experience, and the existential philosophy, which emphasizes the need “to focus on our lived experience” (Yüksel, & Yıldırım, 2015, p. 2). In an attempt to understand students’ experiences with a teacher-designed discussion protocol, I interpreted students’ narratives that explained individual experience with the discussion protocols. Chapter Three describes all three of the data sets collected. Furthermore, Chapter Three explains the method utilized to collect the data.

For the purpose of this study, the selected literature classroom took part in a teacher-designed literature discussion protocol for a minimum of thirty minutes, on six different occasions over the timespan of five weeks. The protocol was designed by the instructor and asked students to reflect on their knowledge of Vladimir Nabokov's "Good Readers, Good Writers" (Nabokov & Bowers, 1982) to collect important details to share with randomly selected reading groups. For the purpose of this study, students were placed into groups by random drawing for each of the six protocols. The minimum group size was four students and the maximum group size was six students. The discussion protocol used the following format:

1. In preparation for the activity, students were tasked with collecting a minimum of important details to critically analyze for effect from the assigned text.
2. Students began the discussion protocol by individually sharing one of a minimum of three details that they critically analyzed as well as their analysis. They were allowed to read from the paper, which they wrote on, or they could elaborate by sharing in a more conversational manner.
3. Once one student shared, everyone in the circle (starting clockwise from the speaker) had the opportunity to comment on a connection, question, or concern regarding the shared detail. Once all circle members have shared, the next circle member shared their detail and repeat the process.
4. Students continued to share details until all members of the circle have shared. Once all members of the circles have shared, the students began the process again, and shared until time commenced.

The data collected for this study followed the administration of discussion protocol one, discussion protocol three, and discussion protocol six. The data collection occurred at the

beginning, middle, and end to denote any difference or similarity in response from beginning to end. All three data sets were collected through the website *Survey Monkey*. The responses to the electronic questionnaire were anonymous to generate a sense of student safety, and the above questions were administered following all three data collection time periods.

The students enrolled in ENG 212 participated in a series of six, teacher-designed literature discussion protocols. After the first, third, and sixth discussion protocols, students were asked to voluntarily respond to the following question:

Reflect on today's class period. What was your experience with the group discussion protocol?

The data collected were analyzed by reading through all of the text data, "dividing the text into segments" (Creswell, 2012, p. 244), labeling the segments of information into code, and reducing the codes into themes. Each of the three protocol responses were coded, and then the themes from each response were compared to provide an understanding of the effect of the protocol on the classroom over the time period of the study. I searched for trends in the data specific to each protocol response as well as overall themes present in all three data sets.

The students in ENG 212 completed ENG 101 before enrolling in ENG 212. Previous to the Winter 2019 semester, ENG 212 focused on the creation of literary analysis. Although the creation of literary analyses has always been part of the foundation of the course, the course has only recently incorporated formal student discussion. Because discussion is a means of promoting ideas and understanding, the use of discussion to further develop skills in the area of literary analysis may be helpful (Rosenblatt, 2005). When students in ENG 212 were asked if they had ever completed a discussion protocol after the first discussion, students unanimously responded that they had not completed a group discussion. Although I used small group, student

discussion within the past year in the Civics classroom, I had not used small group discussion in my English classrooms. With the hope of better understanding student experience with the unfamiliar process of small, group literature discussions, I designed a discussion protocol that charged students with creating individual analysis and sharing said analysis with a group of randomly selected classmates.

Overview of the Study

This phenomenological study was designed to examine student experience with a teacher-designed literature discussion protocol. Through student reflection on the process of participating in the teacher-designed literature discussion protocol, I hoped to better understand the way in which students interpreted and internalized the process of participation. In this research study, students were asked to participate in six discussion protocols and reflect on their experience in three of the six discussions. Discussion protocols were a regular classroom activity. Throughout all six of the discussions, I also took notes and observed the processes of discussions.

The goal of the research study was to understand student experience with a teacher-designed discussion protocol and to gain perspective on the discussion protocol's perceived effect on the students. The discussion of literary themes, motifs, symbols, and ideas is imperative to the process of creating a dialogue surrounding literature and the shared meaning that may make the process of creating an analysis relevant. Through discussion, "individual students, as well as the teacher, provide ideas and model ways to think about them in a manner that moves the conversation along and enriches the growing interpretations" (Roberts & Langer, 1991, p. 1). The use of analysis may also provide responsiveness to ideas from a community of learners that is difficult to create in a large group discussion. "Teacher discussion practices also affect the

extent to which students act as an interpretive community, collaborating to expand the range and depth of their responses” (p. 2). This examination of student perception of the teacher-designed literature discussion protocol allows for a more in-depth understanding of student’s lived experience with small group discussion in the literature classroom setting.

Setting and Participants

The use of anonymous survey responses following discussion protocols one, three, and six allowed the researcher to examine student reflections on the teacher-designed literature discussion protocol. All of the students’ responses were read following each data collection date and grouped into thematic categories. Table 1 describes the student participants that took part in each data collection.

Table 1

Student Participant Numbers

Total Number of Students in ENG 212	Number of Students Participating in Survey One	Number of Students Participating in Survey Two	Number of Students Participating in Survey Three
21	18	13	19

The population that comprises the sample is high school, dually enrolled students. The dual enrollment program at this particular school allowed students to earn both high school and college credit by attending classes within the high school. At this particular school, the dual enrollment classes were taught by high school teachers that had received advanced degrees in their content area. From the population of high school students dually enrolled, one ENG 212 class was selected for this study. The dually enrolled students chosen for this research were members of a college English course titled, ENG 212—Modern American Literature, 1865-Present. In order for students to participate in dual enrollment, students must achieve a certain

SAT or ACT score. Furthermore, students wishing to enroll in ENG 212 must have previously received a C or better in ENG 101. Thus, ENG 212 students are typically high-achieving high school students. The students attended a common rural, Midwestern high school. Of the 21 students enrolled in ENG 212, 13 of the students identified as female and 8 of the students identified as male. All students were between the ages of 17 and 18 years old at the time of the study. Most of the students in the classroom identify as Caucasian. The student participants were residents of a small, Midwestern school district that covers multiple townships and towns. The total high school population was approximately 420 students. The high school is comprised of grades nine through twelve. This particular group of students had not participated in the teacher-designed discussion protocol previous to the Winter 2019 semester; however, other students that had taken the class in the past had experienced a similar protocol.

Data Collection

Three sets of data were collected during the duration of the study. Table 2 illustrates the dates on which the data were collected.

Table 2

Data Collection Timeline

Date	Data Collected
February 12, 2019	Students Responded to Protocol 1
February 18, 2019	Students Responded to Protocol 3
March 12, 2019	Students Responded to Protocol 6

Post-Discussion, Open-Ended Question

Following their participation in each of the three discussion protocols, students voluntarily responded to an open-ended question. Students had immediate access to the survey through a link posted to Schoology, the high school's Learning Management System (LMS). The student responses were analyzed using an analytic strategy for qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). Throughout the analysis process, I searched for themes that described students' experience with the teacher-designed literature discussion protocol. Each data set was individually coded; furthermore, the resulting themes from each data set were coded in an attempt to understand common themes as well as a progression of experience. The coding process made use of three strategies: open coding, axial coding, and constant comparative coding. Open coding allowed for the labeling of concepts, and the development of categories based on common themes. Axial coding allowed for the categories created to form relations to one another. Constant comparative coding compared existing categories as they emerged from the data.

Analysis Procedures

Throughout the process of analyzing the data sets collected, I used an analytical strategy where I generated ideas based on emerging themes, took detailed notes on the ideas generated, identified codes and reduced said codes to themes, counted how frequently the codes occurred, compared categories, and eventually generated a point-of view and displayed the data. (Creswell, 2012). As the sole teacher of ENG 212, the creation of the discussion protocol was influenced by a similar discussion protocol that I used in my Civics classroom. The discussion protocol appeared to positively affect student learning in my civics classroom, so I began to use the protocol in my English classroom. Although I was familiar with the use of discussion in the

classroom, I had not previously gathered any formal feedback from students on the process; furthermore, I had never allowed for a process of anonymous, honest feedback on student experience with the discussion process. During the study, I gathered three sets of data. The collections of data occurred following discussion one, three, and six. The data collected reflected student response to an open-ended question that challenged students to reflect on their experience with the teacher-developed literature discussion protocol. The analytical strategy helped me to navigate the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

To better understand student experience with a teacher-designed literature discussion protocol, three sets of survey data were collected and analyzed. Chapter Four describes all three data sets independently and relative to the progression of the data collection times and dates. Data were collected on three separate dates that marked the first, third, and sixth teacher-designed literature discussion protocol. Each data set was collected using the same survey question and collection method.

Data Collection One

Data Collection One commenced on February 6, 2019. Students read the poem, “Oh Captain, My Captain,” by Walt Whitman (2008) and wrote three separate analysis paragraphs to share in the students’ first attempt at a literature discussion protocol. Students were randomly placed in small discussion groups. At the end of the first protocol, students were asked to answer the survey question. Students were told that participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. No grade would be attached to the response. Of ENG 212’s 21 students, 19 students were in attendance on the date of Data Collection One, and 17 of the 19 participating students responded to the survey question. After the analysis of the responses to the survey question for Data Collection One, the themes of *Discussion of Protocol’s Structure* and *Discussion of Engagement* were evidenced and further investigated.

Discussion of Protocol’s Structure

The open-ended survey response for Data Collection One yielded nine comments relating to the structure of the discussion. Because the structure of the survey was predetermined by the teacher and taught as a means to conduct the discussion, the student response to the structure of

an activity that is unfamiliar was unsurprising. That being said, the student's unique comments on the discussion yielded both positive and negative aspects regarding student experience during the first discussion protocol.

Students referenced the awkward nature of the protocol while simultaneously referencing the idea that the structure may have allowed for the students to continue the process of discussion. Because students had not previously participated in the teacher-designed protocol, some responses noted the "clumsy" nature of the discussion. One student noted, "It was a bit awkward at times, but we moved on to the next person to read their analysis . . . I wouldn't mind doing something like this again in the future. I'm not big on talking to people I don't know but this wasn't too bad of an activity." Interestingly, the student made mention of the protocol's demand for the process to continue, although the established process may have, in fact, made the experience feel regimented and lacking the authenticity of a less structured discussion. Furthermore, the student's comment discussing his or her distaste for talking to unfamiliar classmates yet feeling as though he or she may not mind participating in another discussion seemingly aligns with Kipp-Newbold's (2010) conclusion that structured discussions encourage student participation and engagement.

Although some students found the structure awkward, other students referenced the group's ability to work through the steps of the protocol. "Overall I thought it was going to be worse than it was. Once the group started actually talking and getting into the poem it went smooth." Another student discussed the protocol's structure as a means of promoting student participation. "There was lots of time to discuss all of everyone's analysis choices and discuss them. I think that each person saying at least one comment is a really reasonable idea. This gives each person a chance to speak their mind and also introduce other viewpoints on the same topic."

Because the protocol's design demands that all students participate in an equitable manner, increased participation in the discussion process is a benefit of the structure. Dallimore, Hertenstein, and Platt (2016) articulated the ways that student participation increases both engagement and learning, and the notation that the structure of the protocol encouraged participation might signify student understanding of the importance of all group members participating in the process of discussion.

When reflecting on the structure of the discussion, some students were compelled to offer insights into how the discussion structure could be more effective in the future. One student stated that the discussion went "well" but his or her group could have benefitted from spending more time reflecting on individual ideas. Another student also characterized the discussion as having went "well," yet offered the following insight, "Something that I think went well was just everyone talking about someone's piece they wrote, instead of having the person to the left answer because I feel like it gets a better discussion going." The previously mentioned student's notation of a shift from protocol was unique in that his or her group felt a level of autonomy and confidence that allowed the group to slightly alter the protocol in order to make the discussion fit the needs of the group.

The theme of reflecting of "Discussion of the Protocol's Structure" was prominent in the open-ended response to the first literature discussion. Although students were given permission to reflect on the day's discussion and encouraged to answer in any way the students felt comfortable responding, many students chose to specifically discuss the way that they individually experienced the protocol's structure rather than discuss the text or learning. Because the protocol was new to the students taking part in this study, the students may have been in the

preliminary stages of understanding the structure, and the learning of the process may have eclipsed the students' reflection on learning and understanding the text.

Discussion of Engagement

Data Collection One resulted in various comments directly and indirectly referencing student engagement. The comments on engagement were diverse and often referenced the idea of student learning through participation in the discussion protocol. Thus, student engagement is not a theme limited to the feeling of fun, but also seemingly tied to the theme of "Learning through Discussion." Although some students simply noted that the first discussion was "fun" or "enjoyable", other students noted the knowledge that their group members possessed that was shared through a group discussion. Furthermore, similar to the student who noted overcoming his or her distaste for talking to students that he or she does not know through the discussion protocol, two other students referenced surprise in regard to their individual experience with the discussion. One student stated, "At first, I thought I was going to be passive, but I had a somewhat easy and enjoying time contributing. 10/10 would do it again." While another student stated, "I also didn't think I would enjoy this, but I didn't mind it at all." The students' surprise at their own enjoyment of the discussion echoed the ideas of the social environments that encourage engaged learning described by Roskos and Neuman (2011).

When reviewing the responses, some of the students referenced both liking the process and learning from the process. For example, a student discussed both enjoying the group activity, but also finding it "fun to be able to share and to hear one another's responses." Because there was not a length requirement for the open-ended question, students responded with varying levels of depth. Yet, after reviewing the data, students that referred to both engagement and learning were students that did not feel the need to reference a feeling of discomfort or surprise

within the structure of the process. Because the process of learning is dependent on an individual's ability to navigate the variances and boundaries of the learning environment, it is possible that students that referred to the process as both engaging and an opportunity to learn were students with more advanced social and/or discussion skills.

Data Collection Two

Data Collection two was completed on February 12, 2019. Students read the short story, "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge," by Ambrose Bierce (2008) and completed three separate analysis paragraphs to share in the students' third attempt at a literature discussion protocol. Students were again randomly placed in small discussion groups. At the end of the protocol, students were asked to answer the survey question. Students were told that participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. No grade would be attached to the response. Of ENG 212's 21 students, 15 students were in attendance on the date of Data Collection Two, and 13 of the 15 participating students responded to the survey question. After the analysis of the responses to the survey question for Data Collection Two, the themes of "Reflection on Group Dynamics" and "Comparison to Past Discussions" were discerned and investigated.

Reflection on Group Dynamics

In relation to the theme of "Reflection on the Success of Protocol," many students responded to the open-ended question in a way that referenced the dynamic of the groups and how the group's dynamic contributed or took away from the discussion of the text. The comments on group dynamics referred to both the social element of participation and the social and dynamic nature of learning. Nine of the thirteen responses referred to the dynamics of the group that the student was randomly assigned to participate.

In reflecting on the day's discussion, students referenced their individual group's ability to aid in their individual learning an understanding of the text. "This group discussion went well because others in my group made some of the same connections that I did but with different details. It showed me how there were even more details that matched mine than I thought." The student's response notes the advantage of sharing the details of a common text with members of the group that also read and analyzed the text. The structure of the protocol was designed to capitalize on shared learning and increase student understanding of the text; in effect, the student's response indicated the potential of the structure to encourage that which it was designed to encourage. Ultimately, the purpose of the group is to encourage the sharing of perspectives and understanding. Another student affirmed the nature of the group's ability to impact learning by stating, "I really get lucky with my group most weeks, so I enjoy it. They are smart, and they really help me understand the text." Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, and Long (2003) noted the rich interactions that take place during authentic classroom discussion, and the students noted above evidence of said discussion. Because the student directly stated that his or her group helped generate a better understanding of the text because of the group's collective intelligence, one is able to surmise that the student's experience in the group was positive and enabled a perspective that was inaccessible when reflecting on the text in isolation.

The large number of responses denoting the group dynamic produced a variety of results relating to the assessment and effect of group dynamics. Because a student's feeling of safety in a group impacts a student's willingness and ability to participate effectively (Bilson, 1986), many students were compelled to note feelings of comfort and discomfort following Discussion Protocol 3. For example, one student reflected that if he or she had "had one friend in the group" he or she may have "talked more." Whereas another student stated that, "It was fun today, mostly

because I was more comfortable around my group than past groups it was easier to talk.”

Creating a feeling of safety and security in the classroom extends beyond the whole group and into the realm of the small group dynamics at work within the discussion protocols. Because a safe learning environment is important to the creation of a positive classroom culture and individual learning (Fisher, Frey, & Pumpian, 2012), the student’s assessment of his or her level of comfort shaping their participation was particularly important. The level of comfort within the group could potentially influence a student’s overall participation and willingness to utilize the tool of discussion.

However, not all students required “friends” within the group in order to feel comfortable participating in the discussion. A particularly interesting reflection referenced the importance of the teacher choosing the groups. “I think when the teacher picks the groups it goes a lot better because people should be able to talk to everyone and you’re not always going to get to pick who you work with in life. It does help when you get along with the people, but sometimes it’s nice to work with people who have different views.” Throughout the data collection process, certain responses have signaled a mature and/or advanced understanding of the discussion process and its design whereas other responses have indicated the need for an approach that is more comfortable for students who do not have the advanced discussion or analysis skills that other students have. The student that referenced the importance of teacher-selected groups was seemingly comfortable within the groups chosen by the teacher. However, it is also possible that the student is confident and comfortable with his or her ability to analyze the text as well as in his or her ability to discuss other student responses to the text. The potential variables that affect a student’s perception and experience within the discussion protocol are large; however, the

variances in confidence between students discussing group dynamics are significant and worth investigating further.

Comparison to Past Discussions

Because Data Collection Two marked the third discussion protocol that the students had participated in, students transitioned from discussing the structure of the protocol and individual levels of engagement in the protocol to discussing the protocols in relation to one another. Although students were prone to evaluating the success of the small group discussions in Discussion Protocol One, the students reflecting on Discussion Protocol Three had the context of the previous two discussions to reflect upon when responding in the second data collection. Although the indicators of comparison were straight forward and included such phrases as, “This group discussion went well . . .” and “I thought today could have gone better” as well as a series of three responses that noted the discussion as “fun,” the collective tone of the responses was unique in that many of the students used the evaluation of the discussion to begin to discern what exactly went well and what could be changed to make the next discussion more positive. For the first time, students were able to provide feedback on the process in comparison to past experience, and many students were eager to showcase the positive and negative comparisons to past discussions. This ability to evaluate is seemingly significant in that students appear to be generating an awareness of traits that are positive and negative within the context of the protocol. That being said, it is difficult to know whether or not the students are planning on using said knowledge and familiarity with the protocol to enhance future discussions; thus, prompting the need for further investigation in this area.

Data Collection Three

Data Collection Three took place on March 12, 2019. Students read the short story, “Hills like White Elephants,” by Earnest Hemingway (1998) and completed three separate analysis paragraphs to share in the students’ sixth literature discussion protocol. Students were again randomly placed in small discussion groups. At the end of the protocol, students were asked to answer the survey question. Students were told that participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous. No grade would be attached to the response. Of ENG 212’s 21 students, 20 students were in attendance on the date of Data Collection Three, and 19 of the 20 participating students responded to the survey question. After the analysis of the responses to the survey question for Data Collection Three, the themes of “Thoughts on Learning” and “Reflection on the Success of the Protocol” were evidenced and further investigated.

Thoughts on Learning

In the final collection of data, students often noted the theme of learning through the completion of the protocol. The theme of learning was denoted in a variety of text and often referenced the way in which a group member’s analysis of the text impacted a different group member’s understanding of the text. The text for Discussion Protocol Six seemingly presented challenges to the students that were not evident in Data Collection One and Data Collection Two. However, it is possible that the students are simply using the structure of the protocol to better understand the literature presented and, now that the discussion protocol is routine, the students are in a developmental zone that allows for greater reflection and denotation of learning and challenges. One student reflected, “There were details I didn’t even catch or understand until the discussion, and I would like to work on this piece more to figure it out. It’s kind of like a puzzle. I never know I enjoyed puzzles like this . . .” Because the discussion of complex topics has the

potential to generate new contexts for meaning making, the student was able to metaphorically reference the text as a puzzle that he or she enjoyed working on. Furthermore, the student noted the group's ability to help in the creation of the metaphorical puzzle, displaying the student's understanding of the shared learning that was occurring during the discussion protocol.

Furthermore, the students elaborated on the past theme of group dynamics and structure in an attempt to highlight a connection between the structure, groups and learning as a whole. For some students, the third response seemed to be a comprehensive response that denoted an evolution of understanding both the purpose of group discussion and analysis of a literary text. For other students, the response to Protocol 6 was isolated to thoughts on the day's protocol rather than the relationship between the protocols. That said, both the comprehensive responses and the isolated responses that displayed the theme of "Thoughts on Learning" suggested that learning and meaning making takes place from a shared discussion of literary themes and details.

In contrast to past protocols, some students found themselves reflecting on specific details of the text discussed in the protocol. Past discussions had little discussion of or reference to specific details discussed or learned. Rather, students opted to share their experiences with the actual process. However, Discussion Protocol's Six's reflections garnered multiple discussions of important and learned details of the text, "Hills like White Elephants." For example, one student directly referenced a group member's thoughts in his or her reflection, sharing, "Leah shared a really strong one about white elephants and an elephant or problem and the room and it really stuck out because I remember trying to connect them with something but never ended up finding anything." In the example above, the student not only credits a group member with helping to generate a new understanding, the student also shares that he or she was able to use

the new information to clarify a moment of confusion during his or her individual reading of the text.

Although multiple students noted learning through the discussion, students did not mention any aspect of the written analysis. Because the analysis was prepared ahead of time, the information presented in the discussion protocol may have affected the learning experiences and overall effect of the quality of discussion as a whole. Although Hess and McAvoy (2015) stated the importance of preparation of materials before protocol, the students' ability to recognize said preparation as a foundational element to the success of the discussion may have been limited by the open nature of the question.

Reflection on the Success of the Protocol

Students in both Data Collection 2 and Data Collection 3 referenced a feeling of success in the completion of the protocol. The feelings of the completion of success varied and often overlapped with students noting learning or growth through the discussion. Furthermore, the inclusion of concepts such as "fun" notes a connection to Data Collection 1's theme of "Engagement." Throughout the reflective responses collected in Data Collection 3, students made comments indicating that "the discussion was enjoyable," and one student even stated that it was the best discussion that he or she had thus far.

The students' feelings of success in the protocol seem to indicate a feeling of both engagement and an understanding of the learning that results. Seemingly, the feelings of success and engagement have been present since the first data collection. Although not all of the students noted the experience as being fun, most responses referenced either success or engagement thereby signifying the continuation of an engaged and successful experience for students. Although many teachers stray from student discussion, fearing the ambiguous and complex

nature of discussions, the ability of the protocol to sustain an engaged audience is promising to the continuation of the use of the protocol in the classroom. Furthermore, it seems as though the students' familiarity with the protocol might increase the likelihood that students perceive the protocol experience as a learning experience. Because familiarity with structures that govern the students' interactions increase with time, students continued interest in the activity as well as new reflection on learning is promising in terms of the protocol's effect on students.

Trends in Student Responses

In an analysis of Protocol 1, the themes of student engagement and discussion of the protocol's structure appeared. Many students described an engaging experience, and some students even discussed an element of surprise in their own ability to partake in the discussion and/or enjoy the discussion. Because the question asked of the students was broad and allowed for many responses, some students expanded upon the theme of engagement while others simply noted that the discussion was "fun." Although students discussed engagement, unlike Protocol 6's data collection, the very few students noted "learning" through the protocol. This may not signify a lack of learning through discussion, because multiple students focused on the structure of the discussion in Protocol 1. Because the protocol was new to the students, the reflection on the structure of the protocol seemingly indicated an attempt by many of the students to understand the new structure that the students were asked to function within. The students participating in the study may have learned, but it is possible that many of the students were focused on participating in the format of the discussion and fully achieving the goals of the discussion; thus, reflections on learning through the protocol were few.

Discussion Protocol 3 marked the second data collection, and students displayed decidedly different responses to the protocol. Seemingly, students evolved past the discussion of

the format of the protocol, as many of the students had, at that point, participated in the protocol three times, and instead discussed the dynamics of individual groups and the groups' effect on the individual protocol's success. In reflection, students referenced both current and past groups and the effect of each group's unique dynamics on the students' overall experience in the protocol. Because groups were created at random for each protocol, students had the opportunity to work with a variety of people. Protocol 3's response appeared to mark students' ability to compare positives and negatives of past protocols to the current protocol. Although students were allowed to respond in any way they felt necessary to the reflective, open-ended question, many students responded in a manner that provided insight into the success of the current or past protocol. Students' ability to use the context of past protocols to engage in such discussion marks a decided turn from the response analyzed in Protocol 1's data collection. Although few students noted learning as part of the experience of Protocol 3, students displayed a familiarity with the structure of the protocol that allowed for individual insights into how the group's dynamics in each protocol discussion influenced the overall experience of the protocol. Although the response and insights varied from student to student, the overall trend in responses indicated a decided shift in what students were thinking about following their third attempt at the literature discussion protocol.

The third data collection occurred following Discussion Protocol 6 and resulted in themes of both student engagement and learning. In contrast to Protocol 1, students noted learning at a much greater rate than engagement. That said, many of the responses that indicated learning as part of the experience of the protocol also alluded to student engagement. The significance of the student notation of learning through the protocol is found in the evolution of student responses. The students began with an emphasis on the structure and engagement of the actual experience,

progressed to reflections on group dynamics and using past knowledge to compare the nuances of each experience, and ended with the students responding in a manner that suggested learning occurred through the experience of participating in the protocol.

Throughout the analysis of student experience in the teacher-designed literature discussion protocol, individual students referenced significant concepts and ideas that were not found to be group themes. Notably, one to two students in every protocol noted that the process was difficult and/or not enjoyable. In each of the responses, the student indicated a reason for his or her negative experience. That said, the final protocol garnered only a single response in which a student stated he or she did not enjoy the protocol because “. . . I don't get along with group members, and I felt my ideas were not very good or worth being said.” Because of the anonymity of the data collection and a lack of ability to see how individual responses change throughout time, it is impossible to know if the student expressing a negative experience in Discussion Protocol Six expressed a similar experience in all other data collections.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Data Collection One Summary

Discussion Protocol 1 produced the first collection of data for the purpose of this Phenomenological Study examining student experience in a teacher-designed literature discussion protocol. Discussion Protocol 1 asked students to discuss individual analyses of the poem, “Oh Captain, My Captain,” by Walt Whitman. Of ENG 212’s 21 students, 19 students were present and took part in Discussion Protocol 1. In student reflection of experience within the discussion protocol, the themes of “Discussion of Protocol’s Structure” and “Discussion of Engagement” were evidenced and further investigated. Student responses displayed a variety of experiences that emphasized the experience with the structure of the protocol. Some students noted the awkward nature of the protocol’s structure; yet, some responses noted that the awkward feeling disappeared toward the end of the protocol. Other students saw the protocol’s structure as a means of encouraging participation and perceived the structure as responsible for students’ continued discussion. In student reflections on the experience of taking part in Discussion Protocol 1, the theme of engagement and/or fun prevailed. Many students indicated that the discussion was fun; furthermore, some students suggested that they found themselves surprised at how much they enjoyed the process and indicated that they did not perceive the process as enjoyable before taking part in the protocol.

Data Collection Two Summary

Discussion Protocol Three marked the second collection of data for the students in Modern American Literature. The second collection of data followed student reading an analysis of the short story, “An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge,” by Ambrose Bierce. The students’

reflection on their experience participating in the protocol indicated a focus on the themes of “Reflection on Group Dynamics” and “Comparison to Past Discussions.” The second data collection followed most students’ third experience with the discussion protocol structure. Students reflected less on the structure of the protocol in Data Collection 2 and instead emphasized the effect of the groups’ composition on the individual student’s experience within the protocol. Students seemingly showed a stronger understanding of the process used within the protocol and used their individual understanding of past protocols’ positive and negative experiences to judge the experience of the day’s discussion.

Data Collection Three Summary

The final data collection followed students’ analysis of the short story, “Hills like White Elephants,” by Ernest Hemingway. The final data collection was students’ sixth experience with the teacher-designed literature protocol. Of the 20 students in attendance, 19 reflected on their experience with the discussion protocol. Data Collection 3 indicated that learning was a significant part of the students’ experience in the discussion protocol. Students also referenced themes of engagement and fun. In the final collection of data, the students appeared to have evolved past reflections on structure and group dynamics and into a more comfortable discussion of what was learned through the process of completing the teacher-created literature discussion protocol.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited in that it investigated one class, in a specific setting, over a five-week period. The study was an investigation of personal practice, and I was the only researcher. Furthermore, the data collected was anonymous and there was no notation of how individual students’ responses changed over time which did not allow for the variances of the

individual's perspective shift or lack of a shift over the time of the protocol's implementation. Finally, the study only used reflections to examine personal perspective and did not use any other method of collecting data, thereby limiting the depth available by other data collections such as interviews.

Areas for Further Research

Multiple areas for future research were revealed through analysis of the data collected. Although, by the final data collection, multiple students noted learning through the discussion, students did not mention any aspect of the written analysis. Because the analysis was prepared ahead of time, the information presented in the discussion protocol may have affected the learning experiences and overall effect of the quality of discussion as a whole. However, throughout the three data collections, students did not state whether the prepared analyses had an effect on the discussion. This connection is interesting in that students did not note the prepared analysis as affecting the perceived outcomes of the protocol. However, because the reflective question was broad, students might have taken the prepared analyses as simply a mandatory portion of their assignment; thereby overlooking the potential effect of the preparation. However, if students had not been asked to prepare responses, how would the shift in the protocol structure affect the students' overall experience? Would the change in structure impact the students' experience in a positive or negative manner given that the change would require a more dynamic, instantaneous response? Would there be more awkward moments, or would the students produce responses that are more genuine? Hess and McAvoy (2015) noted that students reflect more on their own learning when they have the added responsibility to prepare for the discussion. Thus, the added responsibility of preparing for the discussion may lead students to different experiences than discussions that are designed to be organic and of the moment.

Another area of research to pursue in light of the findings in this study is a measure of the teacher-designed literature protocol's effect on student learning. Is the literature protocol as effective or more effective at promoting student learning in the literature classroom? Because this study was phenomenological and attempted to examine the students' perception of the protocol, the study did not examine whether or not the students learned through their participation in the teacher-designed discussion protocol. Some students reported learning as mentioned in the previous section; however, there was no external measure used within the study to record student growth within the content area from beginning to end. A future study might attempt not only to gauge student learning from beginning to end with an approved method of measure but might also make use of a control group that taught the same content without the use of the teacher-designed literature discussion protocol.

As mentioned within the literature review, in one national survey, 95 % of English teachers reported value peer discussion as a component of literature instruction, yet, only 33% of the same teacher reported the use of any discussion within their practice (Comeryas & DeGroff, 1998, p. 434). The discrepancy between what a teacher values and actual implementation and regular practice seems to indicate a problem with the implementation of discussion practices in the classroom. That said, is it possible that the repeated use of a protocol similar to the teacher-designed protocol used in this study would increase teacher willingness and/or ability to implement discussion practices in the classroom on a consistent basis? A teacher's willingness and ability to align that which is valued with personal practice is important to the integrity of the classroom. Thus, increasing a teacher's ability and/or motivation to implement regular discussion practices into the classroom might have a broad and lasting effect on the teacher and/or students.

Teacher Research Reflection

As I plan my classes for next year, I must consider the results of my research. After analyzing the results of Data Collection One and comparing the results to the other two data collections, it seemed that students were much more concerned with the structure of the discussions than in other data collections. Students were seemingly attempting to learn the structure of the protocol and follow directions to complete the assigned process. Because the protocol was completely new to students, and some students had never participated in a small group discussion before, students might have felt pressure to complete the steps of the protocol and work through the process of the protocol. In the future, I plan to introduce the protocol to students in a way that notes the new structure. I will tell students that they have probably not experienced a discussion like the teacher-designed literature protocol discussion, and that it is possible that they will feel awkward or uncomfortable as they attempt to complete all of the steps. I want students to understand that it is normal if they feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, I will make sure that students understand that the class will be completing many more protocol discussions, and that eventually, the structure of the protocol will become familiar.

The method used to construct groups should also be considered in the creation of future literature discussions. In this study, students were part of a randomly selected group that changed for every discussion. Some students noted that teacher-selected groups were a positive aspect of the discussion; however, other students mentioned that having one friend or a familiar face in the group might encourage greater participation. Because a feeling of safety is an important in encouraging participation, I could ask students to privately share with me one or two preferred group members. Then, I could attempt to structure the first few discussions in a way that allows students who are less comfortable in a group setting to have at least one person that they selected

in the group. That said, students said little about group discomfort in the final data collection. Therefore, as students become more comfortable with the teacher-designed discussion protocol and discussing literature with their classmates, I could transition to complete random selection of groups. Seemingly, students were most concerned with the group makeup in the early discussion protocols.

Finally, I must remember that repeatedly implementing the teacher-designed literature discussion protocol is important to promote student perception of learning through discussion. Only after the third data collection (following the sixth discussion protocol) did student reflections reveal an emphasis on what was learned through discussion. After students understood the structure and nature of the groups, students were able to discuss the learning that occurred through the discussion protocol. Although I am quick to jump from tool to tool to promote learning in my classroom, I must remember the importance of repeated implementation of the teacher-designed literature protocol concerning students' experience with learning. Thus, I will commit myself to repeated protocol discussions throughout the semester.

Conclusion

This investigation of personal practice resolved to better understand student experience with a teacher-designed literature discussion protocol. Three collections of data over the course of six literature discussions revealed both themes exclusive to the individual protocols and evolving themes present from one data collection to the next. In the first data collection, students reported experiences that noted themes of engagement as well as an emphasis on thoughts and perceptions regarding the structure of the discussion. By the second data collection, students had completed the teacher-designed discussion protocol three times and reflected on an experience that focused on group dynamics and an evaluation of the discussion in contrast and comparison

to past discussion. However, when the third data set was collected following the sixth discussion, students noted an experience that emphasized the learning that had occurred within the protocol along with feelings of success and engagement. Although students completed the protocol six times, enthusiasm for the protocol as well as student perception of learning through the discussion thematically peaked in the final data collection. Student experience with the teacher-designed literature discussion protocol was unique in that student experience evolved from the first to the last discussion protocol. Students first reflected on the structure of the protocol and feelings of engagement, transitioned to discussing the experiences of past protocols and group dynamics, and ultimately, after participating in six discussion protocols, shared feelings of engagement and learning.

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APPENDIX A

Table 3: *Data Set One, Open-Ended Responses*

Reflect on today's class period. What was your experience with the group discussion protocol?
<p>1. The discussion group was actually surprising interesting. Some of the people in my group had similar ideas to me which made me feel better about my writing. Talking to my classmates about something we've all read and being able to share our interpretations of the text was a good learning experience. We don't often share our ideas with each other and it's even better when we can share them about one topic. It was a bit awkward at times, but we moved on to the next person to read their analysis. I wouldn't mind doing something like this again in the future. I'm not big on talking to people I don't know but this wasn't too bad of an activity.</p>
<p>2. Discussing topics that don't have much controversy I believe is more complicated because we felt the similar ways, so the discussion wasn't long.</p>
<p>3. I found it enjoyable and knowledgeable. Even though it was awkward at first, once we broke the ice it started to go well. After some group members read their analysis' everything started to click and make sense.</p>
<p>4. It opened me up to a lot more on the poem and helped me pay attention to more detail than I thought there was. My group work really well together. We gathered lot of the same details but in somewhat different ways where we could think further and make progress on understanding the poem. I would like to try analysis again, I'm getting the hang of it, but one of my members had done them really well, and I would like to catch up. Not only that, but also because it's fun. I feel like I'm building a puzzle, and the discussion helped me fill in the pieces. At first, I thought I was going to be passive, but I had a somewhat easy and enjoyable time contributing. 10/10 would do it again.</p>
<p>5. My experience today went fairly well. We all had our analysis and all responded to each other well, though it did feel awkward at times. With such a small poem, that had a pretty obvious meaning, we had very similar details picked with similar analysis. That meant that a lot of the responses were simply agreeing with the detail, and how we generally had the same thing. I think it will probably go better if we had a longer piece to pick broader details from.</p>
<p>6. The group discussion was a little repetitive because a lot of people chose the same details to analyze. It was a little hard to come up with questions at times because</p>

of this. The discussion protocol was a little hard to follow because it wasn't how the natural course of things went.

7. There was lots of time to discuss all of everyone's analysis choices and discuss them. I think that each person saying at least one comment is a really reasonable idea. This gives each person a chance to speak their mind and also introduce other viewpoints on the same topic. I think this discussion protocol was helpful for everyone because it gave everyone a chance to pick more details out of the poem that their brain might not have picked up on its own.
8. I thought it went well. My group members noticed thing that I would have never noticed before. I even surprised myself because I had things to say and to add on to the other group member's thoughts. Everyone in my group had something to say, which was nice. I also didn't think I would enjoy this, but I didn't mind it at all.
9. Overall, I thought it was going to be worse than it was. Once the group started actually talking and getting into the poem it went smooth. It helped look at people's different views on things and what some details meant to them compared to what they meant to me.
10. My experience was better than I thought it was going to be. Everybody in my group had very good details and explained them very well. After every analysis, we responded and either agreed or disagreed. If we disagreed, we would explain what we thought the detail meant and that would open up a whole new perspective on the detail.
11. I liked the group discussion activity. I think that it was fun to be able to share and to hear one another's responses. It was a good way to get a deeper understanding of the topic because everyone else had ideas that I hadn't thought of myself. So, it was cool to get some new viewpoints on the topic.
12. Went good for me. There were hardly any breaks in talking. 7/10.
13. The protocol went pretty well, just a little clumsy at some points. It is interesting to hear what other people get from a poem that you don't always pick up on.
14. I thought it went really well for the first time. We all shared good details and reflected on each detail well. I believe we could have spent more time on some details though. We kind of flew through some of them.
15. I think it went well. Something that I think went well was just everyone talking about someone's piece they wrote, instead of having the person to the left answer because I feel like it gets a better discussion going.

16. I found the discussion to be good and open. Me and my other group members had much overlap in our ideas and thoughts, which lead to quite a bit of repeating ourselves on the same topic.

17. Kind of odd that there were so many “rules” or things to help us through, but I thoroughly enjoyed my group and our discussion. We shared a lot of the same ideas, so it was very much like, “Yeah, I agree with that. I said that, and I also had, *insert similar thought*.”

APPENDIX B

Table 4: *Data Set Two, Open-Ended Responses*

Reflect on today's class period. What was your experience with the group discussion protocol?
<p>1. This group discussion went well because others in my group made some of the same connections that I did but with different details. It showed me how there were even more details that matched mine than I thought.</p>
<p>2. When we have a protocol, it kind of forces everyone to talk and share their opinions. Sometimes people don't talk during group activities, either because they are too lazy, everyone keeps talking over them, or they aren't given enough time to think about their answer. By setting an order for commenting, it helps everyone who normally wouldn't share their opinions because they don't want to be rude or cut into anyone else's comments. They are given a significant amount of time to think about their answer and the discussion won't move on without them.</p>
<p>3. It was more awkward this time, we because the people in my group didn't talk as much as last time. The people in my group were more introverted which isn't a bad thing because I know I am an introvert. So it was harder this time but we got through all the responses and talked a little about each one.</p>
<p>4. I think when the teacher picks the groups it goes a lot better because people should be able to talk to everyone and you're not always going to get to pick who you work with in life. It does help when you get along with the people, but sometimes it's nice to work with people who have different views. I think this time it went much better because this text was easier to talk about. I like when everyone can just pitch into the conversation instead of going around in the group one by one because it creates a lot more discussion. Also, I feel these discussions help with getting to know new people in your class that maybe you weren't close with before because you are forced to talk.</p>
<p>5. I thought today could have gone better. Today we only had three people in our group and I feel when there are more members in a group, there is more discussion. Last week I felt there was more talking being done and we had 4 members in our group. I also feel that if I had at least one friend in my group I would have talked more.</p>
<p>6. It was an unpleasant experience because I am somewhat quiet, and I did not discuss with my group members very well. I think it would be better if we could pick our groups.</p>
<p>7. It was fun today, mostly because I was more comfortable around my group than past groups, so it was easier to talk.</p>

8. It was fun, I enjoyed catching up with my classmates and talk about literature.
9. Decent 7/10, group discussions are fun
10. We did not stay on topic the whole time, but when we were on topic we did a really good job sharing and explaining.
11. I think this discussion went much better. The longer piece allowed us to pick more diverse details; none of us had the same one picked. We also were better at responding and making connection both inside and outside the piece.
12. The groups help let everyone say what their thoughts are, but the responses were awkward and clunky.
13. I really get lucky with my group most weeks, so I enjoy it. They are smart, and they really help me understand the text.

APPENDIX C

Table 5: *Data Set Three, Open-Ended Responses*

Reflect on today's class period. What was your experience with the group discussion protocol?
1. We talked the most about the text this time but didn't make it through all the analysis.
2. We all shared our analyses but there was little discussion about the details. I didn't know what to say most times so I didn't say much. But we did get through everyone so that was good. I don't know how I am going to do the Socratic circle; I won't know what to say.
3. We took a lot of time on each analysis which made it hard to get to everyone, but everyone was willing to share stuff about their life and everyone was open hearted
4. I thought it was interesting, but it could've been more engaging. I enjoyed it but I think a lot of us were very reserved, but I still learned a good deal. I really enjoyed this piece, but I never know when I'm reading too closely into Hemmingway. There were details that I didn't even catch or understand until the discussion, and I would like to work on this piece more to figure it out. It's kind of like a puzzle; I never knew I enjoyed puzzles like this, much like Emily Dickinson's poems; I really enjoyed them.
5. We did not get through all of our analysis but the ones we got through had really strong points brought up. Leah shared a really strong one about white elephants" and an elephant or problem and the room and it really stuck out because I remember trying to connect them with something but never ended up finding anything.
6. I felt today went pretty good. We seemed to all agree with what we thought about the story. There were some details said by people in my group that changed my mind on what I thought, but I still had the same general idea. One thing I wish is to have one friend in a group because I feel I talk a lot more when I know someone in my group.
7. I feel like half of my group did not know that the story was about abortion. I completely missed the part about the baby and the operation; I thought they were talking about their travels. One thing I like about the discussions is that if there is a sentence or a phrase that confuses me, someone else in the group will probably have an analysis about it and explain it a little, so I get a general idea and can look at it in more detail.
8. The discussion today was really good. I read the story and I had no idea about the main subject. Two people in my group figured that out prior to the group discussion. It made a lot more sense knowing the whole story rather than trying to guess what was going on. It made my analyses make more sense and allowed me to make my analyses in a little more

depth. All and all it was a good discussion today, we all talked about the story and how most of us didn't realize that it was about an abortion. I did like the story though now that I figured out what it really was about.

9. More things were pointed out to me than I had thought of myself. The discussion that went along with our analysis ended up taking over the group and we talked extensively about one person's analysis before moving on to the next one.

10. We are slowly all learning our ways of doing the discussions, in how we respond and how we answer. This keeps the processes moving and keeps everyone talking.

11. It was what I expected it to be. We talked about our analyses and half talked about other things

12. I did not enjoy it. I don't get along with group members and I felt my ideas were not very good or worth being said.

13. We delved into some details and were able to relate those details to our personal life. It was a good discussion overall and it helped me understand the piece even more.

14. I think today's discussion was a little bit harder because the story was a more difficult one if you did not know what it was about. But other than that it went good, because I was with people who had different views than I did so that added to the fun of it because we got into more of an argument.

15. I thought that this discussion was the best so far, at least for me personally. I think that is because I thought this piece was very interesting and that it was the easiest thing for me to analyze so far. I definitely plan to use this piece for the essay.

16. It was good and many ideas that I didn't think about were brought up. I liked how I got different views on certain details and what they mean to them.

17. We strayed from the protocol a bit, but we had relevant conversation. It was enjoyable.

18. Went great 10/10

19. Good

APPENDIX D

Table 6: *Discussion Calendar*

Discussion Number	Date of Discussion
Discussion One	February 12, 2019
Discussion Two	February 14, 2019
Discussion Three	February 18, 2019
Discussion Four	February 25, 2019
Discussion Five	March 7, 2019
Discussion Six	March 12, 2019

Note: Time lapse between discussions was not as planned. Six school cancellations occurred within the timeframe of the research.

APPENDIX E



**NORTHERN MICHIGAN
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Memorandum

TO: Lacey O'Donnell
School of Education, Leadership, and Public Service

CC: Bethney Bergh
School of Education, Leadership, and Public Service

FROM: Dr. Lisa Schade Eckert
Interim Dean of Graduate Education and Research *LSE*

DATE: January 28, 2019

SUBJECT: IRB Proposal HS19-1011
"Student Experience with Discussion Protocol in the English Literature Classroom"
IRB Approval Dates: 1/28/19 – 1/27/20
Proposed Project Dates: 2/4/19 – 3/5/19

Your proposal "Student Experience with Discussion Protocol in the English Literature Classroom" has been approved via the administrative review process. Please include your proposal number (HS19-1011) on all research materials and on any correspondence regarding this project.

Any changes or revisions to your approved research plan must be approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to implementation.

If you do not complete your project within 12 months from the date of your approval notification, you must submit a Project Renewal Form for Research Involving Human Subjects. You may apply for a one-year project renewal up to four times.

All forms can be found at the NMU Grants and Research website:
<http://www.nmu.edu/grantsandresearch/node/102>

APPENDIX F

Student Discussion Protocol

Directions: Use the steps below to guide small group literature discussion.

1. Review the three details that you chose to analyze for today's discussion of literature. Choose one of the three details to begin the group discussion. *Note:* You will share both the detail as well as your analysis of the detail.
2. Once with your group, choose one person to begin the discussion and share both the chosen detail and their analysis of the detail.
3. Once the first group member has shared their response, the other group members (starting with the person to the left of the speaker) will respond to the speaker's analysis with a question about or connection to the speaker's analysis—other group members, including the speaker may add to the group member comment, but must also present an individual response to the speaker's analysis.
4. Once all group members have commented on the speaker's detail analysis, the next group member (the person to the left of speaker 1) will share their detail and analysis, and the process will begin anew. This process will continue until all group members have shared their detail analysis.
5. If time permits, you should share another detail (from your three detail analyses) and begin the student discussion protocol process again.