

Public Abstract

First Name:Shannon

Middle Name:Cowart

Last Name:Cuff

Adviser's First Name:Carol

Adviser's Last Name:Gilles

Co-Adviser's First Name:

Co-Adviser's Last Name:

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Title:A Balancing Act: Negotiating the Teacher Roles of Instructor and Participant During a High School Literature Discussion Unit

The purpose of this study is to provide more information about how literature discussion as a reading instructional strategy can work in the secondary classroom. Elementary teachers have known about and incorporated literature discussion into their curriculum for years. However, high school classrooms tend to focus more on covering content using anthologies and whole-class reads rather than giving students the opportunity to talk about what they're learning by using a variety of teacher-selected texts. By observing three teachers' literature discussion groups, we learn more about the decisions they make both as instructors and group participants as well as the classroom environment needed for students to be successful during the unit. These teachers help us think about when to step in and out of students' conversations and how to create instructional materials that will aid them in their understanding of a text.

In order to answer these questions, I conducted a naturalistic, qualitative inquiry. Over the course of four months (February through May), I observed three teachers in two different high schools implement a literature discussion unit. I conducted teacher and student interviews, digitally recorded the conversations of one literature group in each classroom, and collected teacher and student artifacts for data analysis.

Although the teachers in the study were very different, we know a lot about how literature discussion can work in the high school classroom by comparing and contrasting their approaches to the unit. The establishment of expectations and guidelines for the literature discussion group affects how productive the in-class conversations about the text will be. Additionally, students who feel comfortable with their teacher may choose to seek more guidance and assistance to help them navigate through a text as opposed to students whose relationship with their teacher has not been well established. The roles the teachers chose to play were mostly based on how they perceived their students' reading abilities and the goals they wanted their students to accomplish during the discussions. Interestingly, the facilitator role emerged as important for all three teachers, regardless of the students' skill level. Finally, the importance of a social learning environment emerged as crucial to reading instruction. In addition, each teacher's knowledge and application of literature discussion resulted in three different outcomes at the conclusion of the unit.

Studying three teachers implement literature discussion provides much insight into how the instructional strategy can best work in a high school classroom. When students talk, learn from one another, and have fun navigating their way through a text together, an environment that celebrates literacy is the result. Students can carry this love of reading with them throughout their lives, thus resulting in a richer overall quality of life.