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Proximity and Preparation: The Keys to Engagement in Secondary Montessori Literature Seminars

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Proximity and Preparation: The Keys to Engagement in Secondary Montessori Literature

Seminars

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Abstract

Dr. Maria Montessori's philosophy defines education as an aid to life. Given the appropriate prepared environment, young people will construct themselves and become strong, resilient, holistic humans, willing to share their gifts to benefit the common good. The developmental needs at each phase, articulated by Montessori's Four Planes of Development serves as an essential guide to the teaching and learning. This research looks at the effects of two developmentally appropriate interventions on engagement within peer-led literature seminars in a secondary Montessori classroom. The first intervention included a low stakes way to increase proximity or a way to create a sense of ease and security at the beginning of each class such as a quick question, activity, or sharing of a quote. The second intervention aimed at preparation to help students feel more confident in participating. During the week between each seminar, students were given short lessons on literature analysis and context for the novel. Triangulated quantitative and qualitative data reveal a positive effect of student engagement due to the presence of the two interventions within the seminars. Results of the research will inform how future literature groups are conducted and will potentially benefit other secondary Montessori programs.

Keywords: Secondary education, Instructional design, Educational psychology, Montessori philosophy, Pedagogy, Literature seminars

Proximity and Preparation: The Keys to Engagement

How do we prepare our young adults for an uncertain and ever-changing future? This is a recurring discussion within the field of education, but is it even the question we should be asking? What if we refocused the conversation on how we are meeting the developmental needs of the adolescent based on who they are today? If we provide students with the environment, conditions, and tools they need developmentally, perhaps they will construct themselves into well-adjusted, thoughtful adults that utilize their individual strengths to collaborate and create the future they desire and one that is good for all. Montessori philosophy holds this to be true, but how does this work in the practical operations of the high school classroom? This research seeks to help fill that space.

It is widely accepted that there is a link between student engagement and learning outcomes (Tredway, 1995; O'Connor, 2013), and this led me to question whether addressing certain developmental needs of adolescents would lead to increased engagement. Our existing practice of peer-led literature seminars seemed like the natural place to study this question in detail due to its recurring nature and school wide participation. There is significant research on how active learning practices such as seminar positively affect other areas of classroom learning (Copeland, 2005; Tredway, 1995), but there is a gap in the research of how to increase engagement within the practice itself. This research looks at the effects of developmentally appropriate interventions, using Dr. Maria Montessori's theory of The Four Planes of Development, on engagement within literature seminars.

Discussion of Theoretical Framework

Dr. Maria Montessori's vision of the development of children divided their growth into four distinct planes. She believed that there were time periods when children demonstrated

certain characteristics and thus needed various types of engagement to fully learn and thrive. These characteristics coincide with brain development and observation of behaviors. Each plane is interdependent with the others, and they build on one another. This research is looking specifically at students in the third plane of development which spans from twelve years old to eighteen years old. The needs included in this research are the social and cognitive needs specifically of the students during that time period of their lives. The social needs of students during this time consist of building a community, having close relationships with peers and at least one adult, feeling psychologically safe, to become competent, and to serve others. The cognitive needs of the adolescent consist of creatively expressing new interests, thoughts, and emotions, learning new frameworks for thinking, gaining inquiring habits of the mind, developing a personal vision, reflection, and meaningful work.

This philosophy is the best fit for this research because understanding the universal needs of students at their stage in development informs how to teach and engage them in the most meaningful way possible. Dr. Montessori writes, “We ought to remember that there is one thing that education can take as a sure guide, and that is the *personality of the children* who are to be educated” (Montessori, 1976, p.99). This research is looking at behavior and engagement in peer-led literature seminars. Looking at this through the lens of Maria’s Montessori’s planes of development helps to identify the reasons why this practice is effective and where it can be improved upon based on the needs and characteristics of the students (Montessori, 1976). For example, knowing that an emotional need of a student in the third plane of development is to exhibit leadership, we might see more engagement out of giving certain students more responsibility within the group.

This theory of development and the needs of the students during this time provides a foundation for this research of the specific educational practice of student-led literature seminars. Will intentionally meeting the developmental needs of the students increase engagement within the seminars? This lens is a way to look at the research through a more holistic approach. As schools are realizing the value of more meaningful and interconnected learning experiences for students, this research helps to answer the question: If we use educational practice as a vehicle for meeting the broader needs of adolescents, will it create more engaged learners? Maria Montessori's lens of the third plane of development and provided the container for which this is explored.

Literature Review

How does incorporating the needs and characteristics of adolescents into literature seminars affect engagement? There is very little research that looks at this specific topic. There is significant research on how seminars and active participation help engagement in other areas, but there isn't a lot of research on how to increase engagement within the seminars themselves. However, there is substantial research that looks at the various elements of the topic such as support for active learning, seminar discussions themselves, engagement, and increasing engagement. The research confirms that active learning is the best way for students to internalize information and that seminar discussions are a solid tool for active learning. The research defines types of engagement, but it is lacking in direct information around how to most effectively increase engagement in seminar discussions. Overall, there is a need for specific research on increasing engagement in secondary seminar discussions specifically in Montessori high school environments.

Support for Active Learning

Educational philosophies and methodologies are evolving constantly. Many practices tend to be adopted, used for a few years, and then forgotten. However, some ideas have become mainstream and stayed. Currently, there is consensus that active student engagement is beneficial to learning in secondary classrooms. Regardless of subject matter, most teachers have moved away from the idea that students are empty vessels to be passively filled with information (Swiderski, 2011). Students need to actively work with information for it to be meaningful to them as individuals and to internalize it in a way they will remember it. “Learning is not a spectator sport. [Students] must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p.4). When students are actively engaged with their learning, they are learning to manage the information that they are gaining. This also prepares them to do the same with information gained outside of the classroom setting (Swiderski, 2011). In the secondary classroom, active learning is often cognitive engagement. Students are taking on ideas, questioning them, connecting them, and building upon them. One tool of active learning that appeared frequently in the research is seminar style discussion.

Seminar Discussion

In this background research, the term seminar discussion includes both Socratic styles of discussion as well as literature circles. There are a couple of differences between these two styles, but “despite these differences, the underlying constructivist philosophy upon which both strategies are built suggests that students are coming together to build meaning and understanding in a collaborative fashion with their peers” (Copeland, 2005, p.10).

Seminar discussions provide a container for students to dive cognitively into ideas within a structure. The norms set up for this style of discussion help to facilitate fruitful and meaningful conversation with purpose and intention. Students are collectively developing ideas of ethics, knowledge, and understanding. When they do this together, they are more likely to retain them (Tredway, 1995). “The process balances two traditional purposes of education: the cultivation of common values and the worth of free inquiry (Tredway, 1995, p. 28). Research agrees that this is a valuable tool for active learning. There is significant evidence of its efficacy in other curricular outcomes, but the research into why it is so effective and how to improve the caliber of this tool is surprisingly sparse. To dive into this, there needs to be an understanding of engagement and what it looks like in a classroom setting.

Engagement

Engagement in the classroom setting has been heavily researched. However, there has been significant variation in how it has been measured and defined. Originally, engagement was thought of in a one-dimensional way, and it looked at objective and observable behaviors such as basic participation (Brophy, 1983; Natriello, 1984). Bloome and Argumedo (1983) would call this procedural engagement. Students appear to be “on task” and aren’t distracting from the business of the classroom. They mostly turn in assignments and go through the motions of school (Nystrand & Gamoron, 1991). However, Bloome and Argumedo (1983) added another dimension to the definition of engagement that they called substantive engagement. This is deeper and more difficult to observe and quantify than procedural engagement. Substantive engagement requires psychological investment from the students that results in a more complex understanding. Tasks that develop this type of engagement are often more open-ended in nature and have some element

of collaboration. “Schoolwork and class activities will foster substantive student engagement only if these activities require more than a mastery of procedures” (Nystrand & Gamoron, 1991, p.263).

Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) eventually conducted a literature review of the studies in engagement and concluded that there are three dimensions of engagement that all work in unison: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. Behavioral engagement focuses on the procedural participation that Blume and Argumedo referred to in their research. This presents as students completing homework on time and speaking in discussions. Emotional engagement focuses on affective reactions and feelings of connectedness to peers, teachers, and content that they are learning. Students engage emotionally when they feel safe, valued, and that they have a place within the community. Finally, cognitive engagement refers to how invested a student is in learning. This often appears as students going beyond what is asked for the sake of understanding and growth and a preference for being challenged intellectually. There is overlap in the definitions of engagement, and it can be difficult to distinguish and measure the types of engagement individually.

Increasing Engagement

There is limited research in how to increase engagement in seminar discussions. There is considerable research on increasing class participation and using seminar discussions as a tool to increase educational outcomes. “The seminar process accomplishes other important educational objectives: vocabulary development, interpretative and comparative reading, and text analysis” (Tredway, 1995). O’Connor’s (2013) study tried to increase class participation by increasing procedural engagement. “If students know there is a chance they will be asked to participate during class meetings they may be more inclined to prepare themselves to do so” (O’Connor, 2013, p. 2). This study looks at student accountability as a factor for in class participation. Clark

and Holwadel's (2007) study looked at how to improve literature circles that were negative feeling due to classroom tensions, lack of discursive skills, and racial, class, and gender barriers. This study was attempting to "fix" literature circles that weren't functioning in a healthy way rather than improve seemingly functioning seminars. They did this by trying to create a better sense of community in the classroom as well as directly teach communication skills.

Gaps in Research

The research about specifically increasing engagement in seminars is very limited. The research that exists approaches the topic from an academic outcomes perspective. There was very little research about what the students need based on where they are developmentally as adolescents. This research will help fill a gap by starting from the other direction: looking at what adolescents need according to where they are developmentally and seeing if adding interventions based on those needs and characteristics will help create more engagement and efficacy of literature seminars. There is also a lack of research on seminar discussions within a Montessori high school environment.

Conclusion

Overall, there is comprehensive research on isolated elements of this research topic, but there aren't any studies that combine them. The literature review helps inform how this study will look at the data and interpret engagement. This study will help fill a gap and provide some insight into how Maria Montessori's ideas of human development influence academic procedures and foster the deep engagement of students.

Methods

The literature groups at this school use Socratic discussion to construct meaning, dive into big ideas and values, analyze authorial intent, make sense of historical situations, learn from other perspectives and interpretations, practice active listening, articulate connections from other content areas, ask thoughtful open-ended questions, and create community through content and shared understanding. Socratic seminars are rooted in the philosophy of Socrates. He believed that every individual had a wealth of knowledge and perspectives to contribute to learning, and that traditional lecture style lessons weren't enough. He developed the practice of Socratic questioning from which the seminars evolved. The text keeps the conversation rooted, and the students practice their critical thinking skills while also learning how to engage meaningfully and respectfully with peers. Our students have had previous practice and lessons about the process. However, the interventions will be a new addition to see if there is a change in engagement.

Structure

This high school population consists of ninety-seven students between tenth, eleventh, and twelfth grades, and everyone participates in literature groups. Each literature cycle, the students have a choice between five different novels. These novels range in Lexile, subject material, author background, genre, and length. However, they are all united around a common element. The unifying element for the cycle of this research was that they are all set during World War I. Students are given the choice of which novel they would like to read. They choose their top two and are placed into one of those literature groups. Each literature group has two leaders that are seniors. Each week, students read to a certain point in the novel, write a Short Constructed Response (henceforth referred to as SCR) with textual evidence and analysis, and prepare an interpretive question for the group.

Prepared Environment and Norms of Seminar Discussions

The way the seminar discussions are set up is intentional and essential to how they run. The prepared environment is work of the adult. The adult provides the conditions necessary for students to be able to thrive. For seminar discussions, the students are set up in the various classrooms throughout the high school. These classrooms are all inviting and comfortable. There are plants, rugs, natural light, lamps, collaborative work spaces, and individual workspaces. These environments set the energy and tone for the students entering them.

For seminar discussions, the students bring chairs into a circle. The circle is symbolic and practical in the functioning of seminar discussions. The following poem, “The Story of a Circle”, demonstrates this importance:

*A Circle expands forever
It covers all who wish to hold hands
And its size depends on each other
It is a vision of solidarity
It turns outwards to interact with the outside
And inward for self-critique
A circle expands forever
It is a vision of accountability
It grows as the other is moved to grow
A circle must have a centre
But a single dot does not make a Circle
One tree does not make a forest
A circle, a vision of cooperation, mutuality and care
-Mercy Amba Oduyoye*

In a circle, all participants including the leaders are equals. Everyone is sitting at the same level, and it is a coming together of ideas and insights. Each participant has their place and has knowledge and perspectives to contribute. This set-up helps create the feeling of safety and community so that the students are more willing to participate.

There are agreed upon norms that the students came up with and agreed to at the beginning of year around seminar discussions. The students are reminded of these at the beginnings of seminars.

- 1) Agree and disagree with statements not people
- 2) Take space and make space (Monitor your participation)
- 3) Invite others to speak
- 4) Look alive (and interested)
 - a. This includes engaged body language.
- 5) Bring it back, bring it back, bring it back (to the text)
 - a. This refers to rooting points and building on ideas with textual evidence.

These norms change from year to year, but they usually are similar in nature. Students discuss what the ideal seminar discussion looks and feels like, and they create the norms from there. The students do a good job of holding each other accountable to these norms as they move through the process of seminar. Having an established set of norms helps to ground the group in shared expectations and language around the responsibilities of the participants.

Research Design

This research looked at one literature group from the beginning to the end of a novel. This sample of students was random and representative of the school population due to participant choice and the Lexile level of 830. Every student had an equal chance of being included. The researcher had selected the book prior to the students choosing which books they wanted to read, and the students did not know that the research was going to occur based on a particular novel.

The researcher started off by explaining the intent and scope of the research to the students that had selected the novel that the study would be conducted around. They explained that participation was completely voluntary and the importance of anonymity in research. Other than answering the pre and post intervention surveys, nothing about the literature group experience was different for the participants in the study versus the non-participants. The students' only questions were not about the study but about the researcher's experience with graduate school. The researcher observed all five of the literature seminars and took notes but was not involved in the facilitation of the student-led seminar.

The literature group met five times over the course of six weeks. There were fifteen student participants. There were eight eleventh graders, six tenth graders, and one twelfth grader. Nine of the students were male identified. Five students were female identified, and one student was gender non-binary. This group read *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Maria Remarque, and the study collected qualitative and quantitative data from three tools over the course of this particular literature group to see if the implemented interventions had any effect.

Interventions

Rooted in Maria Montessori's idea of the planes of development, this study implemented two interventions consistent with the developmental needs and characteristics of students in the third plane. The first intervention dealt with the adolescent developmental need to feel connected socially and emotionally. This is what is referred to as proximity. Proximity is part of knowing someone well and feeling safe with them. This intervention included adding a low stakes way for students to connect with one another at the beginning of each literature group meeting. This was a quick question, activity, or sharing of a quote from the text to invite every voice in the room and bring students together before the actual literature analysis began. The idea

was to create a sense of ease and security so that students would feel more comfortable participating. The senior leaders met with the researcher once a week to prepare for literature lessons. They discussed which social engagement activity they would implement at the beginning of the next discussion and also discuss ways to create a more fluid dialogue amongst their groups.

The second intervention dealt with the adolescent developmental need to feel cognitively engaged and prepared. During the week between each literature seminar, the students were given short lessons on literature analysis and context for the novel they were reading. These lessons included characterization, elements of literary Modernism, theme analysis, and historical context. The idea was that students could feel more prepared cognitively, and thus feel more comfortable participating in the seminar.

Data Collection

Every participant completed a five-question survey before starting the first seminar of the cycle and after the last seminar ended (Appendix A). These questions were to track changes in feelings around seminar over the course of the cycle and interventions. The researcher also tracked weekly averages from the students' self-assessment participation rubrics (Appendix B), as well as kept a tally count of the number of times each participant spoke during each seminar on a seminar assessment map (Appendix C). These numbers and responses were then combined and analyzed to determine the efficacy of the interventions.

Results

This study was designed to determine whether interventions based on Maria Montessori's theory of the Four Planes of Development had an impact on student engagement in peer-led literature seminars. Data was collected through pre-intervention surveys, post-intervention

surveys, student self-assessment rubrics, and observation. This variety of data collection allowed for triangulation of the data. The following are the specific results from each of the data collection tools.

Survey Results

There were five questions on the pre survey, and the same five questions were repeated in the post survey. The following figures compare the responses from both surveys. The first four questions were qualitative in nature, while the last question was quantitative with a scale of one to ten. The results from the qualitative questions were assembled and inductively coded based on common responses and themes.

Survey Question One:

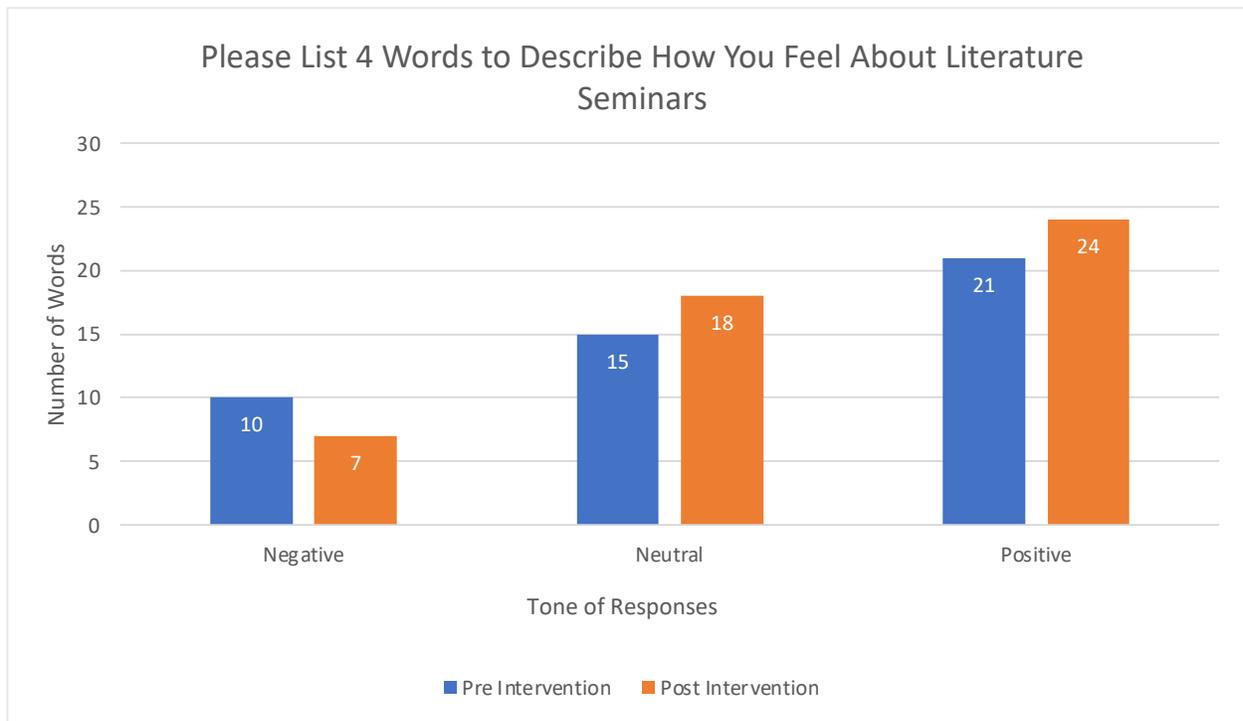


Figure 1: The number of negative tone words decreased from the initial survey, while the numbers of neutral and positive tone words both increased from the initial survey. This question was an open-ended question. Some students listed four words as the question asked, while other

students wrote less or more. The data in figure 1 is representative of all of the answers reported on the surveys. Examples of negative tone words included words such as “stressful” and “nerve-racking.” Neutral tone words included words such as “okayish” and “tired.” Tired was coded as a neutral word due to the fact that it was largely related to factors outside the seminar discussion itself such as the fact that seminar discussions took place first thing in the morning. Positive tone words included words such as “intellectual” and “interesting.” The number of negative words decreased from the first survey to the second survey, and the numbers of neutral and positive words increased.

Survey Question 2:

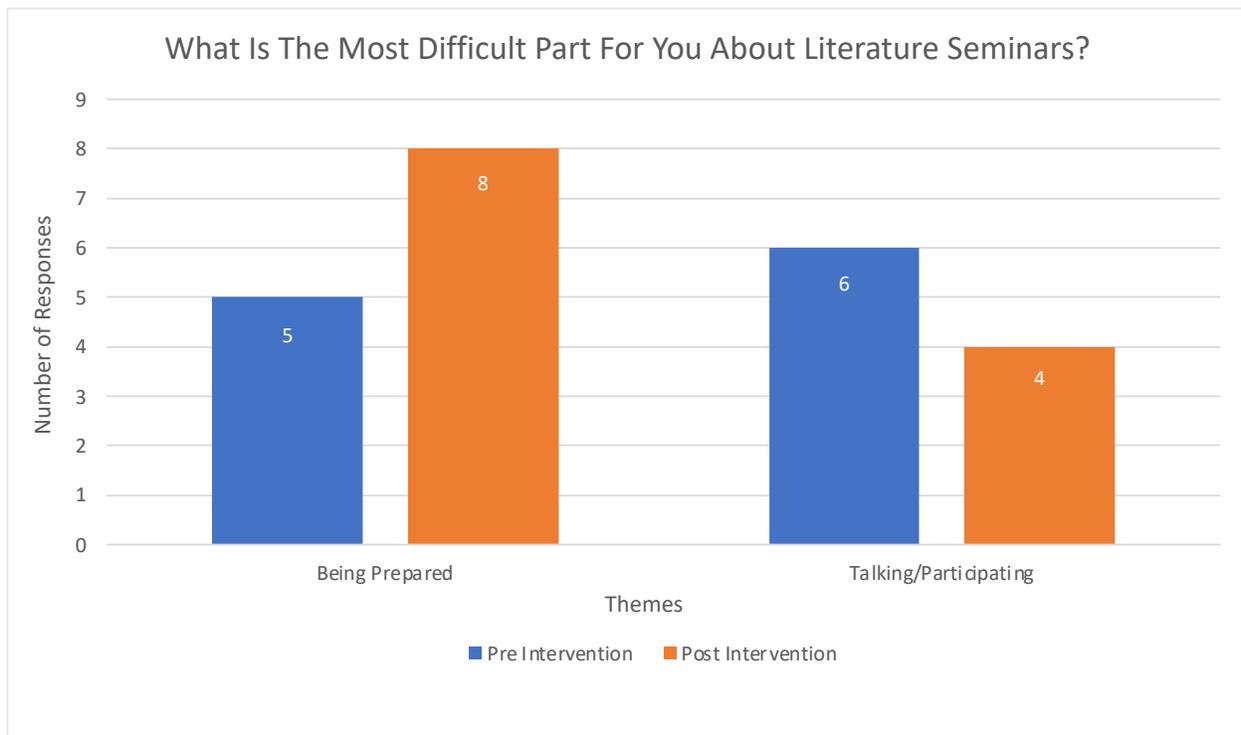


Figure 2. The two major themes that emerged in the responses to this question were being prepared and talking/participating. Being prepared was mentioned three more times in the post-intervention survey while the number of times talking/participating was mentioned decreased by two responses in the post-intervention survey.

The themes that emerged in this question were very clear. Being prepared for seminar included reading, annotating, writing an SCR, and having those things in hand when seminar began. Students reported that this preparation was the most difficult part of participating in seminar at a higher rate in the post-intervention survey. Example responses included, “preparing properly and getting the reading done on time” and “remembering to write the SCR the night before”. On the contrary, students reported talking/participating as being the most difficult part of seminar at a lower rate than in the first survey.

Survey Question 3:

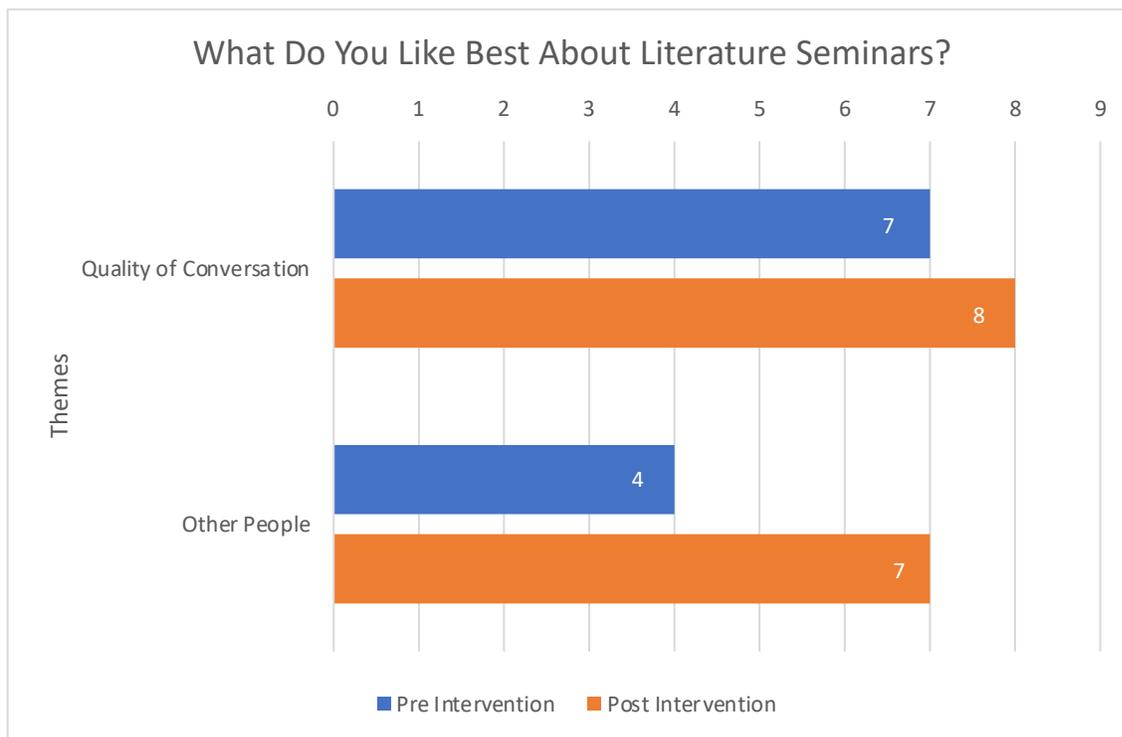


Figure 3. Quality of the conversation and other people were the two main themes that emerged in what students reported to like best about literature seminars. The numbers of both increased from the pre-intervention surveys to the post-intervention surveys.

The theme of quality of conversation was a strong theme throughout the responses. These included responses such as “being able to synthesize information” and “understanding the

meaning of the text better.” The theme of other people included responses such as “engaging with others that I don’t normally talk to” and “other opinions.” Both themes increased from the initial survey with other people increasing more dramatically than quality of conversation.

Survey Question 4:

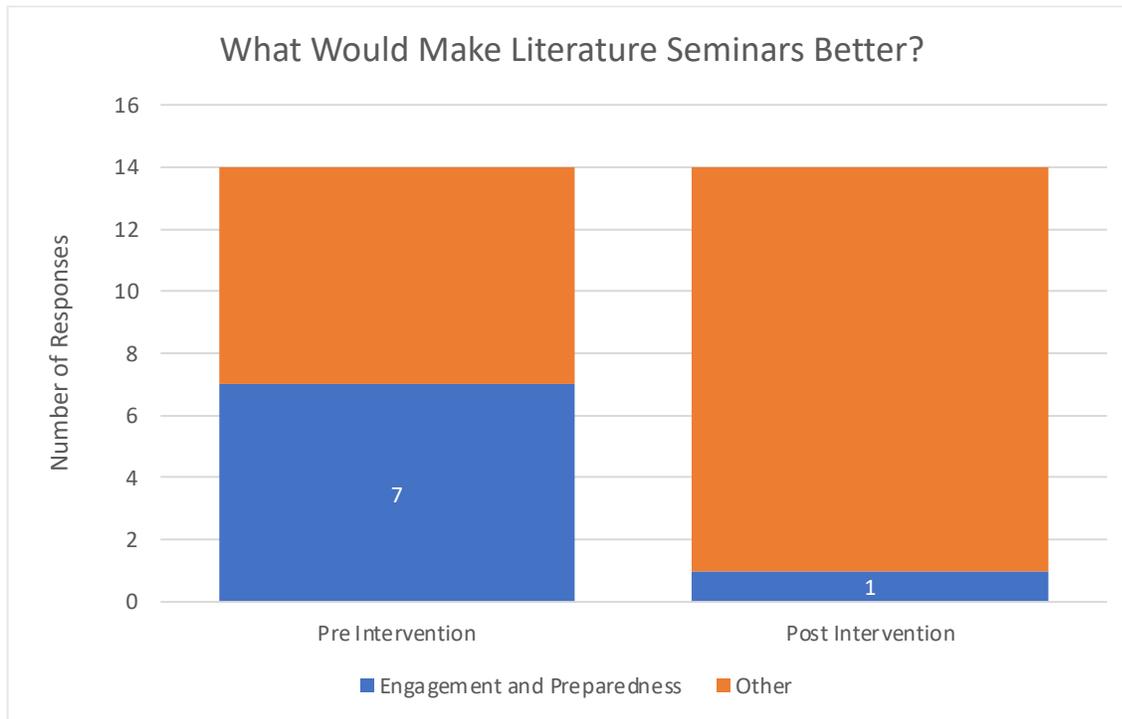


Figure 4. Engagement and Preparedness of participants was the major theme that emerged from the results in the initial survey. This decreased from 50% of all responses in the first survey to 7.14% of all responses in the post-intervention survey.

The theme of engagement and preparedness in this context referred to the students coming to seminar with all the required work done in order to participate. If students did not have the required prerequisite work completed, they were not able to participate in the seminar discussion. This created a smaller group of participants. The surveys included responses such as “if everyone would engage” and “if I was prepared.” However, this theme had a drastic decrease in the post survey.

Survey Question 5:

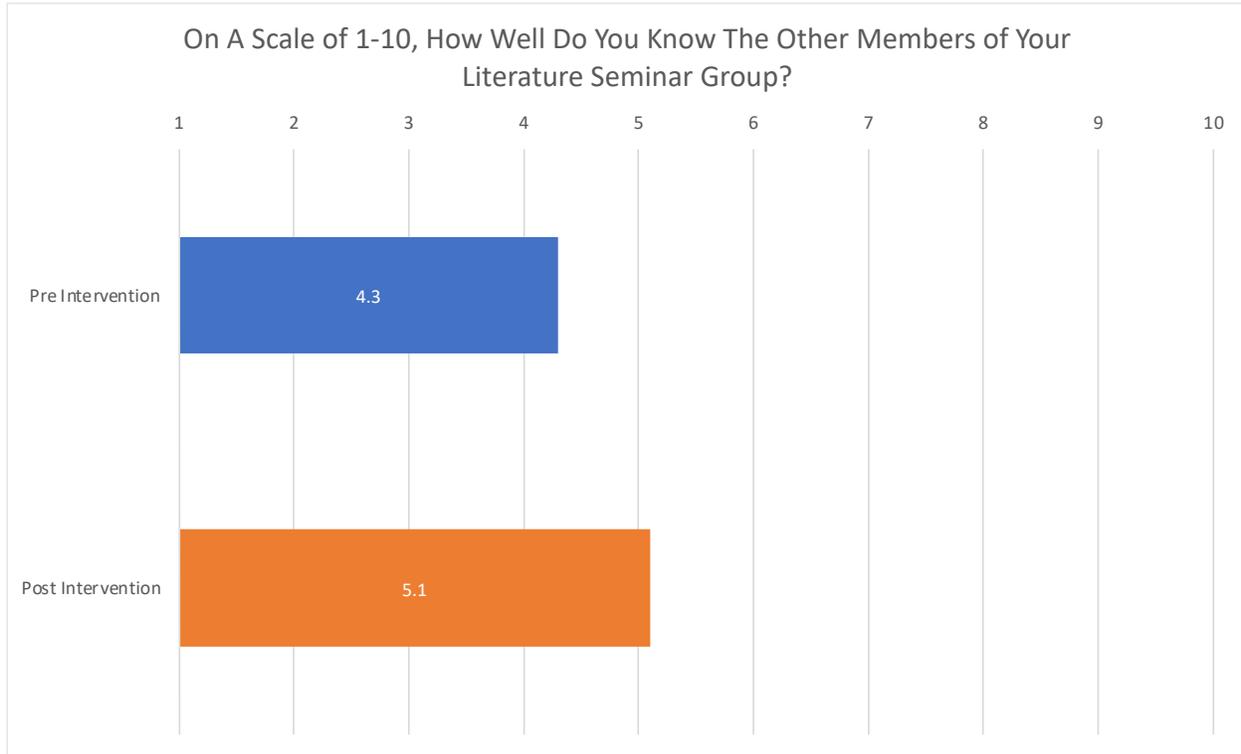


Figure 5. Averaged numerical responses show an 8% increase in how well students feel they know the other participants in their literature group from the pre-intervention survey to the post-intervention survey.

The scale for this question ranged from one (not at all) to ten (best friends). There was an increase in the average response from the pre-intervention survey to the post-intervention survey meaning that students felt like they knew the members of their group better at the end of the six weeks than when they first began.

Self-Assessment Participation Rubrics

Each participant filled out a participation rubric at the end of every literature group (Appendix B). The result was a score on a four-point scale. The self-assessment scores were averaged together for each week. Week five was not included in this data representation because it was an abbreviated seminar discussion because the students were also presenting their creative finals

during that time. The abbreviated week 5 seminar did not include the same self-assessment because of lack of time for all elements to be included.

Averaged Participation Rubric Scores in Weeks 1-4:

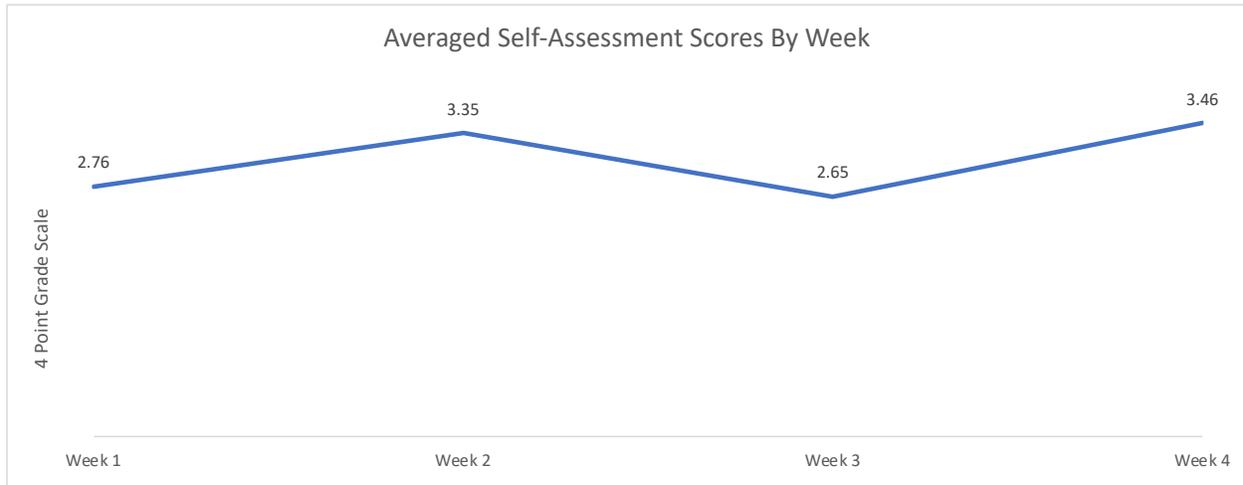


Figure 6. The average of the scores fluctuated from week to week, but from week 1 to week 4 there was a 17.5% increase in the self-assessment averaged scores.

This visual shows the overall trend of an increased self-perception of participation based on the rubric. The individual rubrics (Appendix B) were filled out at the end of each seminar discussion by each participant, and they included the four categories: Preparation, Grace and Courtesy, Engagement, and Evidence. The students averaged their scores on the rubric to come up with a number on a four-point scale. All of the scores were then aggregated and averaged to come up with the data point for each week.

Tally of Contributions Per Student Per Week

Table 1

Number of Times Each Student Spoke Per Week

| Student | Week 1 | Week 2 | Week 3 | Week 4 | Week 5 (Abbreviated) |
|-----------|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------------------|
| Student A | 11 | 8 | 17 | 12 | 5 |
| Student B | 7 | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| Student C | 2 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 2 |
| Student D | 11 | 15 | 10 | 9 | 5 |
| Student E | 2 | 4 | 8 | 4 | 4 |
| Student F | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Student G | 0 | 6 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Student H | 4 | 6 | 0 | 3 | 3 |
| Student I | 1 | 2 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Student J | 2 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Student K | 1 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Student L | 0 | 5 | 9 | 6 | 0 |
| Student M | 7 | 7 | 0 | 9 | 0 |
| Student N | 8 | 7 | 0 | 6 | 4 |
| Student O | 12 | 7 | 9 | 6 | 2 |

Note: This data was collected on a seminar assessment map (Appendix C) by one of the senior leaders.

After analyzing this data, no apparent trends emerged. The numbers were inconclusive, and they did not add to the overall analysis of the efficacy of the interventions on engagement. This finding is important for other research. It isn't useful as a stand-alone evaluation tool for student engagement. The variation in numbers could have been due to several confounding variables such as schedule changes, student interest in the topics covered in the reading that week, or a student's contributions could decrease because of an increase in the participation of other students that week. Students could also be engaged in the conversation without actively verbalizing their ideas.

Discussion and Action Plan

The Literature Review served as a starting point and guide for the focus of the research. As stated in the summary of the Literature Review, there is significant research on the efficacy of seminars and active participation to increase engagement on the part of students. Various studies have confirmed the value of active learning and seminar style discussion has been named specifically as an important tool. However, despite the validation through research of the importance of engagement in teaching and learning, there is a definite gap in how to increase engagement within seminars. As a result, this research aimed to begin to close the gap by focusing on one literature seminar, with one cohort of fifteen secondary students, over six weeks, in one Montessori charter school.

This research attempted to increase student engagement in literature seminars through the addition of two interventions based on Maria Montessori's theory of The Four Planes of Development. The hope was that students would feel more proximate to their peers and more cognitively prepared by the end of the six weeks. Data analysis revealed increases in survey responses regarding student self-perception, peer connection, and perception of quality of conversation. It was difficult to determine the impact on behavioral engagement. The data suggests that being prepared for seminar discussions became more difficult and more of a concern over time.

The increase in emotional engagement became clear through the increase of neutral and positive words to describe their feelings about literature seminars. Also, there was an increase in the average of how well students reported to know their group members. In the survey question asking what the student likes best about literature seminars, the amount of responses that included other people almost doubled in the second survey. Students reported enjoying the varied ideas and

opinions of others that don't normally form part of their social network. There is a correlation between the social intervention that was instituted at the beginning of every seminar and the data. However, it is impossible to rule out that the students may have just gotten to know each other through the consistent weekly connections. Either way, there was an overall positive shift in students' attitudes towards seminar discussions themselves as well as the other students that were included in the seminar.

The data also showed an increase in cognitive engagement. Quality of conversation was a major theme in what students liked best about seminars. There was an increase in the number of responses that mentioned quality from the pre-intervention survey to the post-intervention survey. The averaged self-assessment scores by week showed a 17.5% increase from week one to week four. This suggests that students felt more cognitively prepared and stimulated by the conversation during seminar. This confirms that students' perceptions of their participation and engagement increased. This supports the theory that providing students mini lessons about literary analysis and context throughout helps them to feel more prepared and engaged cognitively.

The interventions that were added did not address behavioral engagement. There was an increase in students reporting being prepared as the most difficult part of literature seminars. Currently, literature seminars happen first thing in the morning on Wednesdays. Students reported that they would often forget the early deadline, and that they still weren't fully awake when seminar happened at that time. This is something to consider researching later. Is there a developmentally appropriate intervention that could help students with this behavioral piece of engagement?

Originally, the tally count of the number of times each student spoke in a seminar was thought to measure behavioral engagement during the discussion. However, there were no trends

to be found. There were many variables that the numbers didn't communicate. For example, a student's number of contributions may have decreased in a certain week due to more people being engaged. Also, the numbers did not detail the type of contribution made by the student. A student may have only spoken two times in a seminar, but they may have made incredibly insightful comments that challenged the other participants to think in a new way. On the contrary, a student could speak seventeen times, but not really add anything of value to the conversation. This demonstrates that looking at engagement through the superficial lens of participation is not enough. It would be beneficial to also include the other aspects of the seminar assessment map for data collection rather than just a tally. The original thought was that it would be easier for the student leader to focus on one set of data collection, which were the tallies. However, field notes and more thoroughly tracking the conversation could add significant meaning to the data collected.

Overall, the two interventions seemed to have a positive effect on aspects of student engagement within seminars. The content of the conversations moved to a deeper place of analysis rather than superficial personal feelings about the text. Students were able to put the story in context of world history, notice the characteristics of the Modernist literary movement, analyze characterization, and engage in intellectual, respectful dialogue with their peers while using textual evidence to back up their ideas. It should be noted that while it appears that the interventions had a positive impact on engagement in this context, the role of each student's previous teachers cannot be understated in the role of developing these thoughtful individuals.

It appears that students do better and feel more confident when they approach preparation for literature seminars from multiple angles. Mini lessons and community building help students to feel confident and that they have something of value to bring to their group. Different interventions and groups of students are guaranteed to bring different results.

In considering future research, it would be fascinating to conduct the same research on a literature group later in the year. This was the first round for the tenth graders, and it would be interesting to note if there were any changes in what the data showed with students having more experience and confidence in the process and their contributions. Future research could also center on senior literature leaders to see if how they facilitate and the questions they ask have an effect on engagement for the participants. If I were to conduct this study again, I would consider revising the survey questions to more specifically target behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. This might help to better define next action steps in those respective areas.

The results of this research will inform how future literature groups are conducted in our program. Beyond the local scope, this research could also benefit other secondary Montessori schools and guides in the teaching and facilitation of meaningful literature seminar discussions.

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Appendix B

Literature Group Rubric

| | |
|---|---|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Preparation</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Interpretive question and SCR are typed and in hand. (If this box is unchecked then you are unprepared, please only fill out the Grace and Courtesy box and take notes.)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Book is in hand.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Text is annotated.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Outside research has been done.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">___ out of 4</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Grace and Courtesy</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Arrive on time.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Is constructive (disagree with the idea, not the person.)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Take space/make space.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Is engaged (No side conversations, appropriate body language, listens to speaker.)</p> <p style="text-align: right;">___ out of 4</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Engagement</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Pose a question verbally or write on board/notecard.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Flip to pages references by others.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Build on an idea that is not your own.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Invite someone else to speak.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">___ out of 4</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">Evidence</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Reference a page # in a question and/or response.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Speak from or about SCR.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Read a quote out loud.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Reference an outside source, lens, or theme.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">___ out of 4</p> |

Please remember to average your score!!!!

Appendix C

Seminar Assessment Map

| <u>Key</u> | |
|------------|----------------------|
| Q | - Question |
| X | - Cite Text |
| C | - Connection |
| N | - Nod |
| H | - Hand |
| BL | - Engaged Body Lang. |
| O | - Opinion |

