# THE PAIDEIA SEMINAR: MOVING READING COMPREHENSION FROM TRANSACTION TO TRANSFORMATION

BY

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*The Paideia Seminar: Moving Reading Comprehension from Transaction to Transformation*

*Abstract*

The Paideia Seminar is a structured, formal discussion that requires critical thinking, and focuses on texts related to ambiguous issues and values. The purpose of this research is to understand how the Paideia Seminar process impacts the comprehension of complex and controversial text.

Major findings include: that students and a teacher perceived the Paideia Seminar's dialogic process as influencing their thinking about the text, that there was evidence of higher level reading and thinking skills during the Seminar process, and that writing samples taken at the beginning, middle, and end of the Paideia Seminar indicated observable changes and solidification in reading comprehension.

Data for this qualitative research were collected through field observations, videography, audio taping, student and teacher interviews, student questionnaires, class artifacts, student drawings, and student notes and essays.

This research promotes an understanding of the process that students move through as the recursive elements of the Paideia Seminar are applied to students' initial understanding of text. During the observed Seminars, as students became engaged in interpersonal conflict, supported by evidence from a text read prior to the Seminar, a more refined or modified synthesis occurred.

This research could be significant to middle school and secondary educators as they attempt to scaffold critical reading and thinking skills in the content areas.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

With all the attention that has been aimed at engaging secondary level students in active, participatory education based on social constructivist and cognitive learning theory, and the ongoing proliferation of transactional learning strategies through professional development, it is startling to read quantitative research (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997) indicating that 85% of the school day is devoted to lecture, seatwork, and recitation. Further, the researchers report that the average amount of discussion in these classrooms amounts to 15 to 50 seconds per day (p. 42). Based on these statistics, there seems to be a significant disconnect between the acceptance of Vygotskian theory and the tenets of social reciprocity in education, and the more evident behavioralist bent to the transmission approach found in actual academic communities.

More importantly, if the goals of education include graduating independent, thinking, literate, problem-solving men and women, why are students being spoon-fed information rather than being asked to act with and on that information?

The goal of this research was to explore one facet of this large, overarching and vital concern, and that was the possibility of developing higher-level thinking skills in the course of reading text and engaging in dialogic discussion through the specific dialogic structure of the Paideia Seminar.

## Definitions

Before going any further, clarity requires the interjection of three definitions that will be utilized throughout the following pages: dialogic discussion, the Paideia Seminar and higher-level thinking/reading skills.

### *Dialogic Discussion*

Dialogic discussion, as defined by four experts in the field, (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Nystrand, 1997; Wells, 1999, 2000) includes the following attributes:

- the dialogue is centered around complex, ambiguous problems or issues
- the discussion requires authentic, carefully crafted, open-ended questions to which students apply the constructs of critical thinking
- the goal of the dialogue is co-constructed, diverse, and enhanced learning
- group members demonstrate a responsibility for the learning process
- the group environment is “safe” and facilitates trust and risk taking
- teachers facilitate the dialogue process, not the direction and
- within the dialogic process there is usually an emphasis on assertions with evidence, open mindedness, and a de-emphasis of “right” or wrong” answers.

Delineating the attributes of dialogic discussion does not suffice in this case. Careful demarcation is needed to distance dialogic discussion from other types of “discussion”. Researchers Alvermann, O’Brien, & Dillon (1990), Applebee (1996),

Nystrand (1997), Nystrand and Gamoran (1991), and Wells (1999) (2000) assert that true dialogic discourse seldom occurs in the classroom and that most classroom discussion follows an IRE sequence in which the teacher *initiates* a question, the student *responds*, and the teacher *evaluates* the response. The purposes are more reiterative or evaluative; whereas, the purposes for dialogic discussion are collaborative meaning-making, and a stimulation of higher order thinking applied to issues and values.

During IRE's teachers often have clear learning objectives, and in so doing, lead the students directly to the information to be reviewed, and move on without allowing students to interact, or question each other. Recitation, no matter how it is gilded, is not dialogic discussion.

*Paideia Seminar*

The Paideia Seminar is one specific and structured version of a dialogic discussion. Mortimer Adler, its initial creator, published a pair of books in the 1980's, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto* and *Paideia Problems and Possibilities*. In *The Paideia Classroom: Teaching for Understanding* (1999) Terry Roberts and Laura Billings purport that Adler was attempting to meld together Maynard Hutchins' focus on an Essentialist philosophy relating to a liberal education and John Dewey's Progressive, active student learning stance (p. 3). A very abridged summary of Adler's tenets include his belief that all children could learn, and that they deserved an equal quality of education in a school run on democratic principles. He felt that learning could take place in three formats: first, didactic teaching of skills, 10 – 15% of the school year; second, coaching through projects, 60-80% of the school year, and third, Socratic questioning in a structured discussion, later called the Paideia Seminar, 10-15% of the

school year. Key to this breakdown of processes was the understanding that they would facilitate a unified and integrated curriculum across subject areas (Roberts & Billings).

Today, the Paideia Seminar and Adler's three-pronged approach to learning are still utilized and are gaining in popularity. This process has been adopted by 80 schools in at least 10 states (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002). The term "Paideia Seminar" is interchangeable with the Socratic Seminar. Roberts and Billings (1999) describe the Seminar as a:

> … formal discussion based on a text in which the leader asks only open-ended questions. Within the context of the discussion, students are required to read and study the text carefully, listen closely to the comments of others, think critically for themselves, and articulate both their own thoughts and their responses to the thoughts of others. (p.41)

The Seminar procedures require some unique preparation and participation and these are what distance it from the more "teacher-fronted" discussions that take place in most schools (Billings and Fitzgerald, 2002). The prior preparation that students must engage in before coming to the actual discussion includes reading a text that relates to specific debatable issues or values. The students are given the questions for the discussion a day or two before it takes place. They are then expected to come with well prepared assertions and evidence. The teacher facilitates the conversation rather than coaches; and the result for students is neither coverage nor recitation of someone else's thinking, but careful analysis and co-construction of knowledge within the context of a hospitable group.

Proponents of the Paideia Seminar say that it prepares students for postsecondary education, and teaches communication skills, cooperation, problem solving and critical thinking – all processes that prepare students for lifelong learning and provide preparation for vital careers in our technological, communication–based world (Adler, 1982; Roberts & Billings, 1999).

*Higher-Order Thinking/Comprehension*

The third key definition required to further explain the basis of this research is higher-level thinking/reading comprehension skills. Thomas Gunning writes in *Creating Literacy Instruction for All Children* (2003), that higher-order thinking embedded in reading comprehension

> …requires a depth of knowledge achieved by focusing on the big ideas or key concepts in the content area. Depth of knowledge also has to do with how the material is encountered. Comparing, contrasting, organizing, evaluating, and applying key concepts develop depth. (p. 357)

Gunning (2003) predicates this definition by categorizing it as “elaboration” and “critical reading”. He writes that elaboration is the umbrella for such sub-headings of reading comprehension as making inferences, imaging, generating questions and critical reading (p. 271). It is this specific area of secondary reading comprehension that this research attempts to address.

Purpose

Given these definitions, the larger conceptual picture that stimulated this exploration relates to two of the many distinct sub-fields in the broad landscape of

literacy. They are higher-level thinking related to reading comprehension and oral communication.

With the exception of studies of adolescent reading comprehension in the content area, reading comprehension has garnered a great deal of attention. Since 1978 when Delores Durkin first drew attention to the dearth of instruction and research on the topic, (Durkin, 1978) to the published findings of The National Panel of Reading in 2000, reading comprehension has drawn interest and an odd amount of consensus. While battles rage over phonemic awareness and phonics instruction, the heart and soul of reading – its comprehension – has caused little division and created a unity of purpose. The knowledge and development of authentic and embedded reading strategies has coincided with the research. Growth in the cognitive sciences and an acceptance of socially mediated instruction have joined to support these strategies, but little has been written about the importance of aligning these reading strategies with specific dialogic discussion processes.

Although the area of dialogic discussion has received some significant attention (Almasi, 1995; Alvermann, 1996; Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002; Connolly & Smith, 2002; Nystrand, 1997; Nystrand & Gammoran, 1991; Wells, 2000, 2001 ) no qualitative exploration has been conducted in the area of the enhancement or transformation of higher-level reading comprehension and its connection to the specific process of the Paideia Seminar approach to dialogic discussion. To date there are four published research projects conducted on the Paideia Seminar. They are: Polite and Adam's, *Improving Critical Thinking Through Socratic Seminars* (1996), Chesser, Gellatly and Hales', *Do Paideia Seminars Explain Higher Writing Scores?* (1997), Wortham's,

*Ventriloquating Shakespeare: Ethical Positioning in Classroom Literature Discussions* (2001), and Fitzgerald and Billing's, *Dialogic Discussion and the Paideia Seminar* (2002). None of these excellent pieces of research examine the dual or intertwined roles of higher-order thinking and reading and dialogic discussion as related to the Paideia Seminar process.

It was therefore, the intent of this research to answer the following questions:

- How do participants perceive the Paideia Seminar's dialogic process as influencing their thinking about read text?
- During the Paideia Seminar process, what higher-level comprehension thinking skills are evident?
- As students move from the initial transaction with the read text, through the Seminar, and then on to an essay, what changes in student comprehension will be observable in their written responses?

## The Plan

At the outset of this qualitative research there is an attempt to weave a contextual nest that supports the research and a discourse relating to a hypothetical connection between the dialogic process of the Paideia Seminar and higher level reading comprehension. It includes a review of: theories relating to the sociocultural tools in learning, constructivism, Rosenblatt's conception of reading as transaction and her vision for using discussion for transformation, the significant need for research in reading in the content area for secondary students, both quantitative and qualitative research that demonstrates how little dialogic discussion occurs in schools and why, the positive attributes of dialogic discussion demonstrated through research, summaries of current

research on the Paideia Seminar, and a review of my own unpublished class assignment study on the Paideia Seminar.

Having “couched” the research in a pertinent contextual framework, data was collected that illuminated the reading comprehension processes that students went through as they read, responded to open ended questions, and participated in the Paideia Seminar.

The data collection includes: videotaped and transcribed audiotape of students’, word for word participation in three Paideia Seminars during the course of five class periods; recordings of a group of five students who “think aloud” and respond to open ended questions about their own thinking as they review their participation in the Paideia Seminars in which they have just participated; structured and unstructured interviews of students and the teacher; observations and field notes of each Paideia Seminar; student questionnaires completed by all participants in the Seminars; visual data in the form of class artifacts, including read text and open-ended questions and five visual representations of the Seminar; and writing samples taken from five students in the form of entry notes or entry essays at the beginning, notes taken during the Seminars, and reflective writing assignments and essays at the end of the Paideia Seminar process.

Data were analyzed through the lens of a qualitative case study reliant on “bounded phenomenon embedded in its context” and magnified by the “richness” and “thick descriptions” of complex and layered classroom experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10). Triangulation of the multiple sources of data, coding, multiple matrices, and careful examination of oral and written reading responses were utilized to indicate coherence or demonstrate inconsistencies.

## Significance of Study

In an earlier unpublished class assignment study at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, I found that students perceived that the Paideia Seminar moved them from a personal transaction with read text to a more informed and expanded version of their earlier understanding. As a result of the earlier study it seemed that it would be significant to understand what happens during a Paideia Seminar and how the students' perceived transformation of personal syntheses are shaped by the interactions within the Paideia Seminar. This could be important to secondary educators as they attempt to scaffold higher-level thinking into content area reading comprehension. The benefits of what was learned include: enough qualitative information that it might merit a quantitative cause and effect investigation relating dialogic discussion to higher level reading comprehension, a deeper understanding of how sociocultural constructs influence the teaching of reading in the content area in secondary schools, and an analysis of data that is indicative of the use of higher-order thinking skills as students process through the Paideia Seminar format.

## Conclusion

As educators are challenged to prepare students for rigorous high stakes tests that include open ended questions and writing assignments, and an educational reform mandate to make education interactive, thoughtful, engaging, relevant, and purposeful, the Paideia Seminar seems to be a process that can meet both challenges well. In the National Paideia Center's manual, *The Paideia Seminar: Active Thinking Through Dialogue* (2002), the authors assert that the, "Paideia philosophy is a powerful fusion of conservative and liberal forces in our society, a synthesis of academic standards with the

teaching and learning strategies that make those standards accessible to the diverse population of American school students" (p.4). The key word is fusion. The Paideia Seminar melds traditional and constructivist philosophies in an amalgam that reflects the mix in which most educators currently find themselves.

Administrators may support this methodology because it prepares students to answer open-ended questions on high stakes tests; teachers that I interviewed in my class assignment study and the teacher who was focused on in this study felt that the Seminar increased reading comprehension, synthesis, depth of understanding, critical thinking and elaboration; and students from both studies rated this method highly, explaining that collaborative meaning-making expanded their knowledge beyond where they themselves could have gone alone. This research demonstrates that the Paideia Seminar can be a teaching process that meets the needs and expectations of many teachers and administrators as they straddle the divide between teacher and student centered education.

This research explores the Paideia Seminar process and determines if the reading of text, which is transactional, can be modified or solidified through the use of this sociocultural tool, and thus transform the initial comprehension.

Figure 1 is a concept design model which graphically portrays what will follow in chapters two and three. This model was originally designed by Maxwell (1996).

*Purposes*
The research may be an impetus in:

Enhancing higher level reading comprehension in secondary level content area classes

Understanding the thinking process that may be stimulated by the Paideia Seminar

Encouraging the use of a form of dialogic discussion in secondary content area classrooms

Preparing students to read and think analytically in collaboration with peers.

*Conceptual Context*
Sociocultural and constructivist theory
Reading as transaction
Critical thinking
Higher level reading comprehension – synthesis, analysis and elaboration
Secondary content area reading strategies
Dialogic discussion
Open-ended questions posed before reading
Mortimer Adler's Paideia Proposal
Paideia Seminar
Previous and class assignment research on the Paideia Seminar
Transformation of knowledge

*Research Questions*

1. How do participants perceive the Paideia Seminar's dialogic process as influencing their thinking about read text?
2. During the Paideia Seminar process, what higher-level comprehension thinking skills are evident?
3. As students move from the initial transaction with the read text, through the seminar, and then on to the essay, what changes in student comprehension will be observable in their written responses?

*Methods for Data Collection*
Observations and field notes
Videotape
Audiotape and transcriptions of three Paideia Seminars
Think-alouds by student informant group relating to video clips (audiotaped and transcribed)
Two types of teacher interviews (transcribed)
    Structured
    Semi-structured after each Seminar
Student writing prompts
Visual data (drawings)
Artifacts (Questions and texts)
Notes and essays written by individuals in the student informant group

*Validity*
"Thick" field notes corroborated by video and audio tapes.
Those being observed have no motivation to be untruthful in self-report. No names will be used.
Triangulation of multiple sources of data.
Reactivity will be negated by familiarity in the school and unobtrusiveness.
Intercoder agreement – trained second coder.
Member checking – data checked by participant teacher.
Examination of competing explanations and unexpected data.
Memos examining personal bias of researcher.
Verification through extensive data displays.

FIGURE 1.
CONCEPT DESIGN MODEL OF THE RESEARCH

# CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

## Overview of Chapter Two

Chapter two consists of six major areas of theory and research that have a direct bearing on the ensuing qualitative research. They scaffold and justify the need for understanding relating to a possible connection between reading comprehension and the dialogic discussion format of the Paideia Seminar. The following is a brief synopsis of the chapter.

### *Sociocultural Theory and Constructivism*

Foundational to any explanation on a form of dialogic discussion is a complete synthesis of sociocultural theory and constructivism. They are the supportive underpinnings of an understanding of the Paideia Seminar when it is focused on the co-construction of meaning. These two overarching theories' emphases on individual perspectives, background information, and unique formulations of meaning, combined with sociocultural constructs, create a tight theoretical weave that provides a base from which to build a theoretical and research-based context for this study.

### *Reading*

Because the conceptual model starts with an individual reading a text in the secondary content area, the research related to reading will start with Louise Rosenblatt's (1978) seminal work on reading as transaction.

The Paideia Seminar's format requires strategic and open-ended questions. Theory and research related to a relationship between analytical and elaborative reading comprehension and the questions that prompt it precede a comprehensive review of higher-order reading comprehension. Because the Paideia Seminar calls for synthesis, analysis, evaluation and elaboration, those particular areas become part of the context.

The setting for this research is a classroom in which secondary content area reading provides the backdrop for the reading assignments. There is a plethora of research on this topic, but the focus, based on the objectives of this study, will be one that Vacca and Vacca (2004) identified as assisting students to learn with books as opposed to learning from books.

### *Dialogic Discussion*

Dialogic discussion will be defined in terms of both what it is and what it is not. This will be followed by a synthesis of theorists and researchers arguments demonstrating the crucial importance of dialogic discussion in learning and why it is so seldom utilized.

### *Paideia Seminar*

A foundation including an explanation of the Seminar's history, philosophy, process and evolution will be followed by a summary and critique of the four pieces of research conducted on the Paideia Seminar to date.

*Class assignment Study Findings and Implications*

In 2002-2003 I completed a class assignment study that allowed me to observe Paideia Seminars facilitated by three teachers with three separate classes. A review of the class assignment research's findings and implications will provide the springboard for the final section of this chapter.

*Justifying the Need for Exploration*

At the conclusion of this chapter I will argue that the theoretical and research-based contextual weave was tight enough to support an exploration that attempts to understand how the sociocultural attributes of the Paideia Seminar's dialogic discussion may enhance and transform analytic and elaborative aspects of reading comprehension of content area texts. Figure 2 is a model of my hypothesis of the interaction related above and will be referred to throughout chapter two.

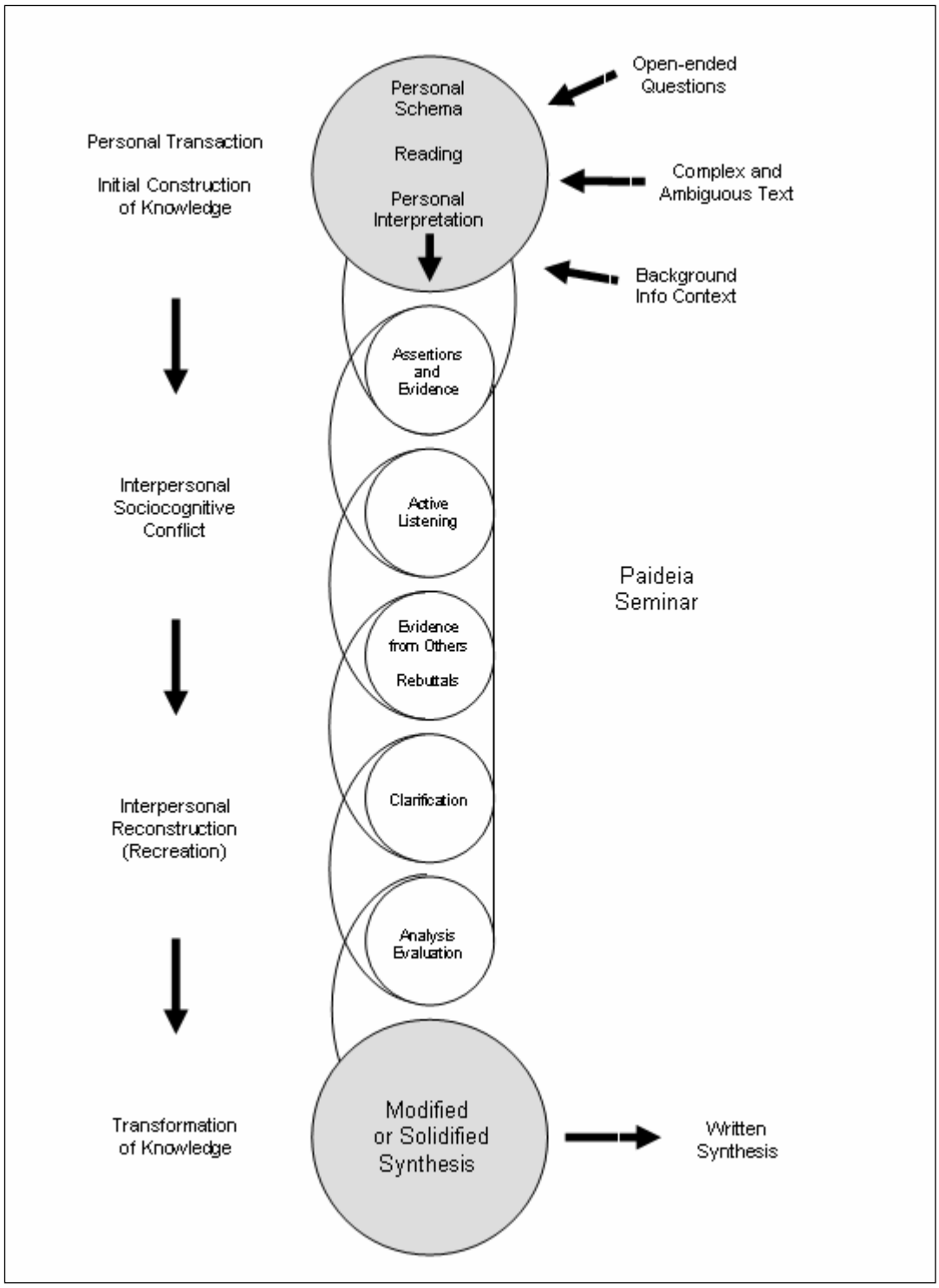


*FIGURE 2.*
READING COMPREHENSION AS IT MOVES THROUGH THE PAIDEA SEMINAR

## Constructivism and Sociocultural Theory

The Paideia Seminar is a form of dialogic inquiry and discussion based on the comprehension of a text in reference to a particular value or issue. Terry Roberts and Laura Billings (1999) explain, its fundamental tenets include, that it "honors both the community and the individual within the community" (p. 42) and that it "values discussion as a means of learning" (p.42). These quotations suggest both constructivist and sociocultural values even though Mortimer Adler, creator of the Paideia Seminar, was an ardent Perennialist, and quite outside the constructivist camp. Adler was influenced by the Progressivist writings of John Dewey in creating a "democratic" methodology for the Paideia Seminar (Adler, 1982, p.4), and explanations of the Paideia Seminar's philosophy and methodology have since been extended by those working for the National Paideia Center. Later in this chapter, an argument will be made that the Paideia Seminar and extensions by its current proponents at the National Paideia Center, *do* honor the creed of constructivism. It is, therefore, essential that the broad theoretical underpinnings of this study start with an examination of constructivist and sociocultural theory as it relates to the Paideia Seminar.

Constructivism and sociocultural theory are integrally interwoven and it is difficult to suggest that one precedes the other. They are very much like a construction plan and an array of tools necessary to undertake the plan. For the purposes of a close examination of their tenets, however, I will separate the co-joined theories and then rejoin them as the broader picture emerges in reference to the Paideia Seminar. Because reading comprehension and dialogic discussion are the foci of this study, the review of these constructs will relate directly to them.

*Constructivism*

In the 2002, *Journal of Content Area Reading*, an article by Swafford and Kallus relates that up until the publication of the fourth edition of Joanne and Richard Vacca's, *Content Area Reading*, they had written that content area reading consisted of "reading *from* text." Their 1993 text was the first to indicate that content area reading involved "reading *with* text" (p. 9). Something quite radical occurred between 1989 (the third edition) and 1993 - a major shift in paradigms. The change occurred as educational philosophers and psychologists convinced educational practitioners that behaviorism, which promoted a stimulus and response mentality, did not explain the complex human transaction that takes place between the learner and the information being learned (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.16). It jarred reading models and practice to the point that content area reading, considered a passive transmission of knowledge, was changed and a more transactional view was accepted.

In the current Vacca text (2000) the authors write that, "learning with texts suggests that readers have much to contribute to the process as they interact with texts to make meaning and construct knowledge" (Vacca & Vacca, p.5). It is clear that a new understanding of what occurs during content area reading hinges on the word "construct".

Constructivism is a "set of assumptions about learners and the learning process" (Cambourne, 2002, p. 26). They are built on cognitive psychology and the premises of theorists and researchers that include Dewey (1933), Piaget (1963), Vygotsky (1986), Gardner (1983), Ausubel (1968), and Bruner (1986). As one might expect with a "set of assumptions," there is no codified set of maxims that define or explain constructivism definitively.

One area of clear agreement in the theoretical and research literature relates to what constructivism is not. It is not traditional, objectivist, behavioristic, passive, transference-oriented education. Some of its essential and current components include:

- Schema theory (Rumelhart, 1980) which purports that students' knowledge networks are comprised of student devised "files" of knowledge which include slots yet to be filled. The categories and the organization of the information in them, change constantly. Building on brain research that indicates that the brain naturally gravitates to arranging information in categories or patterns (Wolfe, 2001), teachers are expected to connect new information into the proper "open slots" by activating or developing schema or categories of prior knowledge on a subject
- Choices in assignments based on interests and "intelligences" (Gardner, 1983; Glasser, 1998)
- Scaffolding (Bruner, 1986) which provides strategic support for students as they interact with new material, coming alongside students in Vygotsky's (1986) "zone of proximal development," providing structure and formatting for new learning
- Individualistic differentiation, affirming multiple backgrounds, cultures, "intelligences," learning styles, modalities and intellectual abilities
- Authentic assessment (Vacca & Vacca, 2002) such as portfolio assessment (Moje, Brozo, & Haas, 1994; Simmons, 1990; Tierney, Carter & Desai, 1991) and the use of rubrics(Schafer, 2001; Stiggins, 1997; Wiggins, 1994). The process is valued along with the product.

- Higher level thinking which is valued over memorization including: prediction, analyzing, evaluating, elaborating, modifying synthesis, reflection, critical thinking, and metacognition (thinking about one's thinking)
- Collaboration (Johnson & Johnson, 1999) including shared talk, projects and problem-solving
- Investigation, inquiry and information gathering to build knowledge and schema (Wells, 1992)
- An understanding of teacher as facilitator, coach, and guide (Dewey, 1933)
- Student-centered, interactive learning (Dewey, 1933)
- Purposeful and motivated learning ( Cambourne, 2002)
- Embedded learning strategies in authentic tasks – separated, simulated and integrated (Langer, 2000)
- Knowledge-in-action (Applebee, 1996)
- Socio-cultural orientation, valuing both intrapsychological and interpsychological input (Vygotsky, 1986; Wells, 2000; Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000)
- Integration of literacy practices suggesting that reading does not stand alone, but is linked and dependent on writing, speaking, listening and thinking (Vacca & Vacca, 2000).

There are as many shades of constructive learning theory as there are writers, but no one captures the ethos of the constructivist vision better than Mikhail Bakhtin, cited by Arthur Applebee in his book, *Curriculum as Conversation* (1996). Applebee writes,

> … allowing each voice to speak in all its uniqueness and at the same time to be part of a larger whole: [ M. Bakhtin writes] "I imagine this whole world to be

> something like an immense novel, multi-generic, multi-styled, mercilessly critical, soberly mocking, reflecting in all its fullness the heteroglossia and multiple voices of a given culture, people, and epoch." (p. 60)

Ultimately, constructivism is a collection of coherent premises about knowing and learning that focuses on the multidimensional complexities that intersect as the learner, with his unique prior knowledge, perspectives, nurture, education, developmental stage, personality, physique and motivation constructs understanding from the knowledge he is afforded, mediated by others who are just as unique, in specific sociocultural environments utilizing sociocultural tools and artifacts.

*Sociocultural Theory*

Sociocultural theory as elucidated by Vygotsky (1962, 1986), Au (1990), Moll (2000), and Gordon Wells ( 2000, 2001) is condensed for the purposes of this review, and focused on reading comprehension and dialogue. It includes the following tenets:

- There is an interfunctional relationship between thought and language (Vygotsky, 1962).
- Understanding between minds requires conscious generalizations that are codified into speech (Vygotsky, 1962).
- "Our schema of development – first social, then egocentric, then inner speech" (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 19) relates the sequence in which speech is learned and utilized. Vygotsky theorized that interpsychological speech (which is socially situated) must come before intrapsychological speech (internal speech).
- "Speech serves to make a person's thoughts accessible to the processes of social influence" (Au, 1990, p.272).

- New concepts come as a result of solving problems (Wells, 1992).
- What a child can do in cooperation one day, he can eventually do alone. It is important to scaffold learning through a “zone of proximal development” so that the student eventually becomes independent and functions without the assistance of a more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky, 1962; Wells, 2000).
- “Thought must pass through meanings and then through words. Thought itself is engendered by motivation, i.e., by our desires and needs, our interests and emotions. Behind every thought there is an affective-volitional tendency.”(Vygotsky, 1962, p. 125).
- Learning is exploratory and collaborative, problems and a social approach to solving them are valued (Wells, 2000, p.61).
- “Knowledge is created and re-created between people as they bring their personal experiences and information derived from other sources to bear on solving some particular problem” ( Wells, 2000, p.67).
- The sense of “culture” that Vygotsky and Moll describe involves “human practices situated in people’s involvement with (and creation of) the multiple contexts that constitute their social worlds” (Moll, 2000, p. 258).
- Social and cultural artifacts mediate literacy practices.(Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000).
- The transformation of ideas occurs through an interaction with others in dialogue. (Wells, 1992).

Sociocultural theory recognizes that neither the concept of transmission or Progressivism captures the full essence of learning. Gordon Wells (1992) cogently synthesizes both his research and the sociocultural approach to learning when he writes:

> …exposition must be seen as contributing to the students' inquiries and, therefore, as just one move in a continuing dialogue, in which the students are equal partners with their teachers in the co-construction of knowledge and understanding….And it is this feature of the dialogic, inquiry-oriented curriculum that enables it to transcend the limitations of both sides in the debate on the goals of education….when students are challenged and their learning is driven by the asking of real questions, to which teachers respond by providing them with the cultural tools they need, and with support and guidance in using them to make intellectually worthwhile answers, the debate will be resolved. (p.29)

There is a very real sense that in sociocultural theory the historical culture, with its artifacts and tools, is incorporated into the present to create a depth of understanding which in turn becomes the platform for creativity and transformation – allowing a modified transference of the original artifacts forward to the future.

*How Does Constructivism and Sociocultural Theory Relate to the Paideia Seminar?*

The term "social constructivism" is often applied when the theories of constructivism and sociocultural theory are merged. The merger indicates that although one constructs knowledge uniquely and individually, it occurs within a sociocultural context. It purports that individual understanding cannot occur in a vacuum.

The Paideia Seminar is a methodological process that embodies the co-joined version of these theories. Students come to the Seminar with their private constructions

and interpretations of a text. Each student's schema or prior knowledge and experience create highly individualistic responses to the questions provided by the facilitator. Motivation and interaction are injected into the learning experience through questions and a text that relates to ambiguous, complex and controversial issues and values. The questions are relevant, titillating and situated within the culture.

As the students sit in a circle with a teacher/facilitator they start a dialogue around the questions. The discussion becomes recursive as it wends in and around synthesis, analysis, evaluation and elaboration. Meaning-making becomes interpersonal as students share their assertions and evidence, and question the other individual interpretations they hear. Learning is not being transmitted, it is being transformed. The thought to speech to thought process is occurring because students are huddled around important questions and texts in an effort to co-construct meaning. The activity is structured enough to promote informed participation, yet interactive enough to engage the students in an activity that creates a transformative outcome. As Laura Billings (2002) writes, the "reciprocal flow of ideas involving actions and reactions of group members may lead to new understandings not held by any group member in advance of the discussion (e.g., Vygotsky, 1978, 1986, 1987; Wortham, 2001)" (p.909).

Constructivism and sociocultural theory are the theoretical underpinnings for the Paideia Seminar when co-construction of meaning is the goal. The Seminar promotes this within a dialogic, inquiry oriented curriculum and methodology (Wells, 1992) melding Progressive and traditionalist constructs, just as Mortimer Adler, the originator of the Paideia Seminar, hoped it would (Roberts & Billings, 1999).

## Reading

As indicated in the conceptual model, the Paideia Seminar begins with an individual student reading an assigned text. As this is the beginning of the process, I will start by examining Rosenblatt's theory that reading is a transaction.

### *Transactional Reading*

Before Louise Rosenblatt's (1976, 1994) seminal work on transactional theory, explained in her book, *The Reader, the Text, the Poem*, the expected role of the reader/learner reflected the educational philosophy of transmission-oriented Essentialists. The reader was portrayed as a "passive recipient" (p. 4) who gained knowledge from a text without any action or reaction to it.

The author of a text and her thoughts were the focus of meaningful reading; the reader was invisible or a part of the impersonal audience.

As an early constructivist in the area of reading, Rosenblatt borrowed "transactional" concepts and terminology from Arthur Bentley and John Dewey, applying them to the dynamics she observed occurring in reading.

Rosenblatt's succinct definition of a transaction clarifies it as distinctly different from an interaction. Rosenblatt adopted her explanation of interaction from Dewey and Bentley. They described interaction as "self-contained entities," the knower and the known, running into each other like "billiard balls colliding" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p.17). On the other hand, Rosenblatt writes that a transaction is "…an ongoing process in which the elements or factors, one might say, aspects of a total situation, [are] each conditioned by and conditioning the other" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p.17).

Rosenblatt (1994) sees the author and reader "conditioned by and conditioning the other" (p. 17). Transaction theory values what the reader brings to the reading relationship as much as what the author brings. Rosenblatt (1994) writes:

> The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader. The transaction will involve not only the past experience but also the present state and present interests or preoccupations of the reader. This suggests the possibility that printed marks on a page may even become different linguistic symbols by virtue of transactions with different readers. (p.20)

Additionally, Rosenblatt (1994) raises awareness that this transaction can be approached with two very different "stances", efferent and aesthetic. An efferent stance is one in which the reader must "carry away" (p. 24) information and an aesthetic stance is signified when, "the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p.25). It is possible for the same text to be read with two completely different stances based on the reader's purpose in reading; however in most cases, as Rosenblatt points out, readers balance themselves somewhere between the two stances as they negotiate a continuum of responses based on their perceived need for a particular kind of meaning.

The third aspect of Rosenblatt's theory that connects with this study, relates to the role of communicating the unique interpretations of a text with others, utilizing language and a social environment. She writes that sharing interpretations, the process of creating them, and the textual evidence that supports a position, bring clarity and crystallization to both the reader and those who hear alternative views. Rosenblatt concludes that,

"Sometimes the give-and-take may lead to a general increase in insight and even to a consensus" (p. 146).

In summary, Rosenblatt affirms the constructivist position that complex, multiple and unique internal and external forces have an influence on the reader who incorporates them within himself as he completes a transaction with the author of a text in the process of reading. What the reader takes away or experiences aesthetically is dependent on the circumstances and the text. In most cases it is a balanced stance as opposed to a purely one-sided approach. Lastly, the unique perspective and interpretation of the reader can be clarified, solidified or modified through discussing the interpretation and circumstances under which it was conceived.

*Why is Transaction Theory Pertinent to the Paideia Seminar?*

In Roberts and Billings (1999) book, *The Paideia Classroom: Teaching for Understanding*, the assertion is made that the Paideia Seminar's "…ultimate goal …is to facilitate the students' learning to read critically, listen closely, respond thoughtfully, clarify their statements, and justify their thinking – all for themselves"(p.52). Later the authors add, "…participants develop a more sophisticated understanding of the text through thoughtful interaction with the ideas of others. Neither consensus or closure should signal the end of a seminar; rather continued inquiry and reflection should flow directly out of the experience" (p. 95).

The goals of the Paideia Seminar hinge on the student's initial transaction with the text. If students do not come to the Seminar with different interpretations, there would be little to discuss. The students all read the same text. It is the individual uniqueness of the students' interpretations and the evidence they utilize to justify their positions that

create the controversy and academic friction. Through the process of clarifying and justifying, students evaluate their perspectives, evidence, and reflections. The unique personal transaction of the reader and text is expected to collide with twenty other such distinctive interpretations.

The second aspect of Rosenblatt's theory relating to stance is also applicable to the Paideia Seminar. Students must take a position on a controversial issue and defend it with evidence. Taking a position is a highly personal and motivating experience and flushing out pertinent facts to defend the position relies heavily on the ability to find and use them effectively. Both aesthetic and efferent stances are required, and quite possibly heightened, by the reading and critical thinking requirements inherent in the Paideia Seminar. The comprehension of text becomes important to the student on two levels.

The final aspect of Rosenblatt's theory that is often overlooked is her emphasis on the valuing of discussion after the reading transaction has taken place. The Paideia Seminar provides a venue for student clarification, crystallization and insight. Rosenblatt asserts that interaction with others enhances the initial transaction with text.

*Open-Ended Questions*

The second important and essential element represented in the conceptual model of the Paideia Seminar is a finely crafted set of open-ended questions that directly relate to the assigned reading. As the students read, their transaction with the text includes open-ended questions.

There are two very different kinds of questions utilized in student reading comprehension – those that assess and those that assist, those that evaluate students'

funds of knowledge and those that steer students into deeper understanding (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; Almasi, 2002; Beyer, 1997).

Questions that teachers use for assessing students' comprehension of literal information from texts or lectures accomplish three important tasks. First, they verify student knowledge for the teacher; he knows what his students know and do not know. Second, they give students practice or reiteration related to information their teacher or curriculum deems important and third, they alert the students as to what information is considered valuable. All three purposes have their place in education, but do little to elicit critical thinking.

The second objective in utilizing questioning is to assist students in developing a deep understanding "in order to produce a mental operation that a student would not do on his own" (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990, p. 182). This is accomplished through the promotion of critical analysis and evaluation stimulated by questioning that provokes dissonance or disequilibrium (Wells, 1992; Beyer, 1997).

*Definition and Purposes of Open-ended Questions*

The type of question most associated with assisting students is known as the open-ended question. According to an ERIC Digest written by Badger and Thomas (1992) an open ended question is a question that requires complex thinking and yields multiple solutions. Others (Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; Roberts & Billings, 1999; Trabasso & Bouchard, 2002) extend this definition, adding that it requires students to: use and interpret knowledge critically and thoughtfully, analyze information, create new and unique linguistic and cognitive responses, synthesize, justify, and articulate positions, and reprocess information in

memorable and relevant recreations. In essence, open-ended questions spark higher-level thinking.

*Sequencing and Writing Open-ended Questions*

Barry Beyer (1997) writes in his book, *Improving Student Thinking: A Comprehensive Approach*, that questions should be structured according to the procedures needed to sequence students through the appropriate thinking process. Beyer writes that this sequence provides scaffolding for young thinkers that will eventually evolve into metacognition. As with all learning strategies, the sequence of the process, and the reasons for following it are skills that have to initially be explicitly taught and then practiced to the point of independence. Using open- ended questions is not only important for critical thinking applied to a particular subject, but it is a strategy that can be practiced and transferred in other situations. The point here, however, is that in providing open-ended questions for students to discuss, the creation and the sequence of the questions assists the student best when they are created in clusters that steer the thinking.

Beyer (1997) suggests that the students be given a question on a “global level” (p.36) related to a broad idea with little specificity. This causes the students to ask subordinate questions in an effort to define agreed upon parameters, and criteria for analysis. An example of a broad open-ended question would be, “Was the United States more or less democratic in 1800 than it is today?” (p. 36) Beyer contends that this forces the students to ask questions about the word “democratic”, about what it meant in 1800, and what it means today. It would also raise questions on how such questions could be analyzed.

One last important piece of information that Beyer (1997) suggests is that an open-ended question be crafted so that it provokes a “jolt” that is in some way relevant to the student’s life (p.41).To truly engage students questions need to be thought-provoking and make some connection with the student.

*When Is It Best for Students to Ponder Comprehension Questions?*

Paul van den Broek, Yuhtsuen Tzeng, Kristen Risden, Tom Trabasso and Patricia Basche (2001) recently published a compelling piece of quantitative research in the *Journal of Educational Psychology* that indicates that students’ responses to questions, relative to improving reading comprehension, are dependent on two important variables. First, students, “benefited from questions *during* reading but not from questions after reading” (p. 8) Second, the researchers found that reading proficiency determines if questioning has any effect on reading comprehension. If students are struggling to decode, focusing attention on word identification and syntax, there is little cognitive attention given to the comprehension process, whether questions are present or not.

Paul van den Broek et al (2001) conclude that “questions during reading are likely to have more profound effects… than questions after reading. For proficient readers, questions during reading elicit processes over and above those in which they would engage spontaneously, thereby leading to increased memory” (p.10).

*Questions and the Paideia Seminar*

Mortimer Adler (1984) wrote the following about questions and the Paideia Seminar:

> The role of the Socratic teacher in a seminar is that of a good conversationalist who primes the pump of discussion by asking leading questions….the primary goal…is to bring out and clarify the ideas and issues that are raised by something that has been read or otherwise experienced jointly…and to which there is no "right" answer. (pp. 18-20)

Fifteen years later, representing the National Paideia Center, Terry Roberts and Laura Billings (1999) wrote *The Paideia Classroom: Teaching for Understanding*. They clarified the role and the process of creating questions for the Paideia Seminar. They wrote that questions should elicit critical thinking and analysis of major ideas embedded in the text and that the questions should, "always be open-ended,…analyze the essential ideas in the text,… examine ideas, concepts and values,… and focus attention on the text or on their [students] relationship to the text" (p.45).

Roberts and Billings (1999) recommend a particular sequence of questions: opening questions that are the most open-ended in the sequence, and evoke interest and connection with the major ideas; core questions that point in the direction of specific ideas in the text; and closing questions that relate the issues directly to the lives of the participants.

In essence, the questions suggested for the Paideia Seminar are open-ended and promote higher-level thinking, are created in a manner that steers the students through the thinking process (starting globally, moving into specifics, and making a connection with the student), are assigned before reading, and utilized during reading, not at the conclusion. Current research and theory support the use of questions like those proposed in Paideia Seminar literature, in stimulating and supporting reading comprehension.

## *Reading Comprehension*

Having described the vital role of open-ended questions in reading comprehension, it was incumbent on me to examine what research has determined about the reading comprehension process, and eventually narrow the focus to higher level comprehension.

### *A Comprehensive Definition of Reading Comprehension*

The National Reading Panel Report (2000) borrows its definition of reading comprehension from Dorothy Durkin (1993) who wrote that it is "intentional thinking during which meaning is constructed through interactions between text and reader" (p.4-5).

This construction of meaning that takes place during reading comprehension is a complex merger of skills, prior knowledge, and text mediated by the language skills, motivation and interest of the reader. It is active and transactive, directed toward a purpose, multifaceted, ever-changing, and sociocognitive (Collins, Gambrell & Pressley, 2002; Almasi, 2002, Cambourne, 2002). It covers the full spectrum of Bloom's taxonomy including knowing facts, understanding concepts, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and elaboration, and it is quite dependent on the reader's ability to decode and read text fluently (Sweet & Snow, 2002).

### *The Beginning of Comprehension*

Before a reading comprehension task starts the student has a fund of prior knowledge, compartmentalized in schemata that stands ready with "open slots" to be enlarged or reorganized (Vacca & Vacca, 2000). Without this cognitive ability, the

student would likely forget new information and have no context in which to couch the new information (Pressley, 2002).

Brian Cambourne (2002) writes that, “Contextualized learning is learning that makes sense for the learner… and is more likely to result in robust, transferable, useful, and mindful learning” (p.35). Context allows students to make connections between what they already know and what they will be learning. When teachers activate prior knowledge and provide bridges into new information, students can make predictions and inferences that fuel metacognitive abilities through the reading comprehension process.

Michael Pressley (2000), citing the research of McKoon and Ratcliff in 1992, adds a caution about student use of prior knowledge. He writes:

> Skilled thinkers do not make inferences unless understanding of the text demands them. When reading a text, there are many inferences that could be made based on prior knowledge, but are not made. Typically, good readers make prior knowledge-based inferences only when they are required to understand ideas in text. (p.550)

Although the use of prior knowledge is an unconscious cognitive process (Pressley, 2000), it sometimes needs to be consciously scaffolded for students before they read, so that the comprehension of text will be maximized.

*Prior Knowledge, Context, and the Paideia Seminar*

The third outside influence referenced in the conceptual model of the Paideia Seminar is background information and context. As the student prepares to read and interpret for deep understanding, he needs to connect with his prior knowledge on a subject and place the text within a valid context. In their book, *The Paideia Classroom:*

*Teaching for Understanding*, Terry Roberts and Laura Billings (1999) stress the importance of preliminary activities that need to take place before a Paideia Seminar is conducted. Knowing the main ideas, connections to student prior knowledge, and contextual information of a book is essential for students as they attempt to comprehend it in order to discuss ambiguous values and issues.

Prior to the Seminar teachers spend time preparing students to make connections between their prior knowledge and the information in the book. If critical thinking is to take place, students need conceptually sound foundations on which to base their interpretations and critique.

As Michael Pressley (2000) noted, the research indicates that students do not do this unless they are "required to understand the ideas in the text" (p550). The Paideia Seminar creates a format that motivates and requires students to grapple with the major values and issues raised in a text. Activating prior knowledge and assisting with creating context is a vital part of the pre-Paideia Seminar preparation. It aides higher order comprehension and compels students to understand major ideas within the text. An example may serve this explanation better than further verbiage.

The National Paideia Center (2002) publishes *The Seminar Sampler* which provides teachers with samples of Paideia Seminar lesson plans. Each Paideia Seminar lesson that they produce suggests a pre-seminar activity. One example, on Emily Dickinson's Poem #1129, demonstrates how the Center expects teachers to activate prior knowledge and establish context before moving into the actual seminar. The lesson plan suggests that the teacher have the students read a letter from Emily Dickinson to Thomas Wentworth about the same topic as the poem, give some historical context about the

letter and poem, have the students summarize the poem in their own words, and have the teacher create a graphic organizer on the board about themes that reoccur in the students' summaries as the students read them to the class. The teacher is then ready to explore the themes and Paideia questions that the students also already possess.

*Higher-Order Reading Comprehension*

Michael Pressley writes in *Improving Comprehension Instruction* (2002):

> I think we are far from being certain about how to promote intelligent understanding of text, understanding that includes sifting the ideas in a text that are wheat from ideas that are chaff. We are far from knowing how to educate readers who will think hard about what they can do with ideas in text, when they apply and when they do not. There needs to be a great deal of thinking about how students can be taught to be comprehenders that use what they read for intelligent decision making. We know more about comprehension strategies that promote simple memory of text than we do comprehension strategies that promote critical understanding of ideas in text. (p. 395)

The difficulty that Pressley delineates in this passage relates to how little we know and teach about the use of higher order thinking and reading comprehension. For the purposes of this review I have broken down the overarching category of higher order thinking / reading into two subcategories: critical reading (Unrau, 2004) and elaboration or generative thinking (Langer, 2000).

In Norman Unrau's book (2004), *Content Area Reading and Writing: Fostering Literacies in Middle and High School Cultures*, he writes that only three in one hundred students perform at a level of reading comprehension where they can analyze meanings

and support that analysis with evidence (p. 249). Unrau goes on to connect critical thinking and critical reading as related fields, and describes critical thinking as reflection on what to believe or not, based on the evidence one possesses.

Adding specific dimensions to this understanding of critical thinking and reading, Perry Weddle, author of the classic book on critical thinking, *Argument: A Guide to Critical Thinking* (1978), describes an argument as " a piece of reasoning [that] consists of a conclusion and a premise or premises. The conclusion is that which is or seems to be supported, the premise or premises that which support" (p.2). In order to reason through an argument, an issue and a point of the argument are necessary. Some of the very same components of critical thinking and argumentation are key to critical reading. According to Weddle (1978) they include: identifying fallacies and oversimplifications; analysis of the quality and authority of the information; screening the information for overgeneralization, comparing and contrasting similar situations or concepts; and identifying strong cause and effect relationships within the premises.

Clearly, critical reading and thinking are the ultimate goals of reading comprehension, but the complexity and the sophistication of the thinking processes present a daunting dilemma for teachers. Where in their tightly constructed curriculum can they teach and scaffold this process? If teachers acknowledge that if students do become independent critical readers and thinkers at the "intrapersonal" level all of their learning will be affected, how then does a teacher incorporate the explicit teaching, scaffolding, and practice of strategic critical reading into the school day?

The answer that Alina Reznitskaya and Richard Anderson (2002) suggest is that teachers involve students in reading argumentative texts to absorb the argumentative

schema, and that they then teach and scaffold the oral dialogic argumentation in the classroom necessary for students to eventually become independent in their use of it in reading, speaking and writing.

Similarly, Janice Almasi (2002) writes in *Research-Based Comprehension Practices That Create Higher-Level Comprehension:*

> Developing an internal monitoring system in which readers can recognize and resolve textual incongruities is essential to proficient comprehension (Baker & Brown, 1984; Paris, Wasik & Turner, 1991; Pressley, Symons, Snyder & Cariglia-Bull, 1989). Thus educators are faced with the dilemma of designing an instructional context that enhances comprehension by fostering student involvement and active cognitive engagement. Research has shown that peer discussion provides such an instructional context (Almasi, 1995; Almasi, McKeown, & Beck, 1996; Almasi, O'Flahavan, & Arya, 2001; Fall, Web & Chusowsky, 2000). (p. 231)

Almasi goes on to report that the National Assessment of Educational Progress results indicate that students who discuss and interpret what they have learned once or twice a week have higher reading achievement than those who do not.

Given the amount of research tapped by Pressley, Unrau, Reznitskaya, Anderson and Almasi, both the need for critical reading and the means to achieve it have been documented. Perhaps critical thinking about read text can scaffold independent critical reading, and promotion of this valuable ability may come through the use of a discussion that incorporates critical thinking as described by Weddle.

The second type of higher order reading and thinking that Pressley alluded to when he described working with and applying ideas from texts is the idea of elaborating or extending the text beyond the boundaries of the two covers of a book.

In Judith Langer's (2000) research, *Beating the Odds*, one of her key findings was that in schools that beat the odds, students were expected to be generative thinkers – they moved beyond the obvious to inquire, research, explore, and bring their findings to bear on relevant and authentic issues and experiences. Students were facilitated by teachers who provoked them to think, and who did not expect "right" answers, or canned recitations. They were incited and motivated to learn. In providing students with problems, issues, resources and reasons to read and think, teachers led their students to elaborative or generative thinking and an appropriation of the process.

The research of both Gordon Wells (2000) and Brian Cambourne (2002) bears out the need for students to be stimulated by problems, issues and intellectual discord as well. They both found that the expectation of generative thinking encourages deep understandings, and moves students through a continuum of intellectual and experiential processes that can be summed up, in its final stage, as a transformation of knowledge.

*Higher-Order Reading/Thinking and the Paideia Seminar*

The Paideia Seminar provides a format that dictates that students prepare and process through a critical reading/thinking and elaborative cycle. The combination of authentic and controversial issues and texts steeped in ambiguity, structured and open-ended questions, the demand for textual or experiential evidence, the expectation of civil argumentation, the necessity of dialogic discourse on the topics, and an openness and expectation of transformative learning, all leads one to believe that the Paideia Seminar is

one vehicle that teachers could use to fulfill Pressley's desire to teach students to read with an ability to discern the wheat from the chaff and to promote critical understandings of texts. Secondly, it also provides the support for students to appropriate the argumentative or critical schema that can move from a facilitated process in the classroom to a process that students can apply independently to all areas of learning.

*Reading Strategies in the Content Area*

The final subcategory of reading that relates to this research is reading in the content area. The research reported in this document was conducted in a secondary history class, and therefore, relates to reading comprehension and comprehension strategies of a particular kind.

In many content area classrooms, research demonstrates that little instruction is occurring in secondary literacy competencies (Pressley, Wharton & McDonald, 1998; Ratekin, Simpson, Alvermann & Dishner, 1985; Vacca, 1998). At the same time 75-90% of classrooms utilize text books (Palmer & Stewart, 1997) and most teachers and administrators would agree with M. Halliday's (1993) words that "Language is the essential condition of knowing, the process by which experience *becomes* knowledge" (p. 94). On one hand educators know and use language and texts in the classroom, and on the other, do not open up opportunities for students to become independent, successful negotiators of learning through the *use* of texts and language. There has been a lot of testing of student literacies, but not a whole lot of teaching.

Lev Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development suggests that cognitive skills that are not fully developed require adult support, or that of a more informed peer. Vygotsky's theory purports that students move from inadequacy to

independence as the “skills to be acquired from others, and used, come to be internalized as self-directed inner speech” (Pressley, 2002, p.247). This is simply stated, but truly the heart of the matter. If students are to learn from content text and become fully literate adults, teachers need to move them from their novice state into that of an independent and autonomous learner. Arthur Applebee (1996) writes that, “activities [we teach] support natural processes of thought and language and in turn help students internalize a repertoire of effective strategies of language and thought that they can use in new contexts” (p 63). Transference of skills, strategies, and textual knowledge in content area reading engenders successful interaction with present and future literacy endeavors. The following three arguments for the use of content area strategy instruction are but three of many. They include research that supports the efficacy of the transference of strategies to other literacy endeavors, meeting the needs of struggling readers, and preparing students for the twenty-first century’s literacy demands.

Three research studies on reading comprehension related to the content area (Langer, 2000; the National Panel of Reading, 2000; and Marzano, Pickering & Pollock, 2001) all point to the need for content area reading strategies being taught that are systematic, well planned, woven into the content lesson, and having as the ultimate goal a transference of strategic tools that will enable students to become successful and independent learners. These three important pieces of research indicate that strategy knowledge and use are transferable.

Another reason that teachers in the content area should teach reading is that their students are a mosaic of differing needs and abilities. Martha Ruddell (1997) writes:

> Diversity is becoming the norm in U.S. classrooms. Where once our schools housed populations of relatively similar students, we now find more and more schools with students representing diverse cultures, languages, backgrounds, family structures, socioeconomic classes, ethnicities, sexual orientations, learning styles and physical and learning abilities. (p. 305)

Fifteen percent of all public school teachers have at least one English learner in the classroom (August & Hakura, 1997) and 25% of secondary students are considered struggling readers (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 1998). Clearly, explicit instruction related to reading and understanding challenging texts is beneficial to those who struggle.

The third reason secondary content area teachers should teach reading in the content area is captured succinctly in the position statement on adolescent literacy released by the International Reading Association in 1999. The authors write:

> Adolescents entering the adult world in the 21st century will read and write more than at any other time in human history. They will need advanced levels of literacy to perform their jobs, run their households, act as citizens, and conduct their personal lives. They will need literacy to cope with the flood of information they will find everywhere they turn. Continual instruction beyond the early grades is needed. (Moore, Bean, Birdyshaw & Rycik, p.3)

As the information glut overtakes students, specialization may well be a coping mechanism. Anthony Manzo (2003) writes that multiple literacies with enhanced abilities and fluency will be required in specific areas like math, computer science or high finance. Strategies that transfer from a high school history class to law school could be very

beneficial to a student. A successful future may well belong to students prepared to utilize transferable strategies from the content areas in high school to the demands of highly specialized and fast moving job markets.

Research documents that teachers *do* believe in teaching reading in the content area, they just don't do it. Pre-service teachers give up their idealistic visions of doing it because their cooperating teachers demonstrate that there is no time to do it (Bean & Zulich, 1992) and veteran teachers listen to administrators promoting coverage of the content for the test, and put literacy strategies aside. They all mean well, but they feel that they just don't have the time (Bean, 2000). They have to cover the standards and prepare students for the tests.

In an interview with M. D'Arcangelo (2002), Donna Ogle refutes the perceived notion that teachers should ignore strategies for content. She says that there is a renewed interest in teaching reading strategies because of the standards and the tests. It makes sense. Students do need to know the content, but they also need to know how to read analytically and write argumentatively to demonstrate a depth of knowledge to do well on the test.

Another complaint about teaching content area reading strategies has to do with taking time from content instruction, to plan, model, demonstrate and create authentic practice, *but* on the other end, when students become independent, they are able to read, synthesize, analyze, elaborate, and write far more quickly and effectively. The key is in the planning. If teachers plan with standards and attending literacy strategies in hand, they can weave them together over the course of a year and create an engaging and rigorous curriculum.

Facilitating meaningful and engaging reading in middle and secondary schools is not an easy or lauded task, but the tools for meaning building that are taught are essential for the success and independence for all students, both now and in the future.

*The Paideia Seminar and Content Area Strategies*

When asked to identify important content area reading strategies, researchers generally enumerate six to ten essential strategies. Among them, strategies similar to the Paideia Seminar are elucidated. One example is Richard Vacca (2002) who wrote a chapter in *What Research Has to Say About Reading Instruction* related to teaching content area reading strategies. One of several strategies that Vacca suggests is the Socratic seminar, which is very much like the Paideia Seminar. Vacca (2002) writes that it "extends and elaborates the ideas encountered during reading" (p.197). He continues "How teachers connect content learning to language processes contributes greatly to a student's comprehension of text" (p.197).

Some of the embedded language processes and strategies found in the Paideia Seminar that students may transfer into their personal repertoires for independent usage in the future are:

- metacognitive skills produced with the scaffolding of open-ended questions assigned prior to reading a text, researched and written about by Almasi (2002)
- demonstration of the importance of prior knowledge and context before reading as suggested in Cambourne's research in 2002
- synthesis, critical thinking skills and generative thinking researched and promoted by Pressley (2002), Unrau (2004), and Langer (2000)
- argumentation with evidence as presented by Weddle in 1978

- active listening, described as the most "undervalued and least understood aspect of discussion"(Brookfield and Preskill, 1999, p.92)
- oral language skills utilized to clearly communiate thinking (especially helpful for struggling readers and English Language Learners) underscored by Wells (2001), Pressley (2002), Applebee (1996), Halliday (1993) and Vacca and Vacca (2002)
- "clarification and crystallization" through "hearing others' views" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p.146)
- expository writing synthesizing a dialogic discourse with an evidenced position as encouraged by Vacca and Vacca (1999) and the research of Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur and Pendergast, (1997)

The ultimate goals in teaching and practicing these strategies within the context of a highly motivating controversy about a content area text are that they will learn the value of transformative learning and have the tools to achieve it, then, and possibly in the future.

## Dialogic Discussion

The second portion of this chapter emphasizes what has been researched and written about dialogic discussion, and in particular, about the Paideia Seminar.

### *What is Dialogic Discourse?*

Gordon Wells (2000) wrote in *Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research* that a dialogic discussion

> …is a form of collaborative meaning-making in which both individual and collective understandings are enhanced through the successive contributions of

> others and oriented to their further responses. It is by attempting to make sense with and for others that we make sense for ourselves. (p.58)

Some of the key words in this definition are “collaborative”, “meaning-making”, “understandings” and “making sense.” One reason that it is “collaborative” is because it is not monologic. Teacher initiated recitation is controlling and one sided, thus it is considered monologic. Lecturing and demonstration are monologic. A dialogue, on the other hand, is a balanced interaction between people with an equal right to speak. Participants often come to a dialogic discussion with many different perspectives and each one is valued and encouraged.

The words “making sense” and “understandings” refer to the goal of dialogic discourse. As students talk, their talk becomes both the “means and the goal” of the dialogue, and it usually bears little resemblance to consensus building, (Adler, Rougle, Kaiser, & Caughlan, 2004, p.317) rather, it is a struggle for meaning, a disquieting sense of disequilibrium that drives a dialogue to depths that other methodological formats for learning seldom reach.

As students co-construct knowledge, they negotiate through a controversial topic or issue by utilizing active listening, critiquing, and bringing their unique background experiences to bear on the topic. In a dialogic discussion the teacher takes the opposite stance of the more prevalent, transference-oriented teaching methodology, and does not impose his views on his students. He facilitates the students in talking to each other. The students build connections that include their personal experiences and a grappling with academic texts and higher-order thinking. In most cases they are fully engaged with the

subject matter as they probe, question, rebuild, and modify original perceptions (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999).

At the end of an effective dialogic discussion students have a new understanding that all the students agree is superior to what they came with (Bereiter, 1994). If one's understanding has not been changed, at least it has been enriched and refined (Alvermann, O'Bien & Dillon, 1990).

*The Dialogic Discussion Process*

The following bulleted sequence of the dialogic discussion process is a compilation of a large number of researchers and writers who are cited throughout the procedure. There is very little variance among them as to what constitutes the dialogic discussion process, but they all add significant insights to the process.

Before a dialogic discussion begins, the facilitator needs to create an intellectual and physical climate that is conducive for the discussion. The intellectual climate includes:

- The teacher and students acknowledging and situating themselves within the cultural and historical context that informs and constrains them (Wells, 2003)
- The students being prepared and open to mutual receptivity of ideas and perspectives (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999)
- The students understanding that their participation is crucial to the process (Brookfiled & Preskill, 1999)
- The valuing  of multiple perspectives and humility (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999)

- Risk-free intellectual environments where a trusting community has been established, and the precepts of civility and etiquette have been reviewed (Alvermann, O'Brien & Dillon, 1990; Cazden, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991)
- Stated goals that include critical thinking, extension and evaluation of read materials, increased understanding, and problem solving (Alvermann, O'Brien & Dillon, 1990; Brookfield & Preskill, 1999; Cazden, 2001; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Wells, 2003)

The physical climate includes:

- Non-hierarchal seating patterns that allow participants to see and hear each other easily (Cazden, 2001, Wells, 2001)
- Adequate time so that the discussion is not hurried (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991).

Along with the context, researchers agree that there are some necessary prerequisites that must precede the actual discussion. They are:

- Creation of meaningful, engaging, open-ended questions (Adler, Rougle, Kaiser, & Caughlan, 2004; Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991)
- Explicitly taught and scaffolded review of the dialogic discussion process (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997)
- Student preparation before the discussion including critical reading of a text and writing notes. ( Brookfield & Preskill, 1999). Wells (2001) calls this "rehearsal thinking (p. 12)".

Finally, the process itself consists of:

- Encouraging students to accept a role shift with the teacher moving to the background and refraining from commenting and domineering the conversation ( Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997)
- The teacher asking open-ended questions with a pacing that is slow, encouraging students to speak to each other and occasionally allowing the teacher to ask "uptake" or follow up questions as students answer ( Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997)
- Teachers also asking students to explain their thinking, and the process their thinking went through to come to a conclusion, modeling an explicit metacognitive process (Cazden, 2001)
- Students actively listening to each other and probing, critiquing and analyzing substantiated answers (Brookfield & Preskill, 1999)
- Encouraging civil conflict and controversy (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1997)
- Assigning a writing assignment that explains the student's position at the conclusion of the discussion. It may be a persuasive essay or a journal entry. This encourages the student to come to a final synthesis on the topic (Nystrand & Gamoran, 1991; Langer & Applebee, 1986)

*What Dialogic Discussion is Not*

John Dewey (1907) wrote, "There is all the difference in the world between having something to say and having to say something" (p.56). What Dewey might have been talking about is the difference between speaking one's thoughts in a dialogic discussion and being asked to recite facts for a teacher who is asking students "to say something."

Gordon Wells (2003) reports that 70% of all dialogue in the classroom is recitation. It involves a teacher asking the student a question that usually requires some memorization, the student responding to the question, and the teacher then evaluating the answer as correct or incorrect. The teacher is at the center of the dialogue and it usually does not include other students.

Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) characterize this form of dialogue as the opposite pole from dialogic discussion on a continuum related to discourse.

*Why Should Teachers Utilize Dialogic Discussion?*

The argument for the use of dialogic discussion as a teaching method spans over a range of premises that move from broad philosophical positions to more pragmatic and application-oriented considerations.

Gordon Wells (2001) is a strong proponent for the use of dialogic discussions. He believes that education is more about the maintenance and improvement of society than a preparation for becoming a part of the workforce. Along with John Dewey, he laments the distance between schooling and the real world of the student. He believes that students can be stimulated by dialogue to both improve society and aid in the growth of the individual. In explaining his philosophical stance on education he relates his belief that a democracy depends on citizens who have dialogic skills. He feels that students need to be prepared with both knowledge and communication skills to participate effectively in a democracy.

Another researcher who built much of his theory on the works of M.M. Bakhtin and L. S. Vygotsky is T. V. Akhutina. Akhutina (2003) writes about the importance of dialogue and its influence on learning. Like the work of the men he studied, he

emphasizes the importance of speech codifying thought. He purports that people are social by nature and learn through the impetus of communicating with each other. He contends that speech motivates and instructs. He, along with Vygotsky, suggest that interpersonal interactions make intrapersonal thinking and learning possible. He goes on to say that people are stimulated by their potential listeners. They attempt to wrap words around concepts and present them in a way that best matches the audience. If people did not need to communicate with each other, they might not codify thought and it would not be known or be expanded upon. Akhutina's most relevant observation for the benefit of this research is that dialogue stimulates, motivates, and creates learning.

Moving from philosophical and theoretical premises to more application based positions, the research of Nystrand and Gamoran (1991) demonstrates that students think more deeply when they are involved in dialogic discussion. Their research indicated that students move beyond memorization when teachers convey through their expectations, that students will be thinkers.

In addition to thinking deeply, researchers (Pressley, M., Wood, E., Woloshyn, V. E., Martin, V., King, A. & Menke, D., 1992) have found that dialogic discussion aids in long term retention of what is discussed. Not only do students understand content more deeply, but they retain that understanding over time.

A final area of growth that has been researched and documented, as the result of dialogic discussion, is reading. Adler, Rougle, Kaiser & Caughlan (2004) quote the research of Alverman and Hayes (1989) and write that discussion influenced the "students' acquisition of reading and analysis skills (p. 312)." The practice with oral

language and argumentation augmented the students' abilities to read and analyze what the students were reading.

Melding the theoretical and the pragmatic, it can be asserted that students who participate in dialogic discussion think deeply as they use words to test concepts, build on each other's knowledge, retain both the knowledge and the dialogic skills, and grow both individually and for the benefit of their participation in a democratic society.

*Why Do Teachers Use Dialogic Discussion So Little?*

The research of Almasi (2002), Alvermann, O'Brien & Dillon (1990), Adler et al. (2004) and Nystrand and Gameron (1997) all found that teachers believe in the use of dialogic discussion, but do not use it. The following statistics bear this out:

- Adler, Rougle, Kaiser & Caughlan (2004) observed 450 classes and found that an average of 52 seconds per class in eighth grade were spent in dialogic discussion; in ninth grade an average of 15seconds were spent in dialogic discussion.
- Nystrand and Gameron (1997) completed a two year study of 1,100 students with 200 lessons and found that eighth grade students were in discussion an average of 50 seconds per class and ninth grade students, 15 seconds per class.
- Alvermann, O'Brien & Dillon (1990) looked into what teachers reported as discussion and found that in 11 of 24 cases, it was recitation, in six of 24 cases it was lecture and recitation, and finally, in seven of 24 cases it was an actual dialogue.

When asked why teachers do not employ dialogic discussion, the following four reasons resounded throughout the research.

The first reason teachers do not use dialogic discussion is that they do not feel they know how to conduct a dialogic discussion effectively, and they also feel the need for some support as they learn. (Adler et al, 2004; Nystrand and Gameron, 1997; Alvermann, O'Brien & Dillon, 1990). The discussion process is dependent on a complex, structured sequence within a well planned and organized format that often times yields unpredictable and risk-taking outcomes. The format and parameters of the discussion are essential to the academic success of the goals, and teachers are rightly concerned about knowing and applying the appropriate structure. Because dialogic discussion is utilized so little, it is also difficult for teachers to find a seasoned support system as they attempt to implement dialogic discussion in the classroom.

The second reason teachers shy away from using dialogic discussions is that the power structure in the classroom changes (Adler et al, 2004; Nystrand and Gameron, 1997; Alvermann, O'Brien & Dillon, 1990). Teachers are not comfortable handing over control of the class and the curriculum to the students. They are acculturated to planning, managing, and predicting the outcomes of each class. In addition to becoming a facilitator, the teacher also has to be willing to juggle the follow-up questions that may take highly diverse pathways from the predictable lesson plan, and model a tolerance and facility with ambiguity and complexity. In essence, teachers have to be comfortable with becoming a co-constructor of learning with the students, rather than the knowledgeable instructor.

The third reason teachers are uncomfortable with dialogic discussion is the pressure they feel to cover the content. Dialogic discussion can, but cannot guarantee, that content vocabulary and details will be covered or reviewed. Teachers feel that

standardized tests and state standards dictate specific coverage of content (Nystrand and Gameron, 1997; Alvermann, O'Brien & Dillon, 1990).

In addition to the need for coverage that teachers express, is the difficulty that teachers have in using texts other than textbooks. The use of textbooks seems to be equated with coverage. Textbooks are seldom springboards for controversy, and thus teachers find little to be discussed within their covers (Alvermann, O'Brien & Dillon, 1990).

The final reason that dialogic discussion is seldom used is that teachers feel that lower-track students cannot achieve the type of thinking needed to participate in them effectively. They feel that because of their demonstrated achievement levels, lower-track students cannot be expected to utilize higher-order thinking (Nystrand and Gameron, 1997).

The four reasons for not utilizing dialogic discussion in the classroom are certainly understandable in the current climate of transmission-oriented, standards and tests based education; however, the reasons for using it should give teachers pause. Nystrand and Gameron (1997) found that discussion had a "strong positive effect on achievement (p.57)" and it would seem that it would aid in achieving strong test scores.

## The Paideia Seminar

Moving from a broad understanding of dialogic discussions to that of the Paideia Seminar is like moving from a category to a subcategory. The Paideia Seminar is one, unique format for implementing a dialogic discussion.

*What is a Paideia Seminar?*

A Paideia Seminar is a structured, formal discussion that requires critical thinking applied to carefully crafted open-ended questions related to texts that foster controversy and debate about issues and values (Adler, 1982; Roberts & Billings, 1999). Initially, the students are required to read one or more texts, and with textual evidence, prepare answers to teacher created questions. During the Seminar the teacher facilitates a dialogue in which the students listen carefully and actively, think critically, and articulate insightful answers and rebuttals with each other. The goal is modified or solidified synthesis, evaluation, and elaboration of the texts (National Paideia Center, 2002).

*What a Paideia Seminar Is Not*

Paideia Seminars are not spontaneous, teacher-driven, or didactic in any way. Thoughtful planning and crafting of open ended questions on the part of the teacher, and prior reading, synthesis, and analysis by the student constrain participants to use this method only when time, careful planning, and appropriate texts are available.

As it was earlier iterated, true dialogue "occurs infrequently in classrooms…most classroom discussion happens as an IRE sequence in which the teacher initiates a question, the student responds, and the teacher evaluates the response (Cazden, 1988; Dabielewicz, Rogers & Noblit, 1996; Mehan, 1979; Michaels & Cazden, 1986; Mehan, 1979, 1998; Newman, Griffin & Cole, 1989; Wells, 1993)," (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 911). Teachers often have clear learning objectives, and in so doing, lead the students directly to the information to be reiterated or evaluated, then move on without allowing students to interact, or question each other. The Paideia Seminar is the antithesis of an IRE. Teachers facilitate the dialogue, but do not lead.

Although teachers often struggle to contain themselves in the midst of a stimulating Seminar, the goal is for the students to interact with each other, not the teacher; therefore, the Paideia Seminar is not a teacher-fronted ( Billings &Fitzgerald, 2002) instructional method. It is an opportunity for students to co-construct and deconstruct information and opinions they have formulated with the texts.

*Background of the Paideia Seminar*

Mortimer Adler and a group of like minded scholars created and wrote about the Paideia Program between 1982 and 1984. Adler was a well known educational philosopher at the time. The Paideia Group chose the word *Paideia* to encompass their overall conceptual framework. It comes from the Greek *pais*, or *paidos*, which means the upbringing of the child and infers a nurturing of the child through learning (National Paideia Center, 2002). The Paideia Seminar is one of the three prongs of the Paideia Program. The other two prongs include didactic instruction and project-based education. Adler leaned heavily on John Dewey's emphasis on active learning, Horace Mann's commitment to a democratic education and equity, and Robert Maynard Hutchins's belief that communication between communities is vital, and that rigor and high standards must be applied to intellectual endeavors. Hutchins had a direct impact on the creation and format of the Paideia Seminar (National Paideia Center, pp. 3-4).

Researcher and Paideia Program proponent, Laura Billings (2002) reflects Gordon Wells' sense of meaning-making through dialogue when she writes that in a Paideia Seminar there is a "reciprocal flow of ideas involving actions and reactions of group members that may lead to new understandings not held by any other group member in advance of the discussion"(p. 909).

Billings' statement also highlights the Seminar's inadvertent bent toward constructivist theory, in that it underlines the uniqueness of each participant's prior knowledge, experience and point of view. This emphasis on a multiplicity of perspectives allows for the richness and the breadth experienced in this type of academic discourse. In addition, because constructivists hold that there is no codifed body of knowledge, and that knowledge is sifted through individual screens of perception and interpretation, a methodology and curriculum that acknowledges and celebrates the diversity of opinion and evidence encouraged in a Paideia Seminar would reflect the constructivist position.

But to be clear, Mortimer Adler was not a constructivist; he was a passionate, secular perennialist. In his book, *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*, (1982) Adler, who was more a philosopher than an educational expert, argues that although most children experience equal amounts of time spent in school, they are not receiving the same quality of education. His Paideia proposal was a model he thought might rectify that inequality.

Some of the key tenets of his educational philosophy include: John Dewey's aversion to vocational training, a curriculum that is the same for all students without use of tracks, early intervention for students who might need it in several years of pre-school, immediate educational remediation before problems get too big, an emphasis on project oriented learning and the Socratic method of discussion, the dual goals of preparing a democratic citizenry and preparing students to develop intellectual skills that will make them lifelong learners, and lastly a strong belief that there are specific books, art, and music that stand out as being necessary for students to know and understand in order to be good citizens.

Up until that last point, Adler appears to be espousing an educational philosophy and methodology that falls in line with many of the “balanced” approaches educators have adopted today. Early intervention, interactive teaching strategies, equity, and inclusion all reflect the balanced tightrope between Progressivism and traditionalism that current educators appear to be straddling. Where Adler parts ways with Dewey and Progressivists is at the door of “truth.” Dewey believed “truth” was to be ever in flux, and Adler felt that some very gifted men and women had discovered it and made it evident in their writing or works of art. Adler encourages disagreement and disequilibrium as students debate over issues and values found in the chosen “great books” or art, but the books and art that were “great” were selected for the students based on their adherence to Western ideals and democratic principles. It was more the choice of curriculum, than the Socratic methods that identified Adler as a perennialist.

Adler is usually connected with two concepts; his devotion to the “great books” and his passion for teaching students to reason, discuss, and analyze. In the years since 1982, when Adler wrote *The Paideia Proposal: An Educational Manifesto*, the great books emphasis has been slowly minimized and the Socratic method has been brought to the forefront. The National Paideia Center, an institution that carries on Adler’s work, published *The Paideia Seminar: Active Thinking Through Dialogue* in 2002. This manual updates and extends the purpose of the Paideia Seminar, and in particular, addresses the issue of what texts to utilize when planning a Paideia Seminar. The writers of the manual explain that the text can be print or non-print, relates ideas and values, and is complex, relevant, integrated with the curriculum, and challenging. The manual does not list specific selections, but provides suggested plans for such diverse texts as *Romeo and*

*Juliet*, “Starry Night” by Vincent Van Gogh, a National Council of Teachers of Mathematics math word problem, and “Ain’t I a Woman” by Sojourner Truth.

Just as Vygotsky, the Russian psychologist, has had an immeasurable impact on education, Adler, the philosopher, has also made his mark on education. Both men were not trained, or experienced in teaching in regular classrooms; however, they had much to say about how it should be done. Carol Lee and Peter Smagoinsky write in *Vygotskian Perspectives on Literacy Research* (2000) that Vygotsky’s theories are utilized and extended to meet educational needs that he did not address at the time he did his work in Russia. Educational practitioners and theorists alike, elaborate, manipulate, and build onto Vygotsky’s initial theories. This may be true for Adler as well. His vision for equity in education and interactive teaching is being extended by the National Paideia Center. They are emphasizing the process and deemphasizing the list of books, that made his philosophy particularly perrennialistic in nature.

Given this argument for the evolution of the Paideia Seminar’s philosophy, it may be possible to see how the Paideia Seminar could be utilized as a constructivist tool, in spite of Mortimer Adler’s initial philosophical bent.

*The Process*

According to Adler (1982, 1983, 1984), Roberts with Billings (1999) and Billings & Fitzgerald (2002) and *The Paideia Seminar: Active Thinking through Dialogue in the Secondary Grades – A Manual*, 2002, the Paideia Seminar is a sequential process that requires adherence to a formal structure that scaffolds student dialogue and elaborative understanding. The structure suggested by reading the authors listed above, and my own observation includes the following:

- The teacher chooses texts that motivate and challenge students to wrestle with complex issues and values appropriate to their developmental level. The texts fulfill curriculum requirements, are relevant to students, and can be discussed from more than one point of view.
- The students are asked to read the text in advance of the Seminar
- Students are given open-ended questions a day or two before the Seminar. Opening questions are the most open-ended and are “hooks” that pull students into the dialogue on a “big-picture” level. The core questions are quite specific and may relate to interpretations of text supported by evidence, and the closing questions ask students to relate the text to their own lives (Roberts & Billings, pp. 45-46). The construction of these questions is pivotal to the success of the Seminar.
- Students may complete a form of preparatory writing prior to the Seminar. It is comprised of possible answers and citations from the text, and demonstrates that the student has completed pre-seminar reading and analysis.
- Chairs or tables are moved to create a circle or a rectangle. Students face each other and the teacher sits among them.
- The teacher reads the first question and indicates when students may jump in. A nod of the head is usually sufficient. As the Seminar progresses the teacher may take notes, summarize what students have said up to a certain point, and ask clarifying or refocusing questions. The teacher moves the students through the questions at appropriate junctures, and may need to remind students to cite evidence for opinions. Throughout, the teacher cannot jump in or allow herself to

take center stage. Reminders that eye contact with fellow speakers and listeners is more important than eye contact with the teacher are often warranted.

- Teachers refrain from praising “right answers” and indicate when students employ inappropriate behavior. Part of the goal is to encourage and practice *civil* and *polite* disagreement.
- Note taking by students is encouraged because they sometimes have to wait substantial amounts of time to rebut a speaker, and it also encourages active listening.
- Students cannot assert an opinion without a citation from the text. The best kind of response is a chain of citations strung together to answer one question or theme.
- The classroom environment needs to feel “safe” for students to take risks and think creatively. Negative or demeaning comments are not acceptable.
- The Seminar should be completed in one sitting of 60 or more minutes.
- The class is not brought to consensus – students should leave still discussing the issues. Many teachers take a vote at the end of a Seminar to demonstrate the diversity of opinion.
- Some teachers grade participation, others use a persuasive essay to grade summative knowledge.

*A Dialogic Format that Straddles Philosophies*

As teachers are mandated to prepare students for high stakes tests that include open ended questions and writing assignments, and are encouraged to follow the precepts of educational reform in making education interactive, thoughtful, engaging, relevant,

and purposeful, the Paideia Seminar straddles the breach well. In *The Paideia Seminar: Active Thinking Through Dialogue* (2002), the authors assert that the, "Paideia philosophy is a powerful fusion… a synthesis of academic standards with the teaching and learning strategies that make those standards accessible to the diverse population of American school students" (p.4) The Paideia Seminar brings traditional and constructivist philosophies together in a balanced blend that reflects the place where most educators currently find themselves.

## Research on the Paideia Seminar

To date, four major pieces of research have been published on the Paideia Seminar. They focus on the influence of the Paideia Seminar on: writing, improving critical thinking through the use of the Paideia Seminar, ethical positioning that takes place within the Seminar, and finally, the facilitation of dialogic discussion in the Paideia Seminar. A brief summary of each will follow, including a critique and a prediction related to how these studies inform this research.

### *Paideia Seminars and Higher Writing Scores*

#### *Summary*

In 1997, William Chesser, Gail Gellatly and Michael Hale published their research article, "Do Paideia Seminars Explain Higher Writing Scores?" It relates their research about the influence of the Paideia Seminar on higher writing scores in the Githens Middle School in Durham, North Carolina. The article was published in *The Middle School Journal*. It attempts to document the improvement in state writing tests over a three year period in a school that implemented the consistent use of the Paideia Seminar over that same three year timeframe.

The statistics relayed in this article are impressive. Scores on the state test rose 20.7% and the scores for minority students rose 28.5%. Other schools in Durham posted a 7.7% gain, and the state saw a 3.6% rise in scores (p.40).

Some significant aspects reported about the seminar process included in the article are that the authors felt that students understood writing with elaboration and analysis because they were required to do this orally in the Paideia Seminar, and that each Paideia Seminar was followed by a writing assignment that required the students to transfer their thoughts and evidence to paper. Because writing is not an essential part of the Paideia Seminar, it was noted that this added requirement might have had an influence on the writing scores as well.

*Critique and Application*

Although the authors reported that there were not many other methodological or student ability changes in the school during the time of the study, and their assertion that the Paideia Seminar was the best explanation for the gain in scores, they did not report other possible variables. In my estimation, this omission and related statistical tests makes their case less trustworthy. The probability that the Paideia Seminar and the attending writing assignments had an influence on students writing scores does seem feasible, however.

There are two important pieces of information that were gleaned from this article that influenced my research. The researchers write:

> First, it is a well-documented fact that the process of implementation in any reasonably comprehensive teaching methodology is an inescapably slow process (Fullan & Miles,1992; Joyce & Showers, 1995). Second, some of the most

> important outcomes of the Seminar, such as improved articulation, higher-order thinking skills, and interpersonal skills, are not directly measurable by current standardized tests…the uneven nature of implementation makes research problematic, and Paideia is no exception. (Chesser, Gellatly & Hale, 1997, p. 44)

Chesser, Gellatly and Hale reconfirmed my choice in using qualitative research methods in exploring what occurs related to higher-level reading comprehension and the Paideia Seminar because of the difficulty a researcher has in measuring and documenting such a nebulous, slow, interwoven, and inconsistent methodology. Without being too intrusive in the educational experience of students, it would be difficult to isolate and test individual variables that would establish a strong relationship between dialogic discussion and higher-level reading processes. In the case of Chesser, Gellatly and Hale, the variables were not isolated enough to determine whether the Paideia Seminar, or the writing at the end of it, caused the writing scores to improve.

The second assertion made by Chesser, Gellatly and Hale that supports this research comes at the conclusion of their article where they write that their research and findings made “a strong case for further exploration of the utility of Paideia Seminars as a vehicle for developing skills of thought and articulation (p.44).

What Chesser, Gellatly and Hale discovered was that standardized tests and interviews do not allow researchers to discover connections and depth like a case study might. They made some tenuous hypotheses about the influence of the Paideia Seminar on writing scores based on the information they had, but found their design did not support clear, unobstructed connections.

*Improving Critical Thinking Through the Use of Paideia Seminars*

*Summary*

In 1996, Polite and Adams published a research report supported in part by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the United States Department of Education. The research was conducted at the Lookout Valley Middle School in Chattanooga, Tennessee, which serves 220 students in grades six, seven and eight. Approximately 20 seminars per year are conducted in this school (p.1).

Polite and Adams collected data utilizing in-depth interviews with nine teachers, observations of team meetings and Paideia Seminars, and analysis of documents related to the Seminar. This triangulated data were transcribed and coded using the research methods of Bogden and Biklen, 1992 (p.3).

What Polite and Adams discovered was that teachers did not take team planning of the seminars seriously, that higher order thinking was not always the primary focus in planning the seminars, that further training of teachers was needed, and because the school had dictated its use, some teachers were not committed to the methodology.

Some positive student findings included the use of conflict resolution by students, and that “approximately 80% of the students engaged in at least intermittent metacognitive activity or Piagetian formal operational activity” (p.7). The researchers noted that since two-thirds of the participants were sixth and seventh graders, the 80% that were engaged in metacognition was higher than one would expect for their age level.

*Critique and Application*

One major criticism I have of this research is that “metacognition” was never clearly defined, the process of determining it was not described, and a source was not cited for determining normal levels of metacognition. Since metacognition was the key determinant for ascertaining a level of critical thinking, it seemed that it should have been discussed at length.

As a result of reading and analyzing this research I discovered the importance of defining and specifying key vocabulary and methodological processes as the research and conclusions are explained. The triangulated case study method of this research relates to the design I have proposed, however, this research article demonstrates that although eight excellent recommendations were made in the conclusion, they appear to have unsubstantiated support, and therefore, questionable applicability.

*Ventriloquating Ethical Positions*

*Summary*

Stanton Wortham (2001) is a researcher that has done a great deal of research on mapping and analyzing participation of students in dialogue. In his 2001 article entitled, “Ventriloquating Shakespeare: Ethical Positioning in Classroom Literature Discussions” he asserts that the students he observed in an urban, ninth grade classroom who were participating in a Paideia Seminar about *Julius Caesar* identified with the “voices” of the characters because they identified with, or had an aversion for, the social and ethical identities of those characters. In other words, they entered the dialogue taking on one of the “voices” of a character they could identify with, arguing and persuading from that point of view.

Wortham's theoretical context is socio-historical in that he believes that students enter dialogue by "renting" words and "voices" from what they have read or experienced, thus "positioning" themselves within the Paideia dialogue as one of the characters (p.49). The character that the student aligns himself with is usually someone that reflects his social class, religion, tendencies, political bent, age group, gender or any other specialized stratification, and it is often the choice of words that the student utilizes in the Seminar that gives that position away. Wortham uses a "systematic empirical approach" that he writes, "uncovers the positioning" (p. 49).

Wortham concludes with a defense for allowing students to position and borrow identities within the Seminar. He writes, "Compelling literature raises political and ethical positions on issues of continuing relevance, and literature classrooms can provide a protected forum to critique the types of positioning that we often adopt unreflectively" (p.62).

In reading terms, Wortham is saying that students adopt a point of view that is most attuned with their own social and historical background. Students should be viewed from this perspective when Paideia Seminars are being analyzed. He goes on to say, however, that teachers should stay away from positioning themselves as they stimulate the Paideia Seminar. He writes that teacher positioning has a tendency to still some of the divergence. He suggests that all the "voices" need to be heard except that of the teacher.

*Critique and Application*

The research and data presented in this article was professional and detailed. A methodological reminder came in Wortham's research as he humbly related one problem from which he allows his audience to learn. So much time elapsed between his

observations and the analysis that he could not go back to the participants and ask interview questions about areas of clarification that would have aided him during analysis. There appears to be more than one reason to keep the data collection and analysis process moving quickly.

Wortham's focus on linguistic anthropology presented another lens under which I scrutinized the "voices" of students and teacher as I observed and interviewed students about the Paideia Seminar's influence on reading comprehension. The shared point of entry that Wortham and I have is the relationship between social context and background information, and student involvement in the Paideia Seminar. Reading comprehension and dialogic positioning both start at this same place.

Without question this research buttresses Wortham's. As Chapter Four will elucidate, students identified their "positioning" and the teacher forced them to "see" their chosen positions in one particular Seminar.

## *Participants in the Dialogue*

### *Summary*

In the winter of 2002, Laura Billings and Jill Fitzgerald had their research entitled, "Dialogic Discussion and the Paideia Seminar" published in the *American Educational Research Journal*. The focus of their qualitative research was to ascertain the quality and the extent of real, student to student dialogue present in one teacher's classroom as she conducted Paideia Seminars in a public school of 1500 situated in a large county in the Southeast. The teacher being observed taught eleventh grade English and had been utilizing Paideia Seminars for three years, once or twice a month (p.916).

The case study relied on observations of three Paideia Seminars, questionnaires, and interviews. The researchers utilized “grand case analysis, micro-examination of the seminar discussions and narrative research analyses…” (p.907).

Billings and Fitzgerald used sophisticated qualitative methods, spending a total of one hour and twelve minutes observing Paideia Seminars.

Their final analyses revealed that the teacher was far more involved in the dialogue of the Seminar than one would expect of a facilitator. The teacher spoke approximately 45% of the time and the students spoke approximately 55% (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002, p.922). The authors characterized the teacher talk as both dialogic and teacher-fronted and suggested that many of the questions that the teacher asked were more pointed at information the teacher wanted conveyed rather than the more open-ended questions one would expect in a Paideia Seminar.

Another key discovery was that in 92% of the time catalogued by the researchers in the Paideia Seminars, the teacher was initiating questions, receiving responses, and responding to the students who answered. There was very little time when student to student dialogue took place.

Lastly, the researchers found that the teacher inserted her opinions and utilized questions to manage the conversation in a manner that reflected her intentions. She was more a “knowledgeable coach” than facilitator (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002, p.925). The authors concluded that the teacher was “in transition” and needed more training and experience in the methods of facilitating Paideia Seminars more dialogically.

*Critique and Application*

Paideia Seminars usually take one to two hours. The description of the Paideia Seminars that Billings and Fitzgerald observed seem to be short and hurried. When a Paideia Seminar is hurried the teacher often feels impelled to talk more in order for students to receive the coverage of material she hoped they would receive, had time allowed. I observed this phenomenon in the class assignment study I did, which will be described hereafter and in the current research. To blame the teacher's lack of training alone seems to leave out the variable of the short time allotted for the seminar.

On a positive note, this research article described a very, well crafted qualitative research model. It included triangulation of data sources including observations, transcriptions of video and audio tape, and interviews, including the use of a focus group from the teacher's class. Coding of all data was conducted with an emphasis on looking for patterns in the data, analysis of "talk turns" for the "purposes and functions" of the respondents indicating the type of talk taking place, and intercoder agreement between the authors and a trained coder. The intercoder agreement demonstrated that there was very little variation in the analysis of the talk turns. Finally, the two researchers utilized ten or more hours of narrative analysis in sifting through themes, issues and interpretations at the conclusion of the "grand case analysis" and "micro-examination" (Billings and Fitzgerald, 2002, p. 918-919).

In a personal conversation I had with Laura Billings on October 24th, 2003, she indicated that based on her experience with the model described above, she would recommend transcribing only the audiotape and utilize the video tape for eliciting students' "think-alouds" as they view it. She also suggested that the "think-alouds"

should be audio-taped and transcribed for later coding. Related to the coding, Billings affirmed the use of a trained coder to verify intercoder agreement throughout the process.

After carefully reading and analyzing the work of Fitzgerald and Billings, and having a personal conversation with Billings, I came away with a sense that the model and course of analysis I planned would work well in capturing an understanding of what was happening during a Paideia Seminar as it pertains to higher level reading comprehension. The methodology and data analyses processes of Fitzgerald and Billings proved to be invaluable in the planning, implementation, and analysis of this research.

## Class Assignment Study on the Paideia Seminar

### *Summary*

In the fall of 2003, under the supervision of Dr. Judith Davidson at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, I conducted a class assignment which was a qualitative study on the Paideia Seminar in the same school and classroom in which I conducted this research. It was entitled, “The Paideia Seminar Process: Student and Teacher Perspectives”. Its purpose was to ascertain if teachers and students perceived the Paideia Seminar’s process and value in the same way.

Because the methodology and findings have particular bearing on this proposal, the summary will be significantly more detailed than those listed above. The names of the school and participants have been changed.

### *Methodology*

The setting for the class assignment was Harrison High School which is made up of approximately 2000 students from a middle class to affluent neighborhood.

The participants were three teachers: Ken O'Shay, James Rhodes and Josh Smith. O'Shay and Smith teach U.S. and World History to Honors and Academic tracks and Rhodes teaches English to the same tracks.

## *Data Collection*

In addition to the two interviews and 32 responses to writing prompts, I completed four observations with field notes, six analyses of student drawings and three analyses of teacher documents.

## *Findings*

The findings were grouped in six categories: how teachers and students value the Paideia Seminar, goals that students and teachers expect to achieve, student preparation before participation, the role of teachers, participant perceptions of the attributes of the Seminar and problems related to the implementation of the Seminar. The findings relate to tables 1 and 2.

### *Valuing of the Process*

The preponderance of this research suggests that the Paideia Seminar is highly valued by both teachers and students as an effective learning experience. Given a rating scale of one to five, the average for all 32 students was 4.35. This includes "Honors" students and "Academic" students. The teachers indicated similar enthusiasm and opinions in their interviews. O'Shay said that it is a highly effective learning tool and Rhodes said it was the best teaching strategy he has ever used. Some of the comments from anonymous students included: "Everyone has a chance to voice their views… I love to hear ideas I wouldn't have thought of myself…you can explore a question in

depth…you might possibly change your views…I comprehend better…it gets you involved in what you are studying."

Clearly, both students and teachers valued this learning experience.

*Common Goals*

Two goals in utilizing the Paideia Seminar that teachers and students shared were the ability for students to understand the complexities involved in important issues and choices and having an opportunity to share individual perspectives on important issues working toward a new synthesis of knowledge and understanding. Two additional goals that teachers emphasized that were not as visible with students were the opportunity to utilize critical thinking and having students support assertions with evidence.

*Preparation Perceived as Priority*

In the process itself the teachers and the students asserted the need for students to prepare for the seminar the night before it took place. O'Shay and Smith also demonstrated their belief that students needed to rehearse the material in class before the discussion ensued. O'Shay encouraged students to pair up and rehearse arguments and use appropriate vocabulary with one person before coming to the large group. Smith conducted a full class review of the readings, with summaries on a whiteboard before he took his class into the Seminar.

*Role of the Teacher*

During the Paideia Seminar process the role of the teacher appears to be pivotal. The students and teachers agreed that the roles included that of referee, summarizer, informant, facilitator, mediator, prompter, a neutral party and clarifier.

The teachers had other aspects of their roles to add. They said they must "set the table" with rules and expectations, promote the seriousness of the issue and the structure, assess performance, create open-ended questions and choose provocative texts. As the seminar proceeds they must help students make transitions, model active listening, focus students on the question, provoke, goad, pursue, pump and prime.

*Attributes of the Paideia Seminar*

The following paragraphs will refer to Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 lists attributes of the Paideia Seminar process as perceived by Mortimer Adler, the three teachers, students and myself.

| | Adler | Teachers | Students | Observer |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Based on text | + | + | + | + |
| Open ended quest. | + | + | | + |
| Spirited dialogue | + | + | + | + |
| Articulate position | + | + | + | + |
| Justify position | + | + | | + |
| Clarify position | + | + | + | + |
| Complexity understood | + | + | + | + |
| Lack of consensus | + | + | + | + |
| Lack of closure | + | + | + | + |
| Includes: reading, writing, listening, speaking, thinking | + | + | + | + |
| Pre-seminar Prep. | + | + | + | + |
| In-class Prep. | - | 2of 3 | - | 2 of 3 |
| Post-seminar Assess. | + | + | | 2 of 3 |
| Participation Assess. | + | 1 of 3 | | 1 of 3 |
| Seminar seating | + | + | + | + |
| Relevance | + | + | + | + |
| Integrates/ curriculum | + | + | | + |
| Note taking by teacher | + | | | |
| Courtesy | + | + | + | + |
| Teacher facilitation | + | + | + | + |
| Teacher provocation | - | + | + | + |

TABLE 1

ATTRIBUTES OF THE PAIDEIA SEMINAR AS PERCEIVED BY ADLER, TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND OBSERVER

*Text.* All four "perceivers" related that a Paideia Seminar is based on text. Further, they all relate that the texts must be issue laden and provoke disagreement and discussion. Rhodes said, "The text has to be something they can sink their teeth into" and later, "very important things have to hang in the balance."

*Questions.* Those who have studied and utilized the Paideia Seminar know how crucial the open-ended questions are. All those involved in this study noted this except the students. It is probably something they take for granted. They do not see or hear the crafting of the questions. Roberts and Billings (1999) suggest a three-pronged approach to writing questions. The opening questions are the most open-ended and are intended to point out broad themes; core questions target specific ideas supported by specific citations; and closing questions relate the text to issues in the students' lives (p. 45-46). Although the teachers I observed utilized open-ended questions, the three-prong approach was not evident.

In the three observations that were made one teacher used a question with several subcategories and the other two teachers used one question each. An example from one of the classes where one question was utilized was, "Should Thomas Jefferson have freed his slaves?" The students had read texts defending both sides of the argument.

*Spirited discussion.* All participants understood that they would be involved in a spirited discussion where they would articulate and clarify their positions, but only a few students understood how important it was for them to cite their sources. The teachers certainly reminded them of this throughout the Seminars as they reiterated the need for evidence.

*Complexity.* All those indicated on the matrix agree about the goal of the Paideia Seminar. Three students summarize this as “Everyone voicing their views”… “to get a more complex understanding of the issue”… “to get input into your ideas to help you evaluate them and possibly change your views or make them stronger.”

Another area where there was significant agreement was the affirmation of a lack of consensus and lack of closure. Students were encouraged to leave the Seminar still discussing and “chewing over” the ideas. At the end of Rhode’s class he took a vote on the issue. It was an eight to seven split. He was happy with that.

*Integrative process.* The Paideia Seminar is a highly integrative process in that it requires reading, writing, listening, speaking and thinking. All participants validated this observation.

*Pre-seminar preparation.* Pre-seminar preparation usually includes reading, thinking and note taking prior to the Seminar. On two occasions, I observed in class preparation as well. In O’Shay’s class the students went over their arguments in pairs before they came to the seminar circle. It appeared to allow rehearsal and private use of vocabulary before coming to the more public arena. In Mr. Smith’s class a decision to go from pairs to a full white board oriented review seemed to be precipitated by a time span between preparation and the Seminar and student attitudes when they were allowed to work in pairs. In both cases it appeared that the in class preparation primed the later discussion.

*Post-seminar assessment.* Post-seminar assessment is recommended by Mortimer Adler and is usually in the form of writing. In two of three observations writing was assigned. The other instance was unusual in that Rhodes said he usually assigns an essay,

but the purpose of this Seminar was to review the Seminar process. The students did not mention writing as a part of this process.

*Participation assessment.* Roberts and Billings recommend noting student participation throughout the Seminar. Mr. Rhodes did this, but Mr. O'Shay and Mr. Smith did not. The latter two said they would grade based on the preparation and the essays. Mr. O'Shay felt that shy students should not be graded based on their speaking as long as they were active listeners.

*Seating and relevance.* No one disagreed on the importance of seminar seating or picking issues of relevance to the students. The students did not note that the Seminars are integrated with the curriculum, but that is not something they would typically consider.

*Note taking.* Roberts and Billings (1999) indicate the importance of teacher note taking during the Seminar. This includes participation with textual references and notes of what students have said. (p. 104) Mr. Rhodes indicated the first two areas with a symbol system, but none of the three teachers wrote extensive notes – they were very busy facilitating the discussion.

*Courtesy.* All participants in the Seminar expected courtesy and politeness. Mr. O'Shay indicated that polite disagreement is a skill that is valued and one that he hopes will transfer outside the classroom.

*Devil's advocate.* All those involved underlined the key role of teacher as facilitator, however, Mortimer Adler and Roberts and Billings do not mention the need of the teacher to be the provoker or "devil's advocate". All those at Harrison certainly do –

teachers and students noted the need and the expectation. In all of the Seminars that I observed the ability of the teacher to provoke discussion was key.

*Closure.* Table 2 indicates how attributes may vary from class to class. Many are similar to Table 1 and for that reason I will comment on only one area and that is closure. On Table 1 I indicated that closure is not valued and is not encouraged. At that point I was talking about reaching a class consensus. On Table 2, closure refers to a teaching technique of summarizing and bringing the Seminar to a close. Mr. Smith summarized, Mr. Rhodes took a vote and summarized and Mr. O'Shay ended the Seminar abruptly because of time constraints. (He later told me he closed by assigning an essay).

| Attributes | Rhodes | O'Shay | Smith |
|---|---|---|---|
| Prep as Homework | + | + | + |
| Prep in class | - | + | + |
| 1-3 Questions | + | + | + |
| Teacher Provocation | + | + | + |
| Teacher Summarizing | + | + | + |
| Graded Disc. | + | - | - |
| Graded Essay | - | + | + |
| Structured | + | + | + |
| Polite | + | + | + |
| Spec. Seating | + | + | + |
| Citations Required | + | - | - |
| Evidence Required | + | + | + |
| Closure | - | - | - |
| Voting | + | - | - |
| Nonjudgmental Comments | + | + | + |
| Strong Teacher Animation | + | + | + |
| Extrinsic Motivation | + | + | + |
| No "right answer" speech | + | + | + |

TABLE 2
ATTRIBUTES OF PAIDEIA SEMINARS IN THREE CLASSROOMS

Overall, these matrices demonstrate a great deal of cohesion in what teachers and students perceive. This is bolstered by my observations of the same behaviors.

*Problems*

*Time.* The problems in the Paideia Seminar process are all related to the setting. No one indicated that there was a problem with the process itself. Students and teachers indicated that there was not enough time in a 46-minute block to have an effective seminar. They felt 80 minutes was more appropriate.

One teacher, corroborated by my observation of this phenomenon, stated that taking a Paideia Seminar on to a second day was "death to the process." He felt that the sense of urgency and involvement just cannot be recaptured after 24 hours has elapsed. Time has to be provided in one large chunk.

*Waiting.* Students, teachers and my observations raised the second problem. When there is a large group enthusiastically participating in the seminar, there are always students who do not get to speak until the particular strand of the discussion they wanted to comment upon has moved on. In the politeness of the discussion, some are left behind. The teachers recognize this and allow moving back to a previous subject and encourage note taking so that students can recall their position and subject five minutes later.

*Group size.* Another problem relates to the size of the group. Teachers felt that the maximum size was 20 students and that was not optimal. Rhodes' suggestion of utilizing an observer group that sits outside the circle was an innovative suggestion for minimizing the size of the circle. However, Roberts and Billings (1999) suggest that this was utilized in the 1980s and early 1990s but that it eventually was dropped because students needed to be directly involved. They wrote that seminars could accommodate up to 40 participants. (p.96) I doubt if any of these teachers would agree with that recommendation.

*Space.* The three teachers I observed created effective seminar seating by moving desks or providing tables, but in some classrooms, space and seating may become a problem.

*Students.* There are two problems that relate to students. First there are students who are shy and exhibit intrapersonal learning styles. Two such students wrote on their prompts that they were uncomfortable with the process but valued what happened in the seminar. The other problem relates to unprepared students. Students who have not fulfilled the obligation of prior preparation do not contribute well. Rhodes gives them a poor grade, O'Shay, and Smith do not because they do not grade the actual Paideia Seminar. They indicated that the essay that follows the Seminar would reflect their lack of preparation and be graded accordingly.

*Surprises*

*Time/provocation.* Some of the little surprises that came out as I coded the data include the following. Teachers work harder at provoking students when they know they have less time to complete the seminar. When O'Shay had 25 minutes to complete a Seminar his interactions with students were far more frequent, urgent and teacher-fronted.

*Tracks*. The Academic track needed more provocation than the Honors class; however, they valued the process just as highly. Smith's class discussed whether Thomas Jefferson should have freed his slaves. He conducted a whole class review of the information after which he led them in the Paideia Seminar. The number of times he interceded to summarize, question and goad far exceeded the Seminar led by O'Shay (with an Honors track group). The assumption that students who needed more

provocation might value the effectiveness of the learning process less was nullified by the fact that they rated the Paideia Seminar with an average rating of 4.4 and the Honors students rated it with a 4.3.

*Workability.* The teachers learned the Paideia Seminar process through professional development and the reason they continue to use it is pragmatic – it works. O'Shay said, "I approached this new discussion format as a skeptic. It worked and I used it. Research on this says that teachers are generally practitioners. The acid test for ideas is workability."

*Usage.* All three teachers interviewed for this study utilize the Paideia Seminar between six and nine times a year. They choose complex texts and issues to make this effective. Some of the issues include governmental intervention in business and private lives, whether force can be justified when a doctor needs to make a crucial diagnosis that will affect others, tragic flaws in characters found in *Macbeth* or *The Crucible*, surprises found in *The Killings*, or issues relating to slavery. The teachers hinge the Seminars on the broad boards of controversy and do it very intentionally.

*Leveling effect.* This process levels social groups and cognitive abilities. Of 32 students, only six felt that social groups affected their participation in the seminar. The teachers felt that it was a place for students with learning disabilities to shine. Rhodes told the story of being asked to another school to demonstrate the use of the Paideia Seminar with a low level group who were studying *Antigone*. He said that for two hours the students never stopped talking. He went on to say, "It is a leveler – special education students who have a difficult time writing, often don't have a hard time speaking."

*Grading.* Another surprise was the fact that the three teachers disagreed on the need for grading, but all usually gave writing assignments that would reflect the students' knowledge of the subject discussed. Rhodes used a grading system that he devised for the Paideia Seminar. It included checks and bars that indicate whether the student had answered with evidence or with a string of interwoven citations. The other two teachers did not do this. O'Shay felt it was unfair to shy students. All three believe that expository writing should usually follow a Seminar.

*Competition and collaboration.* Finally, students and teachers agreed that the Paideia Seminar required competition and collaboration. Disagreement was seen as crucial, but listening to each other and changing opinions based on that listening was seen as collaborative.

*Critique and Application*

The data that I collected at Harrison High School suggested that teachers and students hold the Paideia Seminar in high regard as an effective learning process. The students reflected the enthusiasm of the teachers for the Seminar. They also seemed to understand the purposes and the application of the process. The only areas where there were differences of perception between the two groups were areas in which teachers would have specialized knowledge and interest. This appeared to indicate that teachers communicated the purposes and applications well and that student experiences have substantiated the initial explanations.

The students gave the process a high rating. Even those who indicated they were shy and afraid to speak gave the process a high grade. It seemed that teachers and students valued the process similarly.

The problems that teachers and students spoke or wrote about related more to the Seminar environment, than to the process itself. However, some major questions about the process seemed to suggest a need for further research. What can be done for students who must wait five minutes to be recognized and when called upon, find that the class has moved on to another strand? How can students who are shy or exhibit less verbal learning styles be included in the Seminar? Should Seminar participation be graded? How much provocation should be expected in a Seminar? Is it really necessary? Does the Seminar require modifications and tweaking for differentiated learning? All these questions about the actual application of the process are important and provocative; however, a more overriding set of conceptual questions compelled me to move into this current research.

The dominant questions to come out of this class assignment study related to higher order reading comprehension and the influence of the Paideia Seminar process on it. As students in the class assignment study demonstrated their openness to modify initial understandings of read materials through dialogue I wondered what could be ascertained about how students move from personal transaction with read materials to knowledge transformation as students apply the Paideia Seminar process. Could the Paideia Seminar enhance higher level reading comprehension in secondary level content area classes? Did the Paideia process influence the metacognitive thought that occurred during the initial reading of texts? Would changes in student comprehension be observable as students moved from the initial reading to the final essay? These were the questions that drove this research.

## Conclusion

Metaphorically, this chapter provides a contextual and conceptual nest that has been woven with differing construction materials provided by current theorists and researchers in the fields of learning, reading, dialogic discussion, and the Paideia Seminar. The purpose in creating this "nest" is twofold. First, the information in this chapter connects specific facets of the research to broader bases of knowledge and inquiry, and secondly, justification for the necessity and importance of the research is demonstrated throughout the body of this chapter.

### *Conceptual Context*

The foundational premises for this research relate to constructivism and sociocultural theory. They provide a backdrop for the building of a model that values both individually constructed knowledge and reciprocal and socially mediated understandings.

Louise Rosenblatt's work on reading as a transaction weaves in the emphasis on reading. The starting place for the model I have proposed, as far as the reading component is concerned, is where the individual transaction between the reader and the author takes place.

Open-ended questions that are assigned prior to reading allow students to interact with them during the initial reading of a text, and in a sequence that promotes higher-order thinking. The questions are crucial to the initial stages of the model. They stimulate and direct the transaction.

One of the goals of the transaction is higher order reading comprehension which includes elaboration, analysis, and evaluation. They fall under the category of critical and

generative reading and thinking. These areas of reading, and in particular, strategies that promote these kinds of reading in the content area, although valued, have been demonstrated to be underutilized.

The strand relating to dialogic discussion shifts the emphasis from the research related to transactional reading and comprehension to research about forums that promote interactive perspectives and interpretations of read texts. It becomes apparent that the two strands of reading comprehension and dialogic discussion are quite interrelated and supportive of the other. Their goals are complimentary and overlapping.

The Paideia Seminar, in particular, appears to meld well with the purposes of higher-order comprehension because it promotes a vehicle for comprehension from the very beginning of the transaction with text to the articulation, rebuttal, and evidence gathering necessary to interact in the Seminar. In many cases the Seminar is followed up with an essay, and it is in so doing that the student demonstrates the transformation of knowledge that has taken place since the initial transaction with the text.

*Justification for the Importance of This Study*

The research synthesized in this chapter indicates that higher-level reading comprehension and dialogic discussion are complementary and similar in purpose. They depend on three modalites; visual, auditory and oral, but one way of thinking - critically. It takes little more than common sense to recognize that comprehension stimulated through visual stimuli would be enhanced and enriched by the use of oral and auditory interaction on the same information. As so many have demonstrated (Au, 1990; Billings and Fitzgerald, 2002;Vygotsky, 1962; Wells, 1992, 2000; Wortham, 2001) articulation of

thought in conjunction with others can and does produce thought that was not created by anyone before the social interaction of the dialogue took place.

Also demonstrated in this review of the literature is the startling disuse of dialogic discussion. With the current emphasis on scientific evaluation and standards-based education, teachers are feeling that every moment has to be filled with covering the curriculum and preparing students to achieve well on multiple-choice questions. Perhaps, overlooked in this emphasis on specific curriculum coverage is the need for students to demonstrate comprehension of read texts, critical thinking skills, and elaborative writing. Dialogic discussions can scaffold all of these skills.

If researchers are going to persuade classroom teachers of the academic value of dialogic discourse, one way may include a qualitative study that assists in helping them understand how dialogic discussion affects higher-order reading comprehension. The data and analysis of this research supports the model outlined in these first two chapters of this proposal, therefore, a more significant case can be made for utilizing the Paideia Seminar in content area classes. The following chapters will provide answers to the following exploratory questions and may promote a better understanding of the reciprocal value involved in linking higher- level reading comprehension and the Paideia Seminar. The questions are:

- How do participants perceive the Paideia Seminar's dialogic process as influencing their thinking about read text?
- During the Paideia Seminar process, what higher-level comprehension thinking skills are evident?

- As students move from the initial transaction with the read text, through the seminar, and then on to a possible essay or writing assignment, what changes in student comprehension will be observable in their written responses?

The findings from this research seem to indicate favorable answers to these questions. It is hoped, that as a result, more middle and secondary content area teachers will seek training and implement a form of dialogic discussion in the classroom.

# CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

The Paideia Seminar is a process. Its starts with an initial transaction between the reader, the text, and prepared, open-ended questions, moves through a reflexive cycle of interpersonal analysis and reconstruction, and ends with a modified or solidified synthesis of the initial knowledge and enhancements generated through the analyses and perspectives of peers. In many cases it can be considered a transformation of the initial learning.

This research gets "inside" the thinking processes of the participants in order to explore and understand the complex layers involved in this process – to follow the participants' thinking from the beginning to the end of the Seminar experience. In order to do this I have utilized the perspectives of the teacher, the students, and my own, as an observer.

This research, then, relies on multiple perspectives and a process that focuses on how people make meaning. Because of this emphasis, a qualitative approach seemed like a very feasible methodology to choose.

The Paideia Seminar is a socially constructed process in which variables are interwoven and interdependent. As I attempted to describe, understand and interpret it, I used an inductive and flexible lens, digging deep into the contextual and experiential roots of these lived phenomena. Collecting data on what people said and did allowed me to see the Paideia Seminar in its natural setting and allowed a proximity that produced observations of the varying facets of the process. The purpose was not to assess the process, but to explore, understand and generate some grounded theory about how the process enhances reading comprehension (Creswell, 1994; Maxwell, 1996).

This chapter will detail the assembly of qualitative data collection and analyses tools and methods. It will start with a look back at a class assignment study on a similar subject and how it played into the use of data collection tools in this study; review the setting and participants; explain how the researcher's subjectivity was handled; describe methods of data collection; relate the specific sequence of data collection; explain methods of analysis; and address validity and ethical issues. Figure 3 demonstrates the data collection purposes and plan and Table 3 shows out it played out in actuality.

| **What are the key research questions?** | **Why is it important to know this?** | **What data answered this question?** | **Who participated?** |
|---|---|---|---|
| How do participants (teacher and students) perceive the Paideia Seminars' dialogic process as influencing their thinking about read text? | To understand student perceptions regarding the enhancement of comprehension through dialogue/peer thinking and evidence. | Student writing prompts<br>Drawings<br>Teacher semi-structured interviews post Paideia Seminars<br>Think-alouds by student informant group<br>Formal interview of teacher | Students<br>Teacher<br>Student informant group |
| During the Paideia Seminar process what higher level comprehension thinking skills are evident? | To understand the role of the pre-Seminar questions and preparation related to the evidence of analysis and elaboration. | Observation and field notes<br>Transcribed audiotapes<br>Informant group documents<br>(entry notes, in class notes and essays)<br>Think alouds by informant group<br>Teacher semi-structured interviews post Paideia Seminars<br>Official documents that indicate questions and texts | Participant/Observer<br>Teacher<br>Students<br>Student informant group |
| As students move from the initial transaction with the read text, through the Seminar, and on to an essay, what changes in student comprehension will be observable in their written responses? | To understand how the comprehension process unfolds as individuals move from personal transaction with texts, to peer dialogue, to personal reconstruction of knowledge. | Student entry notes that correspond to teacher produced questions, notes taken during the Seminar, and completed essays relating the final synthesis of the students to Paideia Seminar questions | Students in informant group |
| Data Planning Matrix adapted from Schram (2003)<br>The Paideia Seminar Donna J. Robinson 6-17-04 | | | |

FIGURE 3

KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THE REASONS WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT, THE DATA THAT WAS UTILIZED, AND THE PARTICIPANTS WHO SUPPLIEDTHE DATA.

| | *Types of Data* | *Dates* | *No.* | *Participants* | *Location* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Question 1<br><br>How do participants perceive the Paideia Seminar's dialogic process as influencing their thinking about read text? | Student Surveys | 4/12 | 12 | 12 students | Classroom |
| | Drawings | 4/12 | 5 | Student Informants | History Office |
| | Teacher Interviews | 4/10, 11, 24, 5/9 and 5/10 | 5 | Teacher | History Office |
| | Think-alouds | 4/26, 5/10 and 5/11 | 9 | Student informants | History Office |
| | Formal Interview | 7/17 | 1 | Teacher | Teacher's Home |
| Question 2<br><br>During the Paideia Seminar process, what higher level comprehension thinking skills were evident? | Observations and Field Notes | 4/10, 11, 24, 5/10 and 5/11 | 5 | All students and teacher | Classroom |
| | Transcribed video and audio tapes | 4/24, 5/10, 5/11 | 3 | All students and teacher | Classroom |
| | Informant group documents | 4/10, 14, 24, 26, 5/10 | 21 | Student Informants | Home/class |
| | Think-alouds | 4/26, 5/10, 5/11 | 9 | Student Informants | History Office |
| | Teacher Interviews | 4/10, 11, 24, 5/10 and 5/11 | 5 | Teacher | History Office |
| | Official Documents | 4/10, 24 and 5/10 | 5 | Teacher | History Office |
| Question 3<br><br>As students move from initial transaction with read text, through the Seminar, to a final writing assignment, what changes in student comprehension will be observable? | Pre-Paideia writing | 4/10, 5/10 | 5 | Student informants | Homes |
| | In class notes | 4/24 | 2 | Student Informants | Classroom |
| | Post-Paideia writing | 4/14, 26, 5/10 | 14 | Student informants | Homework |

TABLE 3

DATA COLLECTION INFORMATION AS IT IS RELATES TO THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

## Prior Experience

In the fall of 2002, under the supervision of Dr. Judith Davidson at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, I completed an unpublished class assignment study on the Paideia Seminar. The title of the study was: *The Paideia Seminar Process: Student and Teacher Perspectives*. The completed assignment demonstrated that teachers and students held a common understanding of the Seminar's key attributes and valued the process highly. It was significant because it indicated that both teachers and students perceived that the Paideia Seminar was an effective and transformative learning tool, engendering personal investment, intrinsic motivation, critical thinking, and egalitarian, reciprocal meaning-making. As a result of data and analyses from that study, implications and questions arose that led to this current research.

I collected data utilizing: four observations and field notes, structured interviews with three teachers, thirty-three written responses to writing prompts, six logos or drawings, and several class artifacts or documents. Triangulation of data supported some clear patterns and themes for coding, and the grounded theory that under girds this study was one of the results.

The choice of data collection tools for this current study comes as a result of experiences and retrofitting indicated by the class assignment study. As each data collection tool is described in the following pages, I will indicate the strengths and weaknesses experienced with that tool during the class assignment study, if it was utilized during the class assignment.

The Paideia Seminar makes use of input that is oral, auditory, and sometimes visual, in response to body and facial language. Capturing all of this simultaneously was

this design have been modified to improve those used in the class assignment. This firsthand experience with researching another aspect of the Paideia Seminar, and the adjustments that come as a result of it, were beneficial to this research.

## Setting

The school in which I completed this research is made up of approximately 2000 students from middle class to affluent neighborhoods. It is composed of a mixture of suburban and rural towns. It is a regional high school where ninety-eight percent of the students are white and there are no limited English proficient students. Ninety-seven percent of the high school population plans to attend postsecondary schools. Ninety-seven percent of the students passed the English subtest of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Achievement System (MCAS) and ninety-four percent passed the math subtest of the MCAS (Mass. DOE Profile, 2002, p. 1).

The school was recently renovated. The rooms are large, with good natural lighting. There is significant use of technology and media by teachers and students. Class size ranges from fourteen to thirty.

Faculty demographics are in flux as many older teachers are leaving and being replaced by younger teachers. The principal will be starting his second year at the school. Budgetary concerns have been a major issue. Although the communities in the district are considered moderately affluent, the tax base, related to the lack of businesses in the area, is low. Recently, because overrides were not approved, school course offerings, extra curricular activities, the number of teachers, and school furnishings have been cut to a bare minimum.

The residents of surrounding communities consider this school a rigorous and excellent school. People make real estate decisions based on the school's high quality. It has a lottery for school choice because of the large number of students who apply.

## Participants

The students that were utilized in this research study were in a twelfth grade Advanced Placement American history class. All students at Harrison High have the choice to enroll in Advanced Placement (AP) history classes. The requirements are rigorous. Students who choose to take AP history are usually highly motivated and committed to effortful study. It was the students' second consecutive year of taking American history, as they must take it in their Junior year as well. Taking it twice is the only way they can attain American history AP credit.

In addition to observing the whole class, the research design called for a student informant group of five students who were chosen from the full class for particular pieces of the data. When the student informant group needed to be created, the teacher and I explained the data gathering process for informants and asked for five volunteers. Two young men and three young women volunteered quickly.

The teacher of this class was a veteran teacher and writer. In the past two years he has won two prestigious national teaching awards. He has also written many textbooks on critical thinking and history, and created simulation software that stimulates decision making processes relative to those made at crucial crossroads in history. He was the head of the history department. He opened his classroom to me a year ago for the class assignment. Probably the most important attribute he possessed, however, was that he has

been making use of the Paideia Seminar enthusiastically and successfully for the last twenty years.

## A Rationale for the Setting and Participants

This was a purposeful setting, chosen because it is rich in information. Corrine Glesne (1999) quotes Patton (1990, p.169) when she writes that, “information rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research” (p. 29). The depth and breadth of experience that the teacher possessed with the Paideia Seminar, and the committed nature of the students provided an “information rich case”.

Because the class assignment study was conducted at this school, rapport, respect and trust with the teacher had been established and this current research study was supported and welcomed. The teacher articulated his desire to read and analyze the data in an effort to continue to finesse his use of the Paideia Seminar. The reciprocity he sought in this relationship was continued refinement of this teaching tool.

The final plank in this rationale relates to the school’s culture and the ethos of this particular classroom. The school has taken a strong stand in encouraging teachers to utilize interactive teaching strategies. As my job affords me the opportunity to observe in many of the area schools I had noted that many of these schools are moving to a more transmission-oriented methodology, related to teaching to the test. The Harrison School, on the other hand, continues to demonstrate a commitment to student and subject centered learning. It is only in a school such as this that Paideia Seminars would be refined, respected and open to research.

The classroom environment was also particularly welcoming to an observer. The teacher has observers in and out of his classroom frequently. Because of his notoriety as an excellent teacher he has had film crews, student teachers, and administrators in and out to the point where students take little notice of another observer.

Because of the researcher's prior experience and rapport with the school, the ease of gaining access, the teacher's lengthy experience with the Paideia Seminar, and the opportunity of working with articulate and information rich students the setting was a justifiable choice .

## Subjectivity

Subjectivity is a major concern when qualitative research is undertaken, and because of this, I consciously held an awareness of its influence as a filter over my lens throughout the data collection and analysis. As I focused on what was observed, written and answered, I questioned and analyzed my words and behavior for bias.

I have successfully used the Paideia Seminar over the past seventeen years and because of this I am an unabashed proponent. Some of the very best learning and retention of learning in my classes have come as a result of the Paideia Seminar. The answers on essay style final exams (that reflected earlier Paideia Seminars) and student comments on course evaluations support my opinions. As an assistant professor, I was beginning to assess what makes it successful and why. Because of the outstanding essays that followed the Seminars, I started to wonder how the process related to synthesis and analysis in reading and writing. Because of this interest, I decided to move out of the teacher-evaluator mode and observe the process with "virgin" eyes. It has been my commitment to put my own experiences aside and observe and prod as if I had not

experienced this process before. Because I am a trained evaluator I knew it would be difficult to keep that language and eye out of my mind, but I believe I did it because I was intentional about the process.

The Greek mandate to “know thyself” relates to this short treatise on subjectivity. What I know is that I am an experienced practitioner and proponent of the Paideia Seminar process and that my job often leads me to evaluate rather than observe. I have been aware and cautious of these two factors. In Alan Peshkin’s article, “In Search of Subjectivity – One’s Own” (1988) he relates that we all find ourselves in the “underbrush of our own subjectivity” and that we have to “continue the process of taming (it).” In an effort to scrutinize my subjectivity I have written frequent self-assessment memos as I have researched, read and edited drafts of my research, with a focus on my subjectivity.

A second preventative measure that I have relied on relates to data analysis. When I had completely coded the data, I had a trained research assistant code 10 percent of the same data, checking for intercoder reliability. Cohen’s Kappa has been applied to sharpen the reliability figure. If subjectivity were to become a problem it would likely alter the reliability.

Lastly, because I utilized nine different modes of data collection, a large amount of data was collected, and there seems to be little room for skewing it due to my subjectivity. As Bogdan and Biklen (1982) write, “The data will have to bear the weight of the interpretation” (p. 42). The volume of data in this study is comparable to having a large number of participants in quantitative research, the larger the number, the greater possibility that interpretations are reliable.

## Validity and Trustworthiness

Joseph Maxwell (1996) writes that there are three areas that present threats to validity in qualitative research. They are description, interpretation and theory (p.89) Using Maxwell's format as a guide, I believe this research was protected from these threats.

### *Description*

Description is an area that I wrestled with during the class assignment study. The Paideia Seminar's dialogic discussion moved along quickly. To protect against missing the description of the environment, participant behaviors and other interesting subtleties, along with the dialogue, the use of a tape recorder in both the Paideia Seminar and during the Think Alouds was used. Transcriptions allowed for close analysis of the dialogue while field notes and the videotape enlarged the descriptive capabilities. The videotaping was primarily done to create a stimulus for the Think Alouds, but became invaluable as a backup to the audio tapes, and a crosscheck for other data collection.

Another form of description is self-description. In critical thinking jargon, the participants in this study "have no reason to lie". Their names have not been used, the teacher is a well established veteran whose name is not used, and participants are not being paid. There was no motivation to be untruthful.

The area of subjectivity has already been discussed, but it bears mentioning that bias in description was carefully monitored and filtered.

One last area that could have had an influence on how students behaved, and then, how they are described, is reactivity. The students, teachers and administration are quite used to seeing me in the halls and classrooms of this school as I observe student teachers

there frequently. I am a known quantity. Having the equipment for recording set and started before class, made that experience as unobtrusive as possible. The young man who assisted me with the video camera was a student teacher who all the students knew as he was teaching their physics class in the school. And finally, as mentioned earlier, this teacher's class is visited often by varying adults, so that one or two more visitors did not create reactivity.

*Interpretation*

Maxwell (1996) writes that, "The main threat to valid interpretation is imposing one's own framework or meaning, rather than understanding the perspective of the people studied and the meanings they attach to their words and actions" (p.90). The teacher involved in this study and I used a "common language". We have both studied Adler and read Paideia Seminar literature. The teacher regularly utilizes this language with his students and they interpret and understand it similarly, as well.

Triangulation of nine data sources also aided in valid interpretation. When nine data sources converged, validity and internal reliability seemd to be in place.

During the coding, a research assistant was trained in the coding process and was provided explicit code definitions. She coded 10% of random pieces of the data independent of me, and intercoder agreement was determined. Cohen's Kappa was applied. It stands to reason that interpretation was more valid as it was sifted through the lenses of two independent coders.

Member checking by the teacher aided in the accuracy of interpretation as the accuracy of the data was determined by the teacher who read the accumulated data.

One final check on the validity of interpretations was the verification of data connections through the use of extensive data displays. Matrices, tables and networks demonstrated the validity of the interpretations.

### *Theoretical Packaging*

Maxwell's last category relating to validity is the tendency for some researchers to create a theoretical package that they then attempt to fit the data and data analysis into. They don blinders to competing explanations and unexpected data. Although Chapter Two indicated that I had formulated a conceptual model; that was all it was. This research was exploratory in nature, there was much to learn, but proving or postulating particular theories was not the purpose – understanding was, therefore, I intentionally sought out differing and competing information.

## Ethical Considerations

Many of the ethical considerations are embedded in the previous sections; however, there are a few very important reiterations that should be highlighted in this category.

### *The Right to Free and Informed Choice*

The participants who included, one teacher and one class of 20 students, were presented with a lay summary which presented the proposed research describing who the researcher was, what would be done, and what role the participants would play in the research (Glesne, 1999). Along with this, the students received consent letters outlining for students and parents what the students' proposed role would be.

Two separate letters were used. One was used to explain the full class observations and writing prompt assignment and the other detailed the student informant

group's responsibilities of drawing, Think Alouds, and having copies of written work made. Each of these processes was described in detail.

Both students and parents signed voluntary consent forms and returned them to the researcher. The letters indicated that under no circumstance were names to be used or photographs taken. They were also told that the videotape would be destroyed at the end of the research project.

The letters explicitly stated that the participants were free to withdraw and discontinue their participation at any time.

In addition, this research does not reflect on the students, but on the Paideia Seminar, so there is little chance that there will be any feedback that would be negative or intimidating.

*Reciprocity*

As the participants gave their cooperation, time, and effort the question might have been asked about what they received in return. Earlier, I outlined a process in which the teacher, as a member check and as a curious life long learner read the data. He received data about his use of this strategy. Secondly, I gave him a gift certificate. Because it is a gift and he did not know about it prior to the close of this research, it did not have any bearing on the results. This was also true for the gift certificates for the five student informants.

*Concluding Remarks on Ethical Issues*

The basic ethical stance that I took in this research was that of an observer who was respectful, honest and grateful for the privilege of learning from the students and

teacher. I protected their privacy at all costs as I explored an educational strategy that may benefit the larger community of learners.

## Methods of Data Collection

### *Observations and Field Notes*

Three observations of three separate Paideia Seminars were planned, however, the three class periods to be observed became five, when two of the Seminars were conducted over the course of two days. A written account of what was seen, heard, experienced, and thought in the course of those observations was detailed. As Bogdan and Biklin (1982) suggest, the field notes include portraits of subjects, a reconstruction of dialogue, a description of the physical setting, accounts of particular events, depictions of activities, and a self-assessment of the observer's behavior (p. 74). Nonjudgmental scribing was the norm, with personal reactions and thoughts signified in italics.

The Paideia Seminar includes dialogue that moves at a fast pace. In the class assignment study it was found that some of the other "rich" descriptions had to be ignored in order to keep up with recording the dialogue. In an effort to capture both an accurate flow of dialogue and description, a transcribed audio taping and videotaping of each Seminar took place.

Laura Billings, one of the researchers who wrote, "Dialogic Discussion and the Paideia Seminar" for the Winter, 2002 issue of *American Educational Research Journal* spent a morning discussing this research proposal with me and suggested the use of audio taping the dialogue for accuracy. She said that in her research project there were points where the videotape did not pick up all the words. She had used observations, field notes and videotaping. It is because of her experience with researching the Paideia Seminar that

I chose to augment the videotape with audio tape. Accurate transcription of dialogue was a key source of data for this research study.

*Audio Taping*

Each of the five Paideia Seminars sessions was audio taped and transcribed. During the first session I had a technological problem, in that I was given the wrong microphones. The volume was limited and it was difficult to transcribe. My field notes (which included an accurate script of the dialogue) were used instead of a transcription of the audiotape. In future tapings, different microphones were used.

In addition, audio taping and transcriptions were also used when individual members of the informant group met to "think aloud" about their thinking in response to five minute Paideia Seminar video clips and informal interview questions. In both instances, two audio tape machines were placed between myself and the student, and turned on prior to each interaction. I was unobtrusive and was not working with the equipment when the students started either of these processes.

Two machines and multiple tapes were brought to each session to forestall any difficulties with the equipment.

*Videotaping*

One videotaping camera was placed in a corner of the classroom on a tripod. It was aimed at the circle. It was on when the students entered the room and one of my student teachers stood behind it unobtrusively moving it slowly as the dialogue moved around the circle. Because of the circular seating the camera needed to be manipulated, but did not cause any distraction.

The purpose of using the video camera was not to document the Seminar, but to provide clips that could be used to prompt recall for the individual members of the informant group so that they could verbalize their thinking about particular points in the Seminar.

As with the audio taping, the video tape ensured descriptive validity of the field notes.

*Think Alouds*

A group of five student volunteers aided in the collection of data in three distinct data collection processes. The first was the Think Aloud protocol. I asked each of the five students to see me individually after school, the day after two of the Paideia Seminars. The first time I did this, the television I showed the DVD of the Paideia Seminar on did not work well, so I utilized my notes, read back sections of the dialogue, and asked them to think aloud about their thinking. The second time I met with the students I was able to show them  short DVD clips in which they were involved and asked them to verbalize their thinking non- reactively. I found that I needed to ask questions to prod them in their thinking. Throughout this “prodding”, they were asked to tell me what they were thinking at particular junctures in the dialogue that was read back to them.

Because this research attempted to follow student comprehension processes through the Paideia Seminar, it was vital that portals into student thinking be tapped in order to answer the second research question related to evidence of higher level comprehension and thinking skills.

According to Ericsson and Simon, thinking aloud has gained acceptance as a central method for studying thinking (p.182). Currently, the think aloud protocol is being used in most schools to monitor reading comprehension.

*Drawings*

For years psychologists, sociologists and ethnographers have utilized drawings to understand their subjects. Although new to educational research, it is becoming an acceptable means of collecting information about social and educational contexts that are not always available to an observer. It allows participants a nonverbal explanation of a phenomenon that is difficult to put into words. In many cases it promotes a symbolism that synthesizes a process more succinctly then words. The types of drawings that are expected can be completed by anyone. The data gleaned from drawings integrates well with other data sources, and sometimes drawings allow a new perspective or unexpected understanding of a subject to ensue (Davidson, 2003, p. 3).

Clifford Geertz, an anthropologist who utilized ethnography extensively, coined the phrase, “thick description” for the type of contextual and interpretative descriptions ethnographers need to extend from all sources – including visual data (Bogden & Biklen, 1982). It yields meaning, symbolism, and inferential data similar to verbal exchanges. The complexity of an art form is no more difficult to peel apart than the ambiguousness of many words. Inference, couched in specific and layered context, is the mainstay of the interpretative and triangulated methodology inherent in the ethnographical methods applied in qualitative research (Maxwell, 1996).

For the purposes of this research, drawings were elicited one time from the five student informants. They were each given a sheet of paper with a drawing already in

place. On the far left of the paper, there was a picture of a stick man. Arrows with the words “readings” and “questions” were pointed at its head. An arrow pointing to the right was on the right side of the figure. On the far right side of the paper there was a small picture of a paper, with the word, “essay” in it. The middle space of the paper was empty. See appendix A.

The participants were given the prompt, “If this picture were to fully capture the process you went through in the Paideia Seminar, draw in what is not shown here.” If the students indicated that they were restricted by the prepared drawing on the page, they were encouraged to create another responsive drawing on a blank page. One student elected to create a graphic organizer with words in each section because she was not comfortable drawing.

The purpose of the collection of this data was to assist in answering how participants perceived the Paideia Seminar’s dialogic process as influencing their thinking about the text.

This assignment was the first one requested of the student informant group. It was non-threatening and elicited a response before they started to understand the gist of the questioning as they completed the Think Alouds.

The process that followed the completion of the drawings included: numbering each drawing; creating a log in which the drawing is described in detail, with any note as to something that stands out as significant, or the way in which it was drawn; and finally, a memo was written in which the researcher attempted to interpret and reflect on the meaning that the drawings lent to the question related to participants’ perceptions about dialogic processes and thinking about the text.

In the class assignment study, students were asked to create logos for the Paideia Seminar. The six logos that were created were an unexpected wealth of data and insight. It is because of that experience, that I felt impelled to use this tool again.

*Student Writing*

The third request for the student informant group was that they provide the researcher with copies of three types of writing. The teacher usually grades entry notes and essays from all his students, and notes taken during the Seminar are encouraged. Each of the five times the Paideia Seminar was observed, a collection of these three distinct types of writing took place; however, it became the most difficult type of data to collect. Entry notes are written by the students in preparation for the Seminar and in response to the questions provided by the teacher. I was able to collect three samples of entry notes. Instead of requiring entry notes for the first Seminar, the teacher assigned an essay related to the questions for the Paideia Seminar. The students provided me with two pre-Seminar essays. Notes kept while the Paideia Seminar is in progress are usually taken as students want to remember an argument to rebut or something important they intend to incorporate in their essay. The students provided two samples of in class notes. Fourteen samples of reflective, informal writing of post-Seminar writing were collected.

The purpose of using student writing was to collect data that related to the research question concerning students moving from the initial transaction with read text, through the Seminar, and on to the essay and what changes might be evident in student comprehension through observing their writing.

When this data collection was completed there were 21 pieces of writing that were analyzed and interpreted. Pseudonyms are used for each of the five informants.

Prior to analyzing the writing I became very familiar with the texts, questions and Seminar discussion expectations. The analyses of the writing consisted of careful readings of the written documents to analyze change on issues and questions over the period of time represented by the three kinds of writing. In order for me to analyze change it was incumbent upon me to be quite knowledgeable about the subjects involved. My background as a secondary history teacher and the teacher's supply of the materials before the Seminar was helpful in this regard.

A memo analyzing the student writing and its demonstration of changed comprehension was written.

*Teacher Interviews*

There were two types of teacher interviews, a structured interview, conducted after the last Seminar observation, and a semi-structured interview at the end of each of the three Paideia Seminars. The protocol for the structured interview can be found in Appendix B and the semi-structured interviews consisted of the following open ended questions:

- How do you think the Paideia Seminar went today? Were there any strengths or weaknesses that stood out?
- Did you observe any changes in student thinking today? What were they?

The questions were intentionally nonspecific leaving the teacher a great deal of latitude on where he wanted to take the conversation. In some cases I added follow up questions as he took the conversation in a particular direction, remembering that my purpose was to explore alternative explanations of what I had observed or heard from

students (Glesne, 1999, p.69). This semi-structured interview was a very rich resource in the information needed to ensure a holistic view of the Paideia Seminar process.

When each interview was completed, the notes were typed and eventually coded, adding more data related to the research on how participants (this time the teacher) perceived the Paideia Seminar's dialogic process as influencing the students' thinking about the read text.

Interviews were a major cornerstone for the data collection of the class assignment. Three structured interviews with three different teachers who utilized the Paideia Seminar were conducted. I found Joseph Maxwell (1996) to be correct where he writes: "Your research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask to gain that understanding" (p.74). All three interviews enlarged my understanding of the teachers' perspectives about the attributes of the Paideia Seminar. I found that with the combination of interview styles utilized in this study, that an understanding of the teacher's perspective was evident as well.

*Class Artifacts*

Before each Paideia Seminar the teacher asked students to read texts and prepare notes on questions related to the texts. On two occasions, the questions and grading expectations were written up as hand-outs. At different points before and after the Seminar the teacher asked students to write an essay, and the requirements were summarized on a handout. These documents represent the preface for the Paideia Seminar. A collection of these documents was made for two Seminars. They provided background information, subject matter, teacher expectations, and examples of teacher perceptions of the format, process, and purpose of the Paideia Seminar.

Corrine Glesne (1999) writes that, “documents corroborate observations and interviews and makes them more trustworthy”(p.58). She goes on to write that documents, “…provide both historical and contextual dimensions to your observations and interviews. They enrich … by supporting, expanding and challenging your portrayals and perceptions” (p.59).

There were three purposes in collecting this data. The first purpose was to establish context. Secondly, the documents provided an opportunity for the researcher to analyze the questions and how they may elicit higher level comprehension and thinking related to the text. Lastly, the documents prepared the researcher to be knowledgeable about the subject matter of each Paideia Seminar.

This data collection tool was highly effective during the class assignment study and provided the information listed above.

*Student Writing Prompts*

At the conclusion of the first Paideia Seminar, the teacher passed out student questionnaires for students to complete as homework. Twelve students completed the surveys. This teacher sometimes asks students to assess teaching strategies and to conduct self-assessments of their work, so this assignment did not seem unusual. Students did not write their names on their papers and they were told that along with the teacher reading them for his own edification, that they would also be used as data for a research project.

*Concluding Thoughts on Data Collection Tools*

There were nine data collection tools used to conduct this research. They were intended to create a significant depth of understanding as each layer of data was explored,

cross-referenced and interpreted. The multiple perspectives and internal consistency and coherence of the data should convince readers of its trustworthiness and reliability.

## Timetable for Data Collection

Orchestrating the data collection was an important consideration when there were nine tools involved. A timetable assisted in making plans and arrangements in a timely manner and forced the researcher to anticipate possible constraints or roadblocks (Glesne, 1999).

Due to its explorative nature, qualitative research must remain flexible and responsive to unexpected situations, resources, or findings; therefore, although the timetable was a guideline, it was changed as flexibility dictated. The following elucidates the actual sequence of the timetable.

### *Before the Research Study Began*

- Wrote the lay summary, a written document that presents the proposed research to the participants and gatekeepers, outlining who the researcher is, what will be done, and what role the participants will play in the research (Glesne, 1999).
- Wrote three consent letters outlining for students and parents what the students' proposed role would be either in the whole class study or for those who agreed to be members of the student informant group and a letter was written for the teacher as well.
- Wrote the structured interview protocol for the teacher interview.
- Approached the principal and teacher with the lay summary and asked if the school would allow access for the research study.
- Completed the proposal hearing, and made changes.

- Obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board to conduct research on April 3, 2006.
- Presented the consent letter to students and teacher asking that signed copies be returned with both parental and student signatures.
- Completed the Institutional Review Board review and made changes.

*Research Began*

- The teacher and I explained the data required of five student informants and asked for volunteers. The students who volunteered received consent letters outlining their roles, if they chose to agree to volunteer. Parent and student signatures were required at the bottom of those letters.

*Paideia Seminar Number One*

- Collected, read, and studied official documents (artifacts) that the students used to prepare for the upcoming Paideia Seminar.
- Set up and turned on audio taping equipment in the classroom before students came in.
- Positioned myself as an observer, in a place where I could see and hear what was being said. Field notes were written and typed immediately.
- The teacher assigned writing prompts (survey) about the Paideia Seminar to all students in the class. The teacher collected the prompts and answers the following day and copied a set for himself. Names were not affixed.
- Conducted a semi-structured interview with the teacher about the Paideia Seminar at the end of the day.

- The day after the Seminar, met with the student informant group for the first time, asking them to complete drawings.
- When the teacher received the short essays relating to their prejudice and biases and the book *The Right Nation*, he picked out those belonging to the student informant group.
- Transcripts of the audio tape of the Seminar were attempted and field notes were typed. Field notes became the only documentation of Seminar One dialogue as defective microphones made hearing students on the audio tapes very difficult. The field notes were very complete and accurate replications of the dialogue.

*Paideia Seminar Number Two*

- Collected, read, and studied official documents (artifacts) that the students were using to prepare for the upcoming Paideia Seminar.
- Set up and turned on audio and video taping equipment in the classroom before students came in.
- Positioned myself as an observer, outside the circle, but in a place where I could see and hear what was being said. Field notes were written and typed immediately.
- Conducted a semi-structured interview with the teacher about the Paideia Seminar at the end of the day.
- Met with the student informant group for the second time, one day after the Paideia Seminar. I tried to use a short DVD clip in which each of the students were involved to show to the students individually; however, due to technological problems, I read back dialogue excerpts in which students were involved and

asked them to think aloud about what was going through their mind as they interacted at that particular juncture in the Seminar. I audio taped their response. Responses were transcribed. There were five individual sessions for each member of the group.

- When the teacher received the final writing assignment on the Paideia Seminar from the whole class, he picked out those belonging to the student informant group.
- Transcripts of the audio tape were made and field notes were typed.

*Paideia Seminar Number Three*

- Collected, read, and studied official documents (artifacts) that the students were using to prepare for the upcoming Paideia Seminar.
- Set up and turned on audio and video taping equipment in the classroom before students came in.
- Positioned myself as an observer, outside the circle, but in a place where I could see and hear what is being said. Field notes were written.
- Conducted a semi-structured interview about the Paideia Seminar at the end of the day.
- Met with the student informant group for the third time, one day after the Paideia Seminar. Four of the five informants came. I played a short DVD clip in which each of the students were involved to show to the students individually. I asked them to think aloud about what was going through their mind as they interacted at that particular juncture in the Seminar. Some follow-up questions were asked. I audio taped their responses. Responses were transcribed. There were four

individual sessions, one for each student who came. One student had a family emergency.

- When the teacher received the writing assignments on the Paideia Seminar from the whole class, he picked out those belonging to the student informant group.
- Transcripts of the audio tape were made and field notes were typed.
- Completed a structured interview with teacher, notes were typed up immediately.

*Closure*

Both Bogdan and Biklen (1982) and Glesne ( 1999) suggest that at the end of fieldwork there is a need for acknowledging a relationship or connection with participants. The full class were minimally aware of the presence of someone in the classroom on the five occasions that that they were observed.

The student informant group, on the other hand, volunteered their after school time on three occasions and allowed their writing to be scrutinized. When I met with them for the last time I gave them a small gift ($15 gift certificate for the local cinema) and thanked them for their assistance. They did not know about the gift until that final meeting.

The teacher and I have been colleagues for many years. The end of this research study does not bring that to a close. In the class assignment study the teacher indicated that he welcomed and felt stimulated by the data collection and about what he could learn about his craft through reading and analyzing it, therefore, I asked him to read the data for his own purposes and to check for accuracy. This form of member checking also served as a form of validity verification. At the end of the fieldwork I gave the teacher a gift certificate to a local restaurant.

## Methods of Analysis

### *Case Study*

Miles and Huberman (1994) write that a case study is "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context…a unit of analysis…[which has] a focus, or heart"(p.25). This case study was focused on the Paideia Seminar and an exploration of the kinds of comprehension and thinking that took place during the process. It was bounded by: time – over the course of five class observations; sample size – one class of 20 students, a student informant group of five, and one teacher; and specific research questions that discouraged boundary hopping. Even though the number of participants was small, there was documented variation of perspectives within the group.

Overall, analyzing data through the vehicle of the case study was much like being a "cerebral detective" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29). It included exploring, asking questions, describing and interpreting within the bounded process. This process then brought the researcher to the real heart of the case – the analysis and attempts at explanation, or theorization.

In the next few pages a chronological description of the analysis process is delineated. I adhered to it as I synthesized, analyzed, and prepared the data in its reconstituted and reduced form, in order to answer the key research questions iterated at the outset of this research. In its briefest and bulleted form data analysis for this research included these steps:

- Data organization
- Early data analysis including: contact summaries, document summaries, a drawings log and memos,

- Concept memos, coding through the use of use of QSR NVivo 7 software, and developing propositions
- Triangulation of data
- Case displays – using matrices and networks to demonstrate description and theory.

*Organizing the Data*

Data analysis cannot take place unless there is order and data management. I used both paper and computer files. Files were created in chronological order, data type, and form type, along with files for memos.

Some of the data management and coding were handled by entering documents and data into the software package QSR NVivo 7 which will be described further as the coding process is described.

*Early Data Analysis*

Unlike quantitative research, data analysis took place throughout the data collection. Because qualitative research is recursive, it was necessary to analyze data, reframe questions and approaches, and flex and move with the analysis that was generated as the study unfolded. The analysis process started with the first piece of data and wove back and forth with data collection as it progressed (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.50)

*Contact Summary Form*

One of the first places that data analysis took place in a brief and succinct manner was on a contact summary form. It was a single sheet of paper with focusing questions

about a specific field experience. It was created before any of the field notes were taken and included a heading and four questions. They were:

- What are the main issues or themes that struck you during this visit?
- Given a list of the three key research questions (listed on the page), what information do you think you gleaned today that pertains to any one of them?
- Was there anything that stood out as particularly interesting or important – anything unexpected?
- What new questions were raised by your experience today? What will you be targeting the next time? (Miles & Huberman, 1994)

This form of immediate analysis assisted in the process of thinking about each field experience while it was fresh, reworking the process as one learns what one needs to know, and recording fresh comments which could be referred back to months later when it was not so current.

*Document Log*

The document log was similar to the contact form. As the artifacts from class were passed on to the researcher a log that catalogued and answered the following questions was filled out:

- Name or description of the document
- Event with which the document was associated
- Significance or importance of the document
- Summary of the contents (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p.55)

*Drawings Log and Memos*

Each drawing was described in detail in the log and analyzed in individual memos. Graphic conceptual synthesis and symbolism were inferred and coded.

*Coding*

Miles and Huberman (1994) write that codes are "labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study" (p56) With the volume of verbiage that was present in this qualitative research, coding was initially used to deconstruct and classify, and later aided in the reconstruction working toward identifying patterns and themes. My approach was semi-inductive. The early codes came from the conceptual model created at the end of Chapter One. It was a place to start. As the data continued to come in, as expected, emerging categories were added, and some of the original ones were merged or deleted. Subcategories were also added. The first round of coding was done manually and then, done again for research question number two with the help of the software package known as NVivo 7. It managed the complexity far better than the human mind. It coded data, very much like SPSS does for quantitative data. Coding the written data twice was invaluable. Some of the most important insights of this research came as a result of doing this.

An area that was not overlooked was the need for detailed clarification of code word definitions. Each code related to reading and thinking was defined on a codes definition page. This was helpful for the woman who participated as the second coder, pursuant of an intercoder reliability percentage figure. Clear parameters about code meanings also assisted me in being intentional about keeping codes clear and differentiated enough not to overlap and cause confusion in the analysis.

Reading and rereading documents and field notes were handled in a more traditional manner. In the class assignment study I found that some of my most interesting "finds" occurred as I read and wrote in the margins. The notes in the margins often created the place for a convergence of regularities to take place – codes and patterns stood out visually as they reoccurred in the margins. In the end, both NVivio 7 and the traditional route of noting on hard copies, worked to the benefit of complete "big picture" synthesis and analysis.

*Looking For Rival Explanations*

Throughout the research I looked for the unexpected, outliers of sorts, and rival explanations; however, they had to have the weight of evidence in the data to dissuade me from affirming the established alternatives.

*Memos*

Miles and Huberman (1994) quoting Glaser (1978) defines a memo as the "…theorizing write-up of ideas about codes and their relationships as they strike the analyst while coding…it exhausts the analysts momentary ideation based on data with perhaps a little conceptual elaboration" (p. 72).

The memos I wrote are dated, titled with the key concept under discussion, and connected to particular data that has been collected. They have been kept separate from the data.

During the data analysis for the class assignment study I wrote numerous memos and found them to be a vital workshop for the evolving concepts and analyses. Since memos are written for the benefit of the researcher, and not for any other audience, there is a sense of freedom and risk taking available to the researcher – rough construction and

reconstruction of concepts takes place with little risk of being judged right or wrong, for the time being.

I made frequent use of memos. Each memo looks very different depending on the depth and concept about which I was writing.

*Triangulation*

Creswell (1994) writes that triangulation is a concept "…based on the assumption that any bias inherent in particular data sources, investigator, and method would be neutralized when used in conjunction with other data sources, investigators and methods (Jick, 1979)" (p.174).

Triangulation belongs under two headings in this research. It is both a form of checking for internal reliability of data, and a form of data analysis. It both sifts out bias, and allows for a powerful sense of convergence when data overlaps. In this research, nine forms of data collection are outlined – well beyond conventional triangulation. With the help of NVivo 7, a clear sense of convergence was demonstrated when the analysis was completed.

*Developing Propositions*

After the study had been moving along and many memos had been written I stopped and wrote an informal list of propositions about what my findings and conjectures were. It was part of the condensing process – clustering information and refining it to its most salient points.

*Within-Case Displays*

Miles and Huberman (1994) devote Chapter Five in *Qualitative Data Analysis* to the subject of within-case displays. Their mantra throughout the book is "You know what

you can display" (p.91). They purport that using a "…visual format systematically, so the user can draw valid conclusions and take needed action" is the reason why display is so important (p.91). They argue that most readers of qualitative research will not wade through large quantities of text to discover the writer's data and findings, but will stop and read succinct matrices, tables and maps. That is one excellent argument, but the assertion that resonates most with the purposes of this research and my experience with the class assignment study was that it allowed the researcher a systematic approach to reduce the data, cross-check findings, test hypotheses, synthesize and in essence, explain emerging theories.

Perhaps one of the most useful displays is the matrix. I have used several of them as I crossed lists of data looking for connections or patterns. During the data analysis of the class assignment study, I came to a point where two matrices pulled enormous quantities of information together and allowed me to interpret and understand the data. Matrices can be used early in the analysis to hypothesize and later to explain, which worked well in the class assignment study. I have done this frequently during this research study.

Another form of display is a network. It is a visual display of nodes connected by linking lines (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The network demonstrates connections between variables and allows the observer to see patterns and movement. Given that the conceptual model created in Chapter Two is a form of this display, I built a revised model and utilized it in adapting understandings as the data merited revision. I also used this form of display as I graphically displayed student speakers involved in dialogue in one Seminar. It allowed visual confirmation of dialogue between students.

I do not conceptualize displays as a visualization of an idea or conclusion, but as a vital tool in creating visual analyses of data. It is not a static graphic portrayal of a finding, but a working means to a finding.

## Conclusion

The goal of this research was to explore and understand the possibility of developing higher-level thinking skills in the course of reading text and engaging in dialogic discussion through the specific dialogic structure of the Paideia Seminar.

This bounded case study is supported by a contextual nest of research and theory indicating that there is reason to believe that a connection between the dialogic process of the Paideia Seminar and higher level reading comprehension/thinking may exist. To that end three key research questions and nine data collection tools have been used to describe, interpret and provide a basis for analysis in an effort to explore that connection.

The importance of this study cannot be overrated. As teachers and students straddle an ever increasing divide between research-based, relevant, interactive, collaborative, meaning-making education and traditional, transmission-based, test-oriented education, research that indicates the value of a structured, well prepared dialogue about complex issues and values, related to a possible transformation of higher order secondary reading comprehension should fill a justifiable need in our current educational landscape.

# CHAPTER FOUR: PROCESS, ANALYSES, AND DISCUSSION

## Introduction

The goal of this research was to explore and understand the possibility of developing higher-level thinking skills in the course of reading text and engaging in dialogic discussion through the specific dialogic structure of the Paideia Seminar. That goal was reached and will be fully elucidated in this chapter, through a series of comprehensive and sequential steps.

The contextual background for the data and analysis includes an introduction to the participants, a description of the three Paideia Seminars from which most of the data was extracted, and an explanation of two data analyses tools that played significant roles in analyzing and demonstrating the data; Nvivo 7 software and multiple matrices. Pseudonyms will be used for all people and places to which I refer.

The next three sections will answer each of the three research questions with data and analysis gleaned from the research. Discussion related to each question will be linked to pertinent analyses so that a natural intersection of findings and discussion will occur. Each question will be individually processed with data, analysis and discussion collected

from each of the data sources. A grand synthesis of the findings and discussion, will conclude this chapter.

## Contextual Background

### *Gaining Access and Approaching Participants*

In 2002 I collected data at Harrison High School for a class assignment at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. The participant teacher invited me to return if I needed to collect further data on the Paideia Seminar so the choice of a school and teacher was uncomplicated. The superintendent and classroom teacher endorsed my presence to conduct research. Details on this setting can be found in Chapter Three.

In early April of 2006, Mr. O'Shay, the participant teacher, invited me to his Senior Advanced Placement American History class to explain to the students what I would be doing, pass out informed consent forms, and to explain requirements and ask for five students to volunteer to be student informants. The class was quite interested and enthusiastic about participating in this research, and when I explained the need for five volunteers more hands went up than could be used. I chose the first five hands that were raised. They included two men and three women. They met with me after class and I explained their roles in depth and gave them their specialized informed consent forms. The teacher and the superintendent also were given, and signed, informed consent forms.

*Participants*

*The Twelfth Grade Advanced Placement American History Class, April – May, 2006.*

The class of 20 students that I had the privilege of observing was unique in many ways, and some of those specialized attributes bear mentioning because they have some bearing on the data collected.

First, the class is an Advanced Placement (AP) class which had both positive and negative implications. The students were bright, highly-motivated students acclimated to rigorous assignments and articulating clearly and specifically. They provided rich information with clarity and insight. The negative side; however, included unusual pressure on the students in that they were preparing for, and taking, an AP exam while I was scheduled to collect data. This occurrence dictated the subject matter of one of the Seminars and created fluctuating attitudes about reading long texts, preparation with questions, and the quality of written responses. The students appeared to be on overload. Given this pressure, their level of participation was remarkably good.

The second factor that played into data collection was that these students were seniors in the last full month of their high school experience. Their mind set was typical of graduating seniors.

Each Seminar that was observed was impacted by absenteeism related to students visiting colleges, Senior Skip Day, serious illnesses, and extended vacations.

A third factor related to school vacations and a flu epidemic. On the Good Friday before vacation week, only six students of 20 came to class and received the information needed to participate in a Paideia Seminar on the Monday morning right after school vacation. Participation in the Seminar appeared to be jeopardized by this. During the first

Seminar ten students were absent due to a flu epidemic. These factors did not change the richness of the data, but did play a part in the setting of the study.

Overall, the students were welcoming, articulate, and uninhibited by my presence. It appeared that the data I collected was typical of a Senior AP class in April and May.

*Mr. O'Shay*

The teacher of this class is a veteran teacher and writer. In the past two years he has won two prestigious national teaching awards. He has also written many textbooks on critical thinking and history, and created simulation software that stimulates decision making processes relative to those made at crucial crossroads in history. This year he has had six new books published relating history, decision making, and critical thinking with primary sources.

Mr. O'Shay is the Chair of the History Department at Harrison High School. His students often win first place on a national level in the National History Day Competitions. He opened his classroom to me in 2002 for a University of Massachusetts class assignment. Probably the most important attribute he possessed; however, was that he has been making use of the Paideia Seminar enthusiastically and successfully for the last twenty years.

*Edward*

Edward was one of the student informants. He is a serious and passionate student. When he speaks in class or in a one to one conversation he is intense, focused, and knowledgeable. He is going to major in history in college this fall, so the class and subject that I observed him in is his favorite inside and outside of school. Edward does not appear to be naturally outgoing, but seemed to relax and enjoy the Think Alouds and

informal interviews. He was honest in his appraisals of class and himself, sincere in his beliefs and political leanings, and an open and avowed “moderate conservative” (Political allegiances will become important in understanding data from the informants Think Alouds and writing pieces later in this chapter.). He enjoyed asking questions of other students in class, and said that he plays the devil’s advocate in Paideia Seminars. He claimed to highly value Mr. O’Shay’s class and remarked that he liked reading about foreign policy as opposed to domestic policy, because things here in the United States are “boring” compared to the rest of the world.

Edward was the one student of the five informants totally committed to doing the necessary homework to prepare for the Seminars (the other four intimated they were not). During the interviews and in his drawing Edward indicated that he sensed and read the emotions which other students exuded during the Seminar. He was aware of the Seminar’s affective side. During the Seminars Edward was analytical in his approach to the readings and issues. He referenced a wide range of background information when he spoke in class. This made his analysis, elaboration and analogies quite powerful and believable to fellow students and this observer. He said that when he makes up his mind about an issue he is hard to dissuade.

Edward was a well groomed young man, dressed in subdued colors and clothing, never standing out. He was mannerly and friendly throughout all of the observations and interviews.

*Ina*

Ina was a student informant. She is a friendly and outgoing young woman who takes her studies moderately seriously, but enjoys socializing as well. She sees herself as

“a liberal” and said she was interested in history, politics and the environment. She plans to major in environmental studies when she attends college this fall.

Ina said she enjoys Seminars for “the depth of understanding” she gets, and because she “retains the information better”. She confessed that she only speaks in a Seminar if she “has something profound to say,” but that when she is not talking she is “thinking and engaged, just not outwardly”. During the Seminars she spoke occasionally. She was clear that she was flexible and willing to be persuaded to change her opinion if evidence merited such a change. Josh, another student informant, did persuade her to change her stance on the reliability of the *9-11 Commission Report*.

Ina is attractive and dressed like many of her peers in jeans and shirts or sweat shirts. She was mannerly, sincere, and helpful, and said she enjoyed volunteering for this research. She took her role as an informant seriously.

*Cassie*

Cassie appeared to be somewhat shy and did not speak very often in class, but was clearly able to express herself well in writing. She labeled herself a conservative. She said she was willing to change her mind and that she was “open-minded”.

After one Seminar that most participants dubbed a failure, Cassie enthusiastically hailed it as the “best Seminar” of all because it was laden with important information given by the teacher. From that comment, and several others, I sensed that her learning style is best met in transmission oriented classes.

Cassie and Ina were good friends and always sat next to each other in class. In spending time with both women I felt that they were quite opposite, even in their political views. Cassie did not seem to mind being in Ina’s shadow. Cassie, like Edward, dressed

in muted colors and blended in, rather than stood out. I was only able to interview Cassie once as she had a family emergency during our final appointment.

*Josh*

The minute one meets Josh, it becomes immediately clear that he has a bright mind, an engaging personality, and is used to being respected and lauded by fellow students (His fellow volunteer informants conveyed this in their Think Alouds and interviews.). He is articulate, persuasive, “fast on his feet”, and involved in many extra curricular activities to the point that he said he felt “stretched thin”. During one interview he said that he knows how to “wing it” through discussions and that “snowing” sometimes works well. Sometimes he does not take time to carefully prepare for the Seminars. On one occasion he did not read the two chapters assigned for one of the Seminars and spoke up half way through the Seminar when he was able to relate something he had seen in a documentary to the subject being discussed. He said that he waited for an opportunity to arise where he could use his prior knowledge to relate to the subject at hand. He said he knew his peers would be wondering why he had not spoken because he is known as a key speaker during the Seminars.

On another occasion I watched as Josh copied entry notes from a friend in the first ten minutes of class and pass them off as his own. Students are graded on bringing entry notes to the Seminar, but the notes are not read or corrected well. Josh eventually gave me these notes in his writing samples and what struck me as humorous was that the assertion and evidence that was written in his “copied” notes, was the very opinion and evidence he refuted during the discussion in class. He said he has to use some of these tactics because he has so much to do. During one interview he showed me a sophisticated

robot he had been working on for six weeks. It was a physics project. After he showed me the robot, he left in a hurry to run in a cross country race for the school team.

Josh sees himself as the conservative leader among his peers and appears to be charming, disarming and dresses in a preppy style. He analyzes and elaborates texts and issues smoothly and said, “I always talk”. He claimed that he seldom changes his mind on issues raised during the Seminars, but “sometimes” he does.

*Marcy*

The first thing one notices about Marcy is her clothing. She purposefully dresses as if she were living in the 1950’s. She stands out in an idiosyncratic and flamboyant manner and yet she is not obnoxious or odd. She is well traveled, having spent a year in Europe last year. She is unique, and appears to be a bright and thoughtful gadfly.

Marcy appeared to purposefully bait and manipulate peers in the Seminars, and is passionately expressive when she gets behind an issue or cause in which she believes fervently. She sometimes appeared to be passive-aggressive. One moment she would be nodding off to sleep, and another moment she would be arguing an assertion with excellent connections to significant background knowledge and creating apt analogies. She asserted that she is a liberal and defended that position frequently during the Seminars. She demonstrated her openness to change her opinions on Seminar issues several times over the month that I observed and interviewed her.

Marcy seemed to be more last minute about homework than Josh, often writing notes and responsive paragraphs as class started. One class of the five I observed, Marcy appeared to sleep through half of the class, perhaps feeling tired or sick.

Marcy's classmates and teacher seemed to expect the unexpected from her. She especially enjoyed talking about foreign policy and liberal initiatives during the class and interviews. She said that she "loves discussions, because they give you new ideas and different interpretations of texts". She seemed eager to participate in this research, and had refreshingly honest responses to interview questions.

*Descriptions of the Three Paideia Seminars*

*The Right Nation: Is this a Conservative Country? Paideia Seminar One (Two Sessions)*

The first Seminar was based on the book, *The Right Nation: Conservative Power in America*, by John Micklethwait and Adrian Woolridge and took place on April 10 and 11, 2006. Ten students were absent in the first session due to a flu epidemic that had hit the school particularly hard. Twenty students were present for the second session.

In addition to *The Right Nation*, students were also required to read two book reviews related to this book. *The Right Nation, Conservative Power*, written by two British journalists, has an inquiry approach to building a historical foundation on which they eventually assert that currently the United States is a politically powerful conservative country. The authors are clearly not conservatives, although they do a fair job of sounding unbiased. The book has thirteen chapters and is 480 pages long. The students were required to read the whole book.

The students were given a handout a month in advance of the Seminar delineating the requirements of an essay that needed to be submitted the day of the Seminar and the questions to be answered in the essay and the Seminar. A significant grade was attached to this assignment. The questions were as follows:

- What part of the book surprised you the most?

- How did this book change your thinking? If it didn't why not?
- Is America really that conservative?
- According to the authors, what are the causes of America being a conservative nation (You can add some of your own ideas, especially if you disagree with some of their causes.)?
- What are the effects of America being a conservative nation? (Mix of author's views and your views).

The Seminar spanned two days. The first day of the Seminar a 70 minute block was set aside. It started at eight in the morning, and the second day the class was a 45 minute period that started at seven forty-five in the morning. Both classes began with a five minute pairing of students to review the questions and answers they had prepared with each other. When started, the dialogue was continuous and the teacher facilitated asking the questions and moving students on to new questions. At the end of the first day the teacher said that the Seminar "was really good and it was obvious that they had read the book". He went on to say that "some of the students had asked good questions of each other", that they had "spent too much time on the role of religion in conservativism", and that he would remind them to "specifically cite their sources more often".

At the end of the second day on this topic, the teacher said that the Seminar was better than the day before because some people spoke that did not the day before, and they were articulate. He said that students referred to specific evidence in the book and "hit on most of the causes". He continued that there was "really good listening" and they made "good connections" between the book and their prior knowledge from this class.

*Rating Four Presidents on Domestic Policy, Paideia Seminar Two*

The second Seminar was conducted on April 24, 2006, at eight forty-five in the morning. Fifteen students were present. It was the Monday morning after a week of school vacation. The assignment of one question for this Paideia Seminar was given orally on Good Friday, the day before school vacation when only six students were present. The Seminar consisted of asking the students to rate Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Carter and Reagan on their domestic policy.

The text for this Seminar was the students' text book, *Enduring Vision*, written by Paul Boyer, Clifford Clark, Joseph Kett, Neal Salisbury, Harvard Sitkiff and Nancy Woloch, and published by Houghton Mifflin. The students were asked to read chapters thirty-one and thirty-two and rate Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Carter and Reagan on their domestic policy. The Advanced Placement exam was scheduled to take place in two weeks and the teacher felt that the Paideia Seminar would be a good method to review for the test.

Of the five informants, four said they did not read the chapters. This was indicative of my general impression of the preparedness and the participation of the rest of the students. The teacher's role was very different in this Seminar from the other two because of this. Forty-nine percent of the "talk turns" in this Seminar were taken by the teacher. This will be expanded upon at length in the data analysis portion of this chapter.

Students appeared lethargic and tired. Several young men were slumped back in their chairs. The ethos of this Seminar reflected their physical appearance.

At the end of the Seminar the teacher sighed and said, “I give myself a D for this Paideia Seminar (I did not do a real Paideia Seminar) and a C for the class. They did not prepare and they didn’t know much. I accomplished one thing, I got them back to work”.

The teacher went on to say that he thought the students were reminded about how much they did not know yet, and he thought the discussion might have provided a “frame” for them when they went back and actually read the chapters. He said, “I had to emphasize content… they didn’t have enough of it to manipulate it”. His final comment related to this Seminar’s purpose, “This wasn’t really a Paideia topic…. I guess that begs the question, can it [the Paideia Seminar] be used to … cover the material?”

During the Think Alouds students voiced their reaction to this Seminar. Marcy said she was embarrassed that I had to witness this Seminar and that it had “guilted” her into reading the chapters. Josh said he went home and talked to his Dad about Reaganomics because the Seminar had made him realize how little he knew about the topic, and Edward and Cassie said they were grateful for the amount of information they learned from Mr. O’Shay that day.

*The 9-11 Commission Report Paideia Seminar Three (Two Sessions)*

The third Seminar took place on May 9 and 10, 2006, at eight forty- five and seven forty- five respectively. The text that the students had a week to read before the Seminar was *The 9-11 Commission Report.* The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States is credited with its writing. It purports to examine and report the facts about the circumstances that led to the terrorist attacks on September 11$^{th}$ and makes recommendations so that terrorist attacks can be prevented in the future. It is 569 pages long. The students were assigned chapters one, eight, ten and twelve. The hand-out

indicates that they are to take notes, citing a minimum of five page numbers before coming to class. The questions they were to answer were:

- Does it do us any good to read about the events of September 11th?
- Was the Presidential Daily Brief in August 6, 2001 clear enough that the President should have acted to prevent the attacks?
- How well did the Bush Administration respond to the September 11th attacks in the short run?
- *The 9-11 Commission Report* makes 26 recommendations in Chapter 12. Choose any five. It's almost five years after the attacks. How are we doing on each of the five recommendations?
- How reliable is *The 9-11 Commission Report* as a source?

Students were enthusiastic and well prepared for this Seminar. Motivators seemed to be a test grade they were receiving for the Seminar and the high personal interest in the topic. This was history they had lived and was perceived to have a bearing on their futures. The teacher reverted to his favored stance and "directed traffic". He posed questions, clarified student responses, and moved students on to new questions.

At the end of the Seminar the teacher commented on the high level of student participation in spite of the book's imposing verbiage and size. He said that listening to the students was "like watching ping pong". He noted the students' strong use of background knowledge connections to the book and the general high quality of their reflections. His first comment after day one was, "I'm just watching, it's delightful".

Day two went nearly as well. Mr. O'Shay thought that because the questions were not quite as controversial as the first day, it lagged a bit in the middle; however, the

transcripts bear the evidence that the second day demonstrated good dialogue with substantial amounts of analysis and elaboration relative to the issues raised about *The 9-11 Commission Report*.

## *Important Data Analysis Tools*

### *NVivo 7 Software*

*NVivio 7* software was created to accomplish many tasks for the qualitative researcher. I chose to use just one, the coding and categorizing capability. It became crucial in managing, categorizing and subcategorizing all written data, after which the many layers of complexity could more easily be peeled back to expose themes and patterns significant to this research. An example of this would be a major discovery I made about the higher-order reading/thinking processes of analysis and elaboration. The first step I took was to manually code all the written data using colored pencils to delineate categories. I had little difficulty highlighting examples of analysis and elaboration (along with many other categories), but when I went to do this with *NVivo 7* I was confronted with something I had not seen when I coded manually. In highlighting text to be coded into particular "nodes" (categories) I discovered that really good elaborative excerpts were almost always wedded to analysis and could not be divided into two separate categories. They lost their power in being separated. I started a new node entitled "Combined Analysis and Elaboration". In the end I had 53 examples stored in this node, far more than "stand alone" quotations that demonstrated analysis or elaboration.

Another example of how *NVivo 7* assisted in organizing the data is its ability to subcategorize with what is described as "tree nodes". One of the free nodes or major

coding designations I utilized was “Analysis”. As I scanned the enormous quantity of information going into this node, I was able to create a tree node that subcategorized “Analysis” into “analysis of text”, “analysis of another student’s argument”, and “self-analysis”.

The third and final example of how *Nvivo 7* assisted in data analysis, is that it provided quasi-statistical numbers related to the data and allowed for comparisons and contrasts within matrices. Joseph Maxwell(1996) writes that one of the greatest mistakes that qualitative researchers make is not utilizing clear quasi statistical information in case studies. *The NVivo7* software allowed me to “test and support claims…and assess the amount of evidence in [the] data” (p. 95).

When all the coding was completed I had 27 nodes and data in organized “files” that could be accessed and manipulated with ease.

*Matrices*

Miles and Huberman (1994) write that “You know what you can display” (p.91). They purport that using a “…visual format systematically, so the user can draw valid conclusions and take needed action” is the reason why display is so important (p.91). They have found that most readers of qualitative research will not wade through large quantities of text to discover the writer’s data and findings, but will stop and read matrices. That is one excellent argument for using them, but the assertion that resonates most with what has occurred in this research was that matrices allowed me a systematic approach to reduce the large amounts of data, cross-check findings, test hypotheses, synthesize and in the end, explain findings and recommendations.

Matrices were used early in the analysis to hypothesize and now will be used to explain. In the early stages of the research proposal and data collection I did not anticipate how important this tool would become. It brought me to some significant conclusions and now will assist in succinctly displaying the basis for those conclusions.

Perception of the Dialogic Process's Influence on Thinking about Read Text

The first research question is: How do participants (teacher and students) perceive the Paideia Seminar's dialogic process as influencing their thinking about read text? Data utilized to answer this question were writing prompts for the whole class, drawings by student informants, a formal interview with the teacher and semi-structured interviews at the conclusion of each Seminar, and Think Alouds and informal interviews with the informant group. Participants who provided data for this question were the teacher, the full class and the student informant group.

Key to understanding the intent of this question are definitions or interpretations of the words making up the question. Several have been defined in Chapters One and Two, so only two need to be explained.

*Perception* is the ability to use the senses to apprehend or become aware of a phenomenon, and is unique to each individual( American Heritage College Dictionary, 2002). In this case there were 22 individuals whose perceptions were important to know and understand. The goal in collecting the data pertaining to perception was to look for a preponderance of data indicating enough consensus to answer the question with some sense of surety and reliability. Perception can be fickle, but with the number of different sources accessed in question one, the consensus that was discovered led to the understanding sought in this research.

The second word or concept is *dialogic*. Dialogue was explained at length in Chapter Two. At this point all that is necessary is to point out its antithesis which is a monologue. As the data and analysis begins to unfold, the importance of differentiating these two words will become apparent. It is possible for a student to sit in a circle of peers and talk *at* fellow students without talking *with* them, and that is a distinction that needs to be observed throughout this chapter.

With the question thoroughly understood, the accounting of data and its analysis for the first research question follows.

*Student Writing Prompts*

Eight writing prompts were given to each student. Twelve students anonymously completed the prompts. In an effort to demonstrate the students' responses continua were created and can be accessed in Appendix C. From those continua an abridged version of the information was utilized to create Table 4. The following breakdown of the questions explicates Table 4.

Question one was asked to ascertain how students read and felt about reading for a Paideia Seminar as opposed to other reading. Nine of twelve students indicated that it motivates, creates strategic reading awareness, and generally is a positive influence. They wrote responses that included "the questions focus my reading," "I take better notes," I am more careful," and "I am looking for points I can use in the argument". Three students said their reading was great whenever they are required to read.

Question two was aimed at understanding if students felt that getting questions before reading and the Seminar were more beneficial than receiving them the day of the Seminar. Eleven of twelve students felt it was beneficial, citing that questions provided

ahead of a Seminar promote better preparation, allow for evidence gathering, promote thoroughness and focuses reflection and thinking. One student did not concur, saying he "didn't do the questions anyway".

Question three asked students to verbalize what they thought the purpose of utilizing the Paideia Seminar was. Eleven of twelve students gave positive responses. They included answers like, "to get other perspectives," "to gain deeper understanding," "exchange and develop ideas," and "think independently and analyze critically". Only one student responded, "So the teacher can discern who did the reading".

Question four asked students what they gained by participating in the Paideia Seminar. There were twelve positive responses and half of them revolved around the idea that they gain from the perspectives of others. Other responses included, "analytical skills," "sharpening the ability to think," and "wider knowledge".

Question five indicated significant disagreement. It asked students to evaluate the importance of writing in the Seminar process. Four students of twelve were absolutely positive, with four in the middle remarking on both positive and negative aspects of writing, and four who were strongly opposed to the writing component. An example from each category should suffice to represent the differentiation. In the first category a student wrote that writing "organizes your ideas so that you can see a change in your opinion". A student who was placed in the middle of the continuum said, "It's tedious, but it helps", and a student who was clearly negative wrote, "It is frustrating, I don't want to revisit the issue [by writing about it] after the discussion is over".

Question six asked for an adjective to describe the Paideia Seminar. There were nine positive adjectives, two negative and one student who did not answer. Some of the

positive answers included words like “stimulating,” “interesting,” “engaging,” and “challenging”. Two students wrote that because there was no “right answer” it was “easy” and along the same vein, a student wrote that it was “misguided” because students “can talk off the cuff”.

Question seven asked, if given the right evidence, oppositional to their own, would they change their asserted position. Nine students said they would, one did not answer, and two said “rarely” or “not really”.

Question eight provided the most passionate responses. Ten students valued the Paideia Seminar process of learning highly. They wrote that “it forces the evolvement of ideas,” “it provides a context and a connection about information, not just a spitting out of facts,” and “I think and retain better, I will remember the subjects and issues the rest of my life”. The one dissenter wrote that “lectures have more density”.

| Prompt | Positive | Middle | Negative | None |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. When you know that your assigned reading is a part of a Paideia Seminar, does it change how you read or how you feel about reading it? | 9 | - | 3 | - |
| 2. Mr. O’Shay gives you the Paideia Seminar questions a day or two before the discussion, does that make a difference from a situation where the teacher gives you the questions the day of the discussion? | 11 | - | 1 | - |
| 3. What do you think is the essential purpose of utilizing a Paideia Seminar? (Positive is higher-level thinking and negative is coverage of content). | 10 | - | 2 | - |

| Survey Question | Positive | Middle | Negative | None |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4. What do you think you gain by being involved in a Paideia Seminar? (Positive, includes other perspectives and analytical skills, negative would indicate that there is nothing to be gained). | 12 | - | 0 | - |
| 5. You are often encouraged to bring entry notes to the Paideia Seminar, and more times than not, you are assigned an essay at the end of the Seminar. Do you think these writing assignments are important to the process? | 4 | 4 | 4 | - |
| 6. If you chose one adjective to describe the Paideia Seminar, what would it be and why would you choose it? (Positive includes positive adjectives and negative includes adjectives of disapproval). | 9 | - | 2 | 1 |
| 7. Mr. O'Shay often reiterates that you have to have evidence for an assertion. When you come to the Paideia Seminar with evidence from the texts, do you ever change your asserted position? | 9 | - | 2 | 1 |
| 8. You do a lot of listening, recitation, and writing in school. How does having a formal discussion like the Paideia Seminar fit into the equation? Wouldn't it be a more productive use of time to be having a lecture or reading and writing? (Positive indicates that students favored the Seminar, listing positive attributes, and negative indicates that the student chose another form of learning instead of the Paideia Seminar). | 10 | - | 1 | 1 |

*TABLE 4*

*STUDENT WRITING RESPONSES BASED ON CONTINUA IN APPENDIX C*

Based on the evidence from the writing prompts, a summary of the students' perceptions about *if* and *how* the Paideia Seminar influences students' thinking about text include the following: Students value the Paideia Seminar process and do feel that the dialogic process influences their thinking about text; They read more closely in preparation, they utilize the questions to shape the reading experience, they understand the Seminar's purposes and they are unanimous in understanding the positive impact it has on their learning; Most of the students understand that an open mind is required and all but one student feel that the process should have equal or preferred learning status with reading, writing, listening, and lectures; The perceptions related to writing as a part of the Paideia process received mixed reviews, so it is incumbent on me to take a closer look at why this might be true.

In reading the students' responses about writing in detail a few complaints about the writing assignments become apparent. Two students who valued the dialogic and thinking aspects of the Seminar, said that the writing pieces slow down the thinking and reading process as they stop to take notes. Another student who found the Seminar "interesting" and appreciated the sharing of other opinions said that at the end of the Seminar she is "sick of the topic" and does not want to write. Two students said they preferred writing essays at the beginning of the Seminar because "after the Seminar the class is a lot more unified in opinion than diversified," and "because it prepares me well for the Seminar and everyone else has a lot to say". Others described the writing as "frustrating" and "annoying".

The teacher said that he assigns entry notes or an essay before the Seminar to encourage synthesis and motivate careful reading; up to half of the students who

responded to the writing prompt would agree that for those purposes, the writing is effective. Two students would say that it slows them down and several students feel that an essay at the end is overkill. During the formal interview with Mr. O'Shay he said that he "does not grade entry notes for quality or thoughtfulness because that would take too much time". Perhaps students do not value the entry notes because they feel their teacher does not read them. He notes that they have been completed. Lack of audience and feedback can affect some students. On the other hand, Mr. O'Shay does read the essays and "wants to see reflective writing". He also takes the time to write feedback statements on them.

Writing is more solitary than social and may take more time and effort than talking, but if students could be reminded of the "big picture" and explicitly instructed about the value of writing as the beginning and ending of dialogic discourse, perhaps they would better understand its part in the dialogue. Writing at the outset is a dialogue with the author and writing at the end is a continuation of dialogue with the students who spoke in class (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000). Dialogue happens in the silence of a room with a word processor. Students may not often recognize this until it is carefully explained to them. Teachers cannot assume that students understand and assimilate what they know and understand about the importance of writing. Explicit and persuasive instruction regarding the place of writing in dialogic discourse appears to be needed.

Some of the "outlier" responses are important to analyze as well. Three students were confident that their reading was good under most circumstances and because it was, the Seminar requirements made little difference. It is hard to know if this was true or not, but given that these students were in an AP class, it may well have been correct. The

analogy of first graders learning to read may be apt here. If phonics instruction were being taught in class, there would be some students who could say that they could read well without it and be correct; however, others in the class would benefit from it. This may be analogous to the type of situation for the three students who read well.

One student, number nine, is the source of most of the divergence. Four of his eight answers were decidedly negative. He writes that he doesn't prepare the questions, sees the purpose of the Seminar as the teacher trying to ascertain who has done the reading, and feels that the Seminar is "misguided" because "anyone can talk off the cuff and be heard". Its sounds like he has a "story" that the researcher will never know, but his stance is not representative of the majority of the students.

*Visual Data*

Five students who volunteered to become student informants met after school the day after the first Paideia Seminar and were asked to complete a drawing prompt which is displayed in Appendix A. The students were told, "If this picture were to fully capture the process you went through in the Paideia Seminar, draw in what is not shown here." All five students complied, with one asking if she could create a graphic organizer instead of a drawing. The following matrix demonstrates the results in descending order.

| Attributes | No. out of five |
|---|---|
| The teacher is not a part of the picture | 5 |
| Indicates multiple perspectives of participants | 5 |
| Indicates different people talking and listening | 5 |
| Circular seating or cycle of process | 4 |
| Indicates the influence and persuasive abilities of others | 4 |

| Attributes | No. out of five |
|---|---|
| Indicates that there are choices to be made | 3 |
| Indicates the episodic/ emotional nature of the Seminar | 1 |

*TABLE 5*

*SIGNIFICANT ATTRIBUTES OF STUDENT DRAWINGS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO COMPREHENSION THROUGH DIALOGUE*

In research completed by Billings and Fitzgerald (2002) they found that the Paideia Seminars they observed involved over 50% of the Seminar talk turns dominated by teacher talk. It is a legitimate concern. In this first observation about student drawings it would seem that students do not even incorporate a semblance of a teacher in the picture. The visual representations of the Seminars are about students interrelating. The teacher is not visually present. The students seem to be unaware of the teacher's participation.

All five drawings depict students with differing opinions (signified by differing visuals), talking and listening to each other. This was demonstrated in the drawings in many different forms, but it was clear that participants held different views, they spoke, and were heard.

Four students indicated circular or cyclical seating and talking by placing figures in a circle or using arrows to demonstrate the cycle. It was not linear, but recursive and interactive. Four students also indicated that after multiple perspectives were heard, there were modifications or changes in the visuals that represented the individual student's mind. The end result was a modified version of the starting point. A good example of this is the following detailed description from the visual data log:

This visual has an arrow pointing down from the reader, with a face and a small cloud of circles above it. The mouth is closed. Another arrow, portraying circular movement to the right, points to one slightly larger face with three arrows that point in both directions above it. Above these three arrows are three smaller faces, one, with a small cloud of squares, one with a couple of circles and one with a cloud of triangles. All four mouths are open, seemingly talking. Another circular arrow, moving right and upwards, draws ones attention to a lone face that shows a closed mouth, smiling slightly, with a cloud above with two circles, one triangle and one square. The final arrow points downward toward the essay. My understanding of what the student has portrayed is that the student comes to the Paideia after reading with the questions, with his own interpretation (the cloud with circles). The larger talking face is the student who started with the cloud of circles above his head and the three smaller faces with different geometric shapes above them would be students with differing ideas. The arrows, pointing in both directions indicate a give and take between the four students. The next face on the upper right with the cloud that encompasses a square, a triangle and two circles, suggests synthesized or transformed thinking, melding in ideas from two of the other students (the triangle and square oriented students). The final arrow pointing at the essay graphic, seems to indicate that the student is now ready to write the essay.

Three students, including the one described above, indicated that choices must be made. Students have to sift through what they have heard and either solidify or modify their view based on what they have heard and analyzed in class.

The last category was created by Edward. When I tried to interpret his drawing I decided that I needed some help from Edward. His drawing shows the Paideia Circle at three different time points in the Seminar. He said that if one looked closely at the individual faces, one would note that different emotions were apparent at the three different times. He went on to say that emotional investment and participation changes as the Paideia Seminar occurs. Edward captured the essence of one of the motivators for meaning in the Seminar, its episodic nature. Just as Rosenblatt (1994) wrote about efferent and aesthetic reading and their impact on how information is retained, Edward created a drawing that suggested that emotions play a part in discussion as well.

To summarize the results of this analysis as it pertains to student perceptions about how the Paideia Seminar's dialogic process influences student thinking about text, it could be said that a text is discussed in a student dominated forum, where multiple perspectives are spoken, heard, and evaluated, choices are made, and where student affective engagement plays a part.

## *Teacher Interviews*

### *Formal Teacher Interview*

The teacher's perception of how the Paideia Seminar influences students' thinking about text was clear and well articulated. In the formal interview he said: "It starts with essential questions on which people can diverge. There is no dialogue without good questions. The students then collect information, analyze it, listen to different perspectives, and utilize critical thinking".

He went on to say that, “It comes down to whether you want the students to work with and remember the philosophical or the pedestrian”, and because of this “you can’t cover everything, so you must choose the most important parts of a selection”.

Mr. O’Shay feels that it “is essential for students to have questions prior to the Seminar because they format exploration. They allow reflection and become an advanced organizer for reading.”

He said that “having students prepare entry notes motivates them to read because they are graded”.

When the Seminar was under way, he saw his role as one who “directs traffic,” and a facilitator who summarizes and changes direction by moving on to new questions. He said that when there were a lot of hands up he knew the Seminar was working and if “students don’t read I am more involved”.

The critical thinking strategies the teacher hoped to see in the Seminar were: “evaluating sources, presenting evidence for an assertion, using and evaluating analogies, evaluating causal claims, questioning assumptions, and evaluating generalizations”.

Mr. O’Shay said that the three essential components of the Paideia Seminar were: “good questions, reading, and reflection and high levels of participation”. If those components were not visible, the dialogic process would probably have little influence on the students’ thinking about the text.

At the end of the interview Mr. O’Shay became more global and philosophical about the influence of the Paideia Seminar. First, he spoke about how the Seminar affects reading. He said, “The Seminar makes the students active readers, they cannot be passive.

They see themselves as detectives as opposed to consumers. They need to search for the big picture, with details to support it. They apply critical thinking to their reading."

His last words revealed his belief about the level of comprehension and thinking he feels his students gain from the Seminar. He concluded the interview by saying, "A complex view of the topic is generated by the interaction with other students. The goal is to get students to have their thinking closer to reality. The world is a complex and complicated place. Having students develop multiple perspectives adds complexity. We need to make our stereotypes more sophisticated. Our brain, unfortunately, pushes us to oversimplify".

Mr. O'Shay believes that the dialogic process of the Paideia Seminar influences students to read texts more closely, think more critically, and realistically view the world in all its complexity.

*Post-Seminar Informal Interviews*

After each of the five Seminar periods that were observed, an informal interview took place in the teacher's office. He would comment about what went well and what he would have liked to seen done differently. A summary of his comments as they relate to the current research question follows.

Over the course of five class periods the teacher noted that students completed good generalizations, apt analogies, made connections to prior knowledge from history class, referred to and cited evidence, listened actively, explained how their arguments related to the book, inspired each other to enter the dialogue and participated on a high level (all except the Paideia Seminar about rating the Presidents). Two comments that

Mr. O'Shay made that resurfaced several times were the necessity of teaching students to question each other and the need for pairing two or three times per Seminar.

Mr. O'Shay said that he had been teaching students to question each other since the beginning of the year. He would stop a Seminar and ask the students if they believed everything they had heard so far, and why they were not asking each other questions if they did not. It was a skill that he purposefully embedded in the Seminar and it seemed to give the students permission or encouragement to dialogue with each other, extending and elaborating their thinking about the text.

The second strategy that Mr. O'Shay utilized that influenced dialogue and thinking was his use of "pairing". At the beginning of class and two to three times during class, Mr. O'Shay would stop the Seminar and ask students to "talk to their neighbor" about a particular topic. Sometimes it was meant to "prime the pump" at the beginning of the seminar, sometimes as a "jump start", when the discussion was lagging, and other times when multiple hands were up and he wanted all of the students to have a voice, he would ask them to "pair up" so that they could all be heard. This appeared to be effective for all of the different ways he used it. The students stayed on task, it lasted for about a minute, and then Mr. O'Shay would tap into the content that the pairs had been discussing to stimulate the whole group interaction.

Because of the Paideia Seminar's format and Mr. O'Shay's additives, Mr. O'Shay felt that the Paideia Seminar influenced his students in their thinking about text.

*Student Think Alouds and Informal Interviews*

The five volunteer student informants met with me after Paideia Seminar's Two and Three. On both occasions they met with me one on one and were shown video clips

in which they were speaking in the Seminar. Unfortunately, the first round did not play well on the television we were given in the history office. The DVD played well in other systems. As a result, I read back the same excerpts from the field notes and asked them to think aloud about what they were thinking at the time they were making the recorded statements. Some informal follow up questions were asked as well. The second time I met with the individual students we used another television and there was no problem with the volume. I asked follow up questions the second time as well. These informal meetings were rich in information. Students appeared to be relaxed and enjoyed talking about the Seminars. I spent about a half hour with each student each time I met with them.

The information I gleaned from the Think Alouds about how the dialogic process of the Paideia Seminar influenced the student informants' thinking about the text is substantial and helpful. Eight common themes emerged in the students' answers.

*Eight Common Themes*

*Prior Knowledge.* Students brought substantial prior knowledge to the Seminars and used it effectively. One example of this came from Edward and he discussed it in his Think Aloud. When students were discussing the reliability and bias of the *9-11 Commission Report*, Edward picked out the words "fault lines" in the report and said they came from the works of Samuel Huntington who believed that conflicting civilizations that sat right on the edge of each other, like Russia and Indochina, sat on "fault lines". He went on to argue that the writer of this portion of *The 9-11 Commission Report* obviously had been influenced by Samuel Huntington's very distinctive bias and that the writer in turn was also biased. Edward used his background knowledge about Samuel Huntington

to build his analysis and elaboration upon. The transcripts of the Seminars demonstrate that four of the five student informants used prior knowledge to substantiate their arguments.

*Higher-Level Thinking*. Each Think Aloud demonstrated the students' ability to utilize higher-level thinking including analysis, elaboration, analogies and compare and contrast. During Marcy's Think Aloud she explained her use of an effective compare and contrast. Marcy had prior knowledge of the Committee of Public Information during World War I and compared and contrasted its work in providing positive reports on the war to the positive spin that *The 9-11 Commission Report* produced for the country as a result of its publication. Without her prior knowledge and skill with using higher-level thinking, she could not have done this.

*Open Mindedness*. All five students espoused the importance of being open minded and being willing to entertain change in their thinking. The level of open mindedness varied. When interviewed, Ina said, "I am interested to hear everyone's ideas… [we] need to think about it more and not just have our own views of it and [need] to integrate other ideas with our own, so we get more of an all around view of things".

On the other end of the spectrum of open mindedness, Edward said, "I had some pretty strong ideas…when I am dead set I rarely get my mind changed. If the [subject] is something I don't have a firm idea about, then I am quite easily influenced, depending on where the information goes, or biases I learn about".

Overall, the consensus of the five informants was that open-mindedness is vital to having the dialogic process influence their thinking about text.

*Persuasion by Others with Evidence*. Another area of strong agreement among the informants was the necessity of significant evidence to persuade others of a differing position to change their allegiances. As Edward said above, the quality of the information and biases of others persuade students who are “sitting on the fence”.

*Role Playing*. Interestingly, Wortham’s (2001) research on student positioning during a Paideia Seminar was quickly affirmed by the informants. During the Think Alouds they pointed out whether they were conservatives, moderate conservatives or liberals. They knew each other’s positioning as well and expected that their peers’ political positions would be represented during the Seminar. Marcy, an avowed liberal, enjoyed hearing Josh’s conservative arguments. She said, “I always love hearing Josh speak during these discussions just because he always has a more conservative view, but it is still balanced. It will always change my opinion closer to the center”.

Wortham (2001) concluded that although students play roles during the Seminar it is not detrimental to their learning. Having observed these students during the Seminar, I would concur. There was no harm in knowing a fellow discussant’s political persuasion if it was taken into account by student peers and is analyzed as part of the argument.

*Changing a Position*. Along with being open minded and clear about positioning, students also touted the importance of being unabashedly able to change a position. Marcy provided a good example. At the beginning of *The 9-11 Commission Report* Seminar she passionately argued that the transcripts of the passengers cell phone conversations had no right being included in the report; they were too emotional and private to be in a government report. During the course of the Seminar, several students argued in defense of their inclusion. In the end Marcy agreed with them and wrote about

her change of opinion in her reflective writing. These kinds of changes indicate the influence that the Seminars have regarding thinking about the text.

*Playing the Devil's Advocate*. Both of the male informants indicated that they have played the "devil's advocate" during Seminars; they have asked questions and taken positions that are not really their own. Edward asked critical questions about President Nixon and the Kent State shootings when he truly supported President Nixon during the Rating the Presidents Seminar, and Josh questioned the reliability of *The 9-11 Commission Report*, when he believed it was reliable. Students are encouraged to do this by their teacher. It is another place where students can influence their peers in their thinking about text.

*Asking Hard Questions of Others*. The teacher purposefully embedded the skill of questioning others into the Paideia Seminar process. The students did this, especially when he reminded them to do it. One example of this occurred towards the end of *The 9-11 Commission Report* Paideia Seminar. The students were talking about the reliability of the report as a source. One student argued that it was a bipartisan report, therefore, more reliable. Edward turned to the student and asked how he knew it was truly bipartisan – just because it said it was? How could that be proven? In other words, he was suggesting that there was no proof offered in the document that it was bipartisan. His question was crucial to the ongoing argument as to whether the government can be trusted to tell the truth.

Having students question each other was another way that the Paideia Seminar's dialogic process influenced student thinking about text.

*Purposes of the Paideia Seminar*

The final data that the student informants provided that added insight in answering the first research question, were their responses when asked what they thought the purposes were for utilizing Paideia Seminars in their class. Their composite answer is as follows: The Paideia Seminar mandates “critical thinking,” encourages “growing in understanding,” and “integrating new ideas into your own,” “challenges what you think,” allows a flow of “information from other students,” “reminds us of forgotten knowledge,” and “guilts you if you haven’t done the reading”.

*Was the Setting a Problem?*

The answer to the first research question would be incomplete if the problem or interferences within the setting were not analyzed as part of Question One.

Both the student informants and the teacher commented on how the time of year affected the effectiveness of the Paideia Seminars. Collecting data in an AP class just before the AP exam and graduation from high school could be considered a less than optimal setting. The pressure for students to do well on the exam, the pressure for the teacher to be reviewing for the exam, and a sense for the students that school should be over all played a part in some aspects of the data collected from this class; however, I feel the data were excellent because they came from the very real setting that teachers and students live and work in and also provided a compare and contrast situation where the two Seminars that followed the Seminar format could be compared to the one dictated by necessity and coverage before the AP exam.

Even under these challenging conditions the students and the teacher provided data that more than adequately met the needs of this research and actually added some new dimensions that would have otherwise been impossible.

## Summary of Analyses on Question One

In sifting through the data analysis for a preponderance of consensus on research related to question one, three themes emerge: the perceived purpose of the Paideia Seminar, the components needed to actualize the purpose, and how the dialogic process influences thinking about text.

### *The Perceived Purpose of the Paideia Seminar*

Considering the input of all of the participants, the overriding consensus about the purpose of the Paideia Seminar's dialogic process was that students read a complex text on controversial issues and discussed them to: gain the perspectives and interpretations of others, to grow in depth of understanding, to apply critical thinking skills to the texts and issues, to allow ideas to evolve, and to construct a more complex view of the issues.

### *Components Needed to Actualize the Purpose*

In order for students to fulfill the purposes listed above the participants felt it was necessary for the students to: read the controversial text closely, ascertain necessary evidence to make assertions from the text, be provided with engaging and weighty questions in advance of the Seminar, allow the Seminar to be student dominated, utilize critical thinking skills, listen actively, be open minded, utilize a wide repertoire of background knowledge and make connections with the text under study, and utilize strategies like "pairing" and "questioning" to bolster the effectiveness of the dialogue.

### *How the Dialogic Process Influences Students Thinking About Texts*

Students said that the Paideia Seminar stimulates, engages, and challenges their thinking about texts and issues. It motivates higher-level thinking with its episodic stance and its logical foundation. The teacher and students relished the philosophical over the mundane, and said they sought to keep open minds as a plethora of perspectives were asserted, evidenced and rebutted. Given the essential questions and the teacher inserted organization, skills and strategies, it was evident that students perceived that students influenced other students about their thinking about texts.

## Evidence of Higher Level Thinking Skills

The second research question that this study answers is: During the Paideia Seminar process, what higher level comprehension thinking skills are evident? Data sources for this question include formal and informal questions utilized by the teacher in five Seminar sessions; observations, field notes, and transcripts of five Paideia Seminar sessions; nine student informant Think Alouds; 21 student informant writing documents; and five post-Seminar interviews with the teacher.

### *Definitions*

At the outset of reporting the data and analysis related to this question, four terms require specific definitions to clearly interpret the reported data. The second research question uses the words, “higher level comprehension skills”. The following are the three categories designated to ascertain and enumerate the instances of higher level thinking and comprehension.

The first comprehension category is *critical and analytical sk*ills. This includes: an interpretation supported by textual evidence, identifying fallacies and

oversimplifications, analysis of the quality and bias of a text, identifying overgeneralizations, comparing and contrasting similar experiences and ideas, identifying cause and effect relationships, and analyzing the reliability of sources (Gunning, 2004;Unrau, 2004;Vacca &Vacca, 2005; Weddle, 1978).

The second comprehension category is *elaboration or generative thinking*. It includes: synthesizing information into big picture concepts, application of information to create depth, creating analogies, interpreting inferences, imaging, generating questions, making predictions and creating innovative and new perspectives on the text (Gunning, 2004; Langer, 2000; Unrau, 2004 & Vacca & Vacca, 2005).

The third comprehension category is a *combination of analysis and elaboration* in one talk turn. As coding was taking place it became apparent that the most powerful use of higher-level thinking was when analysis and elaboration were used in tandem. Separating them for counting purposes was artificial and unrepresentative of what the students were doing. For that reason, a third category was added to the two that were suggested in the original research design.

The last definition needed for interpreting much of this section is *talk turn* or *talk segment*. In recent research conducted by Jennifer Berne and Kathleen Clark (2006) on comprehension strategies and discussions, they utilized “talk segments” as a unit of student speech that began and ended when one student took a turn in the dialogue (p. 680). It could be two words or two hundred. Because the purpose of this research was to code higher-level thinking (and that usually takes more than two words) I set the parameters of talk turns as two or more sentences that begin and end with one student taking a turn in a discussion. Teacher talk turns were also subject to the same definition.

*Intercoder Agreement*

For this particular research question, intercoder agreement was a significant check needed for the reliability of the data. This procedure is utilized by many researchers who code discussions (Billings & Fitzgerald, 2002).

A senior Graduate student from Gordon College who is majoring in Reading was asked to read 10% of all the transcripts including Think Alouds, interviews, and the three Paideia Seminars. She coded them using the categories defined above. She chose the pages randomly and did not discuss her decisions or disagreements with me. Using Cohen's kappa coefficient, which is a statistical measure of inter-rater reliability, our inter-rater reliability was 84% (Cohen's Kappa, 2006).

*Formal Questions, Informal Questions and Interview Information on Questions Interviews*

Mr. O'Shay emphatically emphasized the importance of crafting "essential", controversial and open ended questions. He said, "The essence of writing the questions is related to what I want the students to learn. I write questions for that purpose". He went on to say "There is significant skill in writing questions. There must be a taxonomy of questions. The best ones are deceptively simple like 'Do things evolve?' It takes a lot of work for the students to look at all the implications and find the evidence". In essence he was saying that simple questions can be complex and that these complex questions are not simple to create. In referring to a taxonomy of questions, he was intimating that there are levels and a hierarchy. When asked what kind of questions he asks, he said they include "evaluating sources, giving evidence to support a position, using and evaluating analogies, evaluating causal claims, questioning assumptions, and evaluating

generalizations". They are all higher level questions falling in either the analysis or elaboration category.

*Formal and Informal Questions*

Although Mr. O'Shay did not mention or even acknowledge one of the hallmarks that stands out about his questions, they reflect the suggestions of Roberts and Billings (1999). Mr. O'Shay frames many of his thinking questions in such a way that they are personalized. Roberts and Billings encourage personalizing the first and last questions of the Paideia Seminar to motivate, engage, and make connections to the students' real world. Some examples of personalized questions from the three observed Seminars are: "Does it do us any good to read about the events of September 11th"; " What part of the book surprised you the most?"; "How did this book change your thinking?"; and "How are we doing with the 9-11 Report recommendations"?

After interviewing Mr. OShay and examining Mr. O'Shay's questions it seems fair to characterize his questions as purposeful, deceptively simple, related to higher level thinking, open ended (no right or wrong answer) , and sometimes, personalized.

*Formal Questions*

In an effort to categorize Mr. O'Shay's formal questions for the three Seminars into discrete higher level categories the following table was created.

| | Right Nation Seminar | Rating the Presidents Seminar | 9-11 Report Seminar |
|---|---|---|---|
| Elaboration | 2 | - | 1 |
| Analysis | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Combined | 1 | - | - |
| Informational | - | - | - |

TABLE 6
LEVELS OF COMPREHENSION REQUIRED IN WRITTEN PRE-PAIDEIA QUESTIONS

Five higher level questions were posed before the Right Nation Seminar. No informational content questions were asked. The second Seminar required students to rate four Presidents based on their domestic policies, which included a great deal of analysis. The third Seminar was more analytical, with one elaborative question and four questions that required analysis.

An example of an elaborative question, which was usually a personalized question, is represented by, “What part of the book surprised you?”

An example of an analytical question would be, “Was the Presidential Daily Brief of August 6, 2001 clear enough that the President should have acted to prevent the attacks?” Analysis of the text and the sources would be the only way one could yield an evidenced assertion.

A question that required analysis and elaboration would be, “What are the effects of America being a conservative nation? (Mix of authors’ views and your views).” When Mr. O’Shay asked students for their views he was inviting elaboration.

*Informal Questions*

In addition to the formal questions that the students started the Seminar with, Mr. O’Shay would interject informal questions during the Seminar. Categorizing the informal

questions completed the whole picture. The following table indicates the higher order thinking levels required of the students to answer the informal questions.

| | Informational | Analytical | Elaborative | Clarifying |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Right Nation Seminar | 6 | 6 | 2 | - |
| Rating Presidents Seminar | 11 | 13 | 9 | - |
| 9-11 Report Seminar | 1 | 1 | 5 | 6 |

TABLE 7

*LEVELS OF COMPREHENSION NEEDED TO ANSWER TEACHER'S SPONTANEOUS QUESTIONS DURING THE PAIDEIA SEMINARS*

The first and most obvious observation of this data is that during the Rating the Presidents Seminar, which took one class period, the teacher asked 33 questions. In the other two Seminars, which both took two days each, the number of informal questions that were asked were 14 and 13 respectively. It is clear that something unusual was taking place in the second Seminar. That will be examined in detail below.

Other than the Seminar that was an anomaly, the number and kind of questions asked seem to be representative of higher level thinking. Some examples of each category follows. A question like, "Well what was deregulated in the seventies and eighties? A lot of the deregulation took place under Carter. Do you know of any industries that were deregulated?" is a typical right or wrong question that falls in the informational category. The teacher was looking for specific and accurate information.

The informal analytical question category is represented by, “Mike brought up the effects of conservatism. Are they good or bad for the country?” and an example of an informal elaborative question would be, “How are we doing with Saudi Arabia? Should we confront them about abuses or should we go along with them”?

Finally, during the last Seminar Mr. O’Shay utilized six clarifying, or follow up questions, aimed directly at student speakers, usually in an effort to encourage clarity. In one case the student said, “I don’t think we should end the relationship [with Saudi Arabia]. It would be jumping the gun. It is really not our call right now.” Mr. O’Shay retorted, “What is our call?” He was not allowing the student to say something like this without explaining himself

*Summarizing the Interview and Questions*

Earlier in Chapter Two, several research based claims about questions were made. The following is an attempt to sift the data through those claims. First, research has demonstrated that there are two kinds of questions, those that assess and those that assist. The questions that assist are meant to steer students into deeper understanding (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; Almasi, 2002; Beyer, 1997). They promote critical analysis and evaluation and provide dissonance and disequilibrium (Wells, 1992; Beyer, 1997). It is clear from the intentions laid out by the teacher and the questions themselves, that the questions utilized in the three observed Paideia Seminars were intended to assist students in making analytical and elaborative assertions.

The second category reviewed in Chapter Two is open-ended questions. They are questions that require complex thinking and yield multiple solutions; there is no one right answer (; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990;Marzano, Pickering & Polluck, 2001; Roberts &

Billings, 1999, Trabasso & Bouchard, 2002). The questions posed by Mr. O'Shay required individual interpretations, assertions and evidence. The students brought their own transactions with the authors and Mr. O'Shay's questions to a forum where formulated "right" answers were not expected and where co-construction and grappling with complexities was anticipated.

Finally, in both books written by Barry Beyer (1997) and Terry Richards and Laura Billings (1999) a sequence of questioning is suggested. Their focus includes walking students through steps that both scaffold thinking and evoke interest in the subject. Looking at the questions utilized in Paideia Seminars one and three, the sequence and personalization are apparent.

Questions are pivotal to higher-level thinking and comprehension. If the questions do not require it, the students will not be impelled to think about subject matter at the analytical/elaborative level. Mr. O'Shay's objectives and formal and informal questions indicate that he "sets the table" for students to process through text analytically and elaboratively, both before and during the Paideia Seminar.

*The Three Paideia Seminars*

There will be three major sections under this heading. First, the Paideia Seminar that was not a real Seminar will be dissected to learn why minimal higher-level thinking occurred. Secondly, a look at the kind of dialogue that becomes a vehicle for higher-level learning will be reviewed, and finally, the actual analysis of the Seminars will be explained.

*The Seminar That Was Not a Paideia Seminar*

It is important to stop and analyze the Seminar that was an anomaly. Comparing and contrasting it to the other two Seminars provides some unexpected information about what is necessary to successfully engage students in higher-level thinking and comprehension.

The following table displays the attributes of a successful Paideia Seminar delineated by Mortimer Adler (1984) and Terry Richards and Laura Billings (1999). The three Paideia Seminars that were observed are listed across the top and an "x" is placed under each Seminar, if the attribute was present.

The first attribute refers to the necessity of students reading a complex text. During the second Paideia Seminar, only six of the 20 students knew about, or had the opportunity to read the text because only six of them were in school the day it was assigned. Even if the students had read the text it was not a complex text; it was the textbook. The two chapters assigned reviewed the domestic policy of four Presidents.

The second attribute follows along the same vein. The majority of the students did not have the questions in advance of the second Seminar, and in this case it was one question that though simple, required a great deal of analysis.

In the next section on dialogue, tables will visualize that most of the dialogue in the second Paideia Seminar was teacher induced and not student to student. It is difficult to dialogue about a text if it has not been read.

During the second Seminar, the teacher became much more than a facilitator. He coached, he taught didactically, and at one point asked a student to read a portion of the text to the students. He said later that he "had to work very hard".

During all of the Seminars the students sat in a circle so that they could interact effectively with each other.

The two student motivators of a substantial grade and a controversial topic were present in Paideia Seminars one and three. There was no grade attached to Paideia two; it was a review before the AP test. Additionally, there was very little controversy over rating the Presidents on domestic policy.

The last attribute is the purpose of the Paideia Seminar. In Seminars one and three the students utilized critical thinking strategies with a complex text; in Seminar two the teacher was attempting to use the Seminar to review for an AP test.

| Attributes | Paideia 1<br>Right Nation | Paideia 2<br>Presidents | Paideia 3<br>9-11 Report |
|---|---|---|---|
| Students read the same complex text | x | | x |
| Questions related to controversy prepared in advance | x | | x |
| Student to student dialogue | x | | x |
| Teacher is facilitator | x | | x |
| Circular seating | x | x | x |
| Motivators: | | | |
| Grade | x | | x |
| Controversy | x | | x |
| Purpose: | | | |
| Coverage | | x | |
| Critical thinking | x | | x |

Note. Data collected from student informants, transcripts, artifacts and teacher interviews.

*TABLE 8*

*ATTRIBUTES OF PAIDEIA SEMINARS APPLIED TO THREE SEMINARS*

One of the other indicators that the students were not dominating Seminar two was the fact that the teacher took 49% of the talk turns and in the other four class periods he took an average of 18% of the talk turns. There was a definite difference in the participation level of the students.

The following table breaks down the talk turns for each class period of the three Paideia Seminars. It demonstrates the talk turns taken by the teacher and students during the three observed Paideia Seminars.

| Paideia Seminars | Teacher Segments | Student Segments | %of Teacher Talk |
|---|---|---|---|
| Right Nation One | 5 | 26 | 16 |
| Right Nation Two | 5 | 22 | 18.5 |
| Rating Presidents | 28 | 29 | 49 |
| 9-11 Report One | 7 | 39 | 15 |
| 9-11 Report Two | 11 | 38 | 22 |

Note. A talking segment is comprised of two or more sentences per person.

*TABLE 9*

*TALK TURNS FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHER*

*What Does Seminar Two Reveal About Higher Level Thinking?*

Paideia Seminars that were successful started with a clearly communicated plan. Students received handouts with the grading criteria, directions, dates, and questions well in advance of the Seminar. Students cannot use higher level thinking effectively if they do not read the text.

Secondly, the text that is utilized in a Paideia Seminar should be controversial and ambiguous enough to promote an interesting discussion. Most text books do not fulfill this criterion.

And lastly, when the purpose of a Paideia Seminar includes “covering the material” for a test, even an AP test, much of its power to stimulate higher level thinking can be thwarted.

In 2002, Laura Billings and Jill Fitzgerald conducted a study on the amount of true dialogue that took place during a Paideia Seminar. They observed one teacher over the course of three Seminars and found that she took over 50% of the talk turns (p. 932). The teacher’s questioning tended toward the cycle of initiating the question, the student responding, and the teacher evaluating the answer, and she acted more as a teacher than facilitator (p. 933). The researchers concluded that changes in the training of the teacher, the philosophy of the district, and the purposes of both teacher and students needed to be made (p. 936).

With the three Paideia Seminar’s that have been observed and reported in this research, there has been only one of the three Seminars in which the teacher had no choice but to make it teacher reliant and that was Seminar two. The teacher clearly demonstrated his ability to facilitate Seminars and promote dialogue with high-level thinking on two other occasions. The plan, the text, and the purpose impeded success in the case of Seminar two. This was a very different circumstance than that researched by Billings and Fitzgerald (2002), where they had three observations of the same behavior.

In response to the second research question, this section on a Seminar that was not successful, leads to a finding that higher-level thinking during a Paideia Seminar is reliant on teacher planning (including handouts and questions), student reading and participation, a controversial text, and a purpose that serves as a motivator and springboard.

*Dialogue and Higher-Level Thinking*

Berne and Clark (2006) conducted research with secondary students on their use of comprehension strategies during small group, peer led discussions. They found that students moved through “serial monologues” related to a topic, rather than connected conversations around a topic (p. 684). They concluded that, “students must be taught two literacy skills explicitly”. They needed to “be taught to engage in dialogue with one another about the text” and they “need to be taught how to employ comprehension strategies” (p. 685).

The research of Berne and Clark (2006), the research of Billings and Fitzgerald (2003), and the hypothetical model that I created in Chapter Two led me to question and examine the data as to whether real connected dialogue took place in the Seminars. The model infers that the recursive dialogical process stimulates and requires higher-order thinking, which in turn, solidifies or modifies the original transaction that the students had with the text. If there is no true connected, engaged conversation around a question, then, the hypothesis is nullified.

Counting talk turns alone does not indicate the presence of dialogue. I analyzed the transcriptions of two class periods, knowing that a contrast would occur. Tables 10 and 11 demonstrate the topics and number of talk turns that were related to students connecting and talking with each other on each topic.

The first table, portraying dialogue that was analyzed from Seminar two on Rating the Presidents’ Domestic Policies, demonstrates that the total percentage of time in which students were in dialogue with each other was 47%.

Additional information that will be applied to this table when it is analyzed is that the number of teacher interjections within those dialogues was seven. An interjection is any number of words that the teacher spoke while students were discussing a topic. It did not necessarily have to be two sentences long, as was true with a talk turn.

| Major Issues | Student Talk Turns Out of Total of 36 | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Nixon's Policies | 3/36 | 8 |
| Johnson's Policies | 4/36 | 11 |
| Reagan's Policies | 4/36 | 11 |
| Conservation of Energy | 2/36 | 5 |
| Is deregulation a good idea? | 4/36 | 11 |
| Total dialogic talk turns on issues | 17/36 | 47 |

*TABLE 10*

*DIALOGIC TALK TURNS AROUND A MAJOR ISSUE DURING PAIDEIA SEMINAR ON RATING THE PRESIDENTS' DOMESTIC POLICY ON 4-26-06*

In contrast to the table above, another table was created with the same parameters for Paideia Seminar three, session one. This table demonstrates that students were in connected dialogue, 85% of the time. There were six teacher interjections in the course of these dialogues.

| Major Issues | Student Talk Turns Out of Total of 39 | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Is the response to Katrina an apt analogy to the response to 9-11? | 10/39 | 26 |
| Will anything we have learned through the 9-11 Report deter it from happening again? | 10/39 | 26 |

| Major Issues | Student Talk Turns Out of Total of 39 | Percent |
|---|---|---|
| Was 9-11 the President's fault? | 8/39 | 21 |
| How are we doing with the 9-11 recommendations? | 5/39 | 13 |
| Total of four issues | 33/39 | 85 |

*TABLE 11*
*DIALOGIC TALK TURNS AROUND A MAJOR ISSUE DURING PAIDEIA SEMINAR ON THE 9-11 COMMISSION REPORT ON 5-9-06*

*Comparing and contrasting dialogue in two seminars*. The difference in the percentage of dialogue that took place in these two Seminars is significant. The reason for this difference has been chronicled previously. Thinking and dialogue were seriously impacted by lack of student preparation in Seminar two.

The fact that students were involved in student to student conversations 85% of the first session of Paideia Seminar three indicates that dialogue can indeed be the impetus for solidified and modified synthesis.

One more contrast assists in understanding what occurred in these two Seminars. There seems to be about the same number of teacher interjections in both Seminars as students dialogued around a topic; however, the content of those interjections is where one recognizes how the role of the teacher changed in the course of the dialogue. The dialogue related to "Reaganomics" transcribed from Seminar two includes the following interjection by Mr. O'Shay:

> Nobody has any comments about Ronald Reagan? Is this what you are telling me, you have no comments on Ronald Reagan? (Pause.) Clive mentioned Reaganomics, good idea, bad idea? How many of you are confused about Reaganomics? (*Majority raises hands*) Which is why you are not commenting.

> OK, who can explain Reaganomics? It is probably important; I'd say it is important. You will find this out when you read the chapter, or maybe you have read the chapter. Clive, you mentioned it, can you explain Reaganomics for us?

This one interjection symbolizes the lack of knowledge the students brought to the Seminar, some of the teacher's frustration, and the need for him to ask an informational question of a student who had read the chapter. Later in this Seminar, any semblance of dialogue disappeared and the teacher taught information through the use of questions.

The interjections in Paideia Seminar three were quite different from those characterized above. During the dialogue about the analogy of the government's reaction to Katrina and the government's reaction to 9-11, Mr. O'Shay turned to the young woman whose analogy was under attack and said, "Do you want to respond again?" or later when the dialogue had turned to deterring future terrorists, Mr. O'Shay interjected with, "OK Kevin, several people have taken exception to what you have said. Would you like to respond?" In both of these examples, Mr. O'Shay was doing what he calls, "directing traffic".

The key finding in making the contrast on the content of teacher interjections is that the role of interjections in a Paideia Seminar is determined by student preparation.

In both detecting the presence of "real" dialogue and the kind of interjections that a teacher makes, this research infers that success is determined by the preparation of the student to interact with the text and each other.

*Coding Three Seminars for the Presence of High-Level Thinking*

As explained in Chapter Three and earlier in this chapter, the three transcripts of the Paideia Seminars were coded for the presence of analysis, elaboration and a combination of both using *NVivo7* software, in a more traditional manner with pencils and paper, and by a second party who read 10% of them randomly. The terms are defined at the beginning of the section on research question two.

The following is a table demonstrating the results of this analysis:

| Level | No. of Student Talk Turns | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Analysis | 29/153 | 19 |
| Elaboration | 21/153 | 14 |
| Combined | 53/ 153 | 35 |
| Total | 103/153 | 68 |

TABLE 12
PERCENTAGE OF HIGHER LEVEL TALK TURNS IN THREE PAIDEIA SEMINARS

Examples and explanations of each category follow. More analytical questions were asked than any other, so it is no surprise that 19% of the answers were purely analytical and 35% of the answers were analytical with elaboration built upon the analysis.

The 14% that were purely elaborative did not have the strength and support of analysis. In some cases they were insightful and reflective, in others they were attempts by students to add to the dialogue without having read the material carefully. Josh recounted his ability to elaborate by utilizing prior knowledge, when he had not read the text when he explained his thinking and speaking in the Rating the Presidents Seminar. Josh indicated that elaboration can be a form of extemporaneous talk.

An example of a purely analytical interaction with the text comes from *The 9-11 Commission Report* Seminar. The student was analyzing the reliability of the report and said:

> I think that because it is written by the government, they have a pretty big reason to lie. They have more of a reason to lie than a private person who [might be] writing it. They have things they want to hide and especially if it is written by the same administration.

The student was answering an analytical question with analytical reasoning. He asserts two important pieces of evidence for his skepticism.

Two examples of elaborative responses follow. The first one comes from the Seminar on *The Right Nation*. Marcy and her classmates had been talking about the book's revelations about how religious affiliations had made the nation more "right". She said, "I didn't know about prayer [being said] before government meetings. That is bizarre, out of control. In Europe no one goes to church. It is jarring to come back to the United States and the religion here." This was a subjective elaboration relying on her prior knowledge of life in Europe.

A more substantive elaboration began a long dialogue about an analogy relating the way the government responded to 9-11 and the way it responded to hurricane Katrina. The student demonstrates her book knowledge, and then generatively builds an analogy of one instance of government intervention to another. She said:

> I think it would be a good thing if we can learn from it [reading about 9-11], but I think hurricane Katrina shows that we really didn't learn much. In the

> book it talks about who has the authority to tell other airlines in the sky about it [terrorist hijackings].

She goes on to say that the many agencies within the government do not communicate well and they do not have a clear chain of authority, so they are slow to move. The student defended her analogy at length, saying that the government's slow reaction to Katrina does not instill too much hope that the government can move quickly to avert future terrorist activities. This example is elaboration on a higher-level, the former example was more of a personal reaction.

The final, and more prominent, form of higher-level thinking found in the Seminars relates to the combination of analysis and elaboration. Students used the results of their analyses to convince others of a personal stand or assertion that they had generated. The following are two examples of this combination. The first example comes from *The 9-11 Commission Report* Seminar. Students had been analyzing how the United States was doing with the recommendations made by the report. One of the recommendations stated that the United States should become a moral leader in the Middle East. A student analyzed and then elaborated on why the United States should not do this.

> I think that it is not necessarily a good idea, because the Saudi royal family is based on the Sunni extreme Muslim religion. They give no rights to people and it is not moral. They say[ the recommendations] we should be the moral leaders in the world but we support Saudi Arabians.

> We are supporting a regime that oppresses women. They [do] horrible, horrible things…to women over there. It seems that when our interests are based on financial gain for ourselves, not based on stability, we are using them…

Another example of the combined higher level thinking comes from the same Seminar. This young man started an unpopular strand in the dialogue with his combined analysis and elaboration on whether reading and understanding *The 9-11 Commission Report* was important. He quietly, but passionately pleaded his case:

> In talking about the good it will do, I guess we kind of saw it coming from the Presidential brief on August sixth, but whose to say the terrorists will use this means again? They switched up on us this time. I guess we weren't expecting it or weren't prepared for it. They are not going to do something like this again because we just heightened all this security for it. The whole point of this book is to prepare and all the measures that have been taken since 9-11 have tightened airport security, border security, port security, so why would terrorists use this again? Why not find another kind of warfare like chemical warfare or something like that? The terrorists were one step ahead of us this time, so who is to say they won't be again?

In this example the student followed his pessimistic analysis with persuasive, generative questions. He began a reactionary dialogue that went on for nine more talk turns.

The examples utilized here can be duplicated many times over as one reads through the transcripts. The students demonstrated their ability to analyze and elaborate on a text with prodigious quality and quantity.

In analyzing the data, I looked at two areas; first, to ascertain *if* higher-level thinking were present and then, *how*, or with what tools or strategies the teacher and students used to process the text. Four strategies became apparent.

*Four Components of the Seminars that Stimulated Higher-Level Thinking*

*Prior knowledge.* In coding the Seminars ten examples of students referencing prior knowledge outside of the topic under discussion were found. Analogies and analyses were built by using this information. Higher level thinking is enhanced by a fund of prior knowledge. Students referenced knowledge of world religions, political parties, business scandals, world history, early American history, economics, world travel, and current events.

*Background information*. In the formal interview with Mr. O'Shay I asked him about whether he provides background information for students prior to the Seminar. His answer on providing contextual information was surprising. He said that providing background information "can be a trap". It can take too much time away from the Seminar and his goal is to have the students grapple with what they need to know, and do the research themselves. He feels that at this point in their schooling the students need to get in the habit of using technology and of asking the right questions to discover what they need to know before the Seminar. Unlike elementary and middle school models of providing context for reading experiences, Mr. O'Shay believes that for seniors in high school it should be part of the individual preparation and thinking process.

*Pairing and sharing*. In the five class periods that were observed, Mr. O'Shay told the students to pair up eleven times. These pairings stimulated and encouraged higher-level thinking at the beginning of class, and many times along the way. Two examples of

what students were asked to share when they paired come from *The Right Nation* Seminar and are: “What are the short term causes [of conservativism]? How did we get the Great Society, that’s not conservative? What caused the revival after the sixties and seventies? Talk to a partner.” And later, Mr. O’Shay asked, “Is conservativism a good thing or a bad thing; politically, socially, economically? Talk to a partner about this”.

As observed previously, Mr. O’Shay used pairings as a catalyst for thoughtful discussion. Each time students came out of pairings there was a renewal of thinking and talking that took place.

*Questioning.* The questions provided for the students at the beginning of the Seminar, the informal questions during the Seminar, and the questions that students asked each other during the Seminar all contributed to the higher-level thinking that was observed. The Paideia Seminars that were observed were reliant on questioning.

In summary, the data gathered from the five class periods of three Paideia Seminars conclusively support the finding that students utilized higher-level thinking comprehension strategies in dialoguing with each other around a text. Background knowledge, prior knowledge, pairings and questioning amplified the quality of the analysis and elaboration that students exhibited.

*Student Informant Think Alouds and Higher-level Thinking*

The following table is a representation of the kind of thinking that student informants recalled as they met to “relive” their thinking after two Paideia Seminars. The students reported varying reactions on how the dialogue during the Seminars had affected their thinking. The two most common reactions were that they had their minds changed

on an issue and that what was said clarified or answered questions that they had. Both of these reactions highlight the need for an open mind when higher-level thinking is the goal. The responses of the two men indicated that they were the least likely to be open to change.

Attaining a deeper understanding and modifying understanding were also high on the students' report list of how they were influenced by the thinking in the Seminar.

The final column on the right in the table gives representative examples of what students said during the Think Alouds that placed them in a particular category.

| Responses to dialogue | No. of Informant Responses in Think- Alouds | Examples |
|---|---|---|
| Did not change | 2/9 | "When I am dead set, I rarely change…" |
| Modified understanding | 3/9 | "Hearing Jack… always changes my opinion closer to the center." |
| Changed position | 5/9 | "I changed my mind on the reliability of the 9-11 report because of something said by Aaron." |
| Deeper understanding | 4/9 | "The Seminar challenges what you think…gives new ideas and different interpretations of texts." |
| Clarifies and answers questions | 5/9 | "I had forgotten about Nixon's environmental accomplishments." |
| Raised new questions | 2/9 | Kevin says it is bipartisan, but he doesn't know it is bipartisan." |

*TABLE 13*
*THE INFLUENCE OF DIALOGUE ON INFORMANTS COMPREHENSION*

The Think Alouds indicated that students valued the higher-level thinking because, if they maintained open minds, their minds could be changed, their thoughts

developed and their synthesis could be modified. In addition they could expect to clarify and raise questions. Being willing and open to evidenced persuasion by classmates is the receiving end of analysis and elaboration. Without a sense of active and participatory listening, all the high level thinking in the world would not make a bit of difference.

*Student Writing Samples and Higher-Level Thinking*

Because the last section of this chapter holds student writing up for close scrutiny, the following will attempt to answer only the second research question and that is: During the Paideia Seminar process what higher-level comprehension thinking skills are evident?

Student informants provided 21 pieces of writing for analysis. There were five pieces written before the Seminars, two written during the Seminars and 14 written after the Seminar had taken place.

The writing included essays, notes taken before class, notes taken during class and one page reflections and responses at the conclusion of the Seminars. The five students took very different approaches to these assignments.

*Josh and Edward*. Josh and Edward evidenced strong use of analysis and elaboration in their writing. They utilized persuasive citations from the texts.

Josh had the erudite language of a scholar and the smooth delivery of a lawyer; however, one of his writing samples for pre-Seminar notes was copied from a friend's notes.

Edward not only skillfully analyzed the text in his writing, but made significant use of prior knowledge and wove his way around to finishing his writing with generative questions.

*Ina.* Ina's writing demonstrated a very good use of analysis and elaboration. She wrote clearly, succinctly and used appropriate citations. Her style was honest, direct, open-minded and well organized. She provided in-class notes that summarized, but did not analyze what had occurred in class.

*Cassie.* Cassie's writing cannot be generalized into one overarching category. One essay demonstrated analysis and use of evidence, another post-writing reflection was primarily an affective personal reaction to other students in class. Her in-class notes reflected that she questioned and actively interacted with the information and in another post-Paideia writing assignment she demonstrated that she had changed her opinion on an issue.

*Marcy.* During the time that Marcy was observed she wrote three pieces that were quickly completed, as I watched. There was no sense of process writing, preparation, or organization. At one point the teacher caught her writing an assignment during the first ten minutes of class and deducted points from her writing grade. Because of this last minute approach, Marcy's writing was always handwritten (the majority of the other students had typed their writing) and had little significant analysis and elaboration. Marcy's in class behavior was just the opposite. She analyzed and elaborated with ease.

*Overall generalizations on student writing*. Saphier and Gower (1997) write that teachers will get what they clearly delineate in their expectations to students. Mr. O'Shay's students are examples of this dictum. Students know that Mr. O'Shay checks to see if they have completed pre-Seminar writing, but it is not graded for content, so its value is diminished and copying of each other's work is possible.

The expectations for essays and their grading were clearly explained on handouts; however, students know from the past that writing mechanics have not been graded, and therefore, little attention has been given to it. The content was very good, but the presentation was often sloppy.

Some of the written assignments that Mr. O'Shay made were last minute afterthoughts and students did not have written directions to which they could refer. Two examples include: two paragraphs that students were told to write about how their personal prejudices affected their reading of *The Right Nation,* and the writing of a one page reaction piece regarding the 9-11 Seminar. These add-on writing assignments varied in quality because students were not given standards or expectations regarding the level of thinking to be used, questions that would elicit analysis and elaboration, directives on the use of citations, or standards regarding the quality of writing.

During the formal interview with Mr. O'Shay, he said that writing essays every time a Seminar occurred generated "too much correcting". The pragmatics of teaching often dictates the practice that is instituted. On the other hand, students value grades.

The last generalization applies to the students. The survey indicated that students had very mixed feelings about the effectiveness and importance of writing assignments as part of the Paideia Seminar process. They were not convinced that it was an integral part of the process. It could be possible that students have not had a clear and explicit explanation of how writing impacts the quality of dialogue, and later the quality of their learning.

Students in the last weeks of high school generally exhibit a laxity born of the belief that important work is over. This, too, could explain some of the quality issues.

*Writing and thinking*. Despite the generalizations written above, there certainly were multiple examples of students utilizing analysis and elaboration in their written work. Although motivation, expectations, and the time of year may have marred the view, students did demonstrate higher-level thinking in their writing.

*Post-Seminar Interviews and Higher-Level Thinking*

After each Seminar, I would meet with Mr. O'Shay and ask him what had gone well and what he would like to see improved. The following is a synthesis of those five conversations as it reflects on higher-level thinking.

Several areas of critical thinking were identified by Mr. O'Shay in the course of the three Paideia Seminars. He noted that students had generalized and questioned each others generalizations, asserted propositions with evidence, and demonstrated cause and effect relationships. Relating to Paideia Seminar behaviors that encourage thinking, he said that students asked questions of each other, listened actively, made connections to prior knowledge and exhibited a high level of participation.

Mr. O'Shay felt that improvements could be made by: insisting that students cite sources and page numbers when they cited text, moving students off a question that dominates a Seminar session, stay away from using the Paideia Seminar for coverage of content purposes, and manage time better.

For the most part, other than Seminar two, Mr. O'Shay was "delighted" with the level of thinking the students exhibited in the Seminars.

*Summary of Findings on Research Question Two*

Six sources were utilized to triangulate data about the evidence of the presence of higher-level thinking during the Paideia Seminar process, attempting to find congruence,

while being careful in looking for inconsistencies. The following categories emerged as key findings from the analysis.

*The Importance of Questions*

The questions that are prepared in advance of the Seminar and those that occur spontaneously during the Seminar frame the kind of thinking that will occur. If the questions are written to elicit analysis and elaboration, it occurs; antithetically, if teachers do not ask higher-level questions, students will not usually volunteer the information spontaneously.

Questions take students to the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1962). They scaffold or frame a kind of thinking that students would not do on their own. The questions: assist, prod, allow for risk taking because they are open ended, are sometimes personalized to stimulate motivation, and are often sequenced to provide steps in the scaffolding.

*Mediating Higher-Level Thinking*

Comparing an effective Paideia Seminar to one that was not, allowed discovery of the importance of mediating factors. Before all else, the teacher and the students need to be thoroughly prepared and organized. The questions need to be given to students in advance, the text needs to be read, and entry notes prepared.

Secondly, an atmosphere of controversy has to be created. It motivates and creates interest. Another motivator is the attachment of a grade to the Seminar. If clear expectations and a grade are explained on a handout, the outcome appears to be significantly more successful, as far as higher-level thinking is concerned.

Another mediator is the perceived purpose of the Seminar. When students and a

teacher discuss a topic to “cover the content,” a very different kind of thinking occurs. Controversy is the catalyst for analysis and elaboration.

Finally, the text is important in motivating thinking. Adler (1984) contended that the text needed to be raise “the most fundamental and lively issues of all” (p.19). Text books seldom do this.

*Dialogue and Its Effect on Higher-Level Thinking*

In comparing an effective Seminar to an ineffective Seminar it was found that students utilize dialogue well as they come prepared to discuss, listen, and question each other. The hypothesized model found in Chapter Two suggests that dialogue promotes higher-level thinking. “Real” dialogue was authenticated through the analysis of data collected during the first session of *The 9-11 Commission Report* Seminar.

*Higher-Level Thinking Evidenced by Coding Three Seminars*

Coding three Paideia Seminars indicated that students utilized analysis, elaboration, or a combination of the two, during 68% of the talk turns. The combination of analysis and elaboration created strong arguments because elaboration was supported by analysis with evidence.

*Ancillary Skills and Attitudes for Higher-Level Thinking*

Students who exhibited strong abilities in higher-level thinking used prior knowledge, background information, stimulation and clarification from pairings, and the multiple versions of questioning supplied by the Paideia Seminar.

Open-mindedness and a commitment to understanding in depth created a mindset that invited the influence of higher-level thinking.

Writing did exhibit higher-level thinking, but it appears that students do not fully understand its place in the Paideia Seminar process or its dialogic capabilities.

## Changes in Comprehension As Viewed Through Student Writing

The third and final research question addressed in this chapter is the following: As students move from the initial transaction with the read text, through the seminar, and then on to the essay, what changes in student comprehension will be observable in their written responses?

This section will be divided into three emphases: the plan and the actuality involved in collecting written data, individual analyses of the five students writing as it pertains to a change in comprehension, and an overall summary of writing as it pertains to this class and the Paideia Seminar.

### *The Plan and the Actuality of Collecting Written Data*

The research design for utilizing student writing to ascertain change in student comprehension made two assumptions that proved to be untrue. First, because of previous research work conducted in this particular teacher's classroom, it was assumed that Mr. O'Shay would follow a pattern observed previously: requiring entry notes, encouraging note taking during class, and assignment of essays at the conclusion of the Seminars.

On the first day that I arrived to observe a Seminar, the teacher asked students to pass in a comprehensive essay written at the outset of *The Right Nation Seminar*. When asked about this change in protocol, Mr. O'Shay answered that he does not have a "usual" protocol. He changes the writing requirements as he sees fit. He said that requiring an essay with five citations and a referencing of two book reviews was an

excellent preparation for the Seminar. The writing to promote reflective closure on this Seminar was an informal writing response asking students how their personal biases affected their reading of the book.

As the Seminars went on, there was no regularity in how they were conducted as far as writing was concerned. Each Seminar had unique writing requirements.

The second assumption that was inaccurate was that the five student informants would remember to turn over all written work to Mr. O'Shay or me. This was the most elusive data collected. Of a potential 45 pieces of writing, I received 21 and was grateful to collect them after much reminding and cajoling. As mentioned earlier, these students were at a point in their education where distractions and illnesses were numerous, and written work was not saved or accounted for.

In the end, the written data consisted of two essays written before *The Right Nation* Seminar, two sets of entry notes for the *9-11Commission Report* Seminar, two sets of notes taken during the Rating the Presidents Seminar, four pieces of informal reflective writing written after *The Right Nation* Seminar, five one page reflections on the *9-11 Commission Report* Seminar, and five informal written responses to the Rating the Presidents Seminar.

Since the research question and design had assumed that three pieces of writing per student, per Seminar would allow a tracking of possible changed comprehension on major issues, and those writing pieces were not always present, a modification was made in how change would be identified. Transcripts of what the individual informants said during the Seminars and what they said during their Think Alouds were referenced in relation to their writing to ascertain change in comprehension on a major issue.

*Individual Analysis of Student Writing As It Pertains to Change in Comprehension*

Initially, a writing log and memos notebook was created as I sifted through the written data, synthesized it, and reflected on each individual piece of writing. From there, I created individual matrices for each student so that information could be concisely synthesized, categorized, compared, and evaluated. Table 14 is the abridged version of the individual matrices. Following the table, in a sequence that reflects the table, a full explanation of each student's writing as it pertains to evidence of change in comprehension will be provided.

| Name | No. Of writing pieces | Evidence of change in writing | Use of analysis and elaboration* | Attributes of writing |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Marcy | 3 | 2 | Good | Handwritten<br>Honest<br>Done quickly |
| Ina | 5 | 2 | Very good | Handwritten and typed<br>Clear<br>Evidenced |
| Cassie | 6 | 2 | Good | Handwritten and typed<br>Affective<br>Critical |
| Josh | 4 | 2 | Strong | Typed<br>Erudite<br>Persuasive<br>Evidenced<br>Analytical |
| Edward | 2 | 1 | Strong | Handwritten and typed<br>Analytical<br>Evidenced<br>Generative<br>Organized |

* Continuum included: Poor, Fair, Good, Very Good, Strong

*TABLE 14*
*EVIDENCE OF CHANGES OF ANALYTICAL OR ELABORATIVE COMPREHENSIONON MAJOR ISSUES IN INFORMANTS' SUBMITTED WRITINGS THAT WERE ATTRIBUTED TO SEMINAR DISCUSSION*

*Marcy*

Marcy changed her position on an issue in two instances. She changed her opinion about President Carter's domestic policy and moved him from second to fourth place in the ratings.

During the *9-11 Commission Report* Seminar Marcy passionately argued that the transcripts of private phone calls between loved ones should not be published in *The 9-11*

*Commission Report.* In her reflection at the end of the Seminar she wrote, “I have changed my mind regarding the statement I made yesterday in reference to the phone calls from loved ones. The other students made a good point in the usefulness and relevance of the phone calls.”

*Ina*

Ina chronicled two changes in her writing. After Josh convinced her that the government could not be trusted as a reliable source in *The 9-11 Commission Report* Seminar, she changed her opinion on the reliability of the report.

Her second change came in the Rating the Presidents Seminar where she wrote that she needed to lower President Carter’s rating because she had listed him in first place because “of my knowledge of his good intentions” and raised President Johnson to first place because of “the important programs he implemented”.

*Cassie*

Cassie wrote about the same change of opinion in two pieces of writing, her in-class notes and an informal writing piece on rating the Presidents. She had rated President Johnson on top before and after the Seminar; however, she moved Presidents Nixon and Carter because, “Nixon had his Clean Air Act and did a lot for the environment that I forgot about. Carter also did things that I forgot about. I was mostly considering foreign affairs.”

*Josh*

Josh’s writing indicated two changes. In class he convincingly persuaded others that the government was not to be trusted and that *The 9-11 Commission Report* was not a reliable source; however he wrote the following in his final reflection: “The American

people should greatly appreciate the candidness of the government in explaining the background reasons and actions of the terrorists, and the areas of the system which failed."

In the Rating the Presidents Seminar, Josh moved President Johnson from second to first because, "he concentrated on the issues of poverty and Americans who were underprivileged".

*Edward*

Because of illness, Edward submitted only two pieces of writing, but they reflected the way he characterized himself. He said that when he had a strong, evidenced position, there was no amount of persuasion that would change his mind. His final reflection on the 9-11 Seminar is strong, analytical, and elaborative. On the other hand, he said when he was interviewed that he can be persuaded if he does not know too much about the subject. During the Rating the Presidents Seminar, he changed the position he had put President Carter in. He went from second to last. He wrote that, "Carter dropped to last because all he did was waste money on the Energy Commission".

*Overall Observations on Student Informant Modifications and Solidification*

Given that Cassie wrote about the same change on two occasions, and all of the students reported change during a Seminar that most of them had not prepared for, the amount of change on a major issue is not staggering; however, the number of students and the number of Seminars involved need to be considered. Evidence from writing prompt seven indicates that nine of eleven students feel that they would change on an issue if the evidence were present to substantiate a change. Perhaps if there had been a

larger number of students and pieces of writing, the evidence of change would have been more substantial.

What the writing does assist with is an understanding of what happens during the course of a Paideia Seminar. The goal of this qualitative research is to understand the Paideia Seminar process as it relates to higher-level thinking and comprehension. The writing that the student informants provided clearly indicated that they utilize writing to maintain the dialogue after the Seminar is over. Analysis and elaboration continues and because of the friction with other perspectives, becomes more solidified. A notable example of this was Edward's reflective writing after the 9-11 Seminar. Some excerpts indicate that he is still in dialogue with his peers and continuing to use analysis and elaboration. Edward took on three of his peers' arguments when he wrote:

> I disagreed with Evie's comparison to hurricane Katrina. I don't see the connection…that it shows that communication throughout the government is weak….9-11 happened within an hour and half…it is unreasonable to say we failed there on the scale that we failed in dealing with hurricane Katrina.
>
> Also, Matt's comment on how security measures would be useless may be true in some cases, but in all honesty, what does one expect the government to do? Just say that they're not going to do anything because if a terrorist really wants to, there is no way to stop them?
>
> Last, was Josh's comment on air marshals. This problem was more scientific, since last time I checked having a gunfight in a pressurized air chamber, especially with automatics, is a bad plan.

The first observation one must make on Edward's writing is that he had to have been actively listening and taking notes during the Seminar in order for him to take on an active dialogue with three of the students arguments that he analyzed in his writing. Secondly, Edward did not make any of these statements in the Seminar, so the writing assignment gave him the opportunity to voice his arguments, and thirdly, although Edward did nor change his opinion, he solidified it by analytically arguing against his peers assertions.

The hypothetical model of what occurs in a Paideia Seminar in Chapter Two suggests that students come out of a Paideia Seminar with modified or solidified synthesis. With the significant changes exhibited by Marcy and Ina in their writing, and the solidification exhibited by Edward, there is evidence that it occurs, to what degree that these behaviors take place must be left to another study.

*Writing and the Paideia Seminar Process*

Richard Vacca (2002) has written extensively about reading in the content area and emphatically purports that talking and writing are language processes that "contribute greatly to reading comprehension of text" (p.197). Administrators, teachers, and students seldom see how integral the three processes are. The Paideia Seminar process is one teaching method that attempts to bring the three together. Writing is another place where dialogic discourse takes place (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000). The following is an analysis of the writing components within the observed Seminars, their perceived purposes, and the problems that were observed.

*Pre-Seminar Writing*

The purposes for using entry notes at the outset of a Paideia Seminar are wide ranging. Mr. O'Shay said that he uses them: as a motivator and accountability reminder, because they are graded; as a preparatory list of answers to the questions students are given before the Seminar; as talking points for students when they are involved in a dialogue; to provide a listing of citations required as evidence; and to ensure preparation, which in turn generates participation.

Pre-Seminar essays fulfill all the same purposes, but require a smooth synthesis of analysis and elaboration that notes do not. The drawback in creating an essay before the Seminar is that all the perspectives gained in the Seminar do not play into the essay.

Pre-Seminar writing is what Mr. O'Shay called "setting the table". The students have been involved in personal transactions with the text and write their responses based on their interpretations.

There was one major drawback to this form of writing and that was that students did not value the level of content in the notes because the teacher did not read them when he graded them. The grade was dependent on completion of the work, not how well it had been done. There was a sense that there was no "audience" for this form of writing. It also fostered varying forms of students copying notes from each other.

*In-Seminar Notes*

There seemed to be two purposes for note taking in class. One purpose was to write notes about a response that a student would like to make to another student. This was done because it could be up to five minutes or more before the responder was called on to respond.

The second purpose students had in taking notes was to utilize the notes when a reflective writing assignment was going to be given, and students needed to recall what had been said and by whom.

In-class notes were purely voluntary and not many of the students wrote them.

*Post-Seminar Writing*

The purposes for post-Seminar writing were to reflect on the Seminar informally or write an essay, which usually meant a student was summarizing his final thoughts on an issue based on the perspectives that he, or she, had encountered in the Seminar. In both cases the student could continue the dialogic discourse started in the Seminar. Adler (1984) did not believe that there should be closure to a Seminar so that is not the purpose of this kind of writing.

*Problems*

Much of the writing listed above is of an informal nature. The content is what matters; however, when formal essays are written, the informality of writing mechanics should give way to higher standards. In the essays that I was privileged to read, the content was all that mattered. It would seem that students who were planning to go off to college in the fall would be held to writing standards expected of them in English classes.

In conjunction with this problem, came what appeared to be, a lack of clear expectations, parameters, or rubrics for all writing. Some of the writing was barely legible, while other pieces of the same assignment were typed and well written.

Finally, and most importantly, some of the students do not exhibit an understanding of the continued dialogic process that post-Seminar writing affords. Their writing prompts indicated that they feel that when the Seminar is done, thinking and

further writing are “overkill”. Perhaps explicit explanation of the process would benefit student understanding.

### *Summary on Writing and Evidence of Modified or Solidified Synthesis*

There is some evidence of modified or solidified synthesis of text in the student writing. There is also evidence of how this occurs. The pre-Seminar writing chronicles the early transaction with the text, the in-class notes assist the memory of what is occurring during the dialogue, and the post-Seminar writing extends the dialogue. Perhaps the most important finding from this analysis is the need for students to see writing as a part of the dialogic process. They see it more as an add-on.

Secondary findings include the need for valuing pre-Seminar writing and for clear and explicit writing expectations and standards.

Writing and high-level reading comprehension are integrally linked and this analysis demonstrates that it can extend both the intrapersonal and interpersonal dialogue.

## Grand Synthesis of Analysis and Discussion

The analyses and discussion related in this chapter suggest that higher-level comprehension of text can be elicited from, and embedded in, the dialogic discussion process of the Paideia Seminar. Utilizing nine data sources, manual coding, coding with NVivio 7 software, and multiple matrices the following major findings emerged.

### *Participants Perceived that the Paideia Seminar’s Dialogic Process Influences Thinking About Text*

Five data sources demonstrated a consensus that participants perceived the purpose of the Paideia Seminar’s dialogic process as: discussion of a complex text related to controversial issues; growing in understanding of the text as the interpretations and

perspectives of others are explained and discussed; the application of critical thinking skills to the text and the interpretations of others; and the co-construction of a more complex view of the issues raised in the text.

The participants identified several key components in achieving the purposes. They include: reading an ambiguous text closely with engaging, open-ended questions before the Seminar; a discussion that is dominated by students using critical thinking skills, listening actively, and being open-minded; making connections between prior knowledge and new knowledge; and utilizing pairs and questioning of each other to stimulate effective dialogue.

Participants reported that the Paideia Seminar motivated the effort and work of higher-level thinking because the issues were controversial and relevant. The episodic nature of the discussion and the defense of an argument with evidence challenged and interested the students. The questions, which "set the table" for the Seminar, were the responsibility of the teacher and also acted as motivators.

The teacher and the students clearly perceived that students influenced other students about the comprehended text through the use of the Paideia Seminar process.

*The Evidence of Higher-Level Thinking Skills throughout the Paideia Seminar Process*

The data from six data sources converged to suggest that in two of the three Paideia Seminars that were observed, higher-level thinking was judiciously applied to text. Several necessary mediators for higher-level thinking were identified.

*Questions*

The first important contributor to the Paideia Seminar process was the creation and assignment of higher-level questions well before the Seminar. Students utilized

analysis and elaboration during the Seminars because the questions were written to elicit them. Research corroborates that students usually do not spontaneously volunteer higher-level responses if teachers do not require them (Gallimore & Tharp, 1990). The questions acted as a frame or scaffold for student reading. They assisted students rather than evaluated them; they allowed risk taking because they were open-ended; they were sequenced to lead students through the thinking process; and they were sometimes personalized to engage students in relevant applications to issues ( Almasi, 2002; Beyer; 1997; Gallimore & Tharp, 1990; Roberts & Billings, 1999).

*Planning*

The second mediating factor was planning. This research indicated that the Paideia Seminar process is only as good as its full application. When students do not start with a complex text reading and questions, the discussion may well degenerate into didactic teaching and coaching. The process worked well on two occasions because the process was followed completely.

Billings and Fitzgerald (2002) observed Seminars where student talk was equaled by teacher talk, and suggested that it was related to the need for more training and experience for the teacher, lack of collegial support, and the attention given to content coverage issues(pp. 935, 936). During this research, the contrast of the one ineffective Seminar to the two that were effective, pointed to somewhat different conclusions than that of Billings and Fitzgerald (2002). The ineffective Seminar was a Seminar where covering the content was paramount, but it was the disuse or misuse of the Seminar process due to factors in the setting that created the problem. This highlights the importance of following the sequential process outlined by Roberts and Billings (1999).

Leaving out any part of the process, can move a dialogic discussion with higher-level thinking to an IRE sequence, where the teacher questions for evaluation purposes, and the students respond with either right or wrong answers. Researchers Alverman, O'Brien, and Dillon (1990), Applebee (1996), Nystrand (1997), Nystrand and Gamoran (1991), and Wells (1999) (2000), all assert that real dialogic discourse seldom occurs and that IRE sequences, or recitation occur instead. This research indicates that one of the keys to keeping a Paideia Seminar dialogic and thought provoking is to follow all of the tenets of the process.

*Motivation*

The data indicated that motivation was both intrinsic and extrinsic and was significant in encouraging students to use higher-level thinking skills. The ambiguous text, the stimulating questions, peer debate with evidence, and relevant content were all intrinsically motivating. Grading was extrinsic. In two of the Seminars all of these motivators were present.

*Dialogue*

Gordon Wells (2000) wrote that dialogue "is a form of collaborative meaning-making in which both individual and collective understandings are enhanced through the successive contributions of others and oriented to their further responses" (p.58). The simplicity of this statement masks the complexity of its application. One of the major difficulties in creating dialogue documented in research is that students lack the skills of talking with each other collaboratively for the purpose of "meaning-making." In research conducted by Berne and Clark (2006), the authors identify the essential differentiator between students that engage in sequenced monologues and those who truly collaborate

in “connected conversation” (p. 685) as knowing how to participate in dialogue. Berne and Clark found that “students need to be taught how to engage in dialogue with one another about text, so they know how to contribute” (p.685). Those who are not taught the skills of dialogue lack the ability to interact effectively with each other.

Three key observed occurrences and an explanation in an interview with Mr. O’Shay demonstrate that he knows and applies the teaching of the skills of dialogue.

First, during observed Paideia Seminars, he reiterated multiple times that the students needed to question each others premises, one time stopping to ask them to write their questions down. Many of the most far reaching dialogues occurred after such a directive. Other times Mr. O’Shay would remind students of the need to cite evidence, demonstrating that dialogue is not so much about opinions as it is about interpretations of text. He was intentional about students talking to students, and reminded them of the key attributes of dialogic discussion in embedded experiences.

Second, Mr. O’Shay stayed out of the conversation. He facilitated and clarified, but when the students had read the text, he marginalized his importance and became the “traffic cop.”

Third, Mr. O’Shay moved students from micro-conversations to macro-conversations, something that is unique to his particular style of conducting Paideia Seminars. It is very much like McTighe and Lyman’s (1988) Think, Pair, Share (Vacca & Vacca, 2005, p.328). Students came to class having thought about the Paideia Seminar questions, were paired up to talk about their answers, and then shared some of these thoughts when the Paideia Seminar was under way. Mr. O’Shay interspersed these “pairings” throughout the Seminar. The observed results were beneficial to individuals

and to the Seminar. Students who might have been passive and non-participatory became engaged in conversation, students tried out new ideas and vocabulary in the safe environment of one person, questions and answers were clarified and modified, students were individually accountable for preparation, and students were exposed to multiple perspectives. Whenever Mr. O'Shay applied this strategy to the Seminar, whether at the beginning, middle, or end, students came to the larger dialogue enriched by the personal dialogue.

Finally, Mr. O'Shay's interview indicated that his practice of teaching and practicing higher-level thinking skills through a dialogic structure was intentional. Content area teachers are often uncomfortable with teaching literacy skills when there is pressure to cover the content (Alvermann, O'Brien & Dillon, 1990; Nystrand & Gameron, 1997). Mr. O'Shay was not. He made the choice to value the teaching of student dialogue and critical thinking processes, along with the content.

*Creating an Environment of Personal Responsibility and Open-Mindedness*

The final mediating factors are environmental, but their inclusion must be intentional. One of the surprises, which changed my hypothetical model, is Mr. O'Shay's insistence that students provide their own background information. He said that at this stage in students' learning, they must know how to research and access information on their own. He felt that providing students with contextual information took too much time from the Seminar, and that it was important for students to take personal responsibility and "grapple" with finding the information themselves. This is a different stance from that taken by The National Paideia Center (2002) in its manual entitled, *The Paideia Seminar: Active Thinking through Dialogue in the Secondary Grades*. They promote

giving contextual information to students before a Paideia Seminar. It seems logical that teachers would make this decision reliant on their personal knowledge of their students' needs and abilities.

The second environmental component was the ethos of open-mindedness. The teacher set the stage with explicit, modeled, and practiced instruction on what would occur and why. Over the course of the year, students learned how to analyze and elaborate about text in the safety of a classroom where there were no right answers in a Seminar, and where evidence was valued above opinion. The questions, the intentional skill instruction, and the embedded skill practice provided students with a sense that multiple perspectives were valued, and growth in understanding occurred as a result.

*Observable Modification and Solidification in Student Comprehension As Viewed through Student Writing*

The twenty-one pieces of written work submitted by five student informants demonstrated solidification and modification of issues related to read text. Given the small sample, examples were not overwhelming, but they were illuminating.

First, when students wrote after a Seminar they identified arguments that swayed their opinions; they were not generalizations, but specific words from an individual participant. This also indicated that students were listening actively, in that they could identify who had said what.

Secondly, when a person solidified a stance on an issue, the students who were refuted were named and rebutted with evidence held by the writer. The dialogue continued. Use of analysis and elaboration continued as well. The students continued the oral dialogue on and moved it into written form (Lee & Smagorinsky, 2000), but they

seemed unaware of the importance of continuing the dialogue in answers supplied from the writing prompts. As with promoting open-mindedness through explicit explanation, it would seem that the promotion of writing as continuing dialogue may assist students in valuing its importance in learning.

Pre-Seminar writing provided insights into how students had transacted with text initially, in-class notes highlighted what students felt they needed to remember, and post-Seminar writing allowed the reader to understand how and why students processed the Seminar the way they did. Post-Seminar writing also demonstrated student reflection on the Seminar.

Gordon Wells (1981) writes that when students are speaking orally they must pay attention to the relationship and nuances that pass between them, which in some small way distracts from the focus on the issue at hand. However, when students write, their sole focus is on meaning (p. 243). Students would do well to understand that both the initial and closing writings prescribed by the Paideia Seminar process allow intrapersonal, focused, high-level thinking related to an interpersonal event that will, or has, provided multiple perspectives for them to analyze and process.

Transformation of learning takes place as reading, speaking, writing, and higher-level thinking are integrated.

# CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The content of this chapter will be composed of: a succinct summary of the key findings, a review of the limitations of this research and its findings, a summarization and explanation of grounded theory that was created and analyzed during the research, a proposal of larger significances of application to the current educational landscape, a consideration of what still needs to be known and researched about the Paideia Seminar process, and finally, a conclusion that distills this research down to a few words from three participants.

## Summary of the Key Findings

The following distills the findings of this research into three categories delineating each of the key findings with brief and specific explanations.

### *Participant Perceptions Related to the Influence of the Paideia Seminar on Thinking about Text*

The participants perceived that the dialogic process of the Paideia Seminar influenced their thinking about text and they believed that an environment of open-

mindedness, personal responsibility, and non-judgment were essential to the success of the Paideia Seminar.

*Evidence that Students Apply Higher-Level Thinking through the Use of the Paideia Seminar*

There was significant evidence that students applied higher-level thinking to text as they processed through the Paideia Seminar. Specific findings that became evident to the application of high-level thinking to text in the Paideia Seminar process are:

- Planning, organizing, communicating and following the tenets of the Paideia Seminar are necessary for optimal learning
- The comprehension elicited by the Paideia Seminar was often aesthetic and episodic in nature, causing implicit motivation and long-term retention of information
- When the Paideia Seminar was implemented appropriately, the teacher was a facilitator of higher-level thinking, not a coach or didactic teacher
- The Paideia Seminar is a teaching method in which teachers can embed reading and thinking strategies; for instance, how to ask questions of peers in a dialogue (or of an author), analysis, and elaboration. Intentional strategy teaching and use can provide transferable skills aside from those expected from particular content area instruction
- Pairing students before and during a Paideia Seminar is a catalyst to the macro-conversation of the Paideia Seminar

- Formulating questions that were open-ended, controversial, analytical, elaborative, and sometimes personally relevant, framed the kind of thinking that took place
- The teacher prepared questions directed students on how and where to pull back the layers of complex text. The sequence in which they were asked were important as well
- Collaborative meaning-making depended on the preparation of the teacher and the students
- Providing background knowledge does not have to be the sole domain of the teacher. Expecting students to research and provide their own background information is a skill that the more mature student should be able to accomplish
- The most powerful and persuasive higher-level thinking answers to questions given during the observed Seminars were composed of an analytical foundation connected to an elaborative or generative evolvement of an idea or concept related to the analysis. The two wedded types of thinking were more potent together than when they stood alone.

*Student Writing and Evidence of Changed Comprehension*

Student writing indicated that students either modified or solidified their comprehension of text as they processed through the Paideia Seminar; however, their understanding of the importance of writing as a part of that process was not clear. It did not appear that students had been explicitly taught that writing is an extension of dialogic discourse. Because writing assignments were inconsistent (informal and formal) and expectations were sometimes unclear, the caliber of writing suffered. Students did not

value writing as much as the oral dialogue. Perhaps embedded and standardized strategies in writing might be as helpful as those already in place with the higher-level reading comprehension strategies.

## Limitations of the Research

This research and its conclusions are bounded by time, sample size, and location. Coming to an understanding about the Paideia Seminar's influence on higher-level reading comprehension occurred in one teacher's AP American History class at the end of the students' senior year, over the course of five class periods; therefore, there is no claim that the findings are in any way externally generalizable. They are, however, "internally" generalizable. Maxwell (1996) defines this as generalizability within the setting. Within the setting for this research there was no "selectivity" that would have jeopardized the representational honesty of the research, (p. 97) and with qualitative research, that is a chief concern.

This research is qualitative, and because that is true, "the development of theory that can be extended to other cases is a possibility" (Maxwell, 1996, p.97). The hypothetical model in this chapter is an encapsulation of this type of theory and will be explained in the next section.

The goal of this research was to explore and understand the Paideia Seminar process as it impacts higher-level reading comprehension in one classroom, during one short period of time. It purports to do nothing more.

## Back to the Hypothetical Model

Chapter Two's review of the literature was organized around a hypothetical model represented in Figure 2. Having completed the data analysis and having discussed

the findings, a second look at the model will serve as a culminating synthesis of how the actualities of the research modified and solidified the theory represented by the model.

In Figure 4 the top circle of the model represents the individual student who is preparing for participation in a Paideia Seminar. The student starts the process with a personal schema developed over a lifetime, reading abilities, and a personal lens through which text will be interpreted. The arrows pointing from the right side of the page indicate that the student will be assigned open-ended questions, read a complex and ambiguous text, and be given contextual background information. The data I collected of actual Seminars impelled two changes here. First, not only were the questions open-ended, but they were written to scaffold analytical and elaborative thinking about the text. These descriptors need to be added to "open-ended." Second, the participant teacher believed that it was the student's responsibility to research and collect background information about the topics under discussion, so this component needed to be moved into the circle representing the student.

Nothing on the left side of the figure needs to change. The students were expected to personally construct knowledge as they read, completing a transaction with the author.

The next two additions occur before the recursive movement of the Seminar begins. First, students are expected to synthesize, analyze, and elaborate about their transaction with the book in either informal entry notes or formal essays. This writing demonstrates the transaction, interpretation, and evidence that students bring to the Seminar. Second, upon arriving to class on the day of the Seminar, students are always required to pair up and converse about the issues privately, before bringing their thoughts to the whole group. The micro-conversation precedes the macro-conversation.

Along the right side of the five circles that represent the dialogue, an addition of a long rectangle with the words “Embedded Skills Practice” appears. The dialogic process did not occur without assistance. Students were encouraged to question each other, present evidence, clarify, and talk to each other, rather than the teacher. This form of structured practice did much to strengthen the interpersonal discourse that took place.

Another addition is an arrow pointing into the Seminar from the right with the word, “Pairing.” Pairing students up to talk occurred frequently throughout the Seminar. It allowed students to clarify, reenergize, or speak freely when many hands had been raised and not all speakers could be heard. Its multiple uses made it a key component during the Seminars.

At the bottom of the figure is a shaded circle which depicts the individual student who has participated in all of the higher-level thinking represented above it. The model assumes that a modified or solidified synthesis of the text would be the end result, and this research affirms that. The arrow pointing to the right suggests that written synthesis would be a result. This has been changed to reflect that written dialogic discourse continues, as oral discourse gives way to written discourse. The writing is both formal and informal, and reflects the analysis and elaboration that took place in the Seminar.

The theoretical sequence suggested on the left side of the figure was affirmed and remains the same. As Gordon Wells (1992) observed, the transformation of ideas occurs through an interaction with others in dialogue, and the actuality of its occurrence was confirmed through this research.

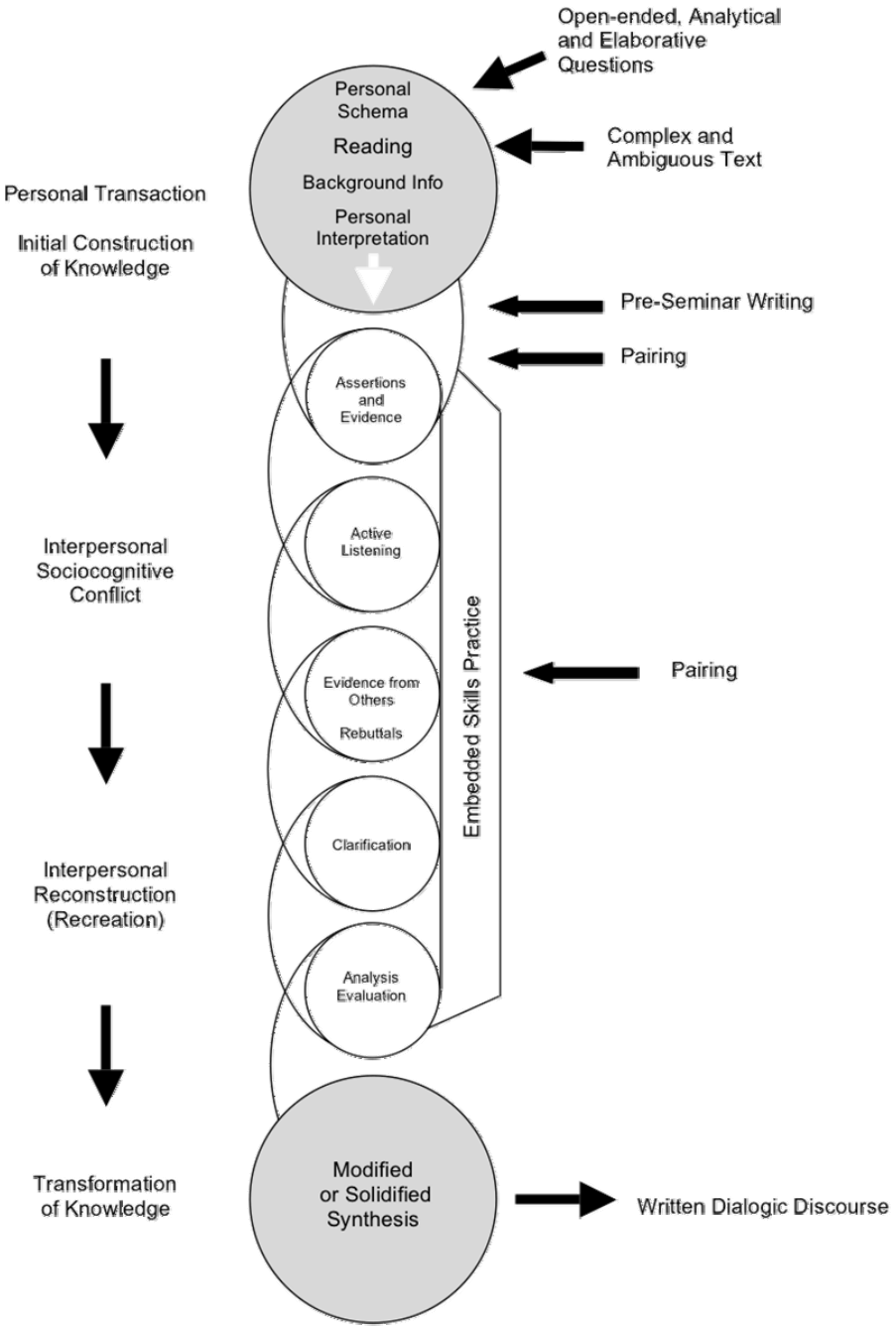


FIGURE 4
REVISED THEORETICAL MODEL BASED ON RESEARCH FINDINGS

## Significance and Application

In 2006, the America College Testing Program, (ACT) created an executive summary about the reading proficiency of graduating seniors. It revealed that according to their 2005 testing statistics, “only 51 percent of high school graduates are ready for college-level reading.” It went on to say that “the clearest differentiator in reading between students who are college ready and students who are not is the ability to comprehend complex texts” (p. 2). It defined complex text as “a text that contains multiple layers of meaning… that requires the unlocking of meaning by calling upon sophisticated reading comprehension skills and strategies” (p. 7). They recommend that high schools assign more complex texts, require teachers to teach critical reading strategies in all classes, and “disseminate best practices that achieve results in this area of reading” (pgs. 8 & 9).

Clearly, ACT has demonstrated that current students are floundering when it comes to college-level, or complex reading requirements. As students spend time preparing for standardized content area tests, which depend largely on literal reading, teachers indicate they have less and less time to focus on higher-level reading and thinking skills. Of the 49 states with state standards, not one of them defines or explains complex reading as a requirement (ACT, p.7). The lack of emphasis on secondary higher-level reading comprehension is starting to get some attention.

In addition to the clear need for higher-level reading comprehension skills, current research indicates that comprehension is best taught when it is embedded in, integrated with, and motivated by “authentic texts” ( Langer, 2000 & Nist & Simpson,

2000). Explicit instruction within a context of meaningful learning far exceeds the purely didactic approach of comprehension skills training.

These three pieces of relevant research lead to an assertion that relates to both the significance and the application of this research. In this one research setting at Harrison High School a theory that I hypothesized about in the proposal was validated. It suggests that higher-level reading comprehension and thinking provided for in a Paideia Seminar's recursive and dialogic process can modify or solidify a student's synthesis of the text. The research also revealed that the Paideia Seminar can become a natural and motivating environment for embedded complex reading skills practice. In both the oral and written dialogue, students demonstrated proficiency with analysis, elaboration, and a combined use of the two skills. Additionally, reading, speaking, thinking at higher-levels, and writing were integrated in this one process.

As districts and teachers become more aware of the dearth of complex reading skills and opportunities for students to participate in, this research demonstrates that one teaching strategy that facilitates, scaffolds, and encourages complex reading skills is the Paideia Seminar. It also demonstrates what occurs when the process fails and why that failure may occur.

As schools search for effective strategies to meet both the standards based and socially interactive requirements of a stimulating learning experience, this research indicates that it is possible to utilize the Paideia Seminar to foster complex reading skills and the study of content in depth.

## Implications for Further Research

The value of dialogic discussion is not disputed, but research indicates that teachers do not use it. The four reasons that teachers gave for its exclusion were: they do not know how to conduct a dialogue; it changes the power structure in the class; it takes away from covering the content; and complex texts would need to be added to the textbooks already in use (Almasi, 2002; Alvermann, O'Brien & Dillon, 1990; Adler et al, 2004; Nystrand & Gameron 1997). An area of research that would be beneficial in addressing this problem is discovering professional development, training, university courses, or books that would successfully meet the teachers concerns and then observe how the interventions play out in the classroom.

Another important area of research related to the Paideia Seminar is whether its use improves measurable achievement in reading comprehension, writing, or thinking skills. The ACT research could be a springboard for researching the Paideia Seminar's impact on complex reading skills.

This research was conducted in an AP History class. It would be important to know if higher-level thinking could be encouraged and observed in lower level classes where students struggle with basic reading skills.

There are many schools where Paideia Seminars are instituted in second grade, and are utilized all the way through high school. It would be interesting to know how the students in these schools fare in complex reading comprehension achievement as compared to schools where the Paideia Seminar is not utilized.

The importance of well crafted questions in eliciting higher-level thinking became apparent through this research. Knowing how teachers create questions that motivate and cause their students to analyze and elaborate proficiently would be helpful to all educators.

The integration of writing in the Paideia Seminar is a powerful piece of the process. It is an integral part of the dialogic discourse. Observing how teachers use the writing component of the Paideia Seminar effectively could encourage teachers who struggle with this piece of the Seminar. Analyzing expectations, parameters, and motivators that work well, could guide teachers and students as they write.

Finally, as national reading experts become aware of the need for reading instruction to take place in secondary schools, it would be beneficial to know what kinds of explicit and embedded teaching strategies will assist students to become competent and independent higher-level thinkers, and if the Paideia Seminar could be one tool among many, that might meet this need.

## Conclusion

This case study has allowed me to explore and understand how the Paideia Seminar impacts student reading comprehension and thinking. These concluding words are an appropriate mix of my words and those of two participants. The participant teacher and one student summarize the Paideia Seminar's value to higher-level reading and thinking, and I will conclude with the overarching "understanding" that I have reached in conducting this research.

The teacher said:

> My rationale [for using the Paideia Seminar] is that I want the students to

> grapple with issues, and I want them to remember the information. I want them to think deeply. It comes down to whether you want the students to work with, and remember the philosophical, or the pedestrian.
>
> A complex view of a topic is generated with other students. The goal is to get students to have their thinking closer to reality. The world is a complex and complicated place. Having students develop multiple perspectives adds complexity. We need to make our stereotypes more sophisticated. Our brains push us to oversimplify, to bring closure. This is not good. The Paideia Seminar…applies critical thinking to [students'] reading …[and] provides complexity.

When students wrote their answers to the writing prompts one student wrote:

> A Seminar forces students to develop ideas, and adapt to *evolving* ideas, rather than just reiterating ideas created and developed by others.

This research has demonstrated that transformation of complex, comprehended text can be achieved through the intentional use of higher-level thinking strategies by students whose purpose is to co-construct knowledge by actively listening and questioning multiple interpretations of the text through the dialogic process of the Paideia Seminar.

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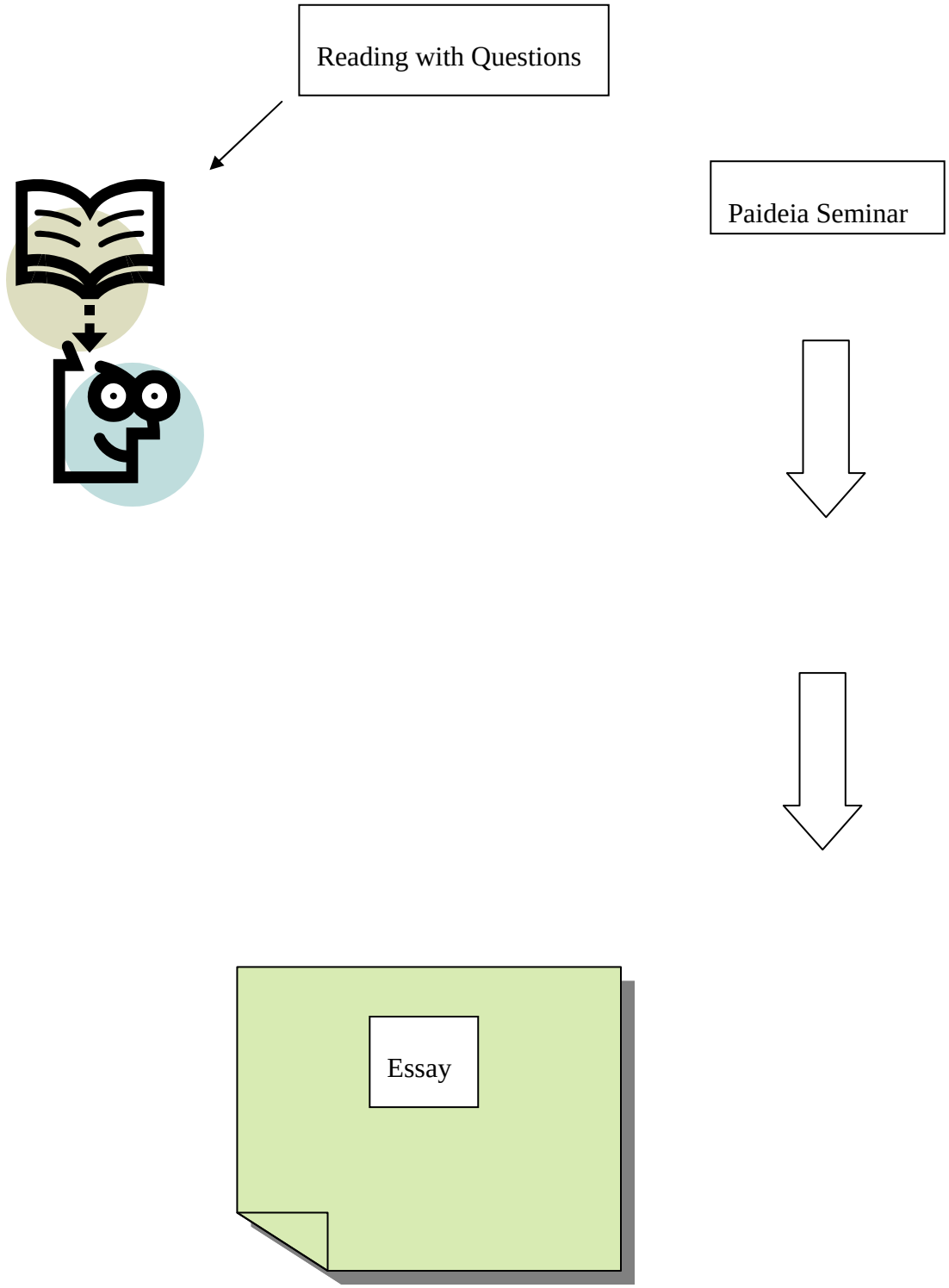
# APPENDIX A

## DRAWING PROMPT



# APPENDIX B

## TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Background

1. How were you first introduced to the Paideia Seminar and what convinced you of the efficacy of this methodology?
2. How do you explain the Paideia Seminar process and rationale to your students the first time you introduce it to them?

### Questions Related to the Paideia Seminar and Reading Comprehension

3. How do you choose the texts for students to read in preparation for the Paideia Seminar? What genres do you use?
4. What is your rationale or thinking process when you are creating the questions for the Paideia Seminar?
5. How do you establish the context or background information on the topic that the students will be discussing during the Paideia Seminar?
6. Do you think it is essential for the students to have the Seminar questions before the Seminar takes place? Why or why not?
7. How important is it to have students write “entry notes” before coming to the Seminar?
8. What is your role, or roles from the very beginning to the end of the Paideia Seminar process?
9. What types of critical thinking strategies do you like to see the students use during the Paideia Seminar?

10. What do you think are the *essential* components of a successful Paideia Seminar?
11. If you were to visualize what happens between your students initial reading of the text with questions, and the writing of the final essay – what do you see happening in between?
12. What is the purpose of assigning an essay at the end of a Paideia Seminar?
13. Aside from the content you are discussing, what other learning might be going on for the students as they process through the Paideia Seminar?

**Conclusion**

14. You know that I am interested in what impact the Paideia Seminar might have on reading comprehension. In your twenty years of experience with the Paideia Seminar, what impact, if any, have you observed?

# APPENDIX C

## CONTINUA RELATED TO STUDENT WRITING PROMPTS

1. When you know that your assigned reading is a part of a Paideia Seminar, does it change how you read or how you feel about reading it?

| Student | + | - |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Questions focus me. I think of points to say. | |
| 2. | It interests me with the topic. | |
| 3. | | My reading is good anyway. I pay more attention to detail. |
| 4. | I take better notes for evidence. | |
| 5. | | Not at all. |
| 6. | | My reading is good anyway. |
| 7. | Motivates careful reading. | |
| 8. | | My reading is good anyway. |
| 9. | It forces synthesis. | |
| 10. | I'm more careful in finding discussion points. | |
| 11. | Similar to writing an essay. | |
| 12. | More aware of important facts for argument. | |

2. Mr. O'Shay gives you the Paideia Seminar questions a day or two before the discussion, does that make a difference compared to a situation where the teacher gives you the questions the day of the discussion?

| Student | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Better preparation | |
| 2. | Think while reading. | |
| 3. | Better preparation andquality answers. | |
| 4. | Preparation | |
| 5. | Can find evidence. | |
| 6. | Think ahead. | |
| 7. | Allows evidence gathering. | |
| 8. | Can formulate strong arguments. | |
| 9. | | No, I don't do it anyway. |
| 10. | | When I have time to do it, it helps to take a second look. |
| 11. | More thorough and deep thinking. | |
| 12. | Time to reflect before discussion. | |

3.What do you think is the essential purpose of utilizing a Paideia Seminar?

| Student | Higher-level Thinking | Coverage Of Curriculum |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | To get other perspectives and compare | |
| 2. | Gain deeper understanding | |
| 3. | Share ideas and possibly change views | |
| 4. | Take others' views into account | |
| 5. | Exchange and development of ideas and knowledge | |
| 6. | Hear others' opinions from other backgrounds and ideas | |
| 7. | Reinforces concepts and assists connection of ideas and opinions | |
| 8. | Voice perspectives, develops arguing skills and listen to other viewpoints | |
| 9. | | For the teacher to discern who did the reading |
| 10. | Form opinions well and think for themselves | |
| 11. | Learn material, think independently and analyze critically | |
| 12. | Process, reflect, debate, and share various viewpoints for further understanding | |

4. What do you think you gain by being involved in a Paideia Seminar?

| Student | + | - |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Others' perspectives and possible change | |
| 2. | Others' perspectives | |
| 3. | Exposure to others' ideas and time to rethink | |
| 4. | Wider knowledge | |
| 5. | Opposing viewpoints not thought of before | |
| 6. | Different perspectives | |
| 7. | Synthesis of ideas and perspectives | |
| 8. | Other's perspectives and my debating skills | |

| Student | + | - |
|---|---|---|
| 9. | Knowledge and others' insights into the reading | |
| 10. | Sharpening ability to think and argue, learning from others | |
| 11. | Analytical skills and knowledge | |
| 12. | Ability to debate and defend ideas and change viewpoints when listening to others | |

5. You are often encouraged to bring entry notes to the Paideia Seminar, and more times than not, you are assigned an essay at the end of the Seminar. Do you think these writing assignments are important to the process? Why or why not?

| Student | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Organizes your ideas, can see a change of opinion | |
| 2. | | Not necessary, it slows things down |
| 3. | Clearly articulates changes in thinking | |
| 4. | | No, discussion is enough |
| 5. | | Don't need notes, essays should come at beginning when students are more diverse in their opinions |
| 6. | Tedious, but they do help | |
| 7. | | People spit back exactly what has been said |
| 8. | Entry notes help, essays don't | |
| 9. | | Frustrating – don't want to revisit after a discussion |
| 10. | My learning style depends on writing, not everybody's does | |
| 11. | Annoying, but necessary for depth of thinking and taking a stand | |

| Student | Yes | No |
|---|---|---|
| 12. | Forces student to expand upon and support points with detail | |

6. If you had to choose one adjective to describe the Paideia Seminar, what would it be and why would you choose it?

| Student | + | - |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | Useful (enhances viewpoint) | |
| 2. | Stimulating (interactive) | |
| 3. | - | |
| 4. | Interesting | |
| 5. | Interesting (new ideas and arguing) | |
| 6. | New perspectives (learn from others) | |
| 7. | | Easy, there is no wrong answer |
| 8. | Engaging (debating and active) | |
| 9. | | Misguided, students talk off the cuff |
| 10. | Involved (requires total attention, it shifts quickly) | |
| 11. | Interesting (can voice an opinion) | |
| 12. | Challenging (one's viewpoint) | |

7. Mr. O'Shay often reiterates that you have to have evidence for an assertion. When you come to the Paideia Seminar with evidence from the texts, do you ever change your asserted position?

| Student | Yes | | | No |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | Yes | | | |
| 2. | | | Rarely | |
| 3. | - | | | |
| 4. | | | | Not really |
| 5. | | Sometimes | | |
| 6. | Yes | | | |
| 7. | Yes | | | |
| 8. | Yes | | | |
| 9. | Sure | | | |
| 10. | Definitely | | | |
| 11. | All the time | | | |
| 12. | Absolutely | | | |

8.You do a lot of listening, recitation, reading and writing in school. How does having a formal discussion like the Paideia Seminar fit into the equation? Wouldn't it be more productive use of time to be having a lecture or reading or writing?

| Student | + | - |
|---|---|---|
| 1. | More productive | |
| 2. | | Lectures have more density |
| 3. | - | |
| 4. | Skills are pertinent to life | |
| 5. | Forces evolvement of ideas, not reiteration of ideas | |
| 6. | Teaches you to voice your opinion coherently – a real world value | |
| 7. | Provides context and connection about information, not just spitting out facts | |
| 8. | Variety – learning from others and evaluating their ideas | |
| 9. | Diverse exercise in learning | |
| 10. | One level above the others – building an argument quickly | |
| 11. | Thinking and retaining better – issues and subjects I will remember the rest of my life | |
| 12. | Students define viewpoints defining and adding to their thoughts and ideas | |

# BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF AUTHOR

Donna J. Robinson began her education in South Paris, Maine and graduated from Oxford Hills Regional High School in 1966. Four years later, she graduated from Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts with a Bachelor of Arts in History and a minor in Secondary Education.

In 1984 Donna started her teaching career in the area of special education and became the program director in a private school. In 1991 she graduated with highest honors from Salem State College with a Masters of Education in Reading. She was inducted into Phi Kappa Phi.

From 1993 to 1995 Donna continued her education at Salem State College completing a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study in Innovative Practices in Education, again graduating with highest honors. At about the same time she started teaching Middle School Language Arts and became a Middle School Team Leader. She also became an adjunct professor in Gordon College's Graduate School of Education.

In 1998, Donna started her career as an assistant professor in the Education Department of Gordon College in Wenham, Massachusetts. For five years she was the Chair of Middle and Secondary Education.

Her publications include articles in *The Journal of the New England League of Middle Schools* and the National Council of Teachers of English, *English Journal*.

In her eighth year at Gordon College she is presently teaching both graduate and undergraduate education courses, with emphases on reading in the content areas and middle and secondary education methods.