

Socratic

Seminars



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The Vision

- Socrates believed that enabling students to *think for themselves* was more important than filling their heads with *“right answers.”*



The Vision

- Participants seek **deeper understanding** of complex ideas through rigorously thoughtful **dialogue**, rather than by memorizing bits of information.



What are Socratic Seminars?

- **Highly motivating** form of intellectual and scholarly discourse.



What are Socratic Seminars?

- Usually range from 30-50 minutes
 - An effective Socratic Seminar creates **dialogue** as opposed to debate.



Starting Dialogue

- **Asking questions** is the key!
- A leader prompts the use of dialogue
 - Participants learn to be less attached to their ideas and less reliant on persuasion for influencing opinions.
- Dialogue is a skill of collaboration that enables groups to **create collective thinking.**



Starting Dialogue

- **Students** must risk making mistakes in order to learn how to learn to think critically, and work collaboratively.
- **Teachers** support this risk-taking when they take their own risks in learning how to improve themselves as teachers.



Dialogue is NOT Debate!



Debate

- Is **oppositional**
- One listens to **counter arguments.**
- **Affirms** participant's points of view.
- **Defends** assumptions as truth
- **Creates a close-minded attitude**

Dialogue

- Is **collaborative**
- One listens to find **common ground**
- **Enlarges** points of view
- **Reveals** assumptions for **re-evaluation**
- **Creates an open-minded attitude**

The Question

- An opening question **has no right answer**
 - *It reflects a genuine curiosity on the part of the leader.*

Should human embryos be cloned in order to save lives?



The Leader

- Helps participants **clarify** their positions when arguments become confused
- Involves **reluctant participants** while restraining their more vocal peers



Designing the Best

- At the end of a successful Socratic Seminar, participants often **leave with more questions** than they brought with them.



Benefits include:

- Time to engage in **in-depth** discussions, problem solving, and clarification of ideas
- Building a strong, **collaborative** work culture
- **Enhanced knowledge** and research base
- **Increased success** for all students
- Teaching **respect** for diverse ideas, people, and practices
- Creating a **positive learning environment** for all students



Conducting a “Fishbowl”

- A strategy to use when you have a **LARGE class** (over 25 students)
- Divide the class into “**Inner**” and “**Outer**” circles



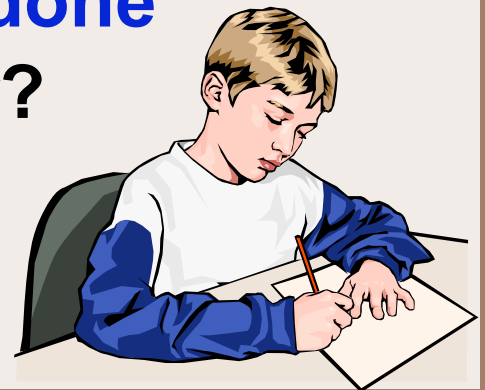
Conducting a “Fishbowl”

- **Inner circle** = active participants
- **Outer circle** = students observe 2-3 active participants for:
 - New ideas
 - Question asked
 - Referred to text
 - Positive comments
 - Negative Behavior
 - Side conversations



Observer Write-up

- What was the **most interesting question**?
- What was the **most interesting idea** to come from a participant?
- What was the **best thing** you observed?
- What was the **most troubling thing** you observed?
- What do you think should be **done differently** in the next seminar?
- What do you **wish** you had said?



Guidelines for Questioning

- Ask hypothetical questions
- Ask questions with no right or wrong answers
- Continue to ask “why?”
 - Probe the responses of the participants with further questioning
- Allow yourself to both guide the discussion but to go with it as well



Example Questions

- *By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?*
- *What would you say to someone who said ___?*
- *Are the reasons adequate? Why?*
- *What led you to that belief?*
- *How does that apply to this case?*
- *What would change your mind?*
- *Who is in the position to know if that is so?*
- *Why did you say “they?”*
- *What view would be in opposition to what you are saying?*



Tips for Teachers

- **Review & post rules**
 - Listen carefully
 - Speak clearly - one person at a time
 - Participate openly
 - Value others opinions, but refer to text when defending your position
 - Avoid side conversations
 - Give others your respect - accept answers without judgement



Designed by

The AVID Team

