

REFLECTIVE STATEMENT: SOCRATIC SEMINAR LESSON PLAN

SLO 1: Demonstrate advanced understanding of the trends, issues, and research associated with education in general and with their respective specialization.

Relevance

To demonstrate my competence with SLO 1, I designed a lesson plan using the Socratic Seminar model. This model supports real-life applications and collaboration, which the New Learning Sciences and P21 Framework identify as crucial to academic and future success. Media literacy, another skill accruing importance in the 21st century, is also an integral element of Socratic Seminars, as students can read and interpret a variety of media in a given lesson. This particular lesson asks them to watch and listen to a text-based online video, and then to reread the full text in order to make annotations and inquiries. Through this lesson, students are engaging in activities that are conducive to the development of 21st century academic skills and to meaningful learning.

In this particular lesson, students study and discuss the Greek myth of Daedalus and Icarus, debating the nature of risk and responsibility and evaluating the decisions and outcomes affecting the characters. Higher-order thinking skills are paramount to student achievement in this lesson, and the subject matter is relevant to 21st century skills. Risk-taking is crucial for success in most fields, and the ability to evaluate risk is a critical skill for people of all ages. Furthermore, the ability to take responsibility for one's learning is vital as teachers are now assuming the role of facilitator with greater frequency. Understanding and discussing responsibility, therefore, will encourage students to consider their own responsibilities as learners in the 21st century.

Significance

The Socratic Seminar model facilitates social knowledge construction and links students' prior knowledge with the lesson content. By supervising and loosely guiding the discussion, the teacher enables students to achieve deeper understanding through active listening, thoughtful dialogue, and reflective thought. This represents a valuable learning experience for teachers and students alike; teachers can observe the value of letting students learn through articulation, and students can gain appreciation for listening and calmly managing disagreements. 21st century learning places tremendous value on understanding and evaluating multiple perspectives, and does the same for achieving deep understanding through inquiry and collaboration. Therefore, this lesson model facilitates growth for educators and learners in their pursuit of modern academic success.

The test-taking skill most clearly addressed in this lesson is "inferential comprehension, which is the ability to reason beyond the information given in the item itself" (Estes, Mintz, & Gunter, 2011, p. 16). By the end of this lesson, students will have spent much time analyzing the text of the story and discussing its apparent themes and lessons. But they also will have spent significant time making inferences and applications beyond the text. Rather than simply focusing on the details and events of the story – elements that reside at the knowledge and comprehension level of thinking – students will discuss questions that allow them to link the content to real life and to make meaningful generalizations.

In order for the Socratic Seminar model to be effective, students will need to have practiced analyzing texts, discovering themes, and making generalizations. If these skills are taught near the beginning of the year, or have already been learned in previous years, then the model can be explained and used at any time. I believe this is a model that will improve with practice, and therefore teachers should be encouraged to implement it at the beginning of the

year so as to maximize its effectiveness by the end of the year. Students will also see their listening and speaking skills increase through repetition with this lesson model, which is another reason to train them in it over a longer period of time.

Adaptations/Accommodations for Advanced, ELD and IEP learners:

- **Advanced:** Create a video narrative using Xtranormal or the Tellagami iPad app that shows a conversation, scripted by students, that debates/explains whether or not Daedalus was responsible for Icarus' death. Use **multiple perspectives** to discuss and argue for each side, but use the dialogue to help the characters reach a peaceful agreement.
- **ELD:** Create a video narrative using Xtranormal or the Tellagami iPad app that retells the story of Daedalus and Icarus in your own words, covering the main ideas and important details. At the end, share your interpretation of the moral or lesson of the story.
- **IEP:** Before the Socratic Seminar takes place, provide IEP students with sample questions that are similar, but not identical to, the ones that will be asked during the seminar. This way, they can begin to form their thoughts and practice the higher-level thinking expected of them before they are asked to demonstrate it in front of the class.

Link to Theory

How does this lesson support the social cognitive learning theory?

This Socratic Seminar lesson plan is grounded in the Social Cognitive learning theory, which acknowledges students' need to acquire or discover new knowledge through observation, and then to apply and repeat it in relevant contexts. Essentially, students are the models for each other as the discussion unfolds, though they are also behaving in accordance with the norms established by the teacher. The presentation and discussion of the norms before the seminar begins account for the stages of attention and retention. Repetition occurs as more and more students are given an opportunity to share, and motivation is present in students' desire to be effective participants and to maintain favorable social standing. The teacher is primarily a facilitator, but their leadership will have a significant impact on students' attitudes toward and behaviors during the seminar.

To which Big Ideas can this lesson be linked?

The most obvious link to the Socratic Seminar can be found in Big Idea #8: *Learners benefit from hearing or reading the ideas of others*. In a Socratic Seminar, each student receives an opportunity to speak, but the majority of their energy is spent listening to other students. Through this active listening process, their perspectives may be challenged, expanded, or changed. When any of these happens and misconceptions are consequently clarified, learning has occurred. Because students are indeed active participants in this activity, as opposed to passive receptors of knowledge, Big Idea #1 is also relevant: *Learners do not passively absorb information from the environment; rather, they actively work to make sense of their environment and construct their own, unique understandings of the world*.

How does this lesson connect with the New Learning Sciences?

The Socratic Seminar lesson model gives students an opportunity to engage in a meaningful dialogue that mirrors the real-world collaboration process in which experts participate. When each student has prepared notes and questions and is permitted not only to share them, but also to listen to the thoughts and questions of others, they are practicing a skill used by many in the professional world. Communicative and collaborative skills are considered essential in 21st century, as they permeate most major professions. The New Learning Sciences are clear in stating that deep conceptual understanding is fostered when student activities resemble those done in the real world, and when students can enter into the role of an expert. Articulation is also critical for developing their understanding and the

understanding of those around them, and it is a key component of Socratic Seminars. (Sawyer, 2006)

What curricular or technological resources have been useful in designing this lesson?

The Reading/Language Arts Framework (2007) was useful for choosing a topic, and highlighted the fact that Greek mythology lessons integrate both language arts and social studies. Several websites were available for presenting this story, with each containing a unique version of the text that varied in age appropriateness. Ultimately, I chose the one from E2BN.org because it presented, in my opinion, the best retelling of the story, and paired the text with the most engaging visual media. Finally, the song “Daedalus” by Thrice (2008) is a powerful rock song that tells the myth from Daedalus’ perspective. Students could be asked to analyze the lyrics in terms of their consistency with the other text or for its contribution to the discussion about risk and responsibility.

Resources/Technology

- **Interactive web programs**
 - Xtranormal/Tellagami (advanced learner modification)
 - E2BN.org (video version): <http://myths.e2bn.org/mythsandlegends/story1598-daedalus-and-icarus.html>
- **e-books, pictures, videos etc.**
 - Song to support lesson: “Daedalus” by Thrice (2008)
 - Available on Spotify, iTunes, and YouTube

Professional Actions/Areas for Growth

After exploring the Socratic Seminar model and designing a lesson using it, I believe it can have a tremendous impact on professional development. In the 21st century, teachers are more commonly being asked to step into the role of facilitator so that students can perform more authentic tasks and take responsibility for their own learning. This lesson model provides practice for teachers who hope to improve their ability (or willingness) to step aside so as to grant students more autonomy and responsibility in the classroom. Attempting this lesson model multiple times will undoubtedly yield improvement in the smoothness of its operation, and will encourage students to speak with greater confidence and to listen with greater patience. An expert teacher is one who gives learners access to information and opportunities to practice (Estes, Mintz, & Gunter, 2011, p. 339), and in this way, the Socratic Seminar lesson model helps teachers move from novices to experts.

When I begin teaching sixth-grade English in the Fall, I intend to use the Socratic Seminar model as a way of helping students engage more deeply with literature and with one another. I would like to be able to use it as frequently as once per month, or perhaps once per week if it proves effective. Regardless, I will persist with it as long as students are demonstrating achievement and discovering deeper understanding.