

# Integrating Socratic Seminar with Twitter in Teacher Preparation Courses

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the effectiveness of using Socratic Seminar combined with Twitter Technology in Teacher Preparation Courses to increase the Teacher Candidates' motivation, engagement, and pedagogy in content reading. This research occurs in two different courses in Delta State University's Undergraduate Elementary Education Program located in Cleveland, Mississippi. The instructor did not deliver the instruction through traditional lecture. The instructor uses an engaging teaching strategy called Socratic Seminar integrated with Twitter, a free online news and social networking service. This paper addresses the purposes and educational uses of Socratic Seminar and Twitter as utilized in this study. The researcher uses a Survey Research Design to identify whether students feel that they are more motivated and engaged in class discussion when participating in a Socratic Seminar integrating Twitter and whether this participation increases the Teacher Candidates' pedagogy in content reading. The findings from the analysis of the survey questions show that using Socratic Seminar integrating Twitter does have a positive effect on Teacher Candidates' motivation, engagement, and pedagogy in content reading.

**Key words:** Socratic Seminar, Twitter, motivation, engagement, pedagogy, technology

## 1. Introduction

This paper serves to accomplish two goals. One goal is to demonstrate to the Teacher Candidates a unique, engaging, and motivational teaching technique using Socratic Seminar combined with Twitter Technology (Socratic-Twitter Seminar) that the candidates can utilize in their future classrooms when they become teachers. The idea is to show the Teacher Candidates how effective learning can occur in a student-centered classroom discussion compared to a teacher-centered classroom lecture presentation through actual participation and demonstration. The second goal is to determine if the Teacher Candidates, after participating in the Socratic-Twitter Seminar, feel they are more motivated and engaged in class discussion, and in addition, if this participation increases their content pedagogical knowledge over a traditional lecture format.

## 2. What is Socratic Seminar?

The Socratic Seminar of teaching is based on the way Socrates instructed students in Ancient Greece. All of his students were encouraged and expected to share their thoughts regarding both the written and the spoken word. Socrates' students were provided materials to read, analyze, and evaluate prior to class so they could prepare to

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contribute to the discussion. During the class, Socrates would often remain silent to allow the students to share their knowledge.

Developed from Plato's Socratic Dialogues, the Socratic Seminar of teaching is a student-centered approach that challenges learners to develop their critical thinking skills and engage in analytic discussion (Coffey, n.d.). Tredway (1995) describes the Socratic seminar as "a form of structured discourse about ideas and moral dilemmas" (p. 26). Students are encouraged to make statements or draw conclusions about a topic and then question those statements or conclusions. Students work together in a group to examine the information from all directions and make decisions regarding whether their original ideas and beliefs are accurate. If the ideas and beliefs are not accurate, students use the information to draw new conclusions and test those ideas. Students continue in this manner until they are comfortable with the conclusion. This type of learning environment promotes inquiry, questioning, and critical thinking by bringing the students together to create ideas and solve problems.

According to Tredway (1995), the Socratic Seminar is a 50–80 minute discussion in which 25 or fewer students react to a novel, poem, essay, document, or art reproduction. Fischer (2011) extends the list of resources that instructors can use to generate discussion to include various texts, speeches, literature, experiments, music, and novels. Students engaging in Socratic Seminar generally sit in a circle and do not raise their hands to speak; instead, they make eye contact and observe body language in order to learn the cues for engaging in discussion. The Socratic Seminar can be used at any grade level and with all subject areas, and lessons can be adapted to fit a changing society (Coffey, n.d.).

The Socratic Seminar can effectively be used in classrooms to engage students and promote higher-level critical thinking. The students learn the content in a more meaningful way because they are required to apply their knowledge to a situation and be more active in the learning process. Not only is the method an effective learning tool, but it gives students practice working in groups to solve problems which is a valuable real-life experience. According to Tredway (1995), when Socratic Seminars engage students in active learning, they "develop knowledge, understanding, and ethical attitudes and behaviors, they are more apt to retain these attributes than if they had received them passively" (p. 26).

Socratic Seminars are characterized as a teaching strategy that encourages students to engage in critical thinking, listening, communicating, and wonder which allows students to determine the direction of the classroom discussion (Hertberg, 2006). Teachers serve as facilitators. An atmosphere of intellectual engagement, cooperation, and conversation is essential for students to learn the difference between dialogue and debate (Hertberg, 2006). The goal of the Socratic Seminar is not to simply answer questions, but to generate more questions leading to a boarder, deeper understanding of the learning. Socrates believed in the power of asking questions. He believed that we learned through responding to questions in a social setting. He prized inquiry over information and believed in discussion over debate (Filkins, 2017). Socratic seminars acknowledge the highly social nature of learning and align with the work of John Dewey, Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, and Paulo Freire (Filkins, 2017).

### **3. What is Twitter?**

Twitter is a free online news and social networking service that allows registered members to broadcast short posts called tweets that are restricted to 140 characters. (Rouse, 2015) Registered users can post tweets and follow other users' tweets, but those who are unregistered can only read them. A new user's account is automatically set to public so other users can interact with the tweets. Anyone can follow anyone on public Twitter. However, a

person can set the account to private.

Users access Twitter through its website interface or a mobile device app. Tweets can be sent quickly by cell phone text message, desktop client, or by posting at the Twitter.com website. To intertwine tweets into a conversation thread or connect them to a general topic, members can add hashtags to a keyword in their post (Rouse, 2015). The hashtag is expressed with the # symbol.

## **4. Procedures**

This section describes the activities and routines that are followed to perform the Socratic-Twitter Seminar.

### **4.1 First Things First.**

In order for the Socratic Seminar to be successful, the students need to understand the purpose of the discussion. The goal of the Socratic-Twitter Seminar is to help students gain a deeper understanding of the values, issues, and ideas in the text, and to actively listen, evaluate, and build on each other's comments. Beforehand, students are debriefed on the observation and scoring guides used to monitor appropriate behavior and learning during the seminar. In addition, the instructor assigns the text that will be discussed, and the students read and make annotations in the text. As they read the text, the students generate ten thought-provoking, open-ended discussion questions that can be asked during the seminar.

The instructor divides the class into two groups, an inner circle and an outer circle, and assigns each student a partner. The groups or the instructor may select a leader to keep the seminar moving and on topic. Next, students are taught Twitter knowledge needed for the seminar along with the roles of the instructor, leader, and students. Finally, the guidelines for the inner and outer circles are discussed along with the schedule to be followed.

### **4.2 Twitter Knowledge.**

In order to include Twitter in the seminar the following needs to occur.

- The instructor needs a Twitter account and a classroom hashtag.
- All students need a Twitter account and need to know the importance of the classroom hashtag.
- Students need to understand that tweets cannot be more than 140 characters.
- Students need to understand the expectations of what to tweet and how to tweet.
- Students need to understand the Twitter observation and scoring guides.
- Students need to understand the importance of online etiquette.

### **4.3 Role of the Instructor**

The instructor serves as a facilitator, not as a director. The instructor can pose thought-provoking, open-ended questions, but in this study the Teacher Candidates created the questions. The instructor gives no response, negative or positive, to the students' discussion. The instructor relies on the leader to pose more questions to move discussion from stalemate positions if necessary. The instructor regulates the time and length of the seminar and adjusts the time allotment as needed.

### **4.4 Role of the Leader.**

Each group has a leader which begins the discussion with an opening statement or question or the leader selects someone else to ask the first question. The leader listens carefully to all responses and clears up any confusion that is evident within the discussion. The leader is essential in helping the participants get back on track if they stray from the topic or begin to debate. The leader encourages collaboration so all participants work

together cooperatively. The leader does not dominate the discussion but keeps the conversation moving especially if it comes to a standstill.

#### **4.5 Role of the Students.**

The students prepare for the seminar by reading and annotating the text so they can have an effective discussion. The students pose thought-provoking, open-ended questions for discussion which allows them to direct the flow of the discussion within the seminar. The students determine the meaning of the discussion and construct their own analysis of the seminar by utilizing critical thinking, listening, and communicating skills. The students try to build on or challenge the ideas of others but respect and honor the opinions and voices of all other participants.

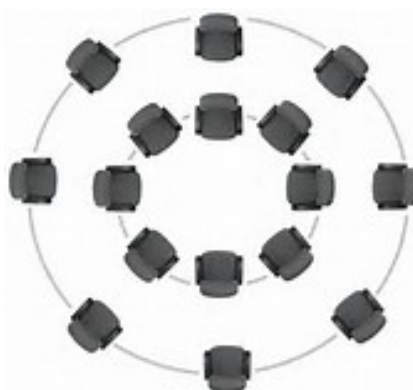
#### **4.6 Guidelines for the Inner Circle Participating in Group Discussion**

The inner group sits in a circle in chairs or desks, allowing all participants to see one another and make eye contact. Only students who have prepared for the seminar by reading the assigned text should participate in the discussion. If no student speaks at first, it is understood that silence is not a negative. Time is given to the students in order for them to generate their thoughts and allow discussion to flow on its own. Mutual respect between the students is key to successful seminars. Students never raise their hands and only one student speaks at a time.

#### **4.7 Guidelines for the Outer Circle Integrating Twitter**

Each person in the outer group sits behind their partner. This allows the student to see and hear their partner during the seminar. Each person in the outer circle monitors and records all responses made by their partner through observation and scoring guides and through posts on Twitter. The outer circle coaches their partner in the inner circle. The outer group comments on the inner circle discussion through Twitter. The students are assigned a class code using a hashtag so a running board of comments can be displayed in the class on the Smart board during the Socratic-Twitter Seminar. This provides the students with a way to continue the conversation through Twitter outside the classroom and serves as a review of the discussion for later conversation. The outer group may tweet questions, tweet comments, retweet comments, and tweet praises about the seminar or their partner's performance. After the seminar, all participants tweet one-word descriptions of the seminar, make comments to other students, and make closing statements as a means of reflection. When allowed by the instructor, the students post a GIF, emoji, or Bitmoji. Mutual respect is given to all participants through online tweets.

#### **4. 8 Diagram of the Inner Circle and Outer Circle Socratic-Twitter Seminar**



#### **4.9 Socratic-Twitter Seminar Schedule for a 75-minute Class**

The following Socratic-Twitter Seminar schedule is used for the 75-minute class period.

- The seminar begins with a 20-minute discussion.
- The instructor stops the discussion and allows partners to coach and talk to one another for two minutes.
- The seminar continues for 15 to 20 more minutes.
- The instructor stops the discussion and allows partners to coach and talk to one another for an additional two minutes.
- The seminar continues with 10 more minutes of discussion and a closing statement is generated by the inner circle.
- After the Socratic-Twitter Seminar, time is allocated for everyone to reflect on the experience, assess personal performance, and tweet responses about the seminar.

#### **4.10 Closing Statement.**

The students compose a closing statement during the final Socratic Seminar discussion. They develop their closing statement as a group. The instructor allows time at the end of the seminar for post-seminar reflection, assessment, and Twitter time. This reflection and assessment time is crucial to each student's individual analysis of learning.

### **5. Methodology**

This small-scale research occurred in two different Teacher Preparation Courses in Delta State University's Undergraduate Elementary Education Program located in Cleveland, Mississippi. A total of 25 Teacher Candidates participated in the study. Fourteen Teacher Candidates were classified as seniors and 11 were classified as juniors. Twenty-two Teacher Candidates were females and three Teacher Candidates were males. Using a Survey Research Design, the researcher collected data on three questions from the participants.

Q1: Was the participant more interested and engaged in class discussion when participating in a Socratic-Twitter Seminar over traditional lecture?

Q2: Was the participant better prepared for class discussion when participating in a Socratic-Twitter Seminar over traditional class lecture?

Q3: Did participation in a Socratic-Twitter Seminar increase the participant's academic learning and content pedagogy over traditional lecture?

### **6. Findings**

According to the student-completed survey, the majority of the students stated that they were more interested and engaged in class discussion when participating in a Socratic-Twitter Seminar over traditional lecture. They stated that they were better prepared for the lesson because they had to read and annotate the text and generate ten thought-provoking questions in order to participate effectively in a Socratic-Twitter Seminar. In addition, the students felt that participation in a Socratic-Twitter Seminar does increase academic learning and content pedagogy more than sitting in a class listening to instruction delivered by traditional lecture. The students that rated the three questions with an answer of no stated that they had failed to prepare for the Socratic-Twitter Seminar; therefore, restricting them from engaging and participating effectively in the discussion both verbally

and through Twitter. They further indicated that had they prepared for the Socratic-Twitter Seminar, they would have rated the questions with an answer of yes.

The student-completed survey data for the three research questions are showed in the chart below.

College Courses	Juniors				Seniors			
	Females		Males		Females		Males	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
CRD 325 – Reading in the Intermediate and Secondary School								
• Question 1	12	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
• Question 2	12	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
• Question 3	11	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
CEL 393 – Classroom Management in the Elementary School								
• Question 1	0	0	0	0	9	0	2	0
• Question 2	0	0	0	0	8	1	2	0
• Question 3	0	0	0	0	8	1	1	1

## 7. Conclusions

This paper examines a research study that was conducted in two different Teacher Preparation Courses in Delta State University Undergraduate Elementary Education Program in Cleveland, MS. The Teacher Candidates participated in an engaging and innovative Socratic-Twitter Seminar where they responded to thought-provoking questions about content reading and pedagogy through oral discussion and Twitter Technology. The students were divided into two groups, an inner circle and an outer circle. Each student had a partner. The inner circle participated verbally in discussion questions while the outer circle observed, took notes, and made tweets through Twitter on ideas and comments made by their partner or other participants. One student in each group served as the seminar leader and kept the group discussion flowing. Engagement, participation, challenges, successes, and lessons learned were addressed. This engaging and innovative teaching strategy called Socratic-Twitter Seminar can be adapted for a variety of grade levels and content areas.

The top three themes developing from this paper are:

- 1). During a Socratic-Twitter Seminar, the students are engaged in collaborative discussion, which increases active participation resulting in higher academic achievement of the content reading.
- 2). The students participate in real-world problem solving resulting in an increase in critical and creative thinking, which better prepares the students for life outside the classroom.
- 3). The instructor serves as facilitator and transforms the teacher-centered classroom into an engaging and energizing student-centered classroom integrating Twitter Technology. This change results in improved student engagement through reflective deep-seeded questions and answers.

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