The Socrates café is now open: Scaffolding critical analysis

Gina Anderson
Jody Piro

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The results of internationalization and globalization have resulted in a world that is highly interconnected. Calls for emphasizing global awareness, diversity, and multicultural education have increased (Bennett, 2011). With this increased emphasis, strategies for multicultural curriculum, culturally responsive teaching, social justice, and equity have been identified. One of the common strategies among these initiatives is the development of critical thinking skills among teachers and students (Banks, 2008; Elder, 2004; Gay & Howard, 2000). The development of these skills is important for all students, including second language learners. While the understanding of the influence of culture on critical thinking and its instruction is limited (Ten Dam & Volman, 2004), scaffolded instruction of language, academic literacy, and critical thinking for English language learners (ELLs) have proven effective (Gibbons, 2009). Strategic instructional methods that facilitate the critical thinking about complex multicultural education issues support the movement toward equity and social justice at the local, national, and global levels and enhance the learning of all students.
The purpose of this chapter is to introduce an instructional framework that engages participants in a Socrates Café through a jigsaw cooperative group activity. This instructional strategy promotes and assesses critical thinking and Socratic questioning via nine universal intellectual standards (Elder & Paul, 2008). The instructional strategy and the intellectual standards, when used in tandem, have the potential to enhance the level of cooperative and critical thinking across multiple content areas as well as to support multicultural connections for all students, including ELLs. The benefits may be applied in pre-service teacher preparation programs as well as in-service education settings.

What is a Socrates Café?

Socratic questioning has long been practiced as a strategy to enhance critical thinking (Golding, 2011; Knezic, Wubbels, Elbers, & Hajer, 2010; Paul & Elder, 2007). The Socratic method has been innovatively applied in a new venue, the Socrates Café. Christopher Phillips (2001) originally established Socrates Cafés by creating open-invitation discussion groups in coffee shops and libraries, but the same strategy can be implemented in schools and classrooms as well. One of the benefits touted for the Socrates Café is the claim that it enhances critical thinking and expands participants’ perspectives. According to Phillips (2001), a Socrates Café “reveals people to themselves” and “makes them see what their opinions really amount to” (p. 20); it “is not so much a search for absolute truth and certainty as it is a quest for honesty” (p. 53). In other words, this expansion beyond the self and quest for honesty are processes that are developed and shaped by opportunities to interact and pose Socratic questions with others.
What is the jigsaw approach to cooperative learning?

Cooperative grouping is commonly known to not only improve social skills but to enhance learning (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec, & Roy, 1990; Kagan, 1992; Slavin, 1990). One of the learning benefits is improved critical thinking (Aronson & Patnoe, 2011). Aronson (1978) originally created the jigsaw approach to cooperative learning in 1971 in response to the resistance to desegregation in schools. Students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds were in schools together for the first time, and the intolerance levels were high. His cooperative grouping method promoted respect and cooperation rather than competition and remains effective today.

To explicitly promote critical analysis in a way that scaffolds language use, a teacher may use a modified jigsaw cooperative grouping that supports a Socrates Café forum. In the traditional jigsaw, students work in small groups, with one student in each group designated as an expert on a given topic, and then they converge to share their completed jigsaw picture of the assigned topic (Aronson, 1978). An adaptation to this process is a Jigsaw Socrates Café. Cooperative home tables are established, and an expert remains in each home group as classmates rotate to the other home tables. In this adaptation, an assigned content question remains constant at each home table, and the rotating students become the variables. All students rotate through each home table, while one expert remains at each original home table group. The experts’ role is to summarize, synthesize, and evaluate responses prior to ongoing learning starting that begins with new classmates as they rotate through the home groups (see Figures 1–4).

What are the universal intellectual standards?

Elder & Paul (2007) suggest that humans regularly distort the
TEACHING AND LEADING IN DIVERSE SCHOOLS

truth; this distortion led them to create universal intellectual standards for evaluating thinking. According to Elder and Paul (2007), we can use these standards to “keep our thinking on track, to help us mirror in our minds what is happening in reality, to reveal the truth in situations, to enable us to determine how best to live our lives” (p. 3). Critical analysis implies sound logic rather than fallacious assumptions. The universal intellectual standards (Paul & Elder, 2006) offer a structure for this process. They comprise “clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logic, significance, and fairness of expression” (Elder & Paul, 2007, p. 5). These standards are exemplified in the graphic organizer displayed in Table 1.

The Jigsaw Socrates Café is now open

A Jigsaw Socrates Café combines the Socrates Café with a jigsaw cooperative grouping technique, leading to a unique group learning process for K–12 students and pre-service or in-service teachers. Coupled with the universal intellectual standards used to analyze the level of Socratic questioning in cooperative learning groups, this instructional strategy enhances the linked goals of critical thinking and academic literacy that teachers and professors often set for their students. This section will describe the seven steps for implementing a Jigsaw Socrates Café in classroom settings. These steps are modified from both the Socrates Café (Phillips, 2001) and jigsaw cooperative grouping ideas (Aronson, 2000; Aronson & Patnoe, 2011), resulting in an amalgamated methodology that can be utilized in a classroom setting and analyzed using the universal intellectual standards (Elder & Paul, 2007). This strategy is scaffolded, cooperative, and includes a graphic organizer for recording questions. A second language learner has the opportunity to serve as an expert while receiving
support from classmates in a safe environment that encourages language use in a small group setting. The seven steps for the Jigsaw Socrates Café are discussed below.

**Step One: Consider content**

Before commencing the Jigsaw Socrates Café, students should be familiar with Socratic questioning, the nine intellectual standards, and basic group work processes. Prior to class, create discussion questions relating to course content. The number of questions will depend on the total number of students divided by the number of desired groups. For example, in a class of 28 students, seven discussion questions would result in four students in each group. Assign each home table a different content question. Type the discussion question using large font on a single piece of paper.

**Step Two: Set the mood**

Before class begins, create table settings for the groups to inspire a café theme for the Jigsaw Socrates Café. White butcher-type paper and flameless candles easily simulate a tablecloth and candlelight. Using a computer or iPod, play café music in low tones. The mood has now been set for the Socrates Café. Place several markers at each table for use on the white paper tablecloth. Clearly label each table with a number, in this case, one through seven, correlating to the seven varying content discussion questions on each of the seven tables. Place one content discussion question on each table.

**Step Three: Create home tables**

Group students by assigning a number, one through seven in this case, for each student in the class, and ask them to move to the numbered table. After students are located in their first of seven tables, announce the directions. Each set of students at a table is known as a “home table.” Ask a student from each home table to record a synopsis of the results of
their content discussion question with a marker on the white paper tablecloth. Then, remind them that an additional outcome of the Socrates Jigsaw Café is to produce Socratic questions. These are questions that result from the discussion of the content. Ask them to record all Socratic questions and other content discussion with a marker on the paper tablecloth. Allow around ten minutes for each table to finish the content discussion and create Socratic questions. Figure 1 represents a home table with four students, one of seven home tables. Each of the home tables has the same configuration.
Step Four: Designate an expert at each home table

One student should be designated to remain at each table as the expert. The expert quickly summarizes the discussions from previous groups before launching a new discussion at the table. Figure 2 represents this step, illustrating Home Table 1 with the expert who remained and three new students from Home Table 1 who rotated to Home Table 2.

Step Five: Rotate through all café tables

Repeat the above process, asking students to move to the next numbered table until each of the content discussions has
ended. First, each home table's expert summarizes the accumulated responses of the previous groups, and then allows each new group to build on previously gathered knowledge. This results in the combined expertise of every student at the culmination of the Jigsaw Socrates Café. This process and final product reflects the voices of each participant and the multiplicities of diverse expressions from their classmates. Encourage active listening to promote a diversity of perspectives among students. Figure 3 represents the rotation of students through each group.

**Figure 3: Home Groups Rotate to all Tables**

*Step Six: Return to the home table*

Step Six encompasses three phases.
Phase One: Students will return to their original café discussion home tables. They will note, with the assistance of the
expert, the changes from their original responses and the accumulation of data that arose from those classmates who followed them in the Jigsaw Socrates Cafe process. Figure 4 illustrates the students’ return to their original home tables.

Phase Two: The students may view the recorded Socratic question types on the tablecloth from the home table rotation process and code them, based upon the sample types of Socratic questioning at each intellectual standard level. The students may then use slash marks to record the frequency of each intellectual standard level representing the Socratic question types and provide example Socratic questions at that level. See Table 1 for a sample graphic organizer.

Phase Three: Students will designate a speaker who will summarize the changes and the overall types of Socratic questioning that occurred with the content question at that Socratic Cafe table. Each group will share a summary so that the entire class has access to the final analysis of each discussion question.

![Figure 4: Students Return to Original Home Table](image-url)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of intellectual standard</th>
<th>Examples of guiding Socratic questions for level of intellectual standard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 1: Clarity</strong></td>
<td>Could you elaborate further? Could you give me an example? Could you illustrate what you mean?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 1 Frequency Count Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample student Socratic questions at this level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 2: Accuracy</strong></td>
<td>How could we check on that? How could we find out if that is true? How could we verify or test that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 2 Frequency Count Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample student Socratic questions at this level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Standard 3: Precision</strong></td>
<td>Could you be more specific? Could you give me more details? Could you be more exact?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 3 Frequency Count Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample student Socratic</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Standard 4: Relevance

- How does that relate to the problem?
- How does that bear on the question?
- How does that help us with the issue?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample student Socratic questions at this level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Standard 5: Depth

- What factors make this a difficult problem?
- What are some of the complexities of this question?
- What are some of the difficulties we need to deal with?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample student Socratic questions at this level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### Standard 6: Breadth

- Do we need to look at this from another perspective?
- Do we need to consider another point of view?
- Do we need to look at this in other ways?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample student Socratic questions at this level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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53
### Sample student Socratic questions at this level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard 7: Logic</th>
<th>Does all this make sense together?</th>
<th>Does your first paragraph fit in with your last?</th>
<th>Does what you say follow from the evidence?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standard 8: Significance</td>
<td>Is this the most important problem to consider?</td>
<td>Is this the central idea to focus on?</td>
<td>Which of these facts are most important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 9: Fairness</td>
<td>Do I have any vested interest in this issue?</td>
<td>Am I sympathetically representing the viewpoints of others?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1: Modified from Elder & Paul, 2007

**Step Seven: Discuss and report**

Ask each speaker from each home table to report to the whole class. Request that students note areas of diverse opinions and also areas of agreement with each content question. As a whole group, discuss the varying perspectives. Determine areas in which students have maintained or changed viewpoints that were established within the Jigsaw Socrates Café. Note the types of Socratic questioning that occurred at each table and the levels of intellectual standards that were produced. Discuss why specific intellectual standards were applied and others were omitted or used with less frequency than others.

**Conclusion**

Calls for practices that enhance critical thinking and cooperative learning will continue to increase in our global society. Having high expectations for all students, including ELLs, is an ethical responsibility for all teachers. Providing K–12 students and pre-service and in-service teachers the opportunities to learn about self and others and to acquire intellectual and academic tools when grappling with facets of diversity and other complex issues will serve these educational aims well. The Jigsaw Socrates Café combines several instructional approaches that, when integrated, provide a framework for students to systematically discuss and reason their way through complicated topics. The jigsaw approach
TEACHING AND LEADING IN DIVERSE SCHOOLS

to cooperative learning improves intercultural interactions and reduces racial conflicts while enhancing learning (Aronson & Patnoe, 2011). A Socrates Café provides a comfortable forum for discussing complex issues while applying Socratic questioning (Phillips, 2001). The level of logic and reasoning during these processes can be assessed using the universal intellectual standards (Elder & Paul, 2007). Finally, these combined approaches provide an opportunity to provide scaffolded, high-quality instruction for the enhancement of critical thinking skills for all students, including ELLs. Cooperation and critical thinking are modes of lifelong learning necessary for each member of a global, interconnected world.

In summary, the following are recommendations for teacher preparation programs and in-service teachers for facilitating scaffolded language use and critical thinking instruction:

- Set high expectations for critical thinking and learning for all students, including ELLs.
- Create a safe community for inquiry by simulating a Socrates Café setting.
- Use the jigsaw approach to cooperative grouping to facilitate discussions of diversity and other complex topics from the curriculum.
- Use graphic organizers to facilitate the application of critical thinking and Socratic questioning.
- Apply the nine universal intellectual standards when assessing critical thinking that is expressed by Socratic questioning.


References


