

Integrating Socratic-Twitter Seminars in a Classroom Management Course Utilizing Various Classroom Scenarios

Timothy B. Watkins, Ed.D.

Associate Professor of Teacher Education, Leadership, and Research
Delta State University, Cleveland, MS
USA

Abstract

This paper examines the effectiveness of combining Socratic Seminar with Twitter Technology in a Classroom Management Teacher Preparation Course using various classroom scenarios to increase the Teacher Candidates' motivation, engagement, and ability to recognize ways to manage an effective classroom and various teacher and student behaviors. This research occurs in a classroom management course in Delta State University's Undergraduate Elementary Education Program located in Cleveland, Mississippi. The instructor does not deliver the instruction through lecture but uses an engaging teaching strategy called Socratic Seminar integrated with Twitter which is 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 and expands on the author's previous Socratic Twitter Seminar research. 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 classroom management. 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 classroom management when discussing scenarios consisting of various teacher and student behaviors.

Keywords: Socratic Seminar, Twitter, motivation, engagement, pedagogy, technology, classroom management, teacher behaviors, student behaviors

Introduction

This paper serves to accomplish three specific goals. One goal is to reveal to the Teacher Candidates a unique, engaging, and motivational teaching method using Socratic Seminar combined with Twitter Technology (Socratic-Twitter Seminar) that the candidates can utilize in their future classrooms when they become teachers to help keep students focused on the learning. The idea is to show the Teacher Candidates how effective learning can occur in a student-centered classroom dialogue 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 attentive in class discussion and dialogue, and in addition, if this participation increases their content pedagogical knowledge in classroom management and in addressing teacher and student behaviors over a traditional lecture format. The final goal is to extend on previous Socratic-Twitter Seminar research completed by the author (Watkins, 2017).

What is Socratic Seminar?

The Socratic Seminar of teaching is grounded in the method Socrates taught students in Ancient Greece. All of his students were encouraged and expected to share their thoughts and opinions 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 contribute to the dialogue. During the class, Socrates would often stay quiet to allow the students the opportunity 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 and draw conclusions about a topic and then question those statements or conclusions (Watkins 2017). Students work together in groups to examine the information from all angles and make judgments 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 (Watkins 2017). Students continue in this manner until they are contented with the conclusion. This style of learning promotes inquiry, questioning, and critical thinking by bringing students together to create ideas and solve problems as a group.

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 to learn the cues for engaging in discussion (Watkins 2017). 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 a variety of classrooms and courses to engage students and promote high-level critical thinking. The students learn the content in more meaningful ways because they are required to apply their knowledge to be more active and engaged in the learning process. Not only is this mode of teaching an effective and valuable learning tool, but it gives students practice working in groups to solve problems which is a 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 instead of the one in charge. 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 only answer questions, but to generate more questions leading to a richer understanding of the learning. Socrates believed in the power of asking and answering questions. He believed that we learned through responding to questions in a social setting with others. 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).

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 280 characters (Newton, 2017). Users that are registered with Twitter can post tweets and follow other users' tweets, but those who are unregistered can only read them. A user can follow anyone on public Twitter. However, a person can set their account to private.

Users access Twitter through its website or a mobile device app. Tweets can be sent quickly by mobile phone text message, desktop client, or by posting at the Twitter.com website (Rouse, 2015). 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.

Procedures

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

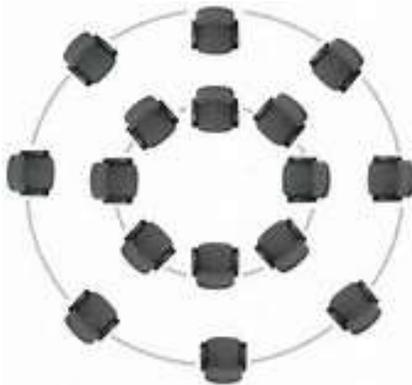
- 1. First Things First.** In order for the Socratic Seminar to be successful, the students need to understand the purpose of the discussion. The goal of the Socratic-Twitter Seminar is to help students gain a deeper understanding of the values, issues, and ideas in the classroom management scenarios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

The instructor divides the class into two groups consisting of an inner circle and an outer circle and assigns each student a partner for the seminar. The groups or the instructor may select a seminar leader to keep the seminar moving and on topic. Next, students are taught basic Twitter knowledge that is 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 seminar schedule to be followed.

- 2. Twitter Knowledge.** According to Watkins (2017), when including Twitter in the seminar the following steps need 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 280 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.
- 3. Role of the instructor.** The instructor serves as a facilitator and permits the learning to be student-centered. The instructor can pose high-order, thought-provoking, open-ended questions, but in this study the Teacher Candidates created all questions for the seminar. The instructor gives no response, positive or negative, to the students' dialogue and discussion. The instructor relies on the seminar leader to ask additional questions to move the dialogue from any standstill positions that may occur. The instructor sets the time and length of the seminar and amends the time allotment as needed.
- 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. According to Watkins (2017), the leader listens carefully to all responses and clears up any confusion that is apparent 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 (Watkins, 2017).
- 5. Role of the students.** The students prepare for the seminar by reading and annotating the classroom management scenarios containing various teacher and student behaviors so they can have an effective discussion and dialogue. The students pose high-order, thought-provoking, open-ended questions which allows them to direct the flow of the discussion within the seminar (Watkins, 2017). 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 build on or challenge the ideas of others but respect and honor the opinions and voices of all participants (Watkins, 2017).

6. **Guidelines for the inner circle participating in group discussion.** The inner group sits in a circle in chairs, desks, or tables, allowing all participants to see one another and make eye contact. Only students who have prepared for the seminar by reading the assigned classroom scenarios and generating the five questions should participate in the discussion. If no student speaks at first, it is understood that silence is not a negative. Thinking time is given to the students in order for them to generate their thoughts and allow discussion to flow on its own. Mutual respect and honor between the students are key to successful seminars. Students do not raise their hands and only one student speaks at a time.
7. **Guidelines for the outer circle integrating Twitter.** Each person in the outer group sits behind their partner so they are close enough to be an active listener. This allows the student to see and hear their partner during the seminar. According to Watkins (2017), 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 (Watkins, 2017). 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 (Watkins, 2017). After the seminar, all participants tweet one-word descriptions of the seminar, tweet comments to other students, and tweet closing statements as a means of self-reflection. When allowed by the instructor, the students post a GIF, emoji, or Bitmoji (Watkins, 2017). Mutual respect and honor are given to all participants through online tweets, retweets, and comments.

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



9. **Socratic-Twitter Seminar Schedule for a 75-minute class.** According to Watkins (2017), the following Socratic-Twitter Seminar schedule is used for the 75-minute class period. (p. 845).
 - 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.
10. **Closing Statement.** The students as a group compose a closing statement during the final Socratic Seminar dialogue. The instructor allows time at the end of the seminar for post-seminar reflection, self-reflection, assessment, and Twitter time. This reflection, self-reflection, and assessment time is vital to each student's individual analysis of their learning.

Methodology

This small-scale research occurred in a Classroom Management Teacher Preparation Course in Delta State University's Undergraduate Elementary Education Program located in Cleveland, Mississippi. A total of 14 Teacher Candidates participated in the study. Thirteen Candidates were females, and one Teacher Candidate was male. 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 and dialogue when participating in a Socratic-Twitter Seminar over traditional lecture?

Q2. Was the participant better prepared for class discussion and dialogue 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 in teacher and student behaviors, along with content pedagogy, using scenarios in a classroom management class over traditional lecture?

Findings

According to the student-completed survey, most of the students stated that they were more interested and engaged in class discussion and dialogue 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 classroom management scenarios and generate five high-order, thought-provoking questions in order to participate effectively in the Socratic-Twitter Seminar. In addition, the students felt that participation in a Socratic-Twitter Seminar does increase academic learning and content pedagogy in how to handle classroom management issues and scenarios more than sitting in a class listening to instruction delivered by lecture. The student that rated two questions with an answer of *no* stated that she was not prepared for the Socratic-Twitter Seminar; therefore, limiting her from engaging fully and participating effectively in the discussion both verbally and through Twitter. She further indicated that had she prepared for the Socratic-Twitter Seminar, she 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	Seniors			
	Females		Males	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
CEL 393 – Classroom Management in the Elementary School				
• Question 1	13	0	1	0
• Question 2	12	1	1	0
• Question 3	12	1	1	0

Conclusions

This paper examines a research study that was conducted in one Classroom Management Teacher Preparation Course 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 high-order, thought-provoking questions about classroom management scenarios involving various teacher and student behaviors through oral discussion and dialogue while implementing Twitter Technology. The students were divided into two groups, an inner circle and an outer circle, and assigned a partner for the seminar. The inner circle participated verbally with the discussion questions while the outer circle observed, took notes, and tweeted ideas and comments made by their partner and other participants through Twitter. One student in each group served as the seminar leader and kept the group dialogue flowing. Engagement, participation, challenges, successes, and lessons learned were addressed as needed. This engaging and innovative teaching strategy called Socratic-Twitter Seminar can be adapted by teachers to use in a variety of grade levels and content areas.

The top three themes developing from this study are:

1. During a Socratic-Twitter Seminar, the students are engaged in collaborative discussion and dialogue, which increases active participation resulting in higher academic achievement of the classroom management scenarios and how to handle various teacher and student behaviors.
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 and in how to handle various teacher and student behaviors.
3. The instructor serves as facilitator and converts the teacher-centered classroom into an engaging and stimulating student-centered classroom where learning is enhanced by integrating Twitter Technology. This teaching method results in improved student engagement through reflective questions and answers generated by the participants.

References

- Coffey, H. (n.d.). *Socratic method*. Retrieved from https://www.evergreen.edu/sites/default/files/writingcenter/docs/cv/Heather%20Coffey_Socratic%20method.pdf
- Filkins, S. (2017). *Socratic Seminars strategy guide*. Retrieved from <http://www.readwritethink.org/professional-development/strategy-guides/socratic-seminars-30600.html>
- Fischer, C. A. (2011). *Socratic Seminar: The power of dialogue* [PowerPoint slides]. Retrieved from <https://freedomactivelearning.wikispaces.com/file/view/Socratic+Seminar+Strategy+Info.pdf>
- Hertberg, H. L. (2006). *Socratic Seminar: The power of questions* [PowerPoint slides}. Retrieved April 12, 2016 from http://www.hhh.k12.ny.us/uploaded/PDFs/DI_Pdfs/Day_1/hertberg.pdf
- Newton, C. (2017). *Twitter just doubled the character limit for tweets to 280*. Retrieved from The Verge Web site: <https://www.theverge.com/2017/9/26/16363912/twitter-character-limit-increase-280-test>
- Rouse, M. (2015). *Definition Twitter*. Retrieved from the TechTarget Web site: <http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/Twitter>
- Tredway, L. (1995). Socratic seminar: Engaging students in intellectual discourse. *Educational Leadership*, 53(1), 26-29.
- Watkins, T. B. (2017). Integrating Socratic seminar with Twitter in teacher preparation courses. *Journal of Modern Education Review*, 7(12), 841-847.