

FOSTERING STUDENTS' CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH SOCRATIC SEMINAR

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Abstract

Student of 21st century have a basket of challenge. They must be able to think critically, to communicate effectively, to collaborate respectfully, and to think creatively. Those four Cs are not a school subject that will be teach independently. Yet, all of them are integrated on each subject that the students' learnt. Among those four, critical thinking is an emergency necessity for college students to help them develop their original thesis report. Through a classroom action research, Socratic Seminar will introduce in Exploring Poetry and Prose subject to foster students' critical thinking skills. The aims of this paper is to find out to what extend Socratic Seminar foster students' critical thinking. Observation, interview, and questionnaire are used to collect the data. To sum up, Socratic Seminar successfully developed students' thinking from equilibrium to disequilibrium to a more sophisticated equilibrium.

Keywords: Critical thinking, Socratic seminar

Introduction

Today we live in the information era. Throughout the day we are bombarded with huge information from television, newspapers, books, magazines, billboards and of course social media. This daily barrage of information is so overwhelming that it's easy to allow our intellectual filters to shut down and to fall into the habit of passively absorbing whatever is thrown at us. We, as educators, have responsibilities to guide our students to be selective. We should teach them how to think, thus they will become a critical thinker. It is line with (Roekel) , he stated that students of 21st century should master the "Four Cs" skills, those are critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. By having those skills, we already prepare them to be ready in life – afford a good living, give any contribution to the society, and find personal fulfillment. But, how to teach them to think? Some people wrongly assume that some students will always better at critical thinking than others. In fact, critical thinking is a skill that students can learn at school and all students can learn it. This is not an instan process absolutely. Teacher and students must do it hand in hand during teaching and learning process in the classroom. One activity that can help this process is through Socratic Seminar.

'Socratic Seminar is a thoughtful dialogue which used in all school subjects to enhance students' thinking, understanding, and knowledge' (Pihlgren D. A., 2010). Those abilities are badly needed for university students, especially for whom in the last semester. It is found that most students rarely understood of their own task, they only

copy and paste from other's writing. It will be hard for them to write their original thesis if they are not trained to think critically. Thus, learning process should provide activities which can help students to foster their critical thinking. How does the implementation of Socratic Seminar affect students' critical thinking in Exploring Prose and Poetry class? The aims of this paper is to find out to what extend Socratic Seminar foster students' critical thinking.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking and problem-solving can be defined in many ways, but P21 (Association) defines critical thinking as follows:

- a. Reason effectively, means the use of various types of reasoning as appropriate to the situation.
- b. Use system thinking, means analyze how parts of a whole interact with each other to produce overall outcomes in complex systems.
- c. Make judgements and decisions, means effectively analyze and evaluate evidence, arguments, claims, and beliefs.
- d. Analyze and evaluate major alternative points of view, means synthesize and make connections between information and arguments.
- e. Interpret information and draw conclusions based on the best analysis, means reflect critically on learning experiences and processes.
- f. Solve problems, means solve different kinds of unfamiliar problems in both conventional and innovative ways. Also identify and ask significant questions that clarify various points of view and lead to better solutions.

Having critical thinking skills give several advantages. For college students, the focus is on higher-order thinking: the active, intelligent evaluation of ideas and information. For this reason critical thinking plays a vital role throughout the college curriculum. In a critical thinking course, students learn a variety of skills that can greatly improve their classroom performance. These skills include understanding the arguments and beliefs of others, critically evaluating those arguments and beliefs, and developing and defending one's own well-supported arguments and beliefs. It will give more beneficial effect when they conduct their thesis report.

For workers, having good thinking and communication skills help much to increase their career. Some of those characteristics are quick learners who can solve problems, think creatively, gather and analyze information, draw appropriate conclusions from data, and communicate their ideas clearly and effectively.

For our life, critical thinking can help us avoid making foolish personal decisions. Also, critical thinking plays a vital role in promoting democratic processes. The last, critical thinking is worth studying for its own sake, simply for the personal enrichment it can bring to our lives.

Characteristics of Critical Thinkers

Critical Thinkers . . .	Uncritical Thinkers . . .
Have a passionate drive for clarity precision, accuracy, and other critical thinking standards	Often think in ways that are unclear, imprecise, and inaccurate.

Are sensitive to ways in which critical thinking can be skewed by egocentrism, sociocentrism, wishful thinking, and other impediments.	Often fall prey to egocentrism, sociocentrism, relativistic thinking, unwarranted assumptions, and wishful thinking
Are skilled at understanding, analyzing, and evaluating arguments and viewpoints.	Often misunderstand or evaluate unfairly arguments and viewpoint
Reason logically and draw appropriate conclusions from evidence and data.	Think illogically and draw unsupported conclusions from evidence and data.
Are intellectually honest with themselves, acknowledging what they don't know and recognizing their limitations.	Pretend they know more than they do and ignore their limitations.
Listen open-mindedly to opposing points of view and welcome criticisms of beliefs and assumptions.	Are closed-minded and resist criticisms of beliefs and assumptions.
Base their beliefs on facts and evidence rather than on personal preference or self-interest.	Often base beliefs on mere personal preference or selfinterest.
Are aware of the biases and preconceptions that shape the way they perceive the world.	Lack awareness of their own biases and preconceptions.
Think independently and are not afraid to disagree with group opinion.	Tend to engage in "groupthink," uncritically following the beliefs and values of the crowd.
Are able to get to the heart of an issue or a problem, without being distracted by details.	Are easily distracted and lack the ability to zero in on the essence of an issue or a problem.
Have the intellectual courage to face and assess fairly ideas that challenge even their most basic beliefs.	Fear and resist ideas that challenge their basic beliefs.
Pursue truth and are curious about a wide range of issues.	Are often relatively indifferent to truth and lack curiosity.

Have the intellectual perseverance to pursue insights or truths despite obstacles or difficulties	Tend not to persevere when they encounter intellectual obstacles or difficulties. (Bassham, Irwin, Nardone, & Wallace, 2011)
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Table 1. The characteristics of critical and uncritical thinkers

Critical thinking is a skill that students can learn at school and all students can learn it. We can give students opportunities to think well in any course we offer, provided the students are interested in the subjects discussed. The key is to give students opportunities to think and to make an effort to connect one subject area to other subject areas in the curriculum and to everyday life (Noddings, 2008).

Socratic Seminar

‘Thoughtful dialogue can be used in all school subjects to enhance students’ thinking, understanding, and knowledge, not only as part of language education’ (Pihlgren, 2010). The dialogue will give the participants deeper insights about the central ideas in different subjects, and also an opportunity to investigate and value these ideas. The text and the discussion can also present moral and ethical dilemmas to the participants, which they will have to consider and value. Thereby, the thoughtful dialogues will also offer a powerful method when working with the fundamental values of society – not as a set of rules to be taught and learnt, but as a practice in analyzing and taking a stance (Pihlgren D. A., 2014)

‘A Socratic Seminar fosters active learning as participants explore and evaluate the ideas, issues, and values in a particular text’ (Balch). A good seminar consists of four independent elements (1) the text being considered, (2) the questions raised, (3) the seminar leader, and (4) the participants. A closer look at each of these elements helps explain the unique character of a Socratic Seminar.

(1) The Text

Socratic Seminar texts are chosen for their richness in ideas, issues, and values and their ability to stimulate extended, thoughtful dialogue. A seminar text can be drawn from readings in literature, history, science, math, health, and philosophy or from works of art or music. A good text raises important questions in the participants’ minds, questions for which there are no right or wrong answers. Other qualities of the text are offer complexity and challenge, relevant to seminar participant and of course fundamentally ambiguous (Paideia, 2015). At the end of a successful Socratic Seminar, participants often leave with more questions than they brought with them.

(2) The Question

A Socratic Seminar opens with a question with multiple perspectives. It has no right answer, yet it reflects a genuine curiosity of the questioner. Each of question has different purpose. The goal of opening questions is to engage all of the participants in identifying the main ideas of the text. While the goal of core questions is to have the participants analyze the seminar text and develop their ideas about it. Then, the goal of closing questions is for participants to consider their ideas and values from the text, in real-world applications.

(3) The Leader

In Socratic Seminar, the leader plays dual role as leader and participant. The seminar leader consciously demonstrated habits of mind that lead to a thoughtful exploration of the ideas in

the text by keeping the discussion focused on the text, asking follow-up questions, helping participants clarify their positions when arguments become confused, and involving reluctant participant while restraining their more vocal peers.

As a seminar participant, the leader actively engages in the group's exploration of the text. To do this effectively, the leader must know the text well enough to anticipate varied interpretations and recognize important possibilities in each. The leader must also be patient enough to allow participants' understanding to evolve and be willing to help participants explore non-traditional insights and unexpected interpretations. Assuming this dual role of leader and participant is easier if the opening question is one which truly interests the leader as well as the participants.

(4) The Participants

In Socratic Seminar, participants share with the leader the responsibility for the quality of the seminar. Good seminar occur when participants study the text closely in advance, listen actively, share their ideas and questions of others, and search for evidence in the text to support their ideas.

Participants acquire good seminar behaviors through participating in seminar and reflecting on them afterward. After each seminar, the leader and participants discuss the experience and identify ways of improving the next seminar. Before each new seminar, the leader also offers coaching and practice in specific habits of mind that improve reading, thinking, and discussing. Eventually, when participants realize that the leader is not looking for right answers, but encourage them to think out loud and to exchange ideas openly, they discover excitement of exploring important issues through shared inquiry. This excitement creates willing participants, eager to examine ideas in rigorous, thoughtful manner.

Socratic Seminar Rules and Goals

Before starting the seminar, participants should know the rules they must obey. Some of them are: First, they do not need to raise their hand to talk. They should focus on the main speaker and wait their turn. Second, they should respond to each other using each other's name. The last, they should express their agreement or disagreement in a thoughtful manner.

Besides, goals should be set before the seminar process. Here are examples of the seminar's goals.

Group goals:

- a. Focus on ideas and values in the text.
- b. Keep an open mind.
- c. Invite everyone to share their ideas.
- d. Use other's names.
- e. Remember that one person speaks at a time.

Novice goals:

- a. Look at the speaker
- b. Speak voluntarily at least twice
- c. Make clear, accurate statements.
- d. Refer to the text.

Advanced goals:

- a. Refer to the text and other relevant sources.
- b. Test assumptions and explore inferences.
- c. Acknowledge changes in students' perspective.
- d. Offer a more global interpretation of a previous statement.

The Implementation of Socratic Seminar in the Classroom

(Copeland, 2007) divides the seminar into three time periods:

1. Preparation work
 - a. Introduce the seminar and its purpose
At the first cycle, we decide that the purpose of our discussion is filling the criteria of the novice goals.
 - b. Have read the text, prepares them with important questions and quotations
The texts that we used are three movies related to the curriculum of the subject. The first is Elizabeth (Michael Hirst, 1998), secondly is Young Victoria (Jean-Marc Valee, 2009), and the last is The Queen (Stephen Frears, 2006). The students can watch the movie wherever they want before the seminar is conducted. Then they must prepare some questions or quotation from the movies.
 - c. Review the discussion norms
Before starting the seminar, I remind the students to pay attention to the discussion norms.
 - d. Divide the class in half. One half forms the inner circle and participate in the disussion, while another half form the outer circle and play role as observers.
The class is divided randomly, thus everyone has a chance either to be inner circle or outer circle.
2. During the seminar
 - a. The leader begins the seminar with an opening question.
The leader is chosen by the member of the inner circle group. He has responsibility to post an opening question or statement thus the seminar will run well.
 - b. From this poin on, the seminar is driven by a questions from both the leader and the participants.
Since the member for each inner and outer circle is about nine people, thus each group has thirty minutes to discuss their ideas. Teacher gives a sign to the leader when the time is over.
 - c. At the end of the seminar, members of the outer circle report their findings.
3. Reflection
 - a. Ask debriefing questions of each participants.
 - b. Share experience among the leader, the inner circle and the outer circle.
 - c. Establish goals for next seminar.

Methodology

The subjects of this study were the sixth semester students of English Education Study Program of UIA Jakarta. This strategy is implemented in Exploring Poetry and Prose class due to the texts fullfill the requirement of ciritical thinking and Socratic Seminar. This class is chosen for their preparation of writing thesis in the next semester. It is found that their critical thinking skills are still undeveloped. Thus, a classroom action researh is held to help them encounter this recent problems. The data are gathered through observation, interview and questionnaire.

Fndings and Discussion

1. Observation and Interview

No.	Aspects	Cycle 1	Cycle 2	Cycle 3
1.	Text	Elizabeth	Young Victoria	The Queen
2.	Purpose	Novice goals	Novice goals	Advanced goals

3.	Leader	Ulfa	Topik	Farhan
4.	Opening question	What impression do you get from Victoria's childhood?	If you were Elizabeth, what was your hardest problem and how to solve it?	What is the big deal about the movie "The Queen"?
5.	Important questions	Victoria was crowned at the age 18. What do you think of it?	Was Elizabeth movie reflected Elizabeth's life?	Do we have that figure in our country (Indonesia)?
6.	Share experience Inner circle	- Difficult to take turn without raising hand	- It is quite hard to make the seminar keep on track since each members has various thought	- Create their own ending was so interesting since the person they discussed still alive.
	Outer circle	- Some of the inner circle members only keep silent during the seminar	- One of the inner circle member dominate the discussion	- Everybody takes turn well and the discussion run smoothly

Table 2: Result of the observation and interview

From the above description especially in point 6, it can be seen that there are some progress existed when the students implement Socratic seminar week by week. At first, they faced difficulties to implement the ethic related to raise their hand. In Socratic seminar they are not allowed to raise their hand when they want to say something, yet they must develop their sensibility to read their friends' expression. It is happened since they are not accustome to be an active listener. For them, it is easier to speak than to listen. In contrast, some of them only keep silent during the seminar. They said that they do not know what to say and they think that all topics already discussed by their friend, that is the reason why they keep silent.

In the second seminar, most of them started to involved in the discussion. But, another obstacles arise related to uncontrol discussion. It is found that the leader faced difficulties to handle their friend, to make them keep on track. It is happened since they started enjoy the discussion and get more excitement. On the last seminar, everthing is getting better. They really excited when they are asked to create their own ending related to Victoria's live. It is raise their awareness of The Royal Family's live today and they also have imagination when Kate Middleton or Meghan Markle become the next Queen of England. The last but not least, the question about "Queen" figure in Indonesia increase their pride and nationality to become Indonesian. They listed many great women started from RA Kartini until Susi Pudjiastuti. They realized that actually Indonesia is great country and they have responsibility to develop Indonesia become greater and better.

2. Questionnaire

No	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)
1	Identifies own learning, personality, and communication style preferences	44.4	55.6	0	0
2	Demonstrates behaviour that indicate states values	50.0	38.9	11.1	0

3	Ask questions, looks for reasons explanations, and meaning	88.9	11.1	0	0
4	Investigates thoroughly when situation warrant precise, in depth thinking	77.8	16.7	5.6	0
5	Express deep understanding	83.3	16.7	0	0
6	Draw reasonable conclusion	88.9	5.6	5.6	0
7	Self-directed, self-disciplined, and accepts accountability	44.4	50.0	5.6	0
8	Seeks help as needed	66.7	33.3	0	0
9	Expresses appreciation of human differences related to values	83.3	16.7	0	0
10	Changes approaches as needed to get the best results	44.4	44.4	11.1	0

Table 3: Result of the questionnaire

Conclusion

In Socratic Seminar, students explore big ideas and values in response to open-ended questions of the text. They express their own ideas and they listen attentively to other participants' point of view. During the dialogue, the leader ask questions that increase students' challenge to deliver their ideas, evaluate their assumptions, and reflect other point of view.

During this process, the students' thinking develop from equilibrium to disequilibrium to a more sophisticated equilibrium. In other words, they start with understanding, than go to uncertainty, and come up with the multiple points of view. Finally, this process will improve not only students' critical thinking skill, but also their communication, cooperation, and creativity.

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