

## PAGE SCHOLARSHIP 2019

Shameen Syed

### Socratic Seminars

#### Background

Being awarded the Walter Hines Page Scholarship came as a great surprise to me. As a mid-career, not so young educator it injected in me a drive and enthusiasm that I felt slightly embarrassed to admit. The opportunity to immerse myself in a contained project in an alien territory was for me, the perfect way to spend my October break. My research proposal focused on the use of Socratic seminars as part of classroom practice. Way back in 1997 my undergraduate dissertation considered the impact of engaging children in Socratic dialogue. As one who did not leave school with an armful of qualifications...four O levels to be precise, I have always questioned the manner in which we choose to educate the young. I align my musings with the following quote by Akala.

*...whether education should be a site of power , a place to reproduce the social ,societal norms or a place to be encouraged to question and thus attempt to transcend them and be active participant in remaking them<sup>1</sup>*

From a personal perspective I believe in striving; to challenge and actively change the beliefs that society concurs are not seen to benefit all people. I have wondered why I did not engage and succeed at school when as an adult I embraced cerebral pursuits and by thirty I was lamenting a misspent youth.

I have worked with hundreds of young people in a variety of environments including a US summer camp, a London children's home, as a parent, foster career and now... a teacher. I pride myself in having built positive relationships with most of the young people I've worked with and appreciate that a key reason for this is that I'm curious, I listen and I prompt. I ask questions that require the young person to dig deep and think and to put it simply I think the majority like this. This is what a Socratic seminar does, it takes you to places that are uncharted, down in the depths of one's neural networks it prompts you to make connections, analyse and then express your thoughts. A powerful tool to have in a world that needs thinkers and activists.

#### Research questions

And so, to my research questions.

- 1.Can Socratic seminars be used to manage challenging behaviours?
2. Do Socratic seminars give young people the tools to help them become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors?

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<sup>1</sup> Akala – Natives Race and Class in the Ruins of Empire.

When I thought of these focus points for my research I had only just reengaged with this area of interest and as my trip progressed, I soon came to realise that this was going to be more of a journey than I had anticipated.

### **Location**

When sat in front of my computer with my good friend 'Google' I became acquainted with a US academic, Terry Roberts. Socrates had led me to Terry and Terry would be the beacon that would guide me. Sat with a map of the US in all its vastness is quite daunting, luckily for me Terry would be my pin. Terry is the Director of the National Paideia Institute. There are a number of Paideia schools in the US as well as public schools who deliver education based on the Paideia philosophy. With Terry's help I identified three states where I could focus my research, Arizona, Tennessee and North Carolina. I planned an itinerary that would last two and a half weeks; the majority of which would sit neatly in my October break. For the remainder, I was fortunate that my rector Anthony Tuffery granted me leave, which I will be forever grateful for; not just for giving me the time but for supporting me and encouraging me to apply.

### **Why Socratic seminars ?**

For the last ten years I have been a teacher of RMPS and a foster carer. I have recently become dual qualified to teach English also. In 2018 I was working in a school for looked after young people who had emotional and behavioural difficulties. This was a challenging teaching environment. My brief was to engage my students, that was it, anything else was a bonus. With a class composed of three students, one teacher and one carer I figured this would be achievable. With my hard drive full of tricks, I got to work. It quickly became apparent that the lessons the students would moderate their language for and would be willing engage with were those based on dialogue. Contrary to what we might believe about higher level thinking skills these young people were able and keen to talk about complex issues. Acquisition of knowledge for them seemed irrelevant and pointless but engaging in discussion about the ethics of eating meat or whether we should reintroduce the death penalty was for them an exciting task. So, despite being pigeonholed as 'low ability' these young people were adept in the complex world of facilitated discussion albeit rather trial and error in its structure. Zohar and Dori's work <sup>2</sup> focuses on the belief that that if we are to be truly equitable then all students should be actively encouraged to engage with higher order thinking.

*Clearly, teachers are often correct in their belief that some tasks may be too difficult for some of their students, causing failure and frustration. However, instead of letting this belief lead to the prevalent conclusion that thinking tasks are just inappropriate for large sections of the student population, staff development programs may equip teachers with tools for helping students construct better abilities.* <sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Higher Order Thinking Skills and Low-Achieving Students: Are They Mutually Exclusive?

<sup>3</sup> Anat Zohar and Yehudit J. Dori Source: The Journal of the Learning Sciences, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2003), pp. 145-181

For the pupils I worked with, their poor academic ability and challenging behaviour was largely a consequence of life circumstances which in turn had demanded of them a resilience. Survival for them had necessitated that they be able communicators.

I am now in a mainstream secondary school teaching RMPS and English. Both subjects have their demands. I am always looking for ways to ensure that all my students are engaged in learning so that the journey to reach the four capacities of successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors is not one fraught with angst and obstacle but rather one that will be reflected on as having been enriching and empowering. I am happy to concede that this is a rose - tinted view but I cling to optimism.

So, I 'm pretty sure that every teacher in Scotland will have to engage with these two areas; managing challenging behaviour and being mindful of and working towards the four capacities. These are not necessarily major issues, but they are relevant to us all regardless of sector or stage.

### **What is happening in the UK?**

Back in 1997 I became aware of the P4C (Philosophy for children) movement and the organisation Sapere. At this time this seemed to focus on using Socratic dialogue in the primary sector. As the years have progressed this movement has grown and it is a pedagogy used in some secondary schools also. A Socratic seminar is a formal discussion based on a text. The facilitator asks open ended questions. Students will be expected to have read the text prior to the seminar. They must then listen closely to comments from other students, think critically for themselves and articulate their own thoughts and findings. This may sound like many classroom discussions / debates but it is the focus on skill development that is different. The focus is not to be triumphant and prove truth but to develop the ability to reach understanding through formal dialogue.

After many emails liasing with Terry I realised that the Paideia model warranted my attention. It could be classified under the umbrella of Socratic seminar but with a broader reach encompassing application in all curricular areas. The unique element of the Paideia seminar as opposed to traditional Socratic seminar is the focus on values education across the curriculum....even in maths!

As a teacher who is always looking to change and improve my practice I feel I am quite in tune with what works and what doesn't. From speaking to colleagues one thing that many agree on is that pupils struggle with analysis and understanding. My red traffic light moment is when I see a beautiful set of revision notes highlighted with the full spectrum of luminosity in handwriting of immaculate precision. In my experience many of these students are great at taking in the facts, they have the facts that they can display and they can be admired. However, these revision notes often lack understanding; the active part of applying the luminous information to a context or analysing the information to inspire thought or draw conclusion.

### **Socratic seminars in the USA**

As I started to delve into my chosen area of research, I decided to focus specifically on the Paideia model. Other US schools that I had identified that did Socratic seminars did not seem to have the same rigour and planning that was evident in Paideia seminars. The Paideia model was my pot of gold. I was lucky to have my visit coincide with two days of Paideia seminar training based in Arizona. Paideia was developed by Mortimer Adler. In his book *The Paideia Program* Adler suggests that we can break down education into three main areas. Information and knowledge, Skills and Understanding. He argues that Information and knowledge are transient citing the many teachers who have little recollection of their degree content years later. Skills he said were more durable but needed to be continually exercised to develop and strengthen them. He maintained that understanding is the most durable component of the education process. He suggests that something understood does not need to be exercised to be retained. It is understanding therefore that the Socratic seminar seeks to nurture as it will equip a student with an empowering tool that will help them navigate the world. For Adler, education should therefore serve three purposes: teaching people how to use their leisure time well, to earn their living ethically, and to be responsible citizens in a democracy.

### **Is there a debate surrounding this topic?**

There are those who have criticisms of Socratic seminars primarily for the reasons stated below

- Certain students end up dominating the conversation
- Some students end up saying nothing
- Some students just repeat or agree with what others say
- Some students show up to a Socratic Seminar without preparing
- Students don't necessarily learn how to analyse the text in a specific way while doing the Socratic seminar.<sup>4</sup>

However, as with all classroom learning experiences there will always be pros and cons. Within the Paideia structure attempts to lessen dominance, being overly compliant and contribution shy is addressed by asking students to make individual learning goals e.g to speak three times no more, no less, encourage another student to speak or to speak out of uncertainty.

The seminar aims to be inclusive and equitable and does not seek to replace existing classroom practice but to enhance it. So what are the aims of a Paideia seminar?

- To increase understanding of concepts, ideas and values.
- To nurture intellectual skills by teaching students to engage in higher order critical thinking, analysing, evaluating and creating.
- To nurture social skills by teaching students the art of speaking and listening within respectful dialogue.
- To nurture skills of critical and purposeful reading and reflective writing.

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<sup>4</sup> Blog - Let's BRAWL: Throwing Socratic Seminars out of the ring – David Theiriault

## **Methodology**

Having established what I was going to research I then had to think about how I was going to do it. Because I was travelling and because also my trip was a dip into the largely unknown I decided that I wanted my evidence to be based on what I could see and elicit from conversations with staff, pupils and if possible parents. Prior to leaving the UK I decided to try and engage a global Facebook teaching group that I am a member of. I gave them the outline of my research and sought responses from those teachers who engaged in Socratic seminars. (See Appendix A) This, I hoped would give me a brief insight into how these seminars are regarded by other teachers.

Once in schools I decided I would ideally like to:

- Observe/ film seminars.
- Speak to a group of children. Ideally a cross section of pupils from a variety of backgrounds.
- Speak to teachers.
- I didn't feel quantitative research methods would be relevant or achievable in the timescale I had, as I would be in and out of schools in a day.

## **Planning**

The schools that I chose to visit were recommended to me by Terry Roberts. In the initial stages of my planning when I had started approaching schools I my own I found response times were not good. Terry selected schools where he knew I would be warmly received and that where he felt I would be able to see good practice. So, four schools were identified. One in Arizona, two in Tennessee and one in North Carolina.

## **Active Research**

### Arizona.

My first stop in the US was Arizona, land of scorched earth and pavements, home to the homeless who migrate because of the heat and an abundance of friendly uber drivers. I'd found out about a two day introductory training event focusing on Paideia seminars to be held at the Paideia School in Arizona. The following week I arranged to do a formal school visit. The first day of the seminar was delivered by experienced teacher Jeremy Speilman, 7 other teachers attended; some of whom regularly use seminars as part of their teaching practice. This gave me an ideal opportunity to speak to practitioners. The first part of the day focused on the relationship between the capacities of reading, writing, speaking, listening and thinking and through facilitated discussion we explored the process of active thinking and the shared personal goals and strategies.

The afternoon session was particularly interesting and useful for me as Jeremy facilitated a seminar so we could experience how it impacted directly. The seminar was formal in structure and required us to identify an individual goal. The seminar had a clear structure and Jeremy suggested doing a warm up 'four corners' activity. For this activity our prompt was a quote from Rudyard Kipling

*“I am a dealer in words, and words are the most powerful drug known to humanity “*

We expressed our responses to this by moving to one of the four corners of the room, either agreeing strongly, agreeing, strongly disagreeing or disagreeing. We then shared our thoughts and if swayed by the views of someone else we moved corners.

We were then given a short story to read. Appendix B outlines the form of the seminar, stimulus text and questions. The stimulus text was provocative and by mid-way through the seminar I felt enthused by the idea of trying it out back in Kirkcudbright. The text pushed people into slightly uncomfortable areas of values based discussion. Whilst we were engaged in discussion Jeremy the facilitator was mapping our seminar. Appendix C shows the mapping process taken from another seminar.

On the following Monday I visited The Paideia Academy. I feel it is important to stress that all the schools I visited had students from a wide demograph, see Appendix D. I was able to observe a pre seminar lesson with 7<sup>th</sup> grade students. I kept trying to think about how my own pupils engage with learning. As the class were working, I found myself comparing the different engagement levels and depth of critical thinking. I was given the opportunity to speak with a selected group of students who were all very able and aspirational and spoke positively about Paideia seminars. They felt that seminars definitely helped develop their skills of analysis and understanding although they said if the stimulus wasn't interesting they said they found it harder to engage. Later in the day I was given a tour of the school by two pupils. As I built a relationship with them, they became less guarded with their comments and spoke more openly about their school experiences. The school itself had a distinct identity. Piped music filled the corridors and I was told that students had to walk with their hand either by their sides or in front of them. I found this a little strange. The Paideia philosophy is evident throughout the school (see Appendix E) and was I encouraged to look at the students work displayed on the walls. I didn't get to see a Paideia seminar due to the timing of my visit but the pre seminar activity gave me an idea of how the students engage with topics. Appendix F shows pupil work relating to a speech by Martin Luther King called Life's Blueprint. The students listened to the speech whilst reading it. They were quiet and compliant and judging by the work they submitted they had engaged well with the tasks that had been set. However, I felt the speech was too long and I could see that some students struggled to concentrate. The Paideia model is about there being one education for all so differentiation for the less able did not seem to be an option in this instance.

### Chattanooga

So, from the dust and heat of Arizona I headed to the tunes and slatted homes of Chattanooga Tennessee. The two schools in Chattanooga that I planned to visit were exemplar Paideia schools, I had heard about them on the Facebook group. The Chattanooga school for Liberal Arts is an Elementary school catering for students from Kindergarten through to 8<sup>th</sup> grade. It is a fully Paideia school, so seminars are a weekly event in all subject areas at all stages. I was very fortunate that the staff at CSLA were incredibly welcoming and had planned my day so that I would see a full range of stages and experience seminars.

It was striking in the school how engaged the students were. They would have engaged in seminars since Kindergarten and it was apparent that they were comfortable with the model of learning. The class would have been given a text to study prior to the lesson and would have engaged in a pre-seminar activity. I observed a number of seminar classes. For the purpose of this report I'll focus on just a couple. The first class I observed was a history lesson that was looking at a political cartoon (see Appendix G) to explore the idea of freedom. The cartoon had been distributed to the students the previous lesson. They had been asked to firstly colour the cartoon to get them to think and focus on the different parts of the picture. They then had to think about what could be added to the picture to change the situation. Pupils engaged confidently. One pupil had put the addition of a dog door on the cartoon to enable both parties to access different types of freedom. Responses to the prompt questions were varied and the seminar culminated in pupils being asked ..

*'Of all ages which is more free and why?'*

Again, pupils were articulate, engaged and gave a variety of considered responses. Although this was a history lesson the structure of the seminar is such that there will always be a relevant values based theme that is explored. This is a key feature of the Paideia model.

The next class I observed were studying a text from the Arabian Nights. As with the history lesson students were arranged in a circle and each had a copy of the text. Prior to the lesson the teacher had pointed out one pupil to me who had recently moved to the school. He was new to this style of classroom practice so she thought it would be interesting for me to observe him more closely. He was reputedly a 'disruptive pupil' in his previous school. He did not display any disruptive behaviour nor did he contribute. I caught up with him at the end of the lesson and asked him what he thought of seminars. He said he liked them because you don't have to raise your hand and you can say what you think. I felt that the physical layout of the seminar classroom and the predominance of quiet made active rebellion quite difficult.

Once again the whole class was very focused and at the end of the seminar students final prompt question was..

*What have you learned about human nature?*

All Paideia seminars follow the same format pre seminar / launch activity- seminar – follow up written activity.

### Parent tour

In the afternoon, I attended an open tour for prospective parents. The school's admission policy is on a lottery basis. CSLA is 'magnet' school which means that any family from within Hamilton county can apply for a place. The only exceptions are for siblings who are automatically prioritised and also pupils of staff. If a place is gained parents have to agree to 18hrs voluntary service to the school each year.

During the tour I was able to speak to parents and I asked why they wanted to send their kids to CSLA. The answers were consistent. The school had a good reputation. I got the

impression that if parents were successful and their children were awarded places the 18 hr volunteering commitment required parents to fully commit to the school. The parent group was definitely a mixed group coming from different income levels and different racial backgrounds.

The following day I headed to Chattanooga school for the Arts and Sciences. I was once again met with the warmest of welcomes from the principal Jim Boles. After only few minutes in his presence I knew he was inspiring, respected and one who seemed to know every pupil in the school and the most minute details about their lives. The school felt like a happy, relaxed place. He gave me list of 'must visit' classrooms and sent me on my way.

The first class I observed was a 9<sup>th</sup> Grade economics class. Economics was a subject I failed spectacularly at school and I therefore I braced myself for boredom. However, I was pleasantly surprised. The class had been reading a novel called *Hillbilly Elegy* by JD Vance. A memoir of a family and culture in crisis. Through the Paideia seminar structure students explored the relationship between poverty and race. It was an engaging lesson on many levels. As an observer I had to stop myself from contributing as the students offered such profound and insightful observations. As 9<sup>th</sup> Grade students this class was a real showcase of the culminative effects of seminars from a young age. It was this lesson that really demonstrated to me why the form of the Paideia seminar has its appeal. Students were able to apply their understanding of economics and how it affects the lives of people. It was one of many 'wow' moments.

I observed a number of lessons, some were more traditional i.e. didactic delivery. Another seminar lesson was a Kindergarten art class. The focus text was a book called *The Indian Paintbrush*. This was an interesting lesson to observe as the students were clearly new to the seminar structure and being little children there was a fair amount of wriggling and distraction. However, many did engage and were showing early signs of being able to empathise and be critical.

My final class of the day was a 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade class. I dropped in because the teacher had caught me in the corridor and said her students were keen to meet the visitor from Scotland. I also thought this would be a good class to quiz about seminars. As it turned out this lesson was another one of those 'wow' moments. I asked them to tell me about seminars. They confidently told me about how they studied a text 'Yellow taxi' by Joni Mitchell. One girl interjected "because .. ya know, a text doesn't haven't to be writing" They went on to tell me about their concerns for the environment and why bees needed protecting. Their confidence, ability to articulate and demonstrate their depth of their understanding about environmental issues was impressive. They were un-prompted by their teacher and respectfully listened to each other.

### Charlotte – North Carolina

And so finally to Charlotte. My final school was Community House Middle School . A large school of 2000 pupils catering for 6-12 grades. My day here had been meticulously planned by Kirsten O'Haver who had wanted to ensure that I saw the whole seminar process i.e. launch activity, seminar and follow up activity at a range of stages.



I observed a total of 6 classes for approx 20 mins each. Out of all the school visits I had done this one really allowed me to see how seminars contribute to curriculum delivery. The form of the seminars were the same as those in the Chattanooga schools. Again, the texts used were provocative and pushed students into some uncomfortable areas of discussion. One of the key texts I observed being used in a number of classes was *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang. This is a graphic novel that aims to show and tell the effects of racial stereotyping and assimilation.

I spoke at length to members of staff including Kyle Wegner who was the guidance teacher. I asked about behaviour management and the use of seminars and he felt it was something that could be considered. He mentioned Socratic Circles which has the objective of dealing with pupils who needed guidance support. I also asked Kirsten about behaviour management as I was struck that in a school of 2000 pupils there seemed to be little evidence of challenging behaviour. She pointed out that any kids that are really challenging are sent to a separate school! So, inclusion is obviously understood differently in the US and I felt a little disappointed with my naivety and the US system.

All the seminars that I observed had very definite themes. Regardless of the subject area once again all the seminars were values based. This was a key selling point for me as I believe that to develop values and a sound moral compass young people should be actively involved in experiences that challenge their own thoughts and opinions in a safe and nurturing environment. Pupils were generally very well engaged and seemed to be used to the routine of having seminars.

## **Results**

I posed my first research question to many of the staff and in particular the Principal teachers at the schools I visited. I noticed that in every school there was a distinct absence of behaviour management provision. Data collated from [www.greatschools.org](http://www.greatschools.org) showed that suspension rates in the all the schools I visited were significantly lower than the state average. It appeared that challenging behaving was not really an issue, which meant that when I queried using seminar as part of restorative practice practitioners could only comment that they felt if an appropriate text was found it would be worth trialling it to see if it had an impact. Although, after my conversation with Kirsten O'Haver and her admission that the really challenging students were put elsewhere I realised this was an area that would need further investigation. However, in the schools I visited the majority of the children having grown up within the school's unique philosophy did not seem to challenge it. It might have been easy to argue that this was a selective school, or it was a 'good neighbourhood' but this was clearly not the case. The table below shows that suspension rates in the schools visited.

The out-of-school suspension rates at these school compared to the state average. <a href="http://www.greatschools.org">www.greatschools.org</a>		
School name	Suspensions	State Average
Paideia Academy of South Phoenix	4%	6%
Chattanooga school of Arts and sciences Lower	2%	7%
Chattanooga school of Arts and sciences Upper	4%	7%
Chattanooga school of liberal Arts	3%	7%
Community Middle School	2%	8%

The classes I observed and filmed showed students engaged and able to think critically. There were a few who had lapses of attention and who struggled to sit still but I noticed that these students would go for short walks out of the classroom to help them cope with these attention issues.

All the teachers I spoke to spoke positively about the delivery of seminars and the impact they have on student's behaviour and performance. So, although I was unable to find direct examples of seminars being used to work with more challenging pupils all teachers were supportive of the idea and thought it would be worth trying. The most important part would be finding appropriate texts.

As for the Four Capacities. I can confidently say that they sit hand in hand with Paideia seminars. I asked a group of about twenty students to work in groups to consider whether or not seminars supported the four capacities. I filmed parts of these discussion which I felt was evidence in itself as I observed young people organising themselves into groups and getting on with the tasks and producing confirmatory results.

According to Adler the aim of the Paidea program is to equip students to participate fully in a democratic society. The twelve paideia principles outline the essential tenets of the philosophy but I feel that the following paragraph clearly sums up how these relate to the aims of the Scottish curriculum

*“ Here then are thee three common callings to which all our children are destined: to earn a living in an intelligent and responsible fashion, to function as intelligent and responsible citizens, and to make both of these things serve the purpose of leading intelligent and responsible lives- to enjoy as fully as possible all the good that make a human life as good as it can be.” The Paideia Proposal p.18*

I appreciate that this quote will be referring to the whole Paideia philosophy but I feel it also encapsulates the driving force behind the seminars.

## **Discussion**

One of the key personal aims of my research was that I would be able to return to Scotland and have something positive that I could share. Not just data, personal musing and polite observations but something tangible that could be trialled in the classroom and that could impact on the way our young people see themselves and others. In the two days prior to my US trip I attended The STUC Black Workers Conference. This was my fourth conference and true to form it was inspiring, empowering and provocative. At the end of conference, the EIS delegation regrouped and together we considered how to tackle Racism that sadly still permeates our schools, colleges and society generally. I have been thinking about this as I've been reflecting on the seminars I was privileged to observe in the US. I feel Paideia seminars would be a really proactive way of engaging young people in a dialogue about race and equality. This would need to be rigorously planned and text carefully selected but I know the contacts I've made in the US would be happy to support me in this. My trip to the US has not only enabled me to have initial training so that I can deliver Paideia seminars, but I've also been engaged in seminar and seen them in action. So, what does this type of practice demand of the classroom teacher? Firstly, a positive attitude and open mind to try something new. A willingness to stand back in the classroom and to let the students take the reins. Invest some time. Yes, time that one thing we're all short of but if you're really interested you can always find.

Having worked with some of the most challenging pupils back in Scotland, I feel that we need to reappraise the accessibility of higher order thinking and not place limits on those young people who have not seen traditional academic success. In line with the work of Zohar and Dori, I feel maybe engaging in seminars would help some of our most challenging students unravel some of the complexities that their lives are often dominated by.

One negative point was made by the Guidance counsellor at CSAS and that was that the seminar process empowers young people. Apparently, parents have said their children had become masters of dialogue to that point that at times it is exasperating for parents who just want compliant kids. I personally see no downside to empowerment and finding a voice and feel this is one the key strengths of the seminar.

## **Conclusions**

So, I first have to temper my enthusiasm for Paideia seminars and remind myself that once back in the UK not everyone in my school will want to embrace my ideas. My plan of action is that firstly I will try Paideia seminars with select classes. If the students engage with the experience, I would ask them tell their other teachers. So, basically plant the seed of curiosity. Once I feel comfortable with my practice, I would then plan to do a seminar with my faculty and then with the whole staff group. It is an expectation of me that on my return I share my findings with the staff at my school. I feel the best way to do this is to do a seminar with them. I know my response when I did the seminar in training and I can only hope that my colleagues will feel the same way I did. I know I haven't discovered something

new, but I do think the Paideia seminar model is something that could be used in classrooms to enhance the good practice that already exists.

I feel Paideia seminars could definitely be trialled in the context of engaging the disengaged and also feel that the four capacities are naturally embed into the Paideia philosophy.

I know that for teachers who have the curiosity and desire to challenge themselves and their students Paideia seminars will have appeal. I have access to lessons and hope to start engaging my classes by delivering a seminar at the end of each unit of work. I am also hoping to trial using seminars as part of our transition programme.

There are few significant things I have learned from this experience:

1. Not to be scared of silence in the classroom. If a question is asked and there's no response don't immediately feel the need to break the silence, give it time.
2. Pupils who don't actively engage in the seminars will still gain though being part of the seminars i.e. listening to the thoughts and ideas of other students. Not all participation has to be vocal.
3. A good teacher steps back and lets the students lead the lesson. "Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel."—Socrates

I started this report by musing about what education is for. I referred to the thoughts of Akala whose attitudes align with my own. However, sometimes I feel we get consumed with the need to find purpose and point to things which is probably why I did a degree in Philosophy and ended up as a teacher of RMPS. This research trip has not concluded anything it has just made me question what my role as a teacher is really all about. I feel Mortimer Adler sums up the current point in my journey.

*All genuine learning is active, not passive... It is a process of discovery in which the student is the main agent, not the teacher."*

*Mortimer Adler ,1982*

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Higher Order Thinking Skills and Low-Achieving Students: Are They Mutually Exclusive?

Author(s): Anat Zohar and Yehudit J. Dori Source: The Journal of the Learning Sciences, Vol. 12, No. 2 (2003), pp. 145-181 Published by: Taylor & Francis, Ltd

Blog - Let's BRAWL: Throwing Socratic Seminars out of the ring – David Theiriault

## APPENDIX A

### Reach out to - Facebook Social Studies network

Shameen Syed

Good afternoon / morning / evening ! I'm heading to the US from Scotland in three weeks time to embark on a short intensive research mission. I'll be in Phoenix AZ, Chattanooga TN and Charlotte NC. I'm researching the impact of Socratic Seminars on 1. Raising attainment and 2. Engaging the disengaged. I'll be going into schools to hopefully observe but I also thought this community may well be a fabulous resource for finding out about real teacher experiences of Socratic Seminars . So if you can comment on either of the points above I'd be really grateful. If your in any of the places I've mentioned I'll get you a coffee to say thanks.

Jessica Miller

I'm in Charlotte, NC! I have done a few Socratic seminars in the past but I have noticed that because I have a high population of English Language Learners- they don't get as involved and are apprehensive to speak out loud. I have had to make modifications like letting them respond online or writing their response first. I enjoy them but I also don't have the luxury of time to have them as often as I like.

Shameen Syed

That's interesting . I fostered unaccompanied migrants so appreciate the challenges of language learning . I guess this highlights that SS is not necessarily inclusive .

Erica Harris

I do Socratic seminars in NYC with a range of students. The challenging part is kids don't know how to continue a conversation so it's often very surface level. They also get so nervous about speaking about something they prepared themselves for that they don't focus on listening.

Mary McDowell Pinnecker

I'm in Phoenix, AZ! I haven't done a Socratic Seminar yet this year but I love them. I always start by doing Philosophical Chair several times before getting into Socratic Seminars.

Ellen Moses

I've never used it but have colleagues who do. Also, I'm in Chattanooga!

Anna M. Ruiz

In the years I have done Socratic Seminars, yes some kids who otherwise would not engage do. We have to be careful in assuming that just because a kid doesn't speak in seminar they aren't, observing, listening, or learning. Socratic seminar success is built on trust and building relational capacity with kids so they do feel comfortable to talk.

Maggie Engman

I read Matthew Copeland's book years ago and took a leap of faith. I love Socratic Circles. It takes time and skill development to build their academic discussion skills but it's worth it. Sometimes I've picked a dud article and they were less engaging but when students are taught to write engaging questions and build on points they work well. I can evaluate students academic skills quickly. I collect students planning so I can see what they might have said and/or to give feedback on how to prepare. Shy students as sophomores have become leaders by senior year. I live in Wisconsin and would love to see your research results.

Beth Dunn Cook

I've been doing Socratic Seminars for 5 years with Freshmen- Seniors. We use sentence frames to help guide them and if I have ELL's who are level 1, they can participate in Spanish and have their translator to translate to English. We are an AVID school so all of our teachers do them.

With Freshmen, we do partners so they can help each other. I also practice a lot of talk strategies with them on a daily basis so they are well prepared by the time we do our first one of the year.

We get 100% engagement with all the scaffolds we put into place.

Joy Carter Chalker

I love Socratic Seminars as do most of my students. Sometimes it is difficult to get the quiet students to participate by talking however even the quiet students pay attention the whole time. I give students plenty of time to research their point of view as well.

## APPENDIX B



### Paideia Seminar Lesson Plan

**Text:** "Rocket Night" by Alexander Weinstein

**Grade/Subject:** MS/HS (ELA) (Community)

**Ideas, Values:** Authority, Community, Many vs. One, Power

**Date of Origin:** **7/17/2019**

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#### Pre-Seminar Content

##### Launch Activity:

Have participants recall and discuss in pairs a time when they were forced to do something. Be deliberate about speaker and listener roles, by having the listeners each say back what they heard the speakers say.

##### Inspectional Read:

Distribute the text and have participants share out what they expect this story will be about. Have all number the paragraphs in the margin. Read the story aloud, and ask participants to underline any vocabulary with which they are unfamiliar.

##### Background Information:

Alexander Weinstein is the Director of The Martha's Vineyard Institute of Creative Writing and the author of the collection *Children of the New World* (Picador 2016). His stories have appeared in the *Notre Dame Review*, *Pleiades*, *PRISM International*, and other journals.

##### Vocabulary:

Elicit from participants any vocabulary that they noted as unfamiliar and provide friendly definitions or context explanations. Have students annotate their copies of the text with vocabulary meanings as is helpful to them.

##### Analytical Read:



Ask participants to reread the story actively. Have them make note of two quotes from the story and what the quotes might reveal about the two characters.

## Pre-Seminar Process:

- ✓ Define and State the purpose for the seminar.

*“A Paideia seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated with open ended questions.*

*“The main purpose of seminar is to arrive at a fuller understanding of the textual ideas and values, of ourselves, and of each other.*

- ✓ Describe the responsibilities of facilitator and participants.

*“I am primarily responsible for asking challenging, open-ended questions, and I will take a variety of notes to keep up with the talk turns and flow of ideas. I will help move the discussion along in a productive direction by asking follow-up questions based on my notes.*

*“I am asking you to think, listen and speak candidly about your thoughts, reactions and ideas. You can help each other do this by using each other’s names.*

*“You do not need to raise your hands in order to speak, rather, the discussion is collaborative in that you try to stay focused on the main speaker and wait your turn to talk.*

*“You should try to both agree and disagree in a courteous, thoughtful manner. For example, you might say, ‘I disagree with Joanna because...,’ focusing on the ideas involved not the individuals.*

- ✓ Have participants set a Personal Goal.

*“Now, please reflect on how you normally participate in a discussion as a group. What goal can you set for yourself that will help the flow and meaning of the seminar? “Please consider the list of personal participation goals – either on the Speaking and Listening Checklist or on the board.”*

- ✓ To speak at least three times
- ✓ To refer to the text
- ✓ To ask a question
- ✓ To speak out of uncertainty
- ✓ To build on others’ comments

*“Is there one that is relevant for you? Please choose one goal from the list or that you feel is best and commit to achieving it during the discussion we are about to have... write down (or circle) your personal goal.”*

- ✓ Agree on a Group Goal.

*For this seminar, I will suggest our group goal (select display for all to see).*

## Seminar Questions:

- ✓ Opening (Identify main ideas from the text):
    - ❖ What in the text surprised you? (Round Robin response)
  
    - ❖ Would anyone like to share why? (Spontaneous discussion)
  
  - ✓ Core (Analyze textual details):
    - ❖ According to the text, what does the rocket journey imply?
  
    - ❖ Reread the sentences in the last paragraph: What does the statement mean in a larger context?
  
    - ❖ What are some of the themes in this text? (going along with tradition, why bad things happen to people, mob mentality, family, following “rules”, etc.)
  
    - ❖ Should free-will override custom? Explain.
  
    - ❖ How does a community, a state, a nation as a society define right and wrong?
  
  - ✓ Closing (Personalize and apply the ideas):
    - ❖ Who ultimately decides if someone is doing the right thing or not?
- 

## Post-Seminar Process:

*“Thank you for your focused and thoughtful participation in our seminar”.*

- ✓ Have participants do a written self-assessment of their personal goal.

*“As part of the post-seminar process, I would first like to ask you to take a few minutes to reflect on your relative success in meeting the personal process goal you set prior to beginning the discussion. Please review the goal you set for yourself and reflect in writing to what extent you met the goal. In addition, note why you think you performed as you did”. (Pause for reflection.)*
  
- ✓ Do a group assessment of the social and intellectual goals of the seminar.

*“Now I would like us to talk together about how we did in relation to the group goal we set for ourselves (insert your group goal). On a scale of one to five, five being perfect, how would you say we did? Why?” (Pause for discussion.)*

*“Now, would someone be willing to (volunteer) to share your personal self-assessment and reflection?”*

- ✓ Note reminders for the next seminar.

## Post Seminar Content:

- ✓ Transition to Writing:

Have students spend 1-3 minutes jotting down interesting points that they said, heard or thought during the seminar dialogue.

- ✓ Writing Task:

After reading and discussing “Rocket Night”, write a letter to a new teacher explaining how the practice of sending a child into space needs to end. Give at least one example from the text and one from class.

- ✓ Brainstorm:

Put students into pairs or small groups to share ideas about what they will include in their note.

- ✓ Structure the Writing:

Guide students in selecting examples to cite from the text and from class, and in making a graphic organizer for their note: introduction, body, and conclusion.

Have students create an outline including their decisions about where their ideas will best fit into the note.

- ✓ First Draft:

Challenge all to draft their ideas into sentences, following the outline they created in *Structuring the Writing*.

- ✓ Collaborative Revision:

Once the first draft is complete, have participants work in pairs and read each other’s note. As they read each other’s work, they are looking for two main things:

1. That the writer made a clear explanation for the use of power.
2. That the writer has at least one quote from the story to support his/her point.

Revision suggestions should focus on these areas. Have students highlight at least one sentence or phrase in their partner's piece they feel was well written, and verbalize to their partner why they like that part. Writers should then begin a second draft.

✓ **Edit:**

Once the second draft is complete, hand out editing resources such as a cell phone, laptop, and dictionaries. Place students in groups of three or four trying to avoid putting students with the same student they revised with earlier. Before starting the edits do a quick review of whatever grammar skills you are currently working on. Have each student in the revision group read each other paper from the group slowly and silently marking no more than five edits and not duplicating an edit that has already been made by another participant.

✓ **Publish:**

Depending on technology resources available, post students' responses on a virtual or physical bulletin board. Encourage students to view the responses and make comments about which notes they find most compelling. If the bulletin board is physical you can do this by leaving room at the bottom where students can pin-up their comments on notecards.

This Paideia Lesson Plan was created by:

Name: **Jeremy Spielman**  
Organization: **The National Paideia Center**

\*Text is attached if open sourced.

\*Text is cited if it needs to be procured.

“Rocket Night” by Alexander Weinstein

It was Rocket Night at our daughter's elementary school, the night when parents, students, and the administration gather to place the least liked child in a rocket and shoot

him into the stars. Last year we placed Laura Jackson into the capsule, a short, squat girl known for her limp dresses which hung crookedly on her body. The previous year we'd sent off a boy from India whose name none of us could remember. Before that our daughter was in kindergarten so we'd yet to become part of the Rose Hill community.

Rocket Night is an event which almost all of us look forward to, falling in late October when the earth is covered by orange and yellows. Our children have begun to lay out their Halloween costumes and their sweaters are heavy with the scent of autumn. It's late enough into the school year for us to get a sense of the best children to send off. For alliances are made early at Rose Hill. Our children gather in the mornings to share their secrets on playgrounds, while the other children, those with stars and galaxies in their futures, can be seen at the edges of the field, playing with sticks alone or staring into mud puddles at drowned worms.

Meet and greet is held, as is custom, in the school gymnasium, and we mingle in the warm glow of its lacquered floors, surrounded by wooden bleachers and parallel bars, talking about soccer games, math homework, and the difficulty of finding time for errands with our children's busy schedules. Our kids run the perimeter, some playing tag, others collecting in clusters of boys around the fifth graders with portable game players, the girls across the room in their own clusters. Susan Beech brought her famous home-baked cupcakes, the Stowes brought Hawaiian Punch, and we brought plastic cups and cocktail napkins and placed them on the table among the baked goods and apple slices.

The boy to be sent off, I believe his name was Daniel, stood near his parents, holding his mother's skirt, looking unkempt. One could immediately see the reason he'd been chosen by our children. There's a hand-me-down quality to the clothing of those selected, the mildewed stench of thrift stores clinging to their corduroys. This boy's collar sat askew, revealing the small white undershirt beneath, and his brown slacks were held tightly by an oversized belt whose end flopped lazily from his side. The boy, our daughter told us, brought stubby pencils to school whose chewed-up ends got stuck in sharpeners. He had the habit of picking his nose. His lunches, she reported, were nothing more than stale crackers and a warm box of chocolate milk. There was a smear of cupcake frosting on the corner of his mouth, and seeing this detail, we knew our children had chosen well. He was the sort of child who makes one proud of one's own children, and we looked over to our daughter, who was holding court with a devil's square, tightening then spreading her small fingers within the folded paper while counting out the letters O-R-A-N-G-E.

At eight o'clock the principal took the stage beneath the basketball hoop, a whine from the microphone as he adjusted it. He turned to us with open arms and welcomed us, the parents and students of Rose Hill, to another year together. He thanked Susan for her cupcakes, and all of us for our contributions to make the evening's festivities so successful, and then, forgetting the boy's name, he turned to the family and said, "Donald, we hope your journey into space will be a joyful one." We all applauded. Admittedly, his parents applauded less than others, looking a bit pale, but we acknowledged that the parents of the

chosen often do seem pale. They are the sort of parents who come to soccer games and sit alone in the stands, a gloomy sadness hanging over them, whose cars make the most noise when they pull into our school's parking lot, and whose faces, within the automobile's dark interiors, remind us not of the joys of parenthood, but of some sorrow none of us wish to share. Seeing them standing there with their child, we realized, with relief, that with the departure of their son we would also gain their departure, and we quietly acknowledged the all-round benefit.

The principal's speech delivered, he invited us to join him on the playground where the capsule sat, cockpit open, its silver sides illuminated by the glow from the launch tower. It's a truth that the child to be sent into space grows reticent upon seeing the glowing tower and the gaping casket-like rocket. We saw the small boy cling to his mother, unwilling to leave her side, and so we let our children loose. I watched my daughter pry the boy's fingers from his mother's leg as two larger fifth-graders seized his waist and dragged him away. The nurse, a kindly woman, helped to subdue the parents. She took the mother aside and whispered to her, while the gym coach placed a meaty hand on the father's shoulder and assured him that the capsule was stocked with water and food tablets, plenty for lasting the boy a long time into the future. To be honest, it's a mystery how long such supplies last. It's a small compartment within that capsule and we are all aware funding was cut to our district earlier this year, but still we assured them there was nothing to worry of. The boy, if hungry for company, had a small microphone inside the shell which would allow him to speak to himself of his journey, his thoughts, and the mystery of the universe.

The boy was strapped into the capsule, his hands secured, and he looked out at us. He spoke then, for the first and only time that night. He asked if he might have one of his pencils with him; it was in his pencil box, he said, the one with a brown bear for an eraser. The principal assured him that he wouldn't need it in outer space, and the custodian noted that the request was moot; the boy's desk had been emptied earlier that day. So they closed the cover. All we could see was the smudge of the boy's face pressed against the porthole.

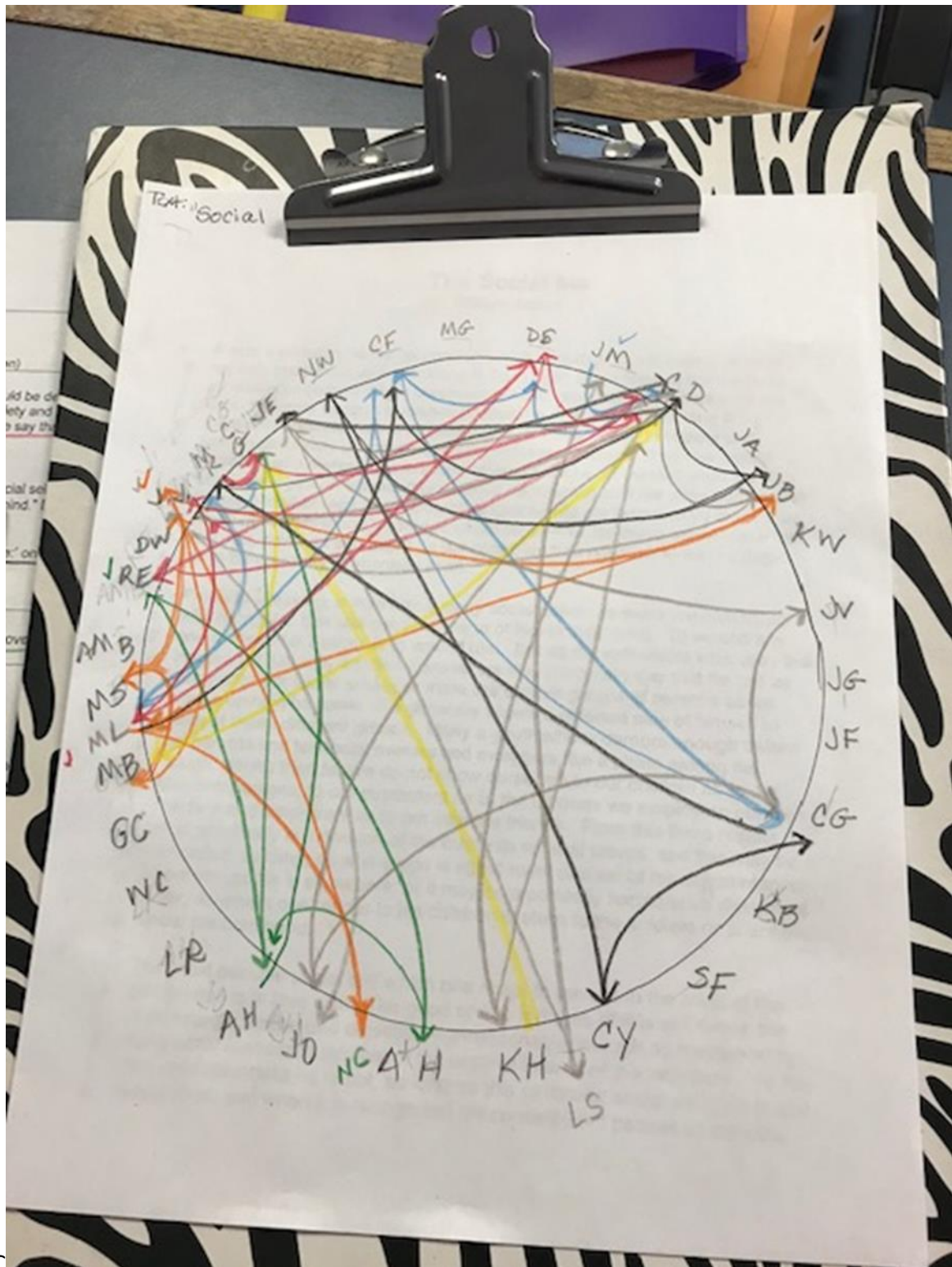
When the rocket blasted off, it made us all take an involuntary step backwards, the light of the flames illuminating the wonder upon our children's faces. We watched as the capsule rose from our playground, leaving behind our swing sets and jungle gym, rising higher, until it was but a sparkling marble in the night sky, and then, finally, gone completely. We sighed with awe, some applauded, and then we made our rounds, wishing one another goodnight, arranging play dates, and returning to our cars. Those of us on the PTO remained to put the gymnasium back in order for the coming morning. And the boy faded from our thoughts, replaced by the lateness of the evening and the pressure of delayed bedtime schedules. I myself had all but forgotten about the child by the time I lay our sleeping daughter on her bed. And yet, when I took out the recycling that night, I paused beneath the streetlamps of our cul-de-sac and thought of the children up there. I imagined all of them drifting alone, speaking into their microphones, telling us about their lives from the depths of the unknown.

<https://www.alexanderweinsteinfiction.com/stories>

[https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/fdfaea\\_952ece86ffae481fa19c5383cadacc5f.pdf](https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/fdfaea_952ece86ffae481fa19c5383cadacc5f.pdf)

## APPENDIX C

Mapping allows the teacher to keep track of student participation. Each colour represents a different question. Students are seated in circle and identified by their initials.

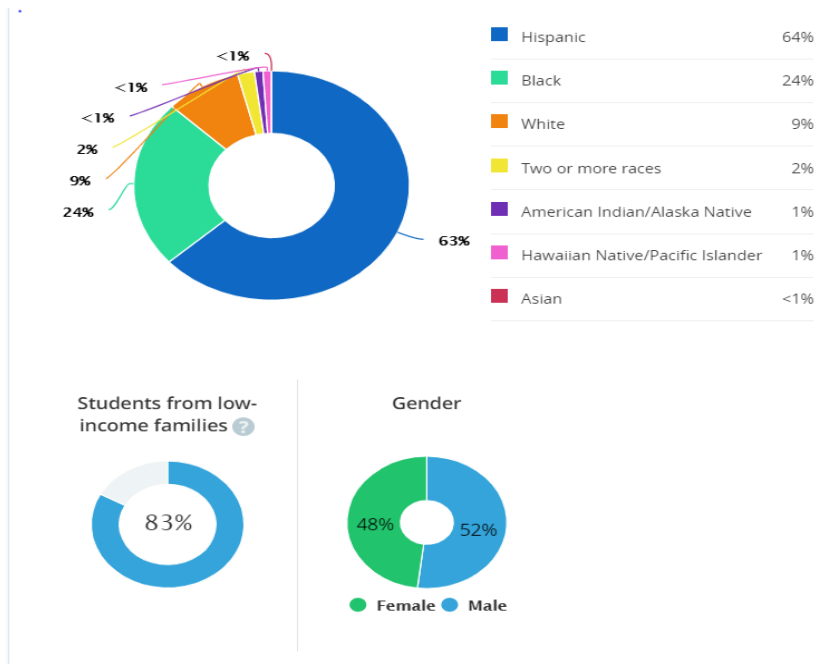




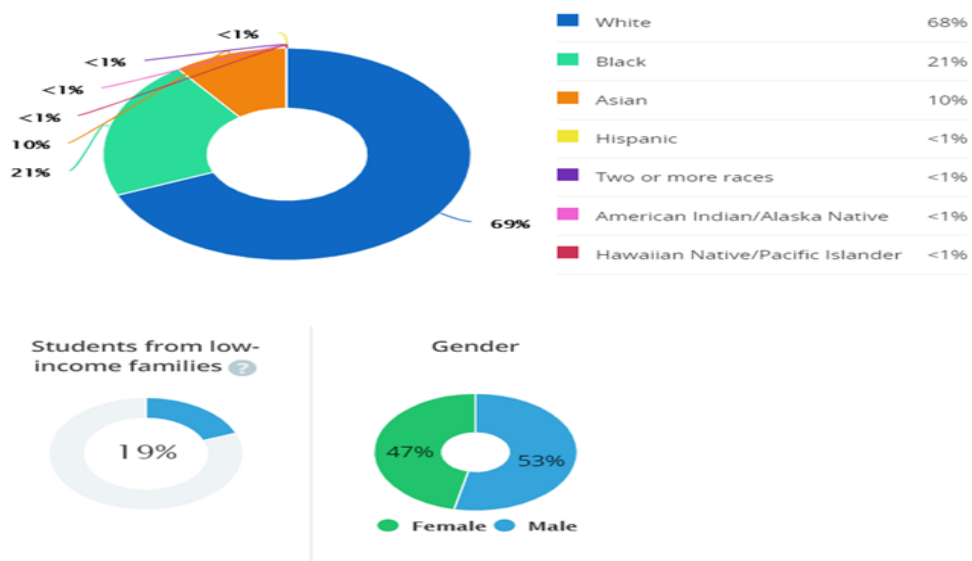
# APPENDIX D

## Demographics

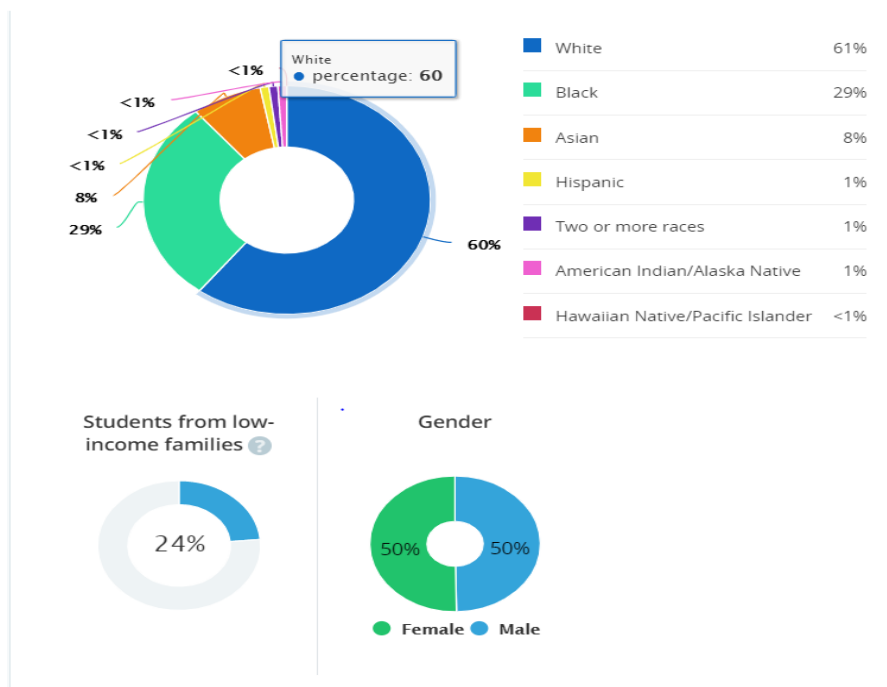
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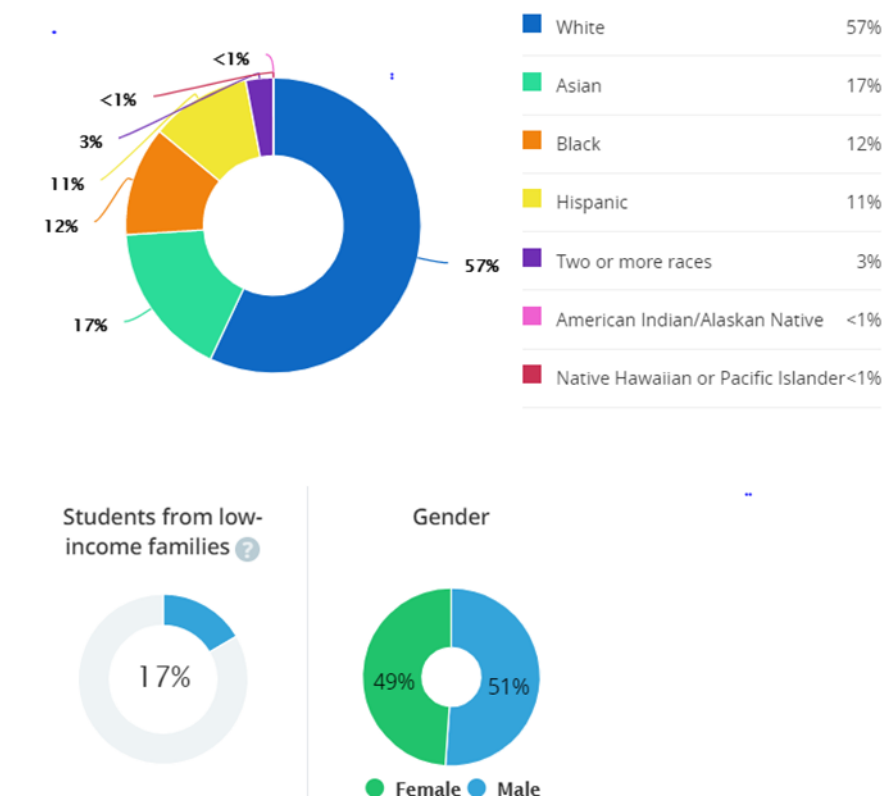
### b. Chattanooga School of Liberal Arts- Tennessee



c. Chattanooga School of Arts and sciences- Tennessee

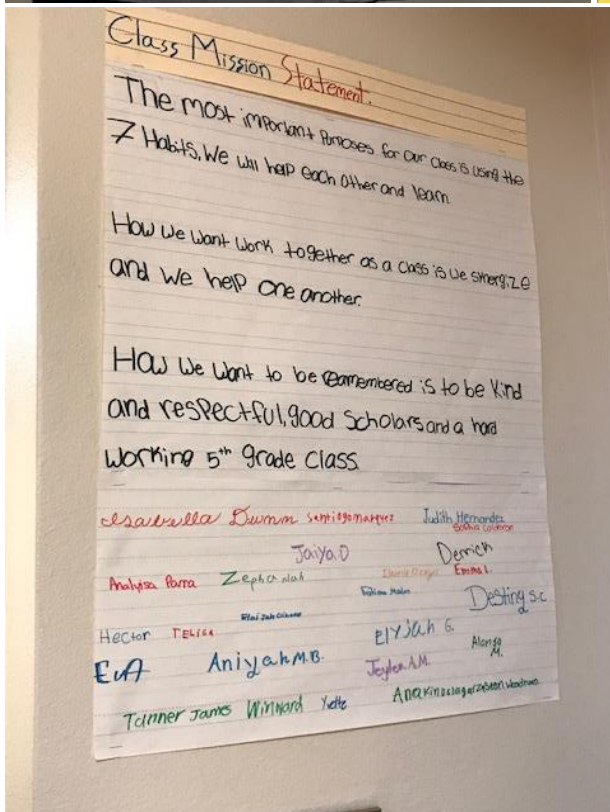
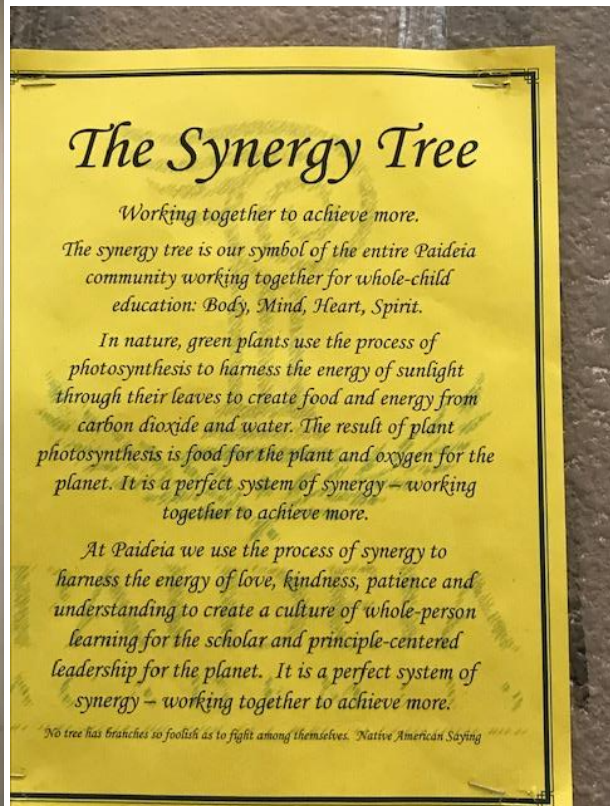
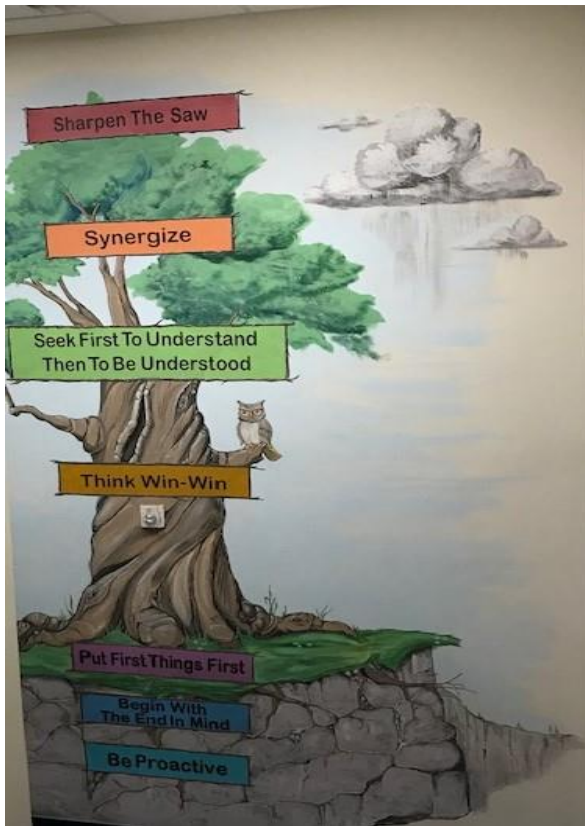


d. Community House Middle School- Charlotte North Carolina



# APPENDIX E

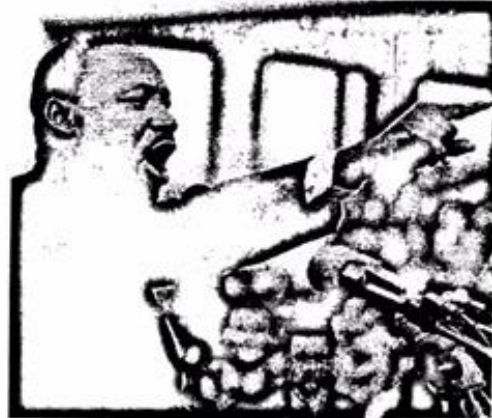
## PAIDEIA ACADEMY - ARIZONA



# APPENDIX F – Pre seminar activity

Angelina Espericu  
10-14-2019  
713

! = 4  
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## What Is Your Life's Blueprint?

On October 26, 1967, six months before he was assassinated, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to a group of students at Barratt Junior High School in Philadelphia.

I want to ask you a question, and that is: What is your life's blueprint? *can we draw our own Bible pri?*

1 Whenever a building is constructed, you usually have an architect who draws a blueprint, and that blueprint serves as the pattern, as the guide, and a building is not well erected without a good, solid blueprint. *?*

2 *what does erected mean?*  
Now each of you is in the process of building the structure of your lives, and the question is whether you have a proper, a solid and a sound blueprint.

I want to suggest some of the things that should begin your life's blueprint. *It is important to stand up for yourself.*  
3 Number one in your life's blueprint, should be a deep belief in your own dignity, your worth and your own somebodiness. Don't allow anybody to make you feel that you're nobody. Always feel that you count. Always feel that you have worth and always feel that your life has ultimate significance.

4 Secondly, in your life's blueprint you must have as the basic principle the determination to achieve excellence in your various fields of endeavor. You're going to be deciding as the days, as the years unfold what you will do in life — what your life's work will be. Set out to do it well.

5 And I say to you, my young friends, doors are opening to you--doors of opportunities that were not open to your mothers and your fathers — and the great challenge facing you is to be ready to face these doors as they open. *?*

what does man can do anything  
essayist mean? but so can women

6 Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great essayist, said in a lecture in 1871, "If a man can write a better book or preach a better sermon or make a better mousetrap than his neighbor, even if he builds his house in the woods, the world will make a beaten path to his door." <sup>what about people who don't drop out of school?</sup>

7 This hasn't always been true — but it will become increasingly true, and so I would urge you to study hard, to burn the midnight oil; I would say to you, don't drop out of school. I understand all the sociological reasons, but I urge you that in spite of your economic plight, in spite of the situation that you're forced to live in — stay in school. <sup>what does plight mean? do what you need to do not worry about others?</sup>

8 And when you discover what you will be in your life, set out to do it as if God Almighty called you at this particular moment in history to do it, don't just set out to do a good job. Set out to do such a good job that the living, the dead or the unborn couldn't do it any better. <sup>what others want you to do?</sup>

9 If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music, sweep streets like Leontyne Price sings before the Metropolitan Opera. Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well. If you can't be a pine at the top of the hill, be a shrub in the valley. Be the best little shrub on the side of the hill. <sup>what does Metropolitan mean? reputation do you want?</sup>

10 Be a bush if you can't be a tree. If you can't be a highway, just be a trail. If you can't be a sun, be a star. For it isn't by size that you win or fail. Be the best of whatever you are. <sup>It is not right to judge anyone by size!</sup>

11 "You should not be ashamed of your color or biological color."  
12 We all ready have examples of color men/women.  
13 "We all can be somebody."  
Finally in your life blueprint must be principles of beauty..

14 "You do not struggle for life justice no matter how young you are"....  
15 "If you cant fly, run if you cant run, walk if you cant walk, crawl, But whatever you do keep moving."  
16

**APPENDIX G**

**Stimulus text – History lesson**



## Staff from Chattanooga school of Liberal Arts



Jennifer

Deputy Principal

Cindy Gaston

Me

Krystal Scarborough

Principal

## Jim Boles – Principal Chattanooga school for Arts and Sciences.



Group work considering the Four capacities



Kindergarten Art seminar - The Indian Paintbrush





# Community House Middle School- Paideia Seminars

