

were no longer observing, summarizing and evaluating their peers. Instead, they were partners – the inner circle participated in the discussion, while the outer circle observed and wrote down additional ideas and questions. The outer circle then supplied the inner circle with these additional ideas and discussion questions. Students were asked to comment on the structure and to express how they felt participating in it.

The Socratic Circle Approach:

The Socratic Circle approach allows participants to discuss a given text without having to memorize information. Instead, the participants gain a deeper meaning of the text through thoughtful dialogues, guiding one another through ideas and questions to arrive at an answer. Structure 1

1. Students are divided into two concentric circles: the inner and the outer circle.
2. The instructor explains how the circles function: the students in the inner circle are the ones leading the discussion based on the reading, the analysis of the text, and the discussion questions they have prepared. The students in the outer circle observe the discussion, take notes, and assess the inner circle's performance using the Socratic Circle Rubric.
3. The Socratic Circle Rubric is distributed and discussed. It guides the students in the inner circle as to how to best contribute to the discussion, while it serves the students in the outer circle to assess their peers. Once the students are familiar with the expectations, it is clear what they need to do in order to get a high grade.
4. The discussion starts with an opening question (it can be a question that the instructor had prepared or a question that one of the students had generated). There is no right answer to this generic question. It should facilitate the students to define, clarify, speculate and evaluate an idea from the reading. From this point on, the discussion may go in various directions, depending on the ideas and the questions that the students generate. The students are

discussions. The instructor explained what the expectations were and pointed out what a student must do in order to earn points, which are then transformed into a number grade using a scale.

The Socratic Circle Rubric was used by both the students and the instructor. When applying the first structure (see above) of the Socratic Circle approach, the students were asked to evaluate their peers. Students were partnered up, so that one of them is in the inner circle, participating in the discussion, while the other one is in the outer circle, observing, summarizing what is being discussed, and evaluating their peer. Using the Socratic Circle Rubric, the students had the opportunity to give each other feedback and indicate what their partners did well and where improvement is needed. The same rubric is used by the instructor. This means that in the first structure of the Socratic Circle approach the students received feedback from both their peers as well as the instructor. Students rotated, so that each of them is in the inner circle and receives feedback. In the second structure, the students only received feedback from the instructor.

The Socratic Circle Rubric, adapted from Copeland, M. (2005). "Socratic Circle Rubric" (Figure 1), consists of six categories and three descriptors. The six categories are (1) understands the selected text, (2) participates in discussion, (3) supports ideas and evidence, (4) demonstrates critical mindedness, (5) demonstrates tolerance for uncertainty, and (6) listens and respects others. The three descriptors are: above target, target, and below target. Students in the outer circle as well as the instructor reflect on their peer's/student's performance in the Socratic Circle, and mark which box best describes their peer's/student's performance during the discussion.

Instructor's Role. The instructor does not have a traditional teacher role in the Socratic Circle approach. He or she is responsible for selecting an insightful text that is relevant to the students and provokes discussion. In case the students read a book, it is the instructor's job to divide the book into logical sections and assign the readings. While in class, the instructor does not participate in the discussion. He or she may choose to prepare the opening question that will start the dialogue. Once the dialogue starts, the instructor takes on the facilitator role and ensures that the dialogue of the inner circle is focused and moving. The instructor also observes the students who are in the inner circle and uses the rubric to evaluate their participation.

Benefits and Flaws of the Socratic Circle Approach. The most important benefit of the Socratic Circle approach is the full participation of each student. Throughout the discussion, each student is applying him or herself and participating in a number of ways. Sometimes the participation is solely based on the discussion, yet, while those who do not participate in the discussion normally sit passively, in the Socratic Circle approach, they too are kept on their toes. If one does not participate in the discussion, he/she is busy summarizing what has been said, evaluating their peer, or preparing comments and questions for the given or the next round of discussion. Having this in mind, students come to class prepared, which is another great benefit of the Socratic Circle approach. This approach awakens the sense of responsibility in the students. They are aware that the discussion and the rest of the group will struggle if they are not prepared to participate, thus they read the assigned text, analyze it, and prepare discussion questions.

Though it has proven to be a very appealing method that the students enjoyed, the Socratic Circle approach has some flaws. First of all, it is time consuming for the instructor to explain the approach for the students to adapt to the novel method. Another issue is that the discussion may focus on broad ideas rather than specific, factual information and arrive at a conclusion without a complete closure. The instructor may