Texas Woman's University Curriculum & Instruction Program
Exemplary Faculty Practices

Overview

Faculty members in the Curriculum & Instruction (C & I) Program in the Dept. of Teacher Education at TWU regularly implement exemplary practices across courses in the program. At the undergraduate level, this program comprises the Education minor coursework (20 credit hours) focusing on Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities (PPR) for all degree plans leading to teacher certification. The exemplary faculty practices contribute to our program quality and improvement, specifically in the areas of 1) quality and productivity in student recruitment and selection, 2) course content and instructional delivery, 3) field-based experiences, 4) research and development, and 5) school-university engagement.

Socrates Jigsaw Café: Drs. Gina Anderson and Jody Piro

Enhancing critical thinking, addressing diversity and equity in schools, investigating, analyzing, and solving problems, modeling effective pedagogy, and assessing student learning are some of the primary goals of our course EDUC 5173: Diversity in the Classroom. In order to support these goals, we created an instructional framework from 2 well known approaches to teaching and learning: Socratic questioning and the Jigsaw Approach to Cooperative Learning. This instructional framework engages participants in a Socrates Café through a Jigsaw cooperative group activity. This instructional strategy promotes and assesses critical thinking and Socratic questioning via the nine Universal Intellectual Standards (Elder & Paul, 2008). The instructional strategy and the intellectual standards, when used in tandem, have the potential to enhance the level of cooperative and critical thinking as well as support multicultural connections across all content area disciplines.

The Socratic Method has been innovatively applied in a new venue, a Socrates Café. Christopher Phillips (2001) originally established Socrates Café by creating open-invitation discussion groups in coffee shops and libraries, but the same objective can be implemented in schools and classrooms as well.

Cooperative grouping is commonly known to not only improve social skills but to enhance learning (Johnson, Johnson, Holubec, & Roy, 1990; Kagan, 1992; Slavin, 1990). One of the learning benefits is improved critical thinking (Aronson & Patnoe, 2011). To explicitly promote critical analysis, we utilize a modified Jigsaw cooperative grouping that supports a Socrates Café forum. In the traditional Jigsaw, students work in small groups and become an Expert in a given topic, then converge to share their completed jigsaw picture of the assigned topic (Aronson, 1978). We adapt this process in our Jigsaw Socrates Café. We commence with cooperative Home Tables where an Expert remains as new students rotate into a Home Table area. In this adaptation, the assigned content question remains constant at each Home Table, and the rotating students become the variable. All students rotate through content Home Groups, while the Expert remains at the original Home Group. The Expert’s role is to summarize, synthesize and evaluate prior to new directions of learning starting with new classmates as they rotate through the Home Groups (see Figures 1, 2, 3 & 4).
Critical analysis implies sound logic, rather than fallacious assumptions. Universal Intellectual Standards (Paul & Elder, 1996) offer a structure for this process. The Universal Intellectual Standards include: clarity, accuracy, precision, relevance, depth, breadth, logic, significance, and fairness of expression (Elder & Paul, 2007, p. 5). To determine whether this Socrates Jigsaw Café practice accomplishes our goals, we assess students’ questions and responses by coding them according to these Universal Intellectual Standards.