

The Chicken and the Egg: Inviting Response and Talk through Socratic Circles

"Literature is, first of all, an invitation simply to speak."

—Robert Probst, 2000, p. 8

When we finish reading a good book, we immediately want to tell someone about it. More than once, each of us has probably nudged a partner awake or chatted with the check-out lady in order to talk about Harry's latest challenge or Bella's new crisis.

Not surprisingly, our students feel the same way. When they turn the final page of *Extras*, completing the Scott Westerfeld series, they typically don't beg to showcase their knowledge of the book in a voluntary five-paragraph essay, and they certainly don't want to prod, pull, and dissect every square inch of the novel for hidden

meanings and symbolism. Instead, just like us, students want to share opinions, feelings, experiences, insights, and questions, as well as hear what classmates have to say. Put quite simply, they want to talk about the books

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they have read.

But we cannot talk about talk without also thinking about response in our classrooms. It's like the chicken and the egg; which comes first? Students need opportunities to respond to a text in order to have something to say, and talk is a means through which students can respond.

Rosenblatt (1996) assures us that a work of literature has no meaning to a reader until he or she has experienced a personal response. So it is up to us, as teachers, to provide for those classroom experiences that facilitate response through talk. After all, literature should evoke discussion. As Probst reminds us, we have a "rare opportunity" in the language arts classroom: "You have thirty kids and a book," he writes. "You can talk" (2004, p. 72).

Unfortunately, we do not always allow for unencumbered student response or talk in the classroom. Beers and Probst (1998) describe an all too familiar classroom scene in which the teacher dominates the conversation with her list of queries that move logically from one topic to the next, frustrating students because they do not have an opportunity to ask their own burning questions. In essence, teacher-controlled literature discussions can alienate students from effectively responding to and talking about a text.

Herz and Gallo (2005) maintain that many teachers have "stolen" their students' freedom to express personal reactions, suggesting that students are not provided classroom opportunities to react to a text individually and apart from the teacher's own bias. They are guided to believe what teachers believe and are robbed of making their own connections and opinions. Instead of opening the floor to students, we perform a literary séance of sorts, conjuring the opinions and analyses of ghosts of college professors past, thus perpetuating and glorifying the New Criticism approach.

Students then blindly regurgitate the passed-down meanings onto our tests. Perhaps said students even score well on the AP, knock out the English portion of the SAT with ease, or even “write a hit play and direct it,” à la Max Fischer, but if they haven’t stopped to talk about how a book affected them, then something is seriously wrong. These children of literature who parrot the thinking of teachers or paraphrase the critical judgments of scholars have not begun to learn literature (Probst, 2004).

We are two teachers who want our students to “learn literature.” While we have read about response and talk, we also recognize ourselves in the scenarios described above. Even though one of us is a university professor and the other an eighth-grade language arts teacher, we have both led students through discussions with class handouts and study guides, heading toward a known destination. We have both tested students on answers to the questions and prompts appearing in those same class handouts and study guides. With this in mind, we began to search for a more authentic means to engage students in response through talk, because talk is one thing young teenagers—particularly middle school adolescents—can do.

For example, there is no mistaking an eighth-grade hallway. Rich conversations, albeit way too loud, echo through the halls as students talk about birthdays, new boyfriends, football victories, even church confirmations. Each of these occasions is a moment of rejoicing, of spontaneous song and laughter, of hugs, fist-pounds, chest-bumps, or squeals. In short, these wondrous creatures find a way to make noise. They talk.

Discovering Socratic Circles

A Socratic Circle encourages voice. It provides students an opportunity to talk about a text without the strict control of teacher-generated questions and “right answers.” Socrates was convinced that the surest way to attain reliable knowledge was through the practice of disciplined conversation, which he called a “dialectic.” A dialectic is the art or practice of examining opinions or ideas

logically, often by the method of question and answer, so as to determine their validity; therefore, a Socratic Circle is a method to try to understand information by creating a dialectic in which participants seek deeper understanding of complex ideas through rigorously thoughtful dialogue.

Socratic Circles open with a question. An opening question has no right answer; instead, it reflects a genuine curiosity on the part of the questioner. A good opening question leads participants to speculate, evaluate, define, and clarify the issues involved. Responses to the opening question generate new questions, leading to new responses. In this way, the line of inquiry in a Socratic Circle evolves spontaneously, rather than as a predetermined dialogue scripted by a teacher.

Through Socratic Circles, students have a conversation about a text or idea while gaining various perspectives. The students are able to go back and forth through talk and finagle with various opinions, perspectives, and viewpoints. As Copeland (2005) writes, “Socratic circles turn partial classroom control, classroom direction, and classroom governance over to students by creating a truly equitable learning community where the weight and value of student voices and teacher voices are indistinguishable from each other” (p. 3). Socratic Circles are a way for student voices to not only be heard, but responded to and valued.

Thus inspired, we collaborated in our efforts to implement the Socratic Circle as a means to facilitate response through talk in a middle-grades language arts classroom. As we both had struggled in previous attempts with prompting response and talk around Shakespeare’s classic tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*, we decided to challenge ourselves and use this play and its complex surrounding issues as the springboard for class discussion. But we also aspired to do more than that by engaging in an inquiry around the nature of response and talk during a Socratic Circle. We asked three questions: 1) What is the nature of talk during Socratic Circles? 2) What is student response to talk? 3) How might knowing more

about student response to talk and the nature of talk improve our teaching during Socratic Circles? The remainder of this article will describe our process of implementing Socratic Circles and discuss our thinking around the nature of talk and student response to talk. The article will conclude with suggestions for teaching based on what we have learned.

Facilitating Socratic Circles

Copeland (2005) recommends that teachers select an appealing text, rich with thought-provoking ideas, but if we are asking students to discuss

controversial ideas, scaffolding them into response is vital. We prepared for Socratic Circles by first introducing the concept of love—ill-fated love, if you will—hoping to generate personal responses and thus more talk in the classroom. After perusing lyrics by Taylor Swift, James Blunt, and others, we listened to Swift's "Love Story" (2008, track 3), a poor man's *Romeo and Juliet*, and Blunt's *You're Beautiful* (2005, track 2). We next tried to make a connection with students through Meyer's (2005; Godfrey & Hardwicke, 2008) *Twilight*. Boys rolled their eyes when the trailer for the movie played on the SmartBoard, but we pressed on.

SIDE TRIP: STUDENT VOICES ESSENTIAL IN SOCRATIC CIRCLES

In an attempt to amplify students' voice and authentic response through talk, the authors of this article implemented the Socratic Circle in a middle-grades language arts classroom. They had come to understand that giving students a "voice" for discussing open-ended questions that did not force them to produce a right or wrong answer actually enhanced the students' appreciation of the text. The authors establish that teachers need to better understand the "reciprocal relationship between response and talk" and that implementing the Socratic circle will illuminate both. To further investigate the phenomena of student talk and the Socratic method, explore these additional resources.

Additional Readings

Paley, V. (2007). *HER classic: On listening to what the children say. Harvard Educational Review, 77*, 152–163.

In this article, Paley explains how she teaches reading comprehension using the Socratic method, in which students learn to use open-ended questions to think deeper about the reading selection. Paley posits that the children's point of view is important in promoting a positive interaction with the text.

Soter, A., Wilkinson, I., Murphy, P., Rudge, L., Reninger, K., & Edwards, M. (2008). What the discourse tells us: Talk and indicators of high-level comprehension. *International Journal of Educational Research, 47*, 372–391.

This extensive three-year study delineates nine small-group discussion approaches to quality student discussions. Student understanding and critical thinking can be augmented by providing authentic experiences for student talk.

Internet Resources

"Making Personal and Cultural Connections Using *A Girl Named Disaster*": This lesson helps students experience both "efferent" and "aesthetic" responses to the story *A Girl Named Disaster* by Nancy Farmer. Students work as a whole class and with partners to explore the main character. They can make geographic, economic, cultural, religious, ethnic, and personal connections to help them develop a rich transaction with the text.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/making-personal-cultural-connections-166.html>

"Socratic Method": Heather Coffey, a former middle and high school English teacher, explains the history and theory of the Socratic Method of teaching, which emphasizes teacher–student dialogue. Coffey also offers suggestions for creating Socratic Circles and Socratic Seminars and provides resources for further reading.

<http://www.learnnc.org/lp/pages/4994>

—Ruth Lowery

As we began a shared reading of the play, students were instructed to keep a reader's bookmark utilizing Daniels and Steineke's (2004) text-marking system. Even though the reader's bookmark is simplistic in nature, the basic act of making checkmarks, question marks, and other notations in the margin can be especially helpful for a student when faced with a difficult text such as a Shakespearean tragedy. We also asked them to write down a question and a comment each night. In an effort to further frontload responses for Socratic Circles, we gave students 10 minutes at the beginning of class to write down questions and comments that would stimulate good discussion. They were allowed to look through the text and use their reader's bookmarks. By allowing them to prepare questions for discussion, students were provided the opportunity to make sense of ideas before they shared them with a group, or what Probst (2004) calls "verbaliz[ing] in solitude" (p. 75).

We were then ready for the Socratic Circle. Desks were arranged in a large circle, and a round table was pushed in the middle, surrounded by 10 chairs temporarily borrowed from the computer lab. Off with the piercing halogen lights above us, and on with a few desk lamps and some strings of mini-lights hung from the ceiling. This was it.

Half of the class moved to the chairs in the middle to begin the discussion. The students in the outer circle were there to observe, all the while jotting down notes about nonverbal communication and positively framed suggestions about how the group could improve the discussion. The role of the outer circle cannot be diminished, as their feedback would be crucial to fostering positive discussions. Moreover, it always means more to a student when a fellow classmate—not the teacher—reinforces or comments on behavior.

We first attempted a "walk through" circle; nothing but the topic (i.e., ill-fated love) was predetermined. Students were asked to generate questions and comments on their own. Initially, the conversation was superficial, but interest was clearly sparked.

Two days later, a more official circle gathered. Remembering student reluctance to discuss more personal responses to love, and quite honestly, scared to lose them on the first real attempt, we elected to stay safe with literary-based prompts, offering them the following predetermined topics:

1. Mercutio's death: "A plague o' both your houses!"

2. Romeo's revenge—Tybalt's death

"Either thou or I, or both, must go with him."

"I am Fortune's fool!" (Fate/Destiny)

A honeymoon kicked off with murder of a family member

Romeo's banishment/exile

3. Juliet's reaction:

"Back, foolish tears, back to your native spring"

The inside circle spoke for about 10 minutes. The outer group offered feedback for approximately 3–4 minutes, and then we followed up with positive reinforcement or a few specific suggestions for each group. Then we changed circles and the process repeated.

Reading continued over the next few days, but students still resisted the obvious connection to the two teenagers on the pages of the play before them. Would a return to the more personal connection circle encourage wanted response and talk? We provided students with the following topics to consider:

1. Have you ever felt like Romeo—so upset that you act in a way you normally wouldn't? What situation was that?
2. Have you ever felt like Juliet—unable to tell a secret to those close to you? What does that feel like, and does it make you sympathize with Juliet? What else?
3. Who in your life has ever given you advice that you didn't want to hear, or advice that is good for you but too hard to accept?

4. Do you ever feel that your parents', teachers', or coaches' way of seeing things is not the way you see things? How does this relate back to R and J?
5. What other general thoughts, opinions, or connections did you make while reading the play—or now as you think back to your reading?

Two more circles followed—both of which were attempts to merge the literature with life experiences. The third circle, however, was unseen, as students were allowed to take their discussions to a nearby conference room.

The Nature of Talk

Every teacher struggles with lofty expectations. Shortly after the Socratic Circles were finished, we would have said that other than a few exceptions, the nature of talk was superficial. The conversations were engaging, but students clung to the text as if it were a life jacket. Connections were few and far between. A few movies and a handful of childhood stories were about as far as anyone ventured. But a closer look at the dialogue transcribed during the circles reveals a different story. Of all the topics discussed, the three most common “hot button” issues were: love at first sight; Juliet’s relationship with her parents; and Friar Lawrence’s role in the play.

Students had plenty to say about Romeo, who became a quick target for criticism when discussing the relationship between the two star-crossed lovers. The majority of those who spoke out were not impressed with the fast-talking Romeo; in fact, several were put off by his advances, as this exchange shows:

JESSICA: Romeo was all over Juliet.

DANIELLE: It was kinda weird on page 59 (when Romeo and Juliet share their first kiss) . . . (pause) . . . I was like . . . (pause) . . . kissing their faces already!

WADE: And they were talking about pilgrims!

JESSICA: He was all in love so fast.

WILL: Romeo seems kinda like a player.

RENEE: And on page 57 . . . (long pause) . . . Juliet’s like calling him a perv!

TAY: Yeah, like he was going too fast.

Another class’s exchange on the same topic went like this:

JAMES: Okay, here’s the question: Is Juliet a good fit for Romeo?

KIM: So far, I don’t think it’s gonna work out.

EMILY: If their parents loved each other, they might have a chance.

TREY: Romeo goes from high to low really fast.

MIKE: He’s a crybaby!

MATTHEW: He’s going crazy.

OLIVIA: He kissed Juliet and they didn’t even know their names.

AUGUSTA: I’m surprised he didn’t get slapped.

JUAN: I don’t know why they didn’t introduce themselves.

KATHERINE: It’s like making out with a hobo!

A third class took the same topic but ventured into gender differences:

AMANDA: Can a 13-year-old really fall in love?

DAVIS: Puppy love, not actual love.

KELLY: ‘Cause we haven’t gone through that stuff.

DAVIS: We’re still adolescents; we are still confused.

AMANDA: I think that it’s possible.

STEVEN: It wouldn’t last long.

DAVIS: Are you saying they could be . . .

AMANDA: Maybe.

MELANIE: I agree, what if (long story about two people meeting, going away, and then coming back together).

DAVIS: That’s like a movie.

SOPHIE: They would have to put in a lot of time.

AMANDA: Maybe it just hasn't happened to you yet, Davis.

CLAIRE: My parents knew each other when they were freshmen in high school.

AMANDA: Why do you think Romeo and Juliet can't be in love?

MELANIE: People were different then.

STEVEN: They died younger.

DAVIS: (Seeking support from other males) Who thinks they cannot fall in love?

(Several boys say "me" or raise their hands.)

MELANIE: Yeah, but y'all (boys) think of stuff differently. You don't want to be in love.

DAVIS: I'm 13; I don't want to be in love . . . I love my dog.

MELANIE: Well, you should be focusing on other stuff.

SOPHIE: We can't do what older people can do.

JACKSON: Romeo was actually like 16, though.

(Conversation unfortunately ended abruptly and went in another direction.)

An especially poignant, personal connection that resulted from the above conversation was from a young man who shared about the death of his dog, who was "like 117 in dog years." After the dog's death, he said his "whole house died," and he compared that situation to Romeo's lost love of Rosaline. But in the same way that Juliet reignited Romeo's love, the presence of a new dog "relit the fire in the house."

The second issue students felt strongly about was Juliet's relationship with her parents. There were several conversations on this topic, but this short excerpt is the most focused:

STEVEN: Her mom doesn't even respect her, it seems like.

AMANDA: If my parents were like Juliet's, I would want a nurse, too.

JACKSON: They don't even act like they love

her.

MELANIE: Lord Capulet's approach is wrong. Why not be happy for Juliet? If I was Juliet, I would run away.

JEFF: And Lady Capulet's life was too valuable to kill herself.

The idea of parents deciding what they want for their children was one we thought would reverberate through the classroom; however, although a few students did voice opinions on the matter of parents, most students saved those comments for their writing. One female student relayed the notion of the failed planning committee of her church's youth group. Instead of coming to the youth for ideas, "Parents decide what *we* want," she said. Another young lady was much more blunt about it, simply stating, "Parents forget what it's like—they're old," to which several students nodded in agreement or laughed approvingly.

The final common thread for each class was during the last circle, where most of the students were critical of Friar Lawrence, as this exchange shows:

DOUG: It's Friar Lawrence's fault; he sold drugs to a juvie!

CATE: And then left Juliet in the tomb . . . who does that?

MITCH: It's ironic that a priest did all these devilish things.

SALLIE: Pretty much everything is his fault.

BRAXTON: Friar Lawrence deserves to die; he got off easy.

ROBERT: I don't know, Friar Lawrence isn't so bad—he's a priest.

DOUG: Robert, have you ever seen the news?

Opinions varied slightly on Friar Lawrence, but the overwhelming majority of the conversations about him were similar to the above excerpt. But while these topics produced interesting conversations, the true confessions, so to speak, came through the written responses after the Circles.

Student Response to Talk

In order to answer our second question—What is student response to talk?—we administered a written survey and collected written reflections from 67 eighth-grade students. We administered the survey before we convened the Socratic Circles and solicited the reflections afterwards. We wanted to gain insight from students' experiences and opinions about talk. So we asked if they liked to talk about what they have read in class and to explain why they answered as they did. We asked them to describe their best conversation and to consider what made it so great. We also asked them to think about what would help them talk more about what they have read and, concurrently, what holds them back from discussing literature.

Student responses reveal a clear connection between talk and comprehension of text. There

is no doubt that these students understand the reciprocal relationship between classroom talk and improved comprehension: "I like to talk about what we read in class because it helps me further understand the book by listening to other people's thoughts." "Sometimes I am confused about the book, and it is easier to understand once we talk about it." "I enjoy talking about what I read in class because it gives you everybody's perspective on many different things, which helps you understand these people, understand the literature, and create your own perspective."

However, these students also believe that in order to talk in class, you need to already understand the text. While they recognize that talk increases comprehension, they also admit they would talk more "if I understood the book a little bit better" and "if I was very knowledgeable about the subject." Our students consider understanding as a predecessor for talk. They do not

SIDE TRIP: CLASSICS AND CONFLICT FOR A MODERN AGE

The authors of this article share how they study *Romeo and Juliet* in their classroom. Here are some additional resources from ReadWriteThink.org:

Tragic Love: Introducing Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

This lesson introduces students to William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* by having them examine the ideas of tragedy and tragic love through connecting the story to their own lives.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/tragic-love-introducing-shakespeare-1162.html>

Star-Crossed Lovers Online: *Romeo and Juliet* for a Digital Age

Explore the modern significance of an older text, such as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, by asking students to create their own modern interpretation of specific events from the drama.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/star-crossed-lovers-online-857.html>

Happily Ever After? Exploring Character, Conflict, and Plot in Dramatic Tragedy

By exploring the decision points in a tragedy, students consider how the plot of the story could have changed if the key characters had made a different choice at the turning point.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/happily-ever-after-exploring-374.html>

Book Report Alternative: Characters for Hire! Studying Character in Drama

In this alternative to the traditional book report, students respond to a play they have read, like *Romeo and Juliet*, by creating a resume for one of its characters.

<http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/book-report-alternative-characters-198.html>

—Lisa Fink
www.readwritethink.org

so much recognize talk as a means of “thinking through” ideas. Instead, talk is reserved more for “knowing” and “showing,” an implication that might inhibit these same students to talk: “Sometimes I’m worried that I may have understood the literature the wrong way and maybe say something silly.” “If I understood it better, I would want to talk more about it.”

When the nature of talk shifts to more personal response, however, some students are more willing to engage in talk: “My favorite discussion was when we made connections to characters in the book. It was fun to tell stories, and I thought it was the easiest discussion because everyone has a million stories about how mean their parents are.” Another revealed that “when people started to talk about things that I could relate to, that’s when I started to talk.” And another astute student recognized, “I think that I would talk more if the questions were more personal. The only reason being is so that you could say something and know that you can’t be wrong because it isn’t actually from the book. The main reason for not contributing to some questions was because I didn’t want to be wrong about something in the book.”

But other students resist public sharing of personal experiences: “I like the Socratic Circles that were more based on the text because . . . I felt less willing to talk about the personal ones because they contained some things that I did not want to share with my classmates.” “My favorite was the final discussions, where we merged the text with personal connections.”

In our classroom, we discovered that talk can be regarded as more of a performance for the teacher and peers. The juxtaposition of the inside and outside Socratic Circle seemed to heighten anxiety: “The only part about the Socratic Circle that I did not like was that everybody was watching you and writing comments on you. Which made you not want to say a lot, because you did not want to ask a weird question, or talk about things that other people did not agree with.” Many students were uncomfortable with the act of being watched during talk. One student even

referred to the “observers” as the “FBI circle” and another as the “audience review.” And even another mentioned experiencing “stage fright,” which she described as “the fear that I may be wrong.” Everybody “stares at the speaker,” and when someone talks, “*everyone* is listening.” It can be “scary” and “embarrassing if I say something wrong.” In other words, students fear saying something “incorrect” or “stupid.”

When our students were freed from the act of observation, as they were when they carried on their dialogue in the conference room, away from the sharp-eyed teachers, students “liked it because (no offense) it felt more open without people watching us and commenting on how we did. It went well because nobody was watching us. We didn’t have to think about what we say or if somebody would think it was dumb. There was no awkward silence or dumb question. Everything seemed so natural and free flowing.”

What we have learned is that there may be a disconnect between our students recognizing the importance of talk and engaging in talk in the classroom. One student writes truthfully about this contradiction and sums up what so many others expressed: “I don’t really like to talk about what I have read in class because I don’t want to be wrong. I do like when the whole class talks, though, because it helps me understand the book.” Students are reluctant to share if they don’t first understand. And we all know that increased talk will help them understand. We are back to the chicken and the egg.

Implications for Teaching

This collaborative venture into Socratic Circles led us to a few realizations that will impact future teaching. What follows are the six most pressing.

Talk to students about talk. As teachers, we need to help students realize the importance of

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talk and its relationship to understanding. Talk is not a performance of thought—it is a means through which we make meaning of all that surrounds us, including text. The sometimes unspoken hierarchy of teacher to “smart” students to “funny” students to “shy” students to “dumb” students must be abandoned and replaced with a give-and-take—an unspoken agreement from all participants to withhold judgments and preconceived notions. In short, we must begin our discussions on an even playing field. And this concept must be reinforced again and again.

Create spaces for unobserved talk. Several students wrote about the “freedom” in their conversations when a teacher’s eyes were not on them. This does not mean we need to leave the room every time we want our students to share in conversation. We can, however, continue to create an atmosphere that does not foster judgment or critique from students or teachers by offering a variety of times for students to talk with only their classmates. Read-aloud responses, paired readings and/or revisions, or book clubs are just a few examples. Students may also be given additional opportunities to work with one another during performance-based assignments, such as tableaux, readers theater, choral readings, or any other type of creative projects. This should also serve to instill more confidence in our shyer students when it comes time for more large-group discussions.

Create a “choice” of response in talk. Students need opportunities for unencumbered student response to text in classrooms. They need and want those opportunities to express opinions, feelings, experiences, and insights, but not all students are ready and/or willing to share private thoughts with classmates, nor should they be forced to. Two opposing but equally sincere responses from students in the same class demonstrate this point: While one student wrote, “It was awkward talking about your feelings,” another felt at ease “because we had no boundaries; therefore, we could discuss the whole book, make connections and comparisons, and use [the] text.” By allowing for both personal response and

literary talk, we offer students a choice for talk—and an opportunity to speak in one’s own voice.

Start with short, more accessible texts. Jumping into *Romeo and Juliet* was fun, but in hindsight, giving students the opportunity to discuss short, contemporary works would have seemingly solved several issues. Poems, songs, essays, even current events serve this role well, as they erase the anxiety so many students felt about being “wrong” or “right.” They can also add just the right amount of intrigue and controversy for a spirited discussion.

Provide students an opportunity to give honest feedback about talk. The students’ final reflections became somewhat of a guilty pleasure for us to read. We pored over these papers with ease, noting the clever insights, candid admissions, a few confessions, and clear growth in thinking and understanding about the purpose of Socratic Circles. That said, students from the same classes again wrote contradictions about how the circles went, which is why we must also assess student feedback with a grain of salt. We do not abandon ship because one student wrote, “I would not want to do any more Socratic Circles as long as I live. End of story.” And we certainly wouldn’t proclaim victory based on one student’s admission that she “could not wait to go to English class when we had Socratic Circles.”

A second factor to consider is that we—students and teachers alike—can’t revise what we say aloud. Even adults will admit that nervousness, anxiety, or pressure sometimes lead to less than elegant rants or other uncharacteristic verbal faux pas. So giving students an opportunity to voice what was going on in their heads is crucial, especially since body language only tells so much of the story. For example, students we clearly identified as engaged participants during the Circles confessed to feeling uncomfortable at times, and vice versa.

Create opportunities for students to learn from one another. The most successful aspect of the Socratic Circles was that we heard from 99% of our students, a rare occurrence in the classroom. More important, nearly every stu-

dent wrote about how it was good to hear other perspectives, particularly from the shy students whose opinions are not usually voiced. This is a bold testament about the inherent power of students learning from each other, side-by-side, rather than being led or forced into what a teacher deems important.

We learned a great deal about talk as a result of our inquiry into Socratic Circles. Talking with each other and listening to our students talk with one another has heightened our awareness of those factors that might encourage classroom conversation. While we are not yet certain if the chicken or the egg comes first, we are more convinced than ever of the reciprocal relationship between response and talk, and we encourage Socratic Circles as a means of inviting both into your classroom.

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