

Executive Summary: Social Studies Instructional Coach Pilot Program



Saxe Middle School

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The Need

“What we really should have done was asking about each other’s opinions, challenging the ideas that people had about the cases and about what is actually the “common good.” - John, 8th grade student

This quote comes from John, an 8th grade student at Saxe Middle School reflecting on his experience after his first Socratic Seminar about the First Amendment. Socratic Seminars engage students in authentic, civil academic discourse. Students work together to think critically, to listen thoughtfully, and to engage in a respectful exchange of ideas based on evidence to achieve a deeper understanding of issues of global significance. Student survey and focus group data demonstrated that students were hindered by their singular understanding of the content and concepts needed for their first Socratic Seminar. They were reluctant to integrate multiple sources of evidence or challenge one another’s arguments. Consequently, without being able to ask meaningful questions from a multi-sourced foundation, the students were not able to move the Socratic Seminar further along the inquiry arc toward deep understanding.

The authentic use of questioning enables students and citizens to examine contemporary and historical issues, which is necessary for healthy and functioning democracy. From the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests to the January 6, 2021 Insurrection at the U.S. Capitol or even to the Supreme Court deciding whether a high school can sanction a student’s Snapchats, the First Amendment and its interpretations are of ever increasing importance. It is no longer sufficient for today’s students to accept a vague understanding of the First Amendment, which has dangerous consequences including weaponizing speech for profit, hate, or damage to our democracy. Our students, who are growing into the citizens who will shape our democracy and the world, must be equipped with the skills to question interpretations of contemporary and historical issues, such as “freedom of speech,” and understand the implications to ensure equitable participation in and benefits from our democracy. The stakes could not be higher.

Data Analysis

Unit 1: Meeting the Needs of the People of our Grade 8 US History course, is well designed for students to develop an understanding of the First Amendment. Following the students’ first Socratic Seminar, the Grade 8 Social Studies team collected student survey data (see Appendix A, Figures 1 & 2). This data revealed that the area of most uncertainty for students was responding to one another’s arguments. Further inquiry through student focus groups and teacher interviews (see Appendix A, Table 1) revealed three major themes: a lack of diversity in thought/content, anxiety or discomfort related to asking questions, and a focus on agreement rather than asking questions or challenging arguments. This touches on two major components of the C3 Framework:

- Dimension 1, which focuses on generating strong questions
- Dimension 4, which focuses on critiquing arguments and conclusions

Students are not yet practicing the reasoning skills required to evaluate multiple perspectives and consider taking action based on their conclusions (Critical Thinker’s Guide: The Art of Asking Essential Questions, 2010 p. 10). The ability to ask meaningful questions is essential to moving the class through the inquiry arc, utilizing critical thinking skills to achieve deep understanding and make connections to real world applications. Mastery of these skills allows the class to push beyond past experiences of history and utilize multidisciplinary skills to think in terms of taking informed action on complex and foundation problems for our democracy, such as the First Amendment. (National Council for Social Studies, 2013, p. 17)

Plan to Address the Need:

We propose a pilot program to release a Saxe Middle School social studies teacher who would develop into an instructional coach in the area of student-generated questions for the 8th grade social studies team. Following the successful implementation and execution of this program at Saxe, these structures and processes could be expanded to other grades and schools within the district.

We have identified Andrew Faugno-Fusci, Grade 8 history teacher at Saxe Middle School, as an instructional coach during the 2021-2022 school year. His students have consistently developed mastery and confidence in Socratic Seminar skills over the course of recent school years. Furthermore, he has a well established collaborative relationship with the Office of Instructional Coaching to implement targeted interventions for Grade 8.

The foundation of this intervention model would include the instructional coach leading data teams, offering co-teaching opportunities, and leading targeted professional development on evidence-based practices for improving student-generated questions. In this new role, the instructional coach would be released for 8-16 hours per week (Appendix B) to serve in the following capacities:

- Observe each teacher to identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth in developing student-generated questions
- Lead cooperative professional development Daresh, 336 (Glatthorn (2007) p. 39) to:
 - Identify collective instructional areas of strength and opportunities for growth
 - Identify opportunities for student growth and intervention
 - Establish criteria for excellent question formulation
- Lead professional development on explicit intervention for student generated questions:
 - Question Formulation Technique: The Right Question Institute's Question Formulation Technique (QFT) is an evidence-based strategy that develops students' skill of asking questions. (See Appendix C)
 - Socratic Seminar Role-Play: Lead students in role-play exercise that provides them with opportunity to practice generating their own questions, responding to one another, and reflecting on the exercise
- Modeling and co-teaching to support the implementation of the intervention strategies
- Engage in research and outside professional development to enhance implementation
- Lead data collection and evaluate the pilot program, providing evidence to support expansion to additional grades and schools
- Produce materials and lead training to support expansion to additional schools in Summer 2022

Evaluation

The instructional coach will lead the teachers in continuous collection and analysis of data to evaluate the success of the program. Evaluation data will include:

- Strength of student generated questions from QFT and role-play protocols, assessed based on team generated criteria every three weeks (See Appendix B)
- Student survey and focus group data, collected at the end of the program
- Performance on future socratic seminars, five total for SY21-22

Requested District Support

In order to implement this pilot program we are asking for support from the district in the following areas (See Appendix B for details):

- Approval for release time for the instructional coach and Grade 8 Social Studies team
- Bud
- get to support substitute coverage during release time
- Budget to support instructional coach external professional development, curriculum writing time, and summer work
- Budget to support after school professional development and curriculum writing hours for Grade 8 Social Studies team

Student Survey Responses

Sample Size: 184 Students

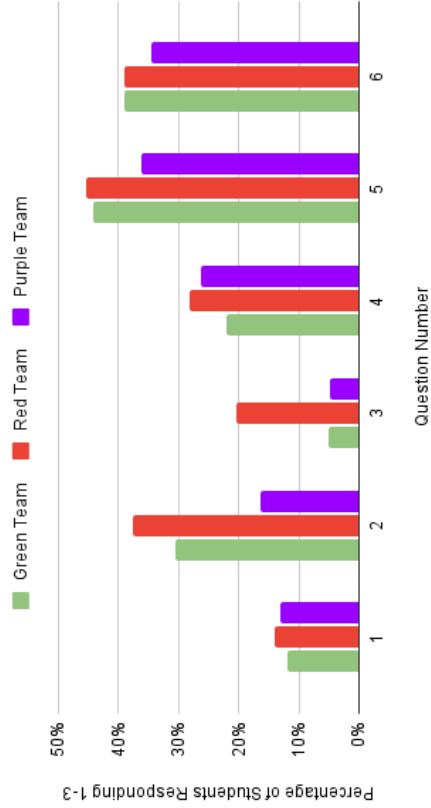
Green Team= 59

Red Team= 64

Purple Team= 61

Scaled Response: Number of uncertain or negative students responses

Figure 1



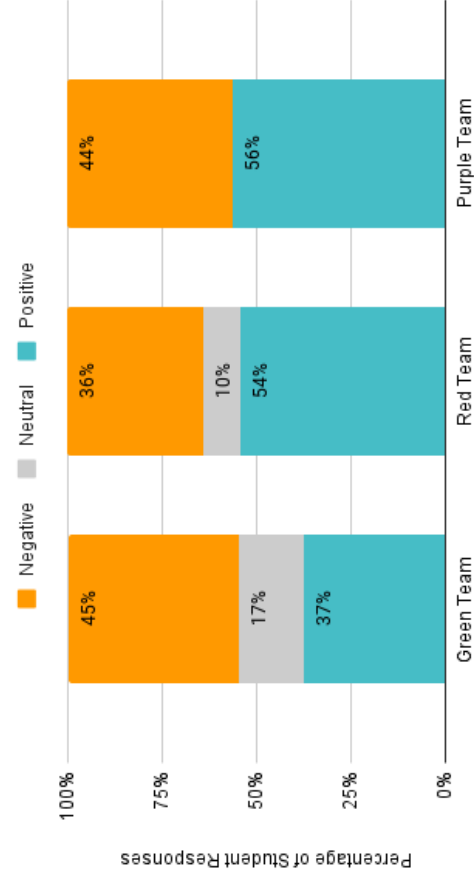
Students were asked to respond to the following questions on a scale of 1-5 (1 = strong disagreement, 5 = strong agreement). This graph represents the number of students responding with a 1, 2, or 3, indicating uncertainty or disagreement.

1. *Did our preparation and our conversation give you a better understanding of the freedoms and limits of the 1st Amendment?*
2. *Did our preparation and our conversation give you a better understanding of the role of citizenship?*
3. *Was there enough evidence provided to build strong arguments?*
4. *Do you feel that you were able to develop a strong argument using the cases we examined?*
5. *Do you feel that your classmates responded to your argument?*
6. *Were you able to respond to arguments made by your classmates?*

Open Response: Coded as positive, negative, or neutral

Students were asked to respond openly to the following question. This graph shows their responses coded as positive, negative, or neutral.

Figure 2



Do you feel that you were able to develop a strong argument using the cases we examined? Do you feel that your classmates responded to your argument? Were you able to respond to arguments made by your classmates?

Positive Response: 91 students responded that they were able to develop a strong argument and that students responded to one another.

Negative Response: 76 students did not feel they developed a strong argument or that students responded to one another.

Major Themes:

- Lack of diversity in thought/content
- Anxiety/discomfort related to asking questions
- Not asking questions or responding, focus on agreement

Table 1: Student Focus Group & Teacher Interview Responses

Major Themes	Semi-Structured Student Focus Group	Teacher Interview
Lack of diversity in thought/content	<p>All of my prep was based off the guiding questions but it made us less flexible because it limited the seminar to the few questions in the prep. And then some people would just speak to take away the silence, they didn't really ask questions because not all the responses were relevant or new. -Abbigayle</p>	<p>They got stuck on one or two documents so they didn't need to ask more questions. Also, the kids who felt comfortable leading only really felt comfortable sharing their own ideas. They didn't realize they should be asking questions to bring other kids into the conversation. - Read Team Teacher</p>
Anxiety/discomfort related to asking questions	<p>Although you feel prepared and have the evidence it is easier to gather thoughts and you can feel overwhelmed by the pressure of asking others questions -Sansa</p> <p>I think the reason why people did not ask more questions, other than the topic questions, is that everyone was mostly comfortable in the subject we were in but were mostly uncomfortable in changing it to another topic beyond that by asking a new question. -Caroline</p> <p>It can be quite stressful because you have no idea what someone is about to say, then they suddenly ask you a question and you feel like you have to find it in the packet which causes tension and pauses. -Marcus</p>	<p>They really tried to ask questions of each other but the students really didn't know how to respond. Sometimes a really good question would get asked but then the other kids would just stare at each other until someone eventually would just cave and say "going back to what so and so was saying." They basically would act as if the question was never asked! ...Clearly we have to work on some norms and expectations beyond what the rubric actually says. - Green Team Teacher</p>
Not responding to classmates' arguments	<p>I think another problem for why we weren't asking questions based off of what other people were saying is that we were trying to prepare what we could say next without actually listening to what the people were saying. -Connor</p> <p>What we really should have done was asking about each other's opinions, challenging the ideas that people had about the cases and about what is actually the "common good." Instead we just kind of said what the court said about the cases and agreed that is what they said. - John</p>	

Appendix B

QUARTER 1	Action	Outcome
	Data Collection & Analysis: G8 SS Data Team review and reflect on Socratic Seminar student survey and focus group responses	Identify student needs and plan intervention
QUARTER 2		
12/13	Observation: Instructional coach observes each G8 SS class, one period per teacher - I.C. Release Time: 4 class periods	Identify areas of strength and opportunities for growth for student generated questions
12/16	Cooperative Professional Development: G8 SS team blind protocol review of classroom observations - District contracted	Identify collective opportunities for improvement & develop criteria for excellent question formulation
1/6	Professional Development: Instructional coach will introduce QFT strategy - District contracted	
1/10-1/12	Co-Teaching: Instructional leader will co-teach QFT lesson with each team member - I.C. Release Time: 12 class periods	
1/13	Data Analysis: Team will analyze and reflect on student generated questions from QFT lessons - Additional PD time: 1 hr	Establish baseline for student generated questions and set SMART goal for growth
1/18-1/20	Co-Teaching: Instructional leader will co-teach second round of QFT lessons with each team member - I.C. Release Time: 12 class periods	
1/20	Cooperative Professional Development: debrief the co-teaching protocol and intervention strategies - District contracted	Identify strengths and opportunities for improvement of the program protocols
Quarter 3		
1/25	Observation: instructional coach will observe the G8 teachers as they independently teach and collect data from a standardized QFT lesson - I.C. Release Time: 4 class periods	Collect student generated questions for review with data protocol
1/27	Release Day: G8 SS team will analyze, code, and reflect on the data from the 3 rounds of standardized QFT lessons, and post-cycle debrief led by instructional coach - Full day team coverage	This will signal the end of the current cycle and the team will determine if the pilot should progress to the next stage of instructional intervention or restart the QFT instructional cycle.
2/10	Professional Development: instructional coach will introduce Socratic Seminar role-play strategy.	

	Co-teaching, observation, data collection and conference cycle repeats - District contracted	
Quarter 4		
	Student Survey & Focus Group: Team will repeat the student survey and focus group protocol	
	Program Evaluation: Instructional coach will lead team compiling a final evaluation of the pilot program and recommendations for expansion	Produce materials and lead training to support expansion to additional schools in Summer 2022

Appendix C

Proposed Community Resources to Support Implementation

- **Curriculum Leadership Council (CLC)** - consisting of educators and administrators, the CLC develops, reviews, and approves all curriculum in the school district. The CLC is chaired by the Deputy Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Jill Correnty. It does not have any members from the Board of Education, but does present all curriculum findings and changes to the Board at public hearings. Should the Board disapprove or raise concerns about the curriculum, the CLC is responsible for addressing those concerns.
 - Social Studies subcommittee includes: Mary Hanna (K-8 Social Studies Coordinator), Robert Stevenson (NCHS Social Studies Department Chair), George Petrakopoulos (5-8 Technology Integrator), Sarah Granite (Assistant Principal - Saxe Middle School)
 - Saxe Middle School G8 SS team will meet monthly with Social Studies subcommittee of the CLC to present findings, receive feedback and support, and discuss possibilities for expansion to additional grades and schools
- **Saxe Middle School Parent Teacher Committee (PTC)**- parent volunteers who engage in fundraising and provide financial support for additional curricular resources
 - The G8 SS team will meet with the PTC to discuss funding for additional curricular material needs
- **Right Questions Institute** - a nonprofit educational organization focused on building best practices for question asking
 - The G8 SS team will utilize the Question Formulation Technique (QFT)- an evidence-based strategy that develops students' skill of asking questions. QFT starts with a "question focus" on a particular source (document, image, phrase, etc) and encourages students to simply ask as many questions as they can. While asking questions in the early stages of the technique students are focused exclusively on generating a high volume of questions and not the quality. Later, they improve their questions by first categorizing them as closed or open-ended. Students then practice changing the questions format between the two styles. Next, the learners select which questions are their priority and plan out the next steps of the inquiry process. Finally, students wrap-up by reflecting on the technique, the questions generated and how the process has impacted their understanding.
 - Source: The Question Formulation Technique (QFT) was created by the Right Question Institute (RQI). Visit rightquestion.org for more information and free resources.

References

Daresh, J. (2007). *Supervision as Proactive Leadership*. Waveland Press.

Elder, L., & Paul, R. (2010). *The Thinker's Guide to: The Art of Asking Essential Questions* (5th ed.). The Foundation for Critical Thinking .

National Council for Social Studies (2013). "The College Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History." Council for Social Studies (NCSS).

The Question Formulation Technique (QFT) was created by the Right Question Institute (RQI). Visit rightquestion.org for more information and free resources.