

Helping Omani Students Succeed with Culturally Responsive Teaching

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The purpose of this paper is to explain how to use culturally responsive teaching methods to alleviate the negative effects associated with Omani students' lack of experience with the Socratic teaching methods commonly used in U.S. universities. The basic argument is that the didactic, teacher-centered methods used in the Omani secondary education system contrast with the active, Socratic style used by professors in American higher education. This difference creates difficulty for students studying at U.S. universities, but culturally responsive methods that address this discrepancy will increase the likelihood of student success.¹

Potential Problems

In 2011, Ruth McDermott-Levy published a study of female Omani students studying in the U.S. This research found that many students were struggling due to the differences in the teaching style they encountered in the U.S. compared to the style commonly used in Oman. When asked about these differences, one student responded: *“the teaching is different in our country. In Oman, the teacher will teach you everything you learn. You will be given all the information. Here, it is nothing like that. You have to search for the information. I learn more back home. They give us more information. They will teach us honestly, everything. Here, it’s like self-study”* (275). Another student from McDermott-Levy’s study agreed, saying: *“The style of teaching is also completely different. In Oman, they give all the information, step to step, and everything in details; they keep repeating the things. And here it is like, some points are made in class, but you have to go search about it. And there’s required reading and there’s articles and*

¹ Recent efforts have been made by the Omani Ministry of Education to improve the overall quality of education in the Sultanate through of a variety of initiatives, including those aimed at “shifting away from teacher-to student- centered learning” (UNESCO-IBE 10). However, “it is too soon for outside observers to make an accurate evaluation of the degree to which changes in the curriculum content and teaching methods have responded to expectations” (Rassekh 17).

other assignments. So, it's tough to study here. We have to work hard" (276). Students from Turkey, a country that also relies on a memory-focused approach to education, found that "the major difficulty in attending a U.S. university is related to the different teaching approach used in America" (Cagiltay & Bichelmeyer 17). A Turkish student who participated in a study conducted by Cagiltay and Bichelmeyer explained that, "*before coming here [to the U.S.], I was expected to read a specific resource, to learn all the details of that resource, and to listen to a lecture. But here, we do not follow that kind of approach... we have to create new things and new ideas. This is really very hard"* (17).

The idea that "the teacher will teach you everything you learn" (McDermott-Levy 275) is the foundation for the commonly used teaching methods in Oman. The traditional Omani teaching methods date back to the Ottoman Empire. Religious teachers would read aloud from the scarce copies of religious texts and have students recite what they heard. The rote memorization approach of the past has had a strong influence on the teaching practices used in modern-day schools. In an Omani school, "teachers take the role of knowledge transmitters and students generally accept their role as passive recipients of knowledge" (Cagiltay & Bichelmeyer 2). In this factory-like model of teaching, behaviorist techniques, such as rote learning and memorization, are the primary tools used by students to succeed in the classroom.

In the 19th century, the methods used in American classrooms were similarly "teacher-centered and reliant on rote memorization" (Schneider 617). However, since that time, there has been a significant "shift away from these traditional methods in favor of student-centered, Socratic methods" (Schneider 622). Rather than relying on lectures to transmit information, the Socratic method emphasizes an interactive classroom environment built around "shared dialogue between teacher and students in which both are responsible for pushing the dialogue forward

through questioning” (Stanford University Center for Teaching and Learning 1). Through participation in Socratic questioning and dialogue, students “develop higher-order thinking skills, which allow them to apply, analyze, and evaluate” what they learn (Lam 44).

With the goal of helping students develop higher-order thinking skills, leaders in American education designed the Common Core State Standards. These standards, which are divided into English Language Arts and Mathematics, prepare students for “success in today’s global economy” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers). Through the English Language Arts Standards, students develop critical thinking skills and “learn to use cogent reasoning and evidence collections skills that are essential for success in college, career, and life” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers). As a result of the implementation of these standards in the American public education system, U.S. students have an advantage when attending American universities, as they already possess the skills required for success in a Socratic environment.

However, when Omani students enroll at U.S. universities and are exposed to Socratic learning methods, they are often unequipped to thrive in this environment. The dominance of teacher-centered methods in their past education means that Omani students often lack the higher-order thinking skills necessary to apply or analyze class material. Therefore, they struggle to abandon their reliance on memorization. In 1999, Christopher Arden-Close conducted an interview study of Western college faculty working in Oman. One of the participants in this study, when describing Omani students’ prior knowledge, commented that it is common for Omani students to “*think they ‘know’ it because they learned it in high school but when they come to U.S. college they can’t use it (so they don’t really know it)*” (Arden-Close 329). Another

lecturer who participated in Arden-Close's interview study confirmed this appraisal of students' knowledge through a description of the first lecture he gave in Oman: "I wrote five points on the board. And the objection was immediately raised that in the school book there are only three" (Arden-Close 326). He went on to explain that the students "had probably memorized the three points from the school book and any kind of deviation from that caused confusion" (Arden-Close 326). Due to this discrepancy between the Omani and American teaching styles, Omani students are "authentic beginners" (Pappamihel & Moreno 338) in the Socratic learning environment. This means that they "are truly just beginning to acquire experience in this particular setting" (Pappamihel & Moreno 338) and therefore will require additional support.

Culturally Responsive Solutions

As Geneva Gay explains in her 2010 book entitled *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice*, "culture determines how we think, believe, and behave, and these, in turn, affect how we teach and learn" (Gay 9). She uses the term *culturally responsive teaching* to describe an approach that uses the "cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay 31). In order to utilize culturally responsive teaching, a teacher must be familiar with students' backgrounds and how those backgrounds may affect students' performance in the classroom. Once the teacher has anticipated the potential issues that could arise for students in the classroom, he or she can create a plan to solve those issues and encourage student success.

When developing a plan to encourage the success of Omani students in the U.S., there are two objectives that require particular attention: developing students' schemas and providing proper support. A student's schema is his or her "personal collection of prior knowledge that

provides a context for meaningful interpretation of new information” (Hunt, Touzel, & Wiseman 92). For students to comprehend new information, they must activate the appropriate schema in order to correctly interpret the information. Because Omani students lack experience with Socratic teaching methods, they do not have the schemas necessary to comprehend these methods. Therefore, before they can learn how to participate in Socratic activities, they must first develop schemas for these activities.

The second goal that American professors should focus on is providing Omani students with proper support. Omani students are likely to face anxiety when immersed in an active, Socratic learning environment. Cowden explains that “students with anxiety often have negative views about their ability to cope with stressful academic situations and therefore believe that they don’t have control or are losing control” (1). He goes on to say that “student anxiety can have significant negative effects including lowered self-esteem, reduced effort and loss of motivation for school tasks” (Cowden 2). Given their lack of experience in the Socratic classroom, Omani students may feel lost or overwhelmed. In order to help them overcome these negative emotions and make the transition from passive to active learners, professors will need to provide additional support.

Both of these areas can be addressed by looking briefly at an unexpected source: the school of medicine. Similarly to students from Oman, American medical students are accustomed to receiving the majority of their core content from lectures rather than active, Socratic activities. The lecture method is a widely used and accepted method in the field of medical education, and, therefore, many medical students and educators are resistant to the introduction of new methods. In her 2015 article entitled “*Not Another Boring Lecture: Engaging Learners with Active Learning Techniques,*” Margaret Wolff explains the recent

improvements in medical students' "knowledge retention and depth of understanding" as a result of the inclusion of "problem-based, team-based, and other active learning techniques in medical school classrooms" (85). However, she does not advocate for an outright shift from the traditional lecture methods to active learning methods but rather recommends the "incorporation of active learning techniques, such as pause procedures, small group activities, case-based scenarios, role-play, and commitment-generating exercises into lecture sessions" (Wolff 88). This combination approach allows students to progressively develop the new schema required for these activities. This plan also allows professors to reach their desired outcomes, without overwhelming students or drastically altering their course design.

Educators of Omani students may find similar techniques useful in easing their students' transition from passive to active learning. Combining the unfamiliar Socratic teaching methods with familiar traditional lecture methods would allow Omani students to gradually acclimate to the new learning environment. In order to help Omani students develop the schemas necessary for success in a Socratic learning environment, professors will need to model and provide explicit directions for each new activity. Showing a video of an activity, such as a Socratic seminar, before asking the students to complete a similar activity is one way that professors can model activities for Omani students. By watching the video, Omani students can gain a better understanding of what is expected of them in this activity. Hearing sample questions and answers given by the teacher and students in the video will allow Omanis to begin building schemas for this type of activity.

In addition to showing videos, professors may also find it useful to explain the purpose of a particular activity. Looking again at the example of a Socratic seminar, professors should point out that the purpose of the activity is to "help them [the students] examine their attitudes, beliefs,

knowledge and logic in order to gain a deeper understanding of the topic” (Learn NC) and not to probe students for the “correct” memorized response. Professors should make it clear that there is no “right” answer to the questions asked during a Socratic seminar, as this may be a new concept to Omanis. The more information professors give to Omani students about Socratic methods, the more thoroughly the learners can develop their schemas for those activities.

Wolff’s technique of combining activities that students are accustomed to, such as lectures and memorization activities, with Socratic methods can also be used to avoid overwhelming and discouraging Omani students. Incorporating some teacher-centered methods, which were common in students’ previous educational experiences, may alleviate some of the anxiety and discomfort associated with their new experiences. One practical way that professors can alter their course design to meet the needs of Omani students is by using differentiated instruction.

When Omani students enroll in American universities, the first classes they take are usually English language classes in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. It is imperative that the professors who teach these classes are aware of each individual student’s culture and how it may affect their learning ability in the U.S. Professors have a responsibility to address the needs of all of their students, not just Omani students. In order to promote the success of students from a variety of backgrounds, professors should utilize differentiated instruction, which entails “creating variations of the main activities of the lessons to meet the needs of specific student subgroups” (Baecher et al. 15). Professors should include activities that allow Omanis to develop the higher-order thinking skills they may lack. However, a different subgroup of students may already possess these skills and require activities that hone rather than introduce these skills.

Differentiated instruction allows the professor to meet the needs of individual students, while still teaching the same core content.

When altering activities to meet students' needs it is also crucial for professors "to strike a balance between adaptations and challenge to ensure that students are pushed to step out of their comfort zone as this is the only way for them to grow and progress" (Dauletova 196). If professors do not challenge students, it will delay the students' development of Socratic learning skills. The longer they are delayed in obtaining these skills, the more behind they will become. This delay will compound itself and students will be playing catch-up, reducing their chances of success.

An effective strategy that educators can use to support Omani students and encourage their growth into Socratic learning is scaffolding. Scaffolding is a technique in which "the teacher provides support to learners through the learning process. This support varies according to learner needs and is withdrawn slowly as learners become more proficient" (Clark & Graves 571). At the introduction of each new Socratic learning activity the teacher carries the majority of the responsibility, guiding students through each step of the process using techniques like modeling and explaining. As students master each step of the process, there is a gradual decline in teacher responsibility which ends with students taking agency of their learning. This approach is particularly appropriate for Omani students who are accustomed to relying on the teacher and who are likely to feel overwhelmed by a complete lack of teacher support. The amount of scaffolding that Omani students require will decrease as they become more familiar with the Socratic learning environment and develop higher-order thinking skills. At first, professors may need to scaffold each skill, but as students grow and develop skills they can shift to scaffolding each semester and, eventually, each year.

Case Study: Oakland University ESL Workshop

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the process of developing a culturally responsive plan to help Omani students transition from passive to active learners, this paper will present a case study of the Oakland University English as a Second Language (ESL) Program. The ESL program at Oakland University began in 1999 and has grown to accommodate an annual attendance of approximately 250 students. The population of this program consists mainly of students from East Asia and the Arabic Gulf with a small number of European and South American students. The majority of the students from the Arabic Gulf have been, and continue to be, Saudi Arabian students. However, in 2014, the Omani Ministry of Education Scholarship created a partnership with Oakland University; the ESL program now includes approximately 20 students from the Sultanate of Oman. This number is likely to increase as more students choose Oakland University as the destination for their international scholarship.

Now that Omani students are a part of the Oakland ESL program population, a culturally responsive plan will need to be created to help these students develop the active, Socratic learning skills they will need to succeed in the ESL program and the academic courses of the university. One practical way to accomplish this goal is to design a workshop in which Omani students can become familiar with Socratic teaching methods and acquire the skills needed to thrive in a Socratic environment. In order to create this type of workshop, Laubach Literacy Action recommends a process which involves the following four steps: “assess needs, adapt or design the workshop, conduct the workshop, and evaluate the workshop” (Laubach Literacy Action 21). This paper will address the first two steps, thus designing a workshop that could be implemented at Oakland University.

Beginning with the first step, “assessing needs” (Laubach Literacy Action 21), the previous sections of this paper explain in depth the Omani students’ lack of experience with Socratic teaching methods and their resulting need to develop higher-order thinking skills and the appropriate schemas to participate in Socratic activities. This need to develop appropriate schemas can then be divided into the following sub-needs: the need to develop an understanding of the cultural and social norms related to discussion in the American university classroom, the need to establish a comprehension of the expectations of a Socratic activity, and the need to increase their English vocabulary to include the words related to the expectations and performance of a Socratic activity.

The second step in the workshop creation process is to “adapt or design the workshop” (Laubach Literacy Action 21). This step is divided into six tasks: “1. Select topics to address in the workshop. 2. Identify learning objectives for each of the topics. 3. Decide what activities to use to meet the learning objectives; lecture, demonstration, practice or some other type. 4. Decide on the length and format of the workshop. 5. Develop a workshop schedule. 6. Identify the materials and equipment needed for each presentation” (Laubach Literacy Action 22). While completing each of these tasks, the designer should keep in the mind the needs that were identified in the previous step of the design process, as the success of the workshop will depend on the satisfaction of students’ needs.

In regards to the first task, “selecting topics to address” (Laubach Literacy Action 22), a wide variety of topics would be appropriate for a workshop designed to help Omani ESL students become familiar with Socratic learning. During a typical workshop session, it will be the responsibility of the facilitator, in this case the graduate assistant or ESL teacher leading the workshop, to choose the topic. One resource that the facilitator may find useful when searching

for a topic is the students' ESL reading course textbook. Selecting a topic that the students have already discussed will provide them with a foundation of knowledge on the topic and allow them to participate in activities related to the topic more effectively. However, the topic does not have to come from the course textbooks in order to be useful. The facilitator can choose any topic that would foster Socratic techniques and interest students. An example of a topic that the ESL students at Oakland University may find relevant is the concept of language barriers. As they currently live and study in a country of their second language, they are likely to have had many personal experiences with language barriers, and therefore, be able to discuss the topic with ease.

Once the topic has been established, the next step is to "identify the learning objectives for the topic" (Laubach Literacy Action 22). One way to ensure that learning objectives are meaningful and appropriate is to utilize established educational standards as a guide. The Common Core State Standards Initiative defines educational standards as "the learning goals for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers). They further explain that "standards help teachers ensure their students have the skills and knowledge they need to be successful" (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers). In order to identify learning objectives for a Socratic dialogue workshop for Omani ESL students at Oakland University, there are two sets of standards that should be referenced: the College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards of the Common Core and the Michigan Department of Education English Language Proficiency Standards for K-12 Schools.

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards "provide additional specificity to the broad grade-specific standards of the Common Core," and together these two sets of standards,

“define the skills and understandings that all [American] students must demonstrate” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers).

Specifically, the following standards relate to a Socratic workshop for Omanis: R1, R2, R8, SL

1, SL 2, SL 4, SL6, L1 and L6 (for a full description of these standards, see Appendix A). The

Michigan Department of Education English Language Proficiency Standards for K-12 Schools

“provide a foundation for English language acquisition and the academic development of students who are identified as limited English proficient” (Michigan State Board of Education).

These standards are useful not only for creating learning objectives for K-12 students, but also in

a university ESL setting. Standards L.3, L.5, S.3, S.5, S. 7, R. 5, R.6, R.8 and R.10 (see

Appendix A) relate to the skills that Omani ESL students should develop in a Socratic seminar.

Based on the previous two sets of standards, the following learning objectives are recommended for an Omani ESL Socratic dialogue workshop at Oakland University:

Participants will be able to: ²

- Pose and respond to questions that relate to the discussion
- Use standard English grammar and appropriate academic and domain-specific vocabulary to share their ideas related to the text
- Participate in academic discussion in which opposing ideas are presented in a culturally and socially acceptable manner
- Present their ideas and opinions in a clear manner and provide clarification to others when needed

² These learning objectives were created to meet the needs of the students who will attend the first Socratic dialogue workshop offered in the ESL Center at Oakland University. Therefore, it was assumed that the students would have very little knowledge of Socratic dialogue and the objectives would need to be appropriate for the skill level of these students. In the future, these objectives could certainly be modified to meet the needs of a group with more experience with Socratic learning.

- Listen and respond appropriately to statements made by peers in the discussion
- Ask for clarification of others' statements in a culturally and socially acceptable manner
- Demonstrate listening skills, such as focusing attention and interpreting meaning and perspective
- Keep up with the pace of an academic dialogue and be prepared to respond to or share ideas
- Identify the essential question, issue, or problem of a text
- Use text-based evidence to support their claims and ideas
- Develop conclusions based on their understanding and interpretation of a text

The third task in designing an ESL workshop is to “decide what activities to use to meet the learning objectives” (Laubach Literacy Action 22). For the purpose of helping Omani ESL students become familiar with Socratic methods, the workshop should be conducted as a Socratic seminar. A Socratic seminar is “a scholarly discussion of an essential question in which student opinions are shared, proven, refuted, and refined through dialogue with other students” (How to Create and use Socratic Seminars). To set up a Socratic seminar, the facilitator will choose a text for the students to read and discuss. This text can be a short story, a poem, an article, or even a piece of artwork that relates to the chosen topic. The facilitator should choose a text that is interesting, engaging, and allows for varying interpretations. Additionally, the text should not be very long, especially for ESL students, given the time restraints of the seminar. The facilitator should choose a text that the students can read completely at the beginning of the seminar and quickly skim through to locate specific evidence during the discussion. The level of vocabulary needed to comprehend the text should also be taken into consideration.

An example of a text that would be well suited for the Omani ESL students at Oakland University is the poem *Language Barrier* by James Kelley (see Appendix B). This poem has only 36 lines and the vocabulary is appropriate for intermediate or advanced level students. Furthermore, ESL students are likely to find this poem interesting as their own experiences are likely to relate to the main character's experience with a language barrier. However, if after using this text or prior to conducting the seminar, the facilitator feels that this text is not appropriate for the level of the students attending the workshop, the facilitator might find the students' reading course textbook a useful resource. Similarly to choosing a topic, choosing a specific text from the reading course textbooks that the students have already discussed in class will provide them with a foundation for the discussion. The students will already have the background and vocabulary knowledge needed to comprehend and interpret the text. This prior knowledge will allow for a more in-depth, thoughtful discussion during the seminar.

Once the facilitator has chosen a text, whether from the students' textbook or a different source, it will be necessary to prepare a list of vocabulary words and background knowledge to help the students better comprehend the text. The facilitator will have to rely on his or her own judgment of what information the students might lack in order to compile this list. Using the poem *Language Barrier* as an example, the facilitator may want to create a handout with the following vocabulary words and their definitions: *enunciated*, *finite*, *console*, *concrete* (*pavement*), *palms* (*hands*), *fathom*, *fumbled*, *barrier*, *pouring* and *fists*. Furthermore, it may be helpful to include background information about the Spanish vocabulary used in the text including "lo siento", "que va a estar bien", and "Dios te bendecirá". These phrases mean "I'm sorry", "It will be okay", and "God will bless you," respectively.

In addition to providing vocabulary found within the text, it would also be beneficial to provide the students with a list of vocabulary words related to aspects of the seminar, such as participation and expectations. In order for ESL students to be able to participate effectively in a Socratic dialogue created through an exchange of questions, they need to understand the vocabulary associated with the questions. Critical verbs such as analyze, determine, evaluate, etc. may be difficult for ESL students to understand to the necessary degree (for a list of critical verbs, see Appendix C). It is not enough for students to simply translate these words. They need to understand the expectations associated with this vocabulary in the context of American higher education. As previously stated, Omani students lack the necessary schemas for participating in Socratic activities. Therefore, providing students with a dictionary definition as well as a contextual explanation of the vocabulary will help them develop a deeper understanding of these words and allow them to perform Socratic tasks more effectively.

The next step in planning the activities for the seminar is to prepare the opening, core and closing questions. The eventual goal of a Socratic seminar is to have the students lead the discussion. This means that the students would write the opening, core, and closing questions themselves and maintain the dialogue without the intervention of the facilitator. However, until the students have developed the necessary skills and gained a firm understanding of the process of the seminar, the facilitator will need to guide the discussion and provide support. Therefore, in the beginning stages, the seminar will tend to be more teacher-centered and the facilitator will need to prepare the opening, core, and closing questions. This gradual transition from a teacher-centered to student-centered environment will help eliminate the anxiety that Omani students are likely to experience in the Socratic workshop.

The purpose of the opening questions is to start the dialogue and to help the students identify the main ideas of the text. Opening questions should be open-ended questions that “elicit more than one-word responses, stem from context, direct participants into the text, and are generally concrete” (Serrano). In order to ensure the effectiveness of the questions they create, facilitators should refer to Bloom’s Taxonomy of Learning. This model is a “classification of the levels of intellectual behavior that are important in learning” (Overbaugh). It is divided into six levels: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Questions that require students to use the “knowledge, comprehension, and application domains are frequently considered lower-order questions,” while questions that ask students to analyze, synthesize or evaluate “are considered higher-order questions which elicit deeper and critical thinking” (Tofade 1).

Opening questions are likely to fall into the domain of comprehension, as their goal is to ensure that “students have understood the text and can interpret the facts” (Haynes). Even though this type of question is considered lower-order, it is still appropriate for use in a Socratic seminar. Research has shown that “questions in the synthesis and comprehension levels [of Bloom’s Taxonomy] elicited the highest number of student-to-student exchanges” (Tofade 4). Therefore, comprehension questions are likely to stimulate dialogue between students and help them begin the seminar. The following is an example of a potential opening question for a Socratic seminar discussing the poem *Language Barrier: Why did the main character stop to speak with the stranger?*

The next set of questions, the core questions, will be asked throughout the seminar to help the students maintain the dialogue. These questions should “move participants deeper into the text and help them examine their own thinking” (Serrano). Similarly to opening questions,

core questions should be open-ended and designed in a way that does not elicit a single, “correct” answer. If written correctly, “open-ended questions have the potential to stimulate higher-level thinking skills, such as critical thinking, because they require students to create, invent, investigate, discuss, debate and justify implication and make judgments based on their own standards” (Alshraideh 60).

In terms of Bloom’s Taxonomy, core questions should come from the domain of synthesis and require students “to choose, combine, create, design, develop, imagine, make up, predict, solve, and change” (Haynes). This type of question will be more challenging, especially for lower level ESL students who may not possess the English vocabulary necessary to formulate appropriate responses. In addition, Omani students may find these higher-order questions challenging, as their past educational experiences are likely to have left them lacking higher-order thinking skills. However, with scaffolding and support from the facilitator, the students should be able to provide at least a basic answer to the questions. Practice with this type of questioning will help the students develop the higher-order thinking skills they will need for success in academic courses. Core questions that could be used in the *Language Barrier* workshop include: *What can you say about the stranger the main character meets? (Based on the text) Why might the stranger be crying? What else could the main character have done when she met the stranger? What are some possible lessons or morals that the reader could learn from the poem?*

The third category of seminar questions is the closing questions. These questions help students establish the relevance of a text to the real world and make connections between the text and their own lives. They are generally abstract and fall into the domain of synthesis in Bloom’s Taxonomy. As a result, closing questions give students the opportunity to develop their higher-

order thinking skills. As indicated by their name, closing questions should bring the seminar to its end. Examples of closing questions for the *Language Barrier* workshop include: *What would you do in the main character's place when she met the stranger? How does this poem relate to your life? How could this poem be significant in your life?*

Once the facilitator has written the seminar questions, the next step in preparing the activities for the workshop is to write a description of the purpose of the Socratic seminar and the responsibilities of the participants. This description will help the Omani students develop the necessary schemas for understanding the expectations of the seminar including what they will learn, how this knowledge will help them in the future, and what they must do in the seminar in order to gain these benefits. "Research has confirmed that learners are more likely to succeed when they understand the learning goals and see them as meaningful and personally relevant" (McTighe 240).

When writing this description, the facilitator should use vocabulary and sentence structure appropriate to the English language level of the participants. Since this description is purely for the benefit of the students (it will help them develop the necessary schemas related to a Socratic seminar) it is only useful if they can understand its meaning. A sample description of the purpose of the Socratic seminars that would be conducted in an Oakland University workshop would be:

"The purpose of a Socratic Seminar is to help students learn how to discuss the deep meaning of a text. Being able to understand and think about a text's deep meaning is a critical thinking skill that students will need to participate in discussions and write papers in academic classes. Therefore, by participating in a

Socratic seminar, students will gain skills they will need to succeed in American academic classes.”

The facilitator may find it useful to post a set of the rules, including the purpose of the seminar, in the classroom or workshop room to remind the students of their roles and responsibilities. The responsibilities of the participants, including the facilitator, may be similar to the following:

Facilitator: *The facilitator will ask the first question. After that, he or she will only ask questions when the participants have nothing else to say and no more questions to ask about the current topic. The facilitator will also make sure that all of the participants show respect to each other during the seminar.*

Participants: *The participants will discuss the poem by asking and answering questions. The participants should always speak to each other, not to the facilitator. Participants do not need to raise their hand to speak, but should never interrupt other participants while they are speaking. The participants should be respectful of each other’s opinions. Each participant should speak at least once during the discussion. Finally, the participants should use sentences from the poem as evidence to support the ideas that they share.*

In addition to these descriptions, the facilitator should also post a list of rules related to the American cultural norms of classroom discussion. Omani students will need to learn how to

politely share their ideas and disagree with others according to American standards, as the rules for exchange may be different in their culture.

Another resource that Omani students will find useful in learning how to participate in a polite academic discussion is a list of sentence starters and frames. The facilitator should provide the students with a list of possible ways to structure their statements in an academic discussion. Sentence frames such as “*I agree with _____ but I also think that _____*” will provide students with a model of how to form their own polite discussion questions and statements. This form of scaffolding will not only help students be polite, but will also help students struggling to participate due to a lack of vocabulary. (For a list of sentence starters and frames, see Appendix D).

As mentioned in the earlier section, *Culturally Responsive Solutions*, the facilitator may find it helpful to show the Omani students a video of a Socratic seminar being conducted as a way to model the activity. Being able to see other students performing a seminar may clarify areas of the facilitators explanation related to the purpose, expectations, format and cultural norms of the seminar that may not have been understood by all of the students. Visual learners in particular would benefit from watching a video rather than just listening to the facilitator’s verbal description. In addition, the facilitator may find it helpful to break the video into sections and pause to explain different aspects of the seminar as they are performed. The TeachingChannel video entitled *Socratic Seminar: The “N-Word”* (Wu) is an example of a video that could be used for this purpose

During the Socratic seminar, once the facilitator has explained the purpose and responsibilities to the participants, the next task is to have the students write goals for the seminar. Each student will set an individual goal, and together, all of the participants will agree

on a group goal. These goals should be measurable, and therefore, goals such as “I will learn more about the text” are not recommended. “I will listen to other participants carefully and comment on at least one of my peer’s ideas” is an appropriate individual goal. An appropriate group goal is “We will discuss the poem for 25 minutes and each person will speak at least once.” The facilitator may find it useful to model effective goal writing so that the students will be able to write goal statements that help them gauge their success and progress.

Once the students have set their goals, the facilitator will read the text aloud and then give the students time to read the text individually. With a more advanced group, the facilitator may not find it necessary to read the text aloud, however, the Omani ESL students are likely to benefit from having it read aloud. The facilitator should bring a printed copy of the text for each student so that he or she can mark the text and make notes on the page. Angela Bunyi recommends having students use a coding system³ to mark “areas of confusion and interest, good talking points, and areas we would like to know more about” (Bunyi). Having Omani ESL students mark the text is particularly beneficial as “marking the texts switches reading from a passive exercise to an active one” (Advanced Studies & Gifted Students Program). Becoming familiar with the practice of marking texts will help students learn how to “apply these strategies to longer works that require considerable time and organizational skills”, which they will encounter in academic courses (Advanced Studies & Gifted Students Program). Once students have marked the text, they should write two or three questions about the text that they would like to discuss during the seminar. These questions will help students lead the discussion and reduce the need for facilitator intervention.

³ For a list of suggested marking symbols, see Appendix E.

Another activity or resource that the facilitator may find useful to incorporate into the seminar is what teachers at Half Hollows Hills Academy (Herberg) refer to as talking chips. Talking chips are a way for the facilitator to ensure a balance of participation from the participants. At the beginning of the seminar, a set number of chips are given to each student. When a student speaks during the seminar they place one of their talking chips at the edge of their desk. Once all of their talking chips are gone, they should look around to make sure that all of the other participants have spoken before they share another idea. This rule would be included in the list of rules discussed at the beginning of the seminar. Each participant is encouraged to use all of their talking chips during the seminar. Therefore, the number of chips given to each student would depend on the level and number of students participating. By using the talking chips, the facilitator and the participants can visually monitor participation and help ensure that no one student or students dominate the discussion. Talking chips can be any object the facilitator chooses, such as poker chips, piece of candy, etc.

At the end of the seminar, after the dialogue has ended, the participants will complete a self-assessment and a group assessment. For the self-assessment, each student will answer questions similar to the following: *Did I meet my goal? (Write three or four sentences explaining how you did or did not meet your goal.) What was the best idea or point I made during the seminar? Did I encourage other participants to speak through my comments and questions? Did I use the text to support my ideas?* McTighe and Brown argue that “one important aspect of becoming a confident and capable learner lies in the capacity to set goals, monitor one’s own progress, self-assess, and adjust as needed” (McTighe 241). The self-assessment will allow students to reflect on their own performance in the seminar and plan how they can improve in the future.

The group goal assessment will provide the students with an opportunity to reflect upon what they learned during the seminar about the text, academic discussion and themselves. Answering questions such as *“Did we meet our group goal?”* followed by *“What did we learn during the seminar and how can we apply it to our classes, life, etc.?”* will help them develop critical and higher-order thinking skills.

The fourth and fifth tasks in designing an ESL workshop are to “decide on the length and format of the workshop” and to “develop a workshop schedule” (Laubach Literacy Action 22). The recommended length for the Socratic seminar workshop sessions at Oakland University is one hour. This amount of time would allow for approximately 20 minutes of pre-discussion activities, such as goal setting and reading the text, 20 minutes of discussion, and 20 minutes of de-briefing in which to complete the self and group assessments. Currently, the Oakland ESL program offers a variety of one-hour graduate-student-led workshops including Test Preparation, Making English Easy, Practice Makes Perfect and Chapter Chats; therefore, the program is prepared to easily incorporate a new one-hour workshop into their offerings for future semesters. The schedule of this workshop would depend on the overall workshop schedule of each semester.

The final task in designing an ESL workshop is to “identify the materials and equipment needed for each presentation” (Laubach Literacy Action 22). In the case of a Socratic seminar workshop at Oakland University, the facilitator will want to ensure that a classroom or workspace has been set aside with enough tables and chairs for the expected number of participants. In addition, the facilitator should bring: their lesson plan, a printed copy of the text for each participant, a printed copy of any additional resources, such as vocabulary or sentence starter lists, talking chips, and a clock/timer. Some additional resources that may be useful are a

large written copy of the seminar rules to post in the room and an audio recorder in case the facilitator would like to record the seminar to provide the students with feedback on their participation or their speaking skills.

Conclusion

This paper does not propose a grand solution that would solve all of the problems facing Omani students all at once, but rather it proposes a variety of strategies that in combination can alleviate some of the difficulties that they face. More precisely, schemas can be created progressively in order to help students acclimate to Socratic teaching methods. Support should be provided in a variety of ways and to varying degrees as students are developing their schemas. Finally, for this process to be successful, students must be appropriately challenged at different stages throughout the learning process. The case study presented in this paper serves as a practical example of how these strategies can be implemented in order to help Omani students succeed in American higher education.

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Appendix

The following appendix is a collection of resources that the facilitator may find useful when planning or conducting the workshop. However, it is not expected that the facilitator will use all of these resources in their entirety. For example, it would be unreasonable to expect that the facilitator would use all of the sentence starters and frames offered in appendix D in each workshop. This list is merely a resource that the facilitator can use as they see fit.

Appendix A

College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards of the Common Core

(National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers)

R1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; and cite specific evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

R2 Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

R8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

SL1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL2 Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

SL4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

SL6 Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

L1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

L6 Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

The Michigan Department of Education English Language Proficiency Standards for K-12 Schools

(Michigan State Board of Education)

L.3 Identify main ideas and supporting details from spoken English

L.5 Identify speaker attitude and point of view

S.3 Use spoken English and nonverbal communication in socially and culturally appropriate ways

S.5 Provide and obtain information; express and exchange opinions

S.7 Present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners on a variety of topics

R.5 Read and demonstrate comprehension of main ideas and supporting details

R.6 Apply reading skills in social and academic contexts

R.8 Make inferences, predictions, and conclusions from reading

R.10 Identify author's voice, attitude, and point of view

Appendix B

(Kelley)

Language Barrier by James Kelley

I couldn't understand the language she spoke,
at least not all of it,
the emotion pouring past her lips,
the tears in her eyes, her clenched and shaking fists
enunciated more clearly,
than any piece of English Poetry I had ever read,
and grabbed me, held me still.
... In that moment, her soul was in my arms.
In that finite, tender breath of our lives,
she was my mother, my best friend...
but I could not console her.
I didn't have the words;
and my heart sank into the
concrete between us,
wet with the pain of God's rain

and her tears.
 ...Were my tears
 So, I simply opened my palms
 toward her crouched form and
 spoke the only words I could
 fathom, that would be accepted
 by a stranger on a dangerous street.
 "I am sorry, It will be okay. God will bless you."
 I knew she did not understand...
 "Lo siento"
 "que va a estar bien"
 "Dios te bendecira"
 the words were as messy as the overturned
 duffle bag at her feet...and fumbled, slowly
 from my lips, as my knees hit the street.
 Two strangers, cried in the rain,
 knowing nothing of each other's suffering,
 and yet we shared the weight,
 together, for those few moments;
 the barrier of language was broken.
 Love spoke for us.

Appendix C

Critical Verbs for Common Core

(M, Melisa)

Delineate: represented accurately or precisely

Determine: find out, learn, or determine with certainty, usually by making an inquiry or other effort

Demonstrate: give an exhibition of to an interested audience

Interpret: make sense of; assign a meaning to

Develop: grow, progress, unfold, or evolve through a process of evolution, natural growth, differentiation, or a conducive environment

Evaluate: evaluate or estimate the nature, quality, ability, extent, or significance of

Describe: give a description of

Distinguish: mark as different

Explain: make plain and comprehensible

Analyze: break down into components or essential features

Identify: recognize as being; establish the identity of someone or something

Paraphrase: express the same message in different words

Articulate: express or state clearly

Infer: conclude by reasoning; in logic

Refer: make reference to

Cite: make reference to

Compare: examine and note the similarities or differences of

Contrast: the opposition or dissimilarity of things that are compared

Integrate: make into a whole or make part of a whole

Retell: to say, state, or perform again

Comprehend: get the meaning of something

*These definitions will need to be modified to the appropriate English language level of the students attending the workshop.

Appendix D

Sentence Starters and Frames

(Advanced Studies & Gifted Students Program)

*It should be noted that the facilitator may need to review or teach some of the vocabulary words found in the following sentence starters and frames in order for students to be able to use them correctly.

Interrupting

Excuse me, but...(e.g., I don't quite understand/I have a point to make).

Sorry for interrupting, but...(e.g., I don't understand/I missed that definition).

May I interrupt for a moment?

Ways to make comments on the central question

- I believe that _____ was the primary motivation for _____ because...
- In my opinion, _____ was the primary motivation for _____ because...
- The evidence suggests that _____ was the primary motivation for _____.

Ways to agree or affirm an opinion

- I agree with _____ because _____ ...
- As _____ said, _____
- My opinion is similar to _____'s idea. I think that....

Ways to disagree

- I disagree with _____ because _____ ...
- I don't agree with _____ because _____....
- My idea is different from _____'s idea. Ways to hold the floor

- As I was saying...
- If I could finish my thought...
- What I was trying to say was...

Asking others' opinions

- What do you think?
- Do you agree, _____?

Asking for clarification

- What do you mean, _____?
- Will you explain that again, _____?
- I have a question about that

Sentence Frames for Clarification:

- _____, could you please rephrase that?
- I did not understand _____, could you repeat that, please?
- I did not understand _____, do you mean _____? (here you rephrase what you think the group member said and wait for clarification)
- It's not quite clear. Can you explain what you said about _____?
- Can you say more about that?
- In other words, are you saying _____?
- I have a question about _____. State your question.

Sentence Frame for changing the subject:

- I think we've exhausted the topic of _____, can we move on to _____?
- Moving on to _____

- Does anyone have any final comments to add about _____ or shall we move on to a new subject?

Sentence Frames for affirming an idea and adding to it:

- My idea is related to _____'s idea _____.
- I really liked _____'s idea about _____.
- I agree with _____. Also, _____.
- My idea build's on _____'s idea. I _____.

Presenting a different angle on a subject:

- While I can see why you believe this, I see this differently. In my opinion _____.
- I understand where you are coming from, but I see it a bit differently. From my perspective, _____.
- That's a valid point, but I feel _____.
- On the other hand, _____.
- I do agree with the part about _____ but _____.

Expressing your opinion:

- I believe that _____.
- In my opinion _____.
- I feel that _____.
- I think that _____ because _____.
- To me, it seems obvious that _____

Appendix E

(Advanced Studies & Gifted Students Program)

WAYS TO MARK A TEXT (guide for students)

Marking the text requires the reader to underline, highlight, or take notes on ideas, issues, or themes in the work. The physical act of marking the text locks information into the student's memory and allows for retrieval of the material later on.

- **Highlight** or underline passages that reveal crucial information, that show changes in character, or that trace the development of character.
- Make notations in the margins as you react to passages that are unique or noteworthy
- Place a question mark (?) in the margin if you don't understand what the passage means.
- Put an exclamation mark (!) in the margin to indicate something surprising or unusual.
- Consider using these symbols:
 - an asterisk (*) to emphasize a statement already underlined or to denote a recurring idea.
 - a plus sign (+) or (-) to indicate something you want to remember.
 - Use post it notes for marking major ideas, for cross-referencing ideas, or for easy access to specific pages in the text. Use a variety of colors.
 - a smiling face ☺ shows you agree or like an idea.
 - a frowning face ☹ shows disagreement or dislike.
 - Circle keywords or phrases.

- Underline vocabulary words you do not know. Jot down a brief definition in the margin, especially if the word is critical to your understanding of the passage.

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