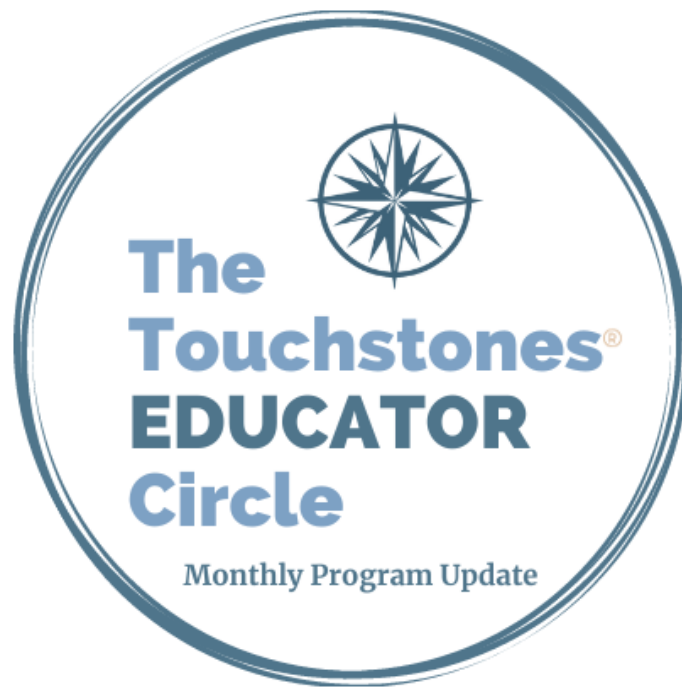




Fall into Touchstones



Beyond Socratic Seminar: How Touchstones Builds Skills to Face the Future

by Howard Zeiderman and Stefanie Takacs



Beyond Socratic Seminar: How Touchstones Builds Skills to Face the Future

by Howard Zeiderman, Co-Founder, and Stefanie Takacs, Executive Director, Touchstones Discussion Project

Over the years, many classrooms have introduced seminar-style discussions to make classroom discussion more student-centered. These discussions typically involve a selected text that students read and then discuss in a forum guided by the teacher's questions and feedback. Unfortunately, these structures have not been as successful as one would hope in addressing the central issues facing today's classrooms: cognitive passivity, student disengagement, and polarized social discourse.

Certainly, there are some accomplishments from these seminars. Students discussing important concepts with each other is a well-documented part of research-based literacy practice, and some schools have seen literacy gains for students tied to those seminar programs. However, even those apparent gains are usually evident for students who were already considered "high achievers" in the

traditional academic sense. In addition, if one examines the rates of student participation in such seminar programs here and abroad (even among high achievers), one typically finds that 25% of participants are very active and dominant, 25% are silent, and about 50% are as frequently disengaged as they are engaged. These percentages are also frequently related to gender and race, and thus these seminars can reflect existing, larger societal issues around who in a group is perceived as “allowed” to have voice.

In the end, these seminar programs have not changed the discussion dynamics in most classrooms.....***continue reading the blog on our website (click the link button below)***

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