

Using Paideia Seminars to Encourage Intellectual Discussion and Discovery in the Statistics Classroom

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What is a Paideia seminar?

Paideia seminar is a collaborative, intellectual dialogue about a text, facilitated by open-ended questions. The teacher serves as facilitator, guiding the discussion with questions, while students are the primary contributors to the discussion. Students respond to the questions posed by the facilitator, state their opinions, ask each other questions, agree and disagree with each other, change their opinions based on what they learn during discussion, preempt the facilitator's questions, and generally surprise you and each other with what they come up with!

What are the goals of a Paideia seminar?

Combined with pre-seminar and post-seminar activities, the Paideia seminar represents a unique opportunity to improve students' communication skills and social skills, while tackling some of the deepest intellectual content of statistics. Students should walk away having learned something from the group discussion, not from you the teacher.

What makes a great text for Paideia seminar?

Keep an open mind. You can use a cartoon for a seminar text; I find they work particularly well. AP exam questions, graphs, paragraphs from your introductory textbook, advertisements or news stories using statistics are all strong possibilities. Don't forget books you can find on the public library shelves, written for the general public! When you think about creating a seminar, look for texts that contain the big picture ideas of statistics. Variation, association & causation, scientific method, type I and II error, etc. Any text you would select must be rich with these ideas.

How do I conduct a Paideia seminar?

First, I highly recommend the training offered by the National Paideia Center (see How do I learn more about Paideia seminars). During their training you will learn all about the Paideia seminar, participate in a Paideia seminar yourself as a participant (student role), and you will be able to practice seminar facilitation (teacher role).

Text selection for your seminar is key. Once the text is identified, you will need to think of questions that have many possible answers. I was truly surprised at the variety of answers provided to the first seminar question I posed. Word to the wise: prepare more questions than you can possibly use; participants often preempt some of them. Also, during the course of a seminar you may decide one question is more appropriate than another for the discussion that is unfolding.

How do I learn more about Paideia seminars?

Please contact the National Paideia Center at

400 Silver Cedar Court	Phone: 919-962 3128
Suite 200	Fax: 919-962 3139
Chapel Hill, NC 27514	www.paideia.org

Tell them Kay sent you!