

Socratic method



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The Socratic Method of teaching is one that has survived throughout many decades. The Socratic Method was started by Socrates, a Greek Philosopher. According to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, the philosopher Socrates remains, as he was in his lifetime (469–399 B. C.), an enigma, an inscrutable individual who, despite having written nothing, is considered one of the handfuls of philosophers who forever changed how philosophy itself was to be conceived. Socrates wrote nothing about his work, as all the information we now have are reports from some of his students. “ Socrates himself never spelled out a " method.

However, the Socratic Method is named after him because Socrates, more than any other before or since, models for us philosophy as a way of living, and as something that any of us can do. It is an open system of philosophical inquiry that allows one to interrogate from many vantage points” (Phillips, 2010). “ Because he wrote nothing, information about his personality and doctrine is derived chiefly from depictions of his conversations and other information in the dialogues of Plato, in the Memorabilia of Xenophon, and in various writings of Aristotle” (Britannica Concise Encyclopedia, 2010).

The Socratic Method of teaching, is popular especially in law schools, it begins with the teacher posing a deceptively simple question such as, what is truth? or, what does it mean to be just? When a student answers, the teacher responds with another question that prompts him or her to think more deeply and offer a new answer” (Noddings, 1998, p. 6). Gregory Vlastos, a Socrates scholar and professor of philosophy at the Princeton University, described Socrates’ method of inquiry as " among the greatest achievements of humanity.

Vlastos added that, the method makes philosophical inquiry " a common human enterprise, open to every man. Instead of requiring allegiance to a specific philosophical viewpoint or analytic technique or specialized vocabulary, the Socratic Method calls for common sense and common speech. And this, he says, is as it should be. Throughout the years education has been view in terms of pedagogy, the art and science of teaching or leading the child, thus the focus was on the instructor rather than the learner.

Under this model all the decisions are made by the instructor, that is what will be learned, how it will be learned, and when it will be learned (Paraskevas, and Wickens , 2003). Ramsden (1992) claims that the larger part of student ' learning' is not about understanding theories and concepts, but about adapting to the requirements of instructors. This model of education was fiercely criticised by many educators who believed it was falling short of its potential (Dewey, 1938). Dewey, (1938) emphasized learning through various activities rather than traditional instructor-focused curricula.

According to Dewey, children learned more from guided experience than authoritarian instruction. These beliefs led to the development of a learner-focused education philosophy, appropriate not only for children but also for adults; a completely different set of learners, with totally different values and expectations from their learning experience (Lindeman, 1926). The approach is similar to that of the Socratic Method. Thus this approach is one positive aspect of the Socratic Method, being that the focus is on the learner.

Another positive aspect of the Socratic Method is that it is applicable at all levels of education. It was a major factor in the Mortimer Adler's Paideia Proposal for America's Education Reform in 1982. (Tredway, 1995 and Strong, 1996) suggest that it is a form of structured discourse about ideas and dilemmas that certain topics present, in this way involving students actively in the learning process by relating activities to their own experiences and thereby engaging them on an emotional level.

Through the use of methodical questions, scenario and inductive thinking, learners are guided along a predetermined path. The learners are required to use their experience and any knowledge they already possess to solve simple or more complex problems or issues posed by the questions. Subsequently, inductive techniques are used to help the learners move beyond the details of the scenario to conceptualize its broader implications (Paraskevas, A and Wickens, 2003). Once the generic ideas and concepts are understood, the instructor uses questions to help the students develop the rationale or a more universal definition of the concepts (Macmillan and Garrison, 1988).

The underlying idea here is that when students actively and co-operatively develop knowledge and understanding, they are more likely to retain these attributes than if they had received them passively and this is another positive attribute to the Socratic Method. The Socratic Method caters for learners of different education background. Paraskevas, and Wickens, (2003), developed a typology of learners, based on learner 'compatibility' with the Socratic Method. This learner typology describe four types of

learners these are as follows: Meno type learner, Protagoras type learner, Gorgias type learner, and the Plato type learner.

The Meno type learner depends totally on the lecture-type of teaching, and need an authority figure to explicitly answer all questions that they have, and to those that they have not thought about (Paraskevas, and Wickens, 2003). Protagoras did seem to have restricted knowledge to sense experience, but he believed emphatically that whatever was perceived by the senses were certainly true. In the same way, Protagoras type learners respond to motivational techniques Paraskevas, and Wickens, (2003).

Teachers using the Socratic Method must quickly recognize Protagoras learners and attempt to build their confidence in order for them to participate in the discussion. Dinkmeyer and Losoncy (1980) suggest using praise, which builds extrinsic motivation and phrasing in encouragement which builds intrinsic motivation. Paraskevas, and Wickens, (2003), believe that the Gorgias type learners have the skill and possibly some knowledge, and see themselves as 'owners of their fate'.

They feel, however, they need to explore the topic that is being discussed with a good 'local guide' (Fox, 1983). Paraskevas, and Wickens, E. 2003), explain that the Plato type learner is educationally more mature and more 'in charge' of their learning. It may be very exciting to conduct a Socratic seminar with this type of learner, but the instructor will soon find himself fading back as the Plato learner takes the lead. After reviewing several materials on Socrates and his method of teaching, it can be concluded that while his method is relevant it should not be the only teaching tool. The

Socratic Method offers the child a chance to use their intuition to solve problems, and build self-confidence. However it can be detrimental to students with low self-esteem.

Paraskevas, and Wickens, (2003), in concluding their study on the Socratic Method of teaching said that it a technique that is well accepted by the majority of learners. However, it is proved that this method cannot be used in all situations and with all learners. The aim of this method is to uncover self-knowledge and develop critical thinking. Still, the realization of ignorance may be shocking or even traumatic to a significant number of learners. The instructor will need to be aware of the different learners and adjust accordingly if not the result of the Socratic method of teaching will be a mere questioning exercise.

References

<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/551948/Socrates>