

Socratic Method Outline

1. What is the Socratic Method? (Definition)
 - a. This form of teaching is the pursuit of truth with questions
 - b. Teaching in this manner demands belief in three fundamental principles
 - i. Truth exists (else why seek it?)
 - ii. Truth can be known (else we would never be able to find it)
 - iii. And truth can be communicated (else two persons could never share it)
 - c. This mode of teaching includes two forms of questions:
 - i. Deconstruction – showing the disciple the contradictions and inadequacies in his current thoughts about the subject
 - ii. Reconstruction – helping the disciple reform his thinking on a more solid set of opinions
 - d. Often two differing motives are at work with those who use questions: Pure Socratic vs Manipulative Coercion
 - i. Pure use of Soc Meth involves truly seeking Truth, wherever this may lead the student and teacher.
 - ii. Manipulative use is when one person seeks to gain power over another by getting them to jump through a set of hoops (loaded questions).
2. Why Use the Socratic Method? (Motivation)
 - a. The power of thinking with questions includes...
 - i. Starting with what you know
 - ii. Stirs the mind to thought by posing a problem to solve
 - iii. Exercise in this form of learning develops the student's ability to attack any new idea or subject
 - b. Using the Topics to jump start the Socratic moment – 5 Questions you can ask about “anything” (for those teachers who resist the Soc Meth because they don't know what to ask)
 - i. Definition: What is x? How can x be defined?
 - ii. Comparison: What is like x? What do I already know that is like x?
 - iii. Relationship: How is x related to things like it? What are x's causes and effects? What are x's opposites?
 - iv. Circumstances: How did x come about? Where did x originate? What is x's purpose and use?
 - v. Testimony: How do we know x? Who would be an authority on x? What is a good book on x?
3. What Do I Do When Others Use the Socratic Method with me? (Practicing as a Disciple)
 - a. A good tutor will cause “unease” or “engagement” by asking questions the disciple has not previously considered
 - i. New ideas are often unnerving – can lead to fear unless embraced as a challenge
 - ii. Think of riding a roller coaster – it scares us but we get on it believing we won't die.

- b. At the heart of any learning is the relationship between tutor and disciple – no trust = no learning
 - i. If you trust your tutor, with good reasons and experience, then you can have an honest tutorial
 - ii. If you don't trust or at least don't know if you can trust your tutor, you have to proceed with caution
 - c. When asked a question, you have several choices
 - i. Silence, usually from fear or distrust (assume more than one student / if one on one, you really can't exercise this option)
 - ii. Answering honestly when you trust the conversation
 - iii. Asking a responding question when you need a better question or more proof of trust
 - iv. Requesting time to consider it further
4. How Can I Use Socratic Method? (Practicing as a Tutor)
- i. The trigger – whenever a student says something that is not clear, muddled, ignorant, or needs more thought.
 - ii. The bullet – choosing the right initial question (often one of definition) is the key to starting the domino sequence of questions.
 - iii. The recoil – trust and safety is key for the student, therefore you must respond properly to any of the four actions noted above in 3.c (silence, answer, asking more, requesting time). The single quickest killer of the Socratic moment is when a teacher is “in a hurry” to get through their lesson. Good learning should be given as much time as it requires, not simply what is “within the bells” of the schedule.
5. Jumping in
- a. The hardest aspect of becoming a Socratic teacher is experience.
 - b. You will have some soaring moments, and some real crashes, but the joys outweigh the sorrows.
 - c. Remember that you can't “plan” Socratic moments. They come up in the midst of good learning. You can't manufacture good learning.
 - d. It starts with your humility.