

SOCRATIC METHODS IN THE CLASSROOM

What are the Socratic Methods? → General

“I know that I know nothing” (Socrates)

this is for sure the most known sentence of Socrates. He believed that the first step to reach wisdom should be the recognition of one’s own ignorance.

As written in the article Socrates in the classroom *“In the dialogues, he was actually educating the citizens not in facts, as “ordinary” teachers do, but by showing them how to improve themselves as humans” (p30, Socrates in the Classroom)* the main goal of the Socratic Methods in school should not be to show the students the solution rather to animate them to think over the content critically and find their own answer through questions and investigations.

Elenchus (widening your mind through a dialogue)

Elenchus is the main part of the Socratic Method (also elenchus method), which is the way people should act in a dialogue for leading to knowledge. At least two people have to tell his/her opinion about the current topic. Wherefore each participant has to know something about it otherwise there will be no benefit for them.

For a good conversation it is necessary that everyone behaves polite against the others believes and also accept them. The different point of views should enable people to think over the meanings and also increase their knowledge.

Questioner ↔ Respondent (guide to the solution)

The Questioner in a Socratic dialogue supports the respondent to think about the recent task in a better way and find own answers. He offers this opportunity due to proper questions.

For example a teacher should make class discussions where he/she tries to guide his/her pupils with special cases, so that they could solve the actual issues on their own. In that case the role of the teacher is a kind of leader described in the Socratic Method.

The method itself belongs to the third column of M. Adler’s Paideia curriculum which is divided in 3 approaches (knowledge, skills and exploring/creating). *“In the third column the teacher becomes a “mid-wife”, facilitating the student’s exploring or creating by asking evocative questions, but not planning the outcome of the discussion or of creativity.” (p2, Thoughtful Dialogue in Relation to Other Instructional Methods)*

It is compared with the job of a “midwife” (maieutic as a conversation-technique), because as the midwife isn’t able to get the child for her patients, the teacher isn’t able to reach the goals of his/her students, both can only guide them how to manage it autonomously.

Why could it be beneficial in the classroom?

As a teacher you are responsible for the academical success of your students. So you have to show them the best ways for acquiring each kind of knowledge. However many children aren't interested in the ways a teacher pretend to them and have less motivation to reach these propounded goals.

Children prefer to make their own experiences, choose their own ways and solve their own problems. In their early age they want to explore everything in the world and have an endless condition to do that. This is the natural way of learning and especially the most effective one. *“Socrates’ chief pedagogic ideas are getting the students to do their own thinking and to introduce the interchange of ideas as a safeguard against self-deception.” (p51, Socrates in the Classroom)*

As I see the Socratic Method could be a good way to keep their positive behaviour. Starting with simple tasks where the teacher increases their curiosity -for the recent topics- by asking questions. During the answer-process the pupils would realize the complexity and profundity of the topic and therefore start to think about possible declarations to deposit their attitude. To go into detail the teacher should scrutinize the answers of the students and ask them for relevant, everyday examples.

As soon as the students create their own opinions and start to inquire critically, both the motivation and as a result the learning experience would increase a lot. As Popper, Lindström and Larsson claimed *“creative intuition is an active art of discovering solutions.” (p16, Socio-cognitive Analysis of Socratic Dialogue)*

How to use? → My class scenario

The Socratic Methods can be used in class like we did it in the course with the yellow duck. For example the method could be applied in Art to talk about the meaning of a special picture like “the human seed”.

Firstly the class would be divided in groups of three with the task to describe the meaning of this picture. The teacher tells them an/some open questions like ...

- What could you see on this picture? What could be the meaning of this drawing? What should it possibly express?

... but also more absorbing questions like ...

- If you were in the pictures, how would you feel in this situation?

It is necessary that every student make his/her own opinion and talk about it in the group. After each statement the other group members are invited to scrutinize and the latest speaker

should defend his/her predication. To lay down personal theories, the students should take use of ordinary examples. That will ease the process.

During the conversations the teacher would move around and participate in all groups for a short time, but he/she should not response. *“The teacher should not give any answers when questions are addressed to him, but instead set the interplay of questions and answers going among the students by asking open-ended questions to the group.”* (p52, *Socrates in the Classroom*) Analytic questions of the teacher could be:

- Where is it? How did she get there? How long has she been here?
- What would be the next step of this picture?
- Where are the roots coming from and are they connected to something else?

The different views of each pupil should lead them to think more critically about the picture and the questions.

Secondly each group should try to find both differences and similarities which all group members accept and write them down. Then the class teacher makes questions concerning the results of each group.

- What were your ideas? What did you think about this picture?
- Were there many different aspects or more similarities?
- Which kind of similarities have you found?

Finally in an open class discussion each group should present their results. Therefore everyone move to the middle of the class where they make a circle so that everyone is able to ask questions to the different point of views. The attendance in the previous group dialogues should also motivate less skilled students to interact.

Like it is written in *Socrates in the Classroom* (p234) *“The group spontaneously “personified” different values or roles during the seminar as an effective way of learning to see the different arguments.”* class-roles change immediately, so that not only the skilled students give their statements, because also they can learn many things of their class colleges.

As everyone has participated the discussion all students should have increased their mindedness and foster their critical thinking. *“The main thing would not be to win, not even to be right; the main thing would be to reach clarity as far as possible.”*(p73 *SitC*)

NOTE: The end-discussion could take time.

References

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