# SOCRATIC DIALOGUE

**Socratic dialogue** or "Socratic method," or "Elenctic method" is a form of discussion based on questions and answers used to encourage critical thinking and "shed light on the path to the truth." It is a dialectic method that includes opposing views, defending those views logically and problem-solving. What is the goal of the Socratic method in education? The standard answer would be that the method encourages children and teenagers (and all those who participate in this type of educational programs) to develop critical thinking. The participants' benefit from the development of critical thinking is probably best described by Show: "The process of Socratic dialogue assists students to organise their thoughts and sequence their learning. It guides learning by emphasising what is important and relevant" (Shaw *2008*). Furthermore, Socratic dialogue develops what we refer to nowadays as critical thinking and what John Dewey referred to as reflective thinking. It was John Dewey who re-established the need to learn how to think in modern society. "No one doubts, theoretically, the importance of fostering in school good habits of thinking" (Dewey *1926*, p. 226). However, according to Dewey, although in theory the problem of thinking in educational process observed in practice is different. However, even the theoretical does not recognize the importance of this problem: "But apart from the fact that the acknowledgment is not so great in practice as in theory, there is not adequate theoretical recognition that all which the school can or need do for pupils, so far as their minds are concerned (i.e., leaving out certain specialized muscular abilities), is to develop their ability to think" (Dewey *1926*).

Modern Socratic dialogue is based on legendary Socrates method. Socrates tried to encourage his fellow citizens and interlocutors to think about the things truly relevant for people. The method he employed is known as the Socratic method. Therefore, Socrates was an advocate of enlightenment and constantly urged his fellow citizens to think. We should also point out that aiming philosophy toward citizens was a process started by the sophists. They offered their intellectual and philosophical services to anyone who could afford them, while Socrates strived to enlighten his pupils and citizens. Socrates used questions to guide the interlocutor toward "the truth," something the interlocutor was unaware prior to the conversation with Socrates. In modern terms, it could be said that Socrates did not teach his interlocutors what they should think but how to think. There is the comparison between Socrates and a midwife; Socrates is helping with "the birth" of an opinion. He used to help the interlocutor to form and state their opinion and bring it into the world. The Socratic method is (rightfully) attributed to Socrates and the way in which he pulled the opinion out of the interlocutor and how he made them question their own principles and judgment.

Is the Socratic method an educational one? Given everything that has been mentioned so far, yes, even more so than many other methods considered to be educational. The Socratic irony is not simple. It is not easy to use irony in the Socratic sense; every answer offered has to be met with its essence, while seemingly naively pretending not to know what the subject is, and then offering a counter answer or question either to allude or provoke doubt.

Socrates' dialectic method has two parts: irony and maieutic. Irony is the initial part of the method where Socrates asks the interlocutor to define the basic notions relating to the subject, because he (Socrates) "does not know them." Towards the discovery of Human Wisdom, in chapter on Irony, dialectic versus maieutic (Reale 2003), Reale discusses the Socratic method. He also talks about Jan Patočka, who says: "Essentially, irony is part of the Socratic educational method, that is, the care for the soul. "(Reale 2003) Socrates, in fact, logically questions the opinions and principles of the interlocutor, while irony brings into question the attitude of the interlocutor, so that the confused individual has to elaborate on their opinion or principle, in accordance with logical consistency of what they are about to say. Socrates believed that only through a live conversation can we get closer to the truth, find out something new, and eventually learn.

Maieutic is a more complex process than irony. Through careful questioning, Socrates examines the attitudes stated by the interlocutor but also guides them to a logically consistent conclusion. However, the conclusion may not always be reached, as evident from Plato's dialogues. Lack of a real conclusion is not or, at least, should not be a problem, because thinking about and raising awareness of the issue is the path toward solving it. Nevertheless, there are authors who doubt that maieutic was actually created by Socrates. Regardless of whether or not maieutic is an original Socratic method, together with irony, it is a part of the Socratic dialogue, as it is called today, with its contemporary interpretation being used more and more in formal and non-formal education.

Socrates "made" the interlocutor to think about their judgments, principles, and statements, but more precisely, he encouraged thinking. The definition of Socrates as the grandfather of critical thinking, that is, of "learning how to think," can be found among most critical thinking theoreticians. Some contemporary philosophical tendencies, such as "philosophy with children," use dialogue based on irony and maieutic. This is called the "Socratic dialogue," "Socratic method," or "elenctic method." It is a form of discussion based on questions and answers used to encourage critical thinking and "shed light on the path to the truth." It is a dialectic method that includes opposing views, defending those views logically and problem-solving.

What is the goal of the Socratic method in education? The standard answer would be that the method encourages children and teenagers (and all those who participate in this type of educational programs) to develop critical thinking. The participants' benefit from the development of critical thinking is probably best described by Show: "The process of Socratic dialogue assists students to organize their thoughts and sequence their learning. It guides learning by emphasizing what is important and relevant" (Shaw *2008*).

The method can be adapted according to age, and the most important question of the method is "Why?". However, modern-day Socratic method in education is primarily based on thoughtful series of questions. These questions open up new question and new explanations. R. W. Paul divided the questions of the Socratic method into six basic types:

1. Questions for clarification: Why do you say that? How does this relate to our discussion?
2. Questions that probe assumptions: What could we assume instead? How can you verify or disapprove that assumption?

3. Questions that probe reasons and evidence: What would be an example? What is.... analogous to? What do you think causes to happen…? Why?

4. Questions about viewpoints and perspectives: What would be an alternative? What is another way to look at it? Would you explain why it is necessary or beneficial, and who benefits? Why it is the best? What are the strengths and weaknesses of…? How are…and … similar? What is a counterargument for…?

5. Questions that probe implications and consequences: What generalizations can you make? What are the consequences of that assumption? What are you implying? How does…affect…? How does…tie in with what we learned before?

6. Questions about the question: What was the point of this question? Why do you think I asked this question? What does…mean? How does…apply to everyday life? (Paul et al. *2002*)

There is lot different suggestion how to lead Socratic dialogue. One of the concrete and good one is made by Craig A. Munns in *The Teaching Professor*, October 2001. Let's see how it's looks like:

"1. Choose a concept to discuss where students have a superficial understanding. As a way to show the development of the idea, always write what the students say on the board.

2. Rephrase the question in order to draw out the other responses and expand the initial definition. This step serves two purposes. First, it allows you to get more information so that the first definition can be enhanced. Second, it provides a way to stimulate the conversation if no one ventures a first definition.

3. Ask how these new ideas fit in with the initial definition. Prompt them with questions about the ideas they generate, forcing them to relate what they say to the main concept.

4. Get students to combine their work into a cohesive definition. By this step students are usually involved in the discussion. Ask them to use a sentence to express the concepts they have agreed on thus far.

5. Ask for or offer test cases to determine if the definition is viable. This is the essence of the Socratic method and yet students sometimes see it as a personal challenge. Reiterate that we are trying to come up with the best overall definition. Presenting the limiting or test case as hypothetical makes them less likely to feel personally threatened.

Craig A. Munns had a 6th step, but this step is for whole course, not just one workshop ("6. Refer to the definition during the course. It is very important, especially after all the work students put into the definition, to keep referring to it throughout the semester").

TASK FOR PARTICIPANTS:

Use one abstract concept end try to lead Socratic Dialogue with your students using the 5 steps by Munns.

Literature:

- Audi, Robert. *Practical Reasoning and Ethical Decision*. London, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 2006.
- Bailin, Sharon; Siegel, Harvey. »Critical Thinking«, u: The *Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Education*, Blake, Nigel; Smeyers, Paul; Smith, Richard; Standish, Paul (ur.), Malden, Oxford: Blackwell, 2003.
- Craig A. Munns in *The Teaching Professor*, October 2001.
- Ćurko, Bruno. „Philosophical Education, An Overview of" u *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory* (Michael A. Peters, ed), Springer, 2016.
- Ćurko, Bruno. „Socratic Dialogue in Education" u *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory* (Michael A. Peters, ed), Springer, 2016.
- Ćurko, Bruno. »Croatie: apprendre à penser dans la petite philosophie«, *Diotime – revue internationale de didactique de la philosophie*, vol. 10 (2010), 46,
- Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education*. Plain Label Books, 1926.
- Dewey, John. *How We Think*. New York: Courier, Dover Publications, 1997.
- Fisher, Alec. *Critical Thinking: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Fisher, Robert. *Teaching Children to Think*. Cheltenham: Nelson Thornes, 2005.
- Kwak, Duck-Joo. »Re-conceptualizing Critical Thinking for Moral Education in Culturally Plural Societies«, u: *Critical Thinking and Learning*, Mason, Mark (ur.), Hong Kong, Singapore: Blackwell, 2008., pp. 121–130.
- Lipman Matthew, »Critical Thinking, What Can It Be?«, *Educational leadership*, 46, 1988., pp. 38–43.
- Lipman, M.; Sharp, A. M.; Oscanyan, F. S. *Philosophy in the Classroom*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.
- Lipman, Matthew. *Thinking in Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
- Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2002). *Critical thinking: Tools for taking charge of your professional and personal life*. New Jersey: Financial Times/Prentice-Hall Press.
- Reale, G. (2003). *Sokrat: k otkriću ljudske mudrosti*. Zagreb: Demetra.
- Sprod, Tim. *Philosophical Discussion in Moral Education: The Community of Ethical Inquiry*. London: Routledge, 2001.
- T*eaching Philosophy in the Arab Region*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2009. UNESCO: *Philosophy – a School of Freedom: Teaching philosophy and Learning to Philosophize: Status and Prospects*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 2007.