



School Culture: Full Lesson Tour in Community, Virtue, & Education with Dr. Christopher Perrin

Lesson 18: Introduction to Socratic Teaching Part 2

Outline:

Introduction to Socratic Teaching

Part 2: Four Styles of Socratic Discussion

- Harkness Style
 - Harkness table
 - It has slats that open out for students to take exams.
 - The teacher will often walk around the table rather than sitting, so that the students perceive that they are leading their own discussion.
 - What kind of table do you sit at when you teach Socratically?

- St. John's Style (Socratic Seminar)
 - The St. John's style features rectangular tables.
 - Seminar classes
 - 17-19 students
 - Meet on 2 evenings per week
 - Students prepare a reading in advance
 - 2 tutors co-lead the seminar.
 - One tutor opens the seminar with a question inviting probing conversation that can lead in unexpected directions.
 - Tutors are sitting at the table with the students.
 - A younger tutor will often be paired with an older tutor.
 - It is text based that encourage clarity of thought and generosity of spirit (slower to speak and quicker to listen).

- Socratic Circles
 - Break the class into halves and have two discussions. The inner circle of 15 would have a Socratic discussion. The outer circle would take notes and assess the quality of the discussion.
 - The outer group would give immediate feedback and then the inner group would become the outer group and vice versa.
 - You learn something by having a Socratic discussion.
 - Should focus on factual, interpretive, and evaluative questions.



- Christological Style
 - The Christological style is an acknowledgement that Christ's claim to be the truth, and the way, and the life has to have bearing on how we have discussions.
 - Christ himself is the universal truth. In Him all things hold together and have their being.
 - What is piety in light of the revelation of Christ?
 - Ask: What would Christ do?
 - Appeal to knowledge of scripture and other authors.

Elements of Socratic Discussion

- Questions
 - What is the right question to ask at the right moment to begin and to lead a discussion?
- Mini-Lectures
- Stories, Poetry, Myth
 - Bring wisdom from that study to bear on a discussion.
- Analogies
- Irony
 - The teacher can do a little bit of play acting and posing.
- Exposure, Illumination
 - Awaken hearers to see something.
- Patience
 - Impart a culture and not just give information to pass the quiz.
- Resolution or Not?
 - This is debatable.
 - Socrates wasn't just randomly shooting the breeze. A good Socratic teacher starts out with a plan.
 - There are some questions that you might want to leave open.
 - It is important to allow students think about something over a longer period of time than one forty-five minute discussion. A student needs to go through the process of becoming his or her own teacher.

The Art of Leading Socratic Discussion

- Try to find a mentor.
- Plan each Socratic discussion with a destination in mind even if it is an unresolved question.
- Preparing by Reading
- Preparing Questions – especially the opening question
- Preparing a Destination
- Listening
- Adapting
- Combining



- Combining the thoughts of other authors and students becomes an art in the moment.
- Weaving
- Resting, pausing
 - Train students to be quiet sometimes. Encourage thought.
- Mentors, Coaching
- Learn by Doing

Kinds of Questions

- **Unconditional open question:** A question asked with no sense of why the question is asked or where it might lead
- **Conditional open question:** A question that seeks a general way of entering into a topic of discussion, but being informed by a truth and an imagined, eventual destination.
- **Leading question:** A question that signals what the teachers thinks, or what the teacher thinks the students should ask or think next
- **Loaded question:** A question that reveals criticism; possibly a question that is designed to evoke a negative response.
- **Hypothetical question:** A question raised that could be raised by a person that is perhaps different from the speaker, or a question that would be legitimate given a certain set of imagined circumstances
- **Prompting question:** A question designed to start a conversation in certain direction, or to shift a conversation in a new direction
- **Prodding/Nudging question:** A question designed to keep the momentum of conversation going, or extend it some way
- **Directing question:** A question that brings a conversation to a particular pathway
- **Redirecting question:** A question designed to bring a conversation back to pathway or topic
- **Interrogating question:** A question that seeks more information or thinking on a topic, or that seeks assumptions and ideas behind a question or topic
- **Rephrasing question:** A question that rephrases a student's comment or question in an attempt to seek clarity or extend the thinking in some direction
- **Qualifying question:** A question that seeks to limit the breadth of a question or make a question more specific
- **Clarifying question:** A question that seeks to eliminate some ambiguity or confusion in a question, topic, or discussion
- **Other question types:** Spontaneous, Exploratory, Focused

Rubrics

- The Ambrose School Rubric – Rubric to help think about how a Socratic discussion has gone.
- Socratic Questioning rubric