



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

Lesson 23:  
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 to 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