



Podcast on a Socratic Discussion



Shalom & Hi everyone -welcome to the UnitEd-Herzog Podcast!

We assume you have familiarity with educational ideas such as Collaborative learning, Jigsaw method, Self-directed learning, and Active learning. Sometimes these these methods and techniques seem a little bit vague

UnitEd-Herzog has prepared a series of short and focused podcasts on a number educational approaches. The podcasts are workshops for building lesson plans based on diverse, inviting, and engaging learning practices that encourage students to take an active and meaningful part in their learning. We've also prepared accompanying materials for you and your students that help improve their learning using these practices..

These practices may be adapted to any content and any age group.

So go ahead, take the material you've planned to teach, find a quiet place, put on your headphones, and join us!



"The only true wisdom is in knowing you know nothing." This is one of the pearls of wisdom brought to the world by Socrates, the famous 4th century BC Greek philosopher, who is considered by many to be the father of Western philosophy. Many describe philosophers before him as pre-Socratic philosophers. Among the ideas he gave us was the Socratic debate, which is a method of dialogue between a teacher and a student, in which the teacher asks the student more and more questions to undermine the student's assumptions and beliefs in an attempt to reach a deep understanding about what can be perceived as truth. But let's give an imaginary example of a conversation between Socrates and a child of about 12 years old on what makes a friend a good friend?

Socrates: I understand that you want to learn what makes a person a good friend, so you tell me what makes someone a good friend?

Child: I think a good friend is someone who is always there when you need them. He will listen to you and help you when you are not feeling good.

Socrates: That's a good point. But what if things are going well and you have no problems? What do you think a good friend would do then?

Child: I think a good friend is happy with what is good for you and encourages you to keep going.

Socrates: And if you are working on a project in class, say a drawing, and you ask your friend for his opinion, he thinks it's bad. How do you think a good friend should respond? Should he tell the truth, or should he lie to not hurt your feelings?



Boy: I think a good friend should always tell the truth, but also try to be kind while saying things that I won't like to hear.

So Socrates will go on asking more and more questions to try to find out what a good friend is. He will talk about loyalty, justice and other qualities. Many times Socrates would use the answers to set the basic assumptions in situations that cause discomfort at times and our challenge as educators is to reach a level of productive discomfort, that allows students to challenge their thinking but feel comfortable moving forward and not to the point where they reach paralysis.

We can use Socratic discussions to stimulate higher order thinking that can help us when we study topics that connect to a system of beliefs and values. Socratic discussions can help us understand concepts in depth, explore basic assumptions, see different questions and viewpoints, and understand perceptions in changing situations.

Please stay with us. I will show you how to build a lesson plan based on Socratic discussion. At the end of this unit, you will have a lesson ready to use in class. Let's start.



Are you with me here? Great. I suggest you sit in a place where you are comfortable to work, maybe put on headphones and prepare a tool for documenting the structure of the lesson: it can be a notebook, a sheet of paper, or a computer. I suggest you use the sheet we prepared for you to plan the lesson – a companion page for listening to the podcast - Socratic questions.

I will explain each stage to you and leave you work time while listening to pleasant music. If you feel you need more time, stop the recording, finish your work, and get back to us.

When thinking about a Socratic discussion in the classroom, the stages of preparation are slightly different since the basic structure is simply choosing a good topic and then creating a class discussion. During this process we, as teachers, have to be very precise in the questions we ask. So, we are going to prepare for a discussion in which the whole class participates. Think about the topic or question you want to pose to your students. Remember that this question must deal with value issues, dilemmas, and basic assumptions.

Take a few minutes to think about the topics.



When we are sure that the topic is clearer, I suggest you think about the questions you want to raise considering the students' possible answers. This is a good opportunity to prepare your questions, as in real time you will not have a lot of time to think about this. Since there is a lot of accumulated experience in the field, I suggest you use the Socratic questions file. In the lesson planning file you will see a division according to six types of Socratic questions.

Clarification questions

Why do you say that? How does this connect to the discussion? What do you mean by that?

Questions to investigate the assumption

How did you come to this conclusion? What will happen if?



Questions to investigate evidence and reasons

Ask for an example of the assumption made in the previous answer. Simply ask why? What evidence supports what you say?

Questions of points of view

In what other ways can we look at this? Is there another alternative? What are the strengths and weaknesses of your argument?

Questions that investigate consequences

What does this assumption mean? How does this affect ...?

Questions about the question

What was the purpose of the question? How does it affect everyday life?

I suggest you delve deeper into the questions. Think about other questions and maybe even draw a kind of discussion tree, where you place the question and start to draw lines and imagine possible answers and additional questions you would like to ask. All this will help you prepare better for the discussion itself. You can also start with a small group of students, who will answer the questions and then you can ask more students to present their points of view. Think about this in the planning process as well.

 **You may need a little more time for this step, so feel free to stop and come back when you're done. You have 3 minutes to finish this task.**



The final stage is the conclusion of the discussion. This can be done independently or in groups. I suggest you use the self-feedback page on discussion engagement - Socratic questions - student self-feedback for evaluation, which can also help you assess the degree of the students' participation and their thought processes.

Ask the students to write down the name and topic of the discussion and to mark on the page how many times they actively participated in the discussion itself. Then ask them to answer three open questions: An opinion I heard during the discussion and agreed with. An opinion I heard during the discussion and did not agree with, and why. My new insight on the topic of discussion.

This page will support the students' deep understanding of the topic.

I suggest you use this idea or think of another set of questions that you would like the students to answer independently, or as a group, so you can process the Socratic discussion that took place.

 **Take a few minutes to think about the summarizing process.**



That's it. Well done. You have a lesson plan based on a Socratic discussion. You are of course welcome to continue developing more lessons.



We hope you found this podcast to be helpful.
Don't forget to also visit the UnitEd and Herzog College websites.
There you will find additional materials about the practice and other useful resources for future lessons, inspiration, and enrichment.
Good luck!

You can also listen to the podcast here:

