

# QUESSIE Newsletter October 2017

Dear **QUESSIE** Member

This month I am exploring “*Socratic Questioning*”.

Socrates was one of the greatest educators who taught his students by asking questions and thus drawing out answers from his pupils ('ex duco', means to 'lead out', which is the root of 'education'). He lived very frugally and was known for his eccentricity. One of his pupils was Plato, who wrote up much of what we know of him.

The overall purpose of Socratic questioning, is to challenge accuracy and completeness of thinking in a way that acts to move people towards their ultimate goal.

Here are the six types of questions that Socrates asked his pupils.

## 1 **Conceptual clarification questions**

The goal here is to get students to think more about what exactly they are asking or thinking about. Prove the concepts behind their argument. Use basic “tell me more” questions that get students to dig deeper.

- Why are you saying that?
- What exactly does this mean?
- How does this relate to what we have been talking about?
- What is the nature of ...?
- What do we already know about this?
- Can you give me an example?
- Are you saying ... or ... ?
- Can you rephrase that please?

## 2 **Probing assumptions**

Probing students' assumptions makes them think about the presuppositions and unquestioned beliefs on which they are founding their argument. This is shaking the bedrock!

- What else could we assume?
- You seem to be assuming ... is that correct?
- How did you choose those assumptions?
- Please explain why/how ...
- How can you verify or disprove that assumption?
- What would happen if ... ?
- Do you agree or disagree with ... ?

### **3 Probing rationale, reasons and evidence**

When students give a rationale for their arguments, dig into that reasoning rather than assuming it is a given. People often use 'un-thought-through' or 'weakly-understood' supports for their arguments.

- Why is that happening?
- How do you know this?
- Show me ...
- Can you give me an example of that?
- What do you think causes ... ?
- What is the nature of this?
- Are these reasons good enough?
- Would it stand up in court?
- How might it be refuted?
- How can I be sure of what you are saying?
- Why is ... happening?
- Why?
- What evidence is there to support what you are saying?
- On what authority are you basing your argument?

### **4 Questioning viewpoints and perspectives**

Most arguments are given from a particular position. So why not challenge the position? Show that there are other, equally valid, viewpoints.

- Another way of looking at this is ..., does this seem reasonable?
- What alternative ways of looking at this are there?
- Who benefits from this?
- What is the difference between... and...?
- Why is it better than ...?
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of...?
- How are ... and ... similar?
- What would ... say about it?
- What if you compared ... and ... ?
- How could you look another way at this?

## 5 Probe implications and consequences

The argument that students give may have logical implications that can be forecast. Do these make sense? Are they desirable?

- Then what would happen?
- What are the consequences of that assumption?
- How could ... be used to ... ?
- What are the implications of ... ?
- How does ... affect ... ?
- How does ... fit with what we learned before?
- Why is ... important?
- What is the best ... ? Why?

## 6 Questions about the question

You can also turn the question in on itself. Bounce the ball back into the students' court, etc.

- What was the point of asking that question?
- Why do you think I asked this question?
- Am I making sense? Why or why not?
- What else might I ask?
- What does that mean?

Did you realise you used so much Socratic Questioning in your lessons? Is there a capacity to use more to improve student outcomes?

Until next month, best wishes

*Sheldon*

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