

Steps for Socratic Dialogue (version 2.0)

This version is based on Huib Schwab's Socratic Dialogue method.

A Socratic Dialogue is a group conversation about a fundamental, preferably philosophical question. The participants embark on a shared voyage of discovery for the answer. The Socratic Dialogue is not a result-oriented conversation and not a discussion; it is about reaching a consensus – and above all about the shared searching itself.

The rules are as follows:

- The chairperson monitors the procedure and does not become involved in the content. The conversation takes place through the chair; participants raise their hand before saying anything. Strict monitoring produces calm and encourages mutual respect.
- Participants talk about their own experience. They are not allowed to call on a higher authority and say things like 'it has been scientifically proved that ...'.
- The chairperson can ask participants questions, to make them repeat what has been said, and to make sure that everyone really listens to each other and remains involved.
- The participants work towards consensus and there is no pressure to produce results. It is a dialogue rather than a discussion or debate.

INPUT

Step 1 The participants each contribute a fundamental, preferably philosophical question, one of which is chosen. Example questions are: What is learning? What is trust? What is tolerance? The chair or one of the participants notes down the questions on a flip chart.

Step 2 The participants contribute an example which fits the chosen question. This may not be a hypothetical example; the participants must have experienced it themselves. Together they choose one example. The participants pose clarification questions to try and make the situation as clear as possible. These will probably be 'who, what, where, when and how' questions.

IMPLEMENTATION

Step 3 The chairperson or the participants choose a method for working on the chosen question.

- Key concepts and key statements. On the basis of the example, key concepts are proposed and these are combined into a shared key statement about the question. The key statement is made as powerful and clear as possible.
- Definitions. The most important concepts from the question are made explicit. This method can be used with or without the help of the example.
- Principles. The underlying principles assumed by the question are mentioned. What are the fundamental principles on which the question is based? This method can be used with or without the help of an example.
- Comparing examples (in this case, of course, there needs to be more than one example). A search is made for common elements in the different examples and how they clarify the question. The differences between the questions can certainly be examined too.

CONCLUSION

Step 4 The conclusion depends on the chosen method. The chairperson or one of the participants concludes by summarising the entire thought process.