

Socratic Pedagogy: An Ancient Approach Serves as a New Catalyst for Teaching Critical Thinking

Christine Sorrell Dinkins, PhD
Department of Philosophy
Wofford College
Spartanburg, SC



Jeanne M. Sorrell, PhD, RN, FAAN
Riley College of Education and
Leadership
Walden University
Minneapolis, MN



Pamela R. Cangelosi, PhD, RN, CNE,
ANEF
School of Nursing
Shenandoah University
Winchester, VA



Introduction

Goals today:

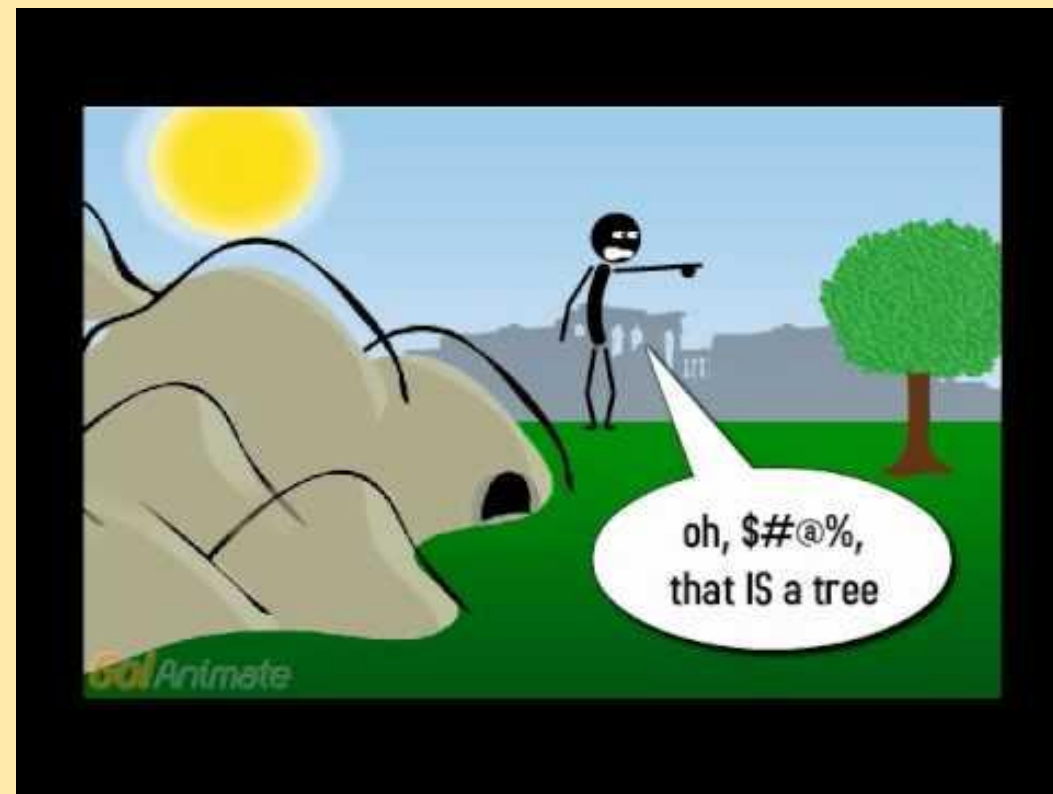
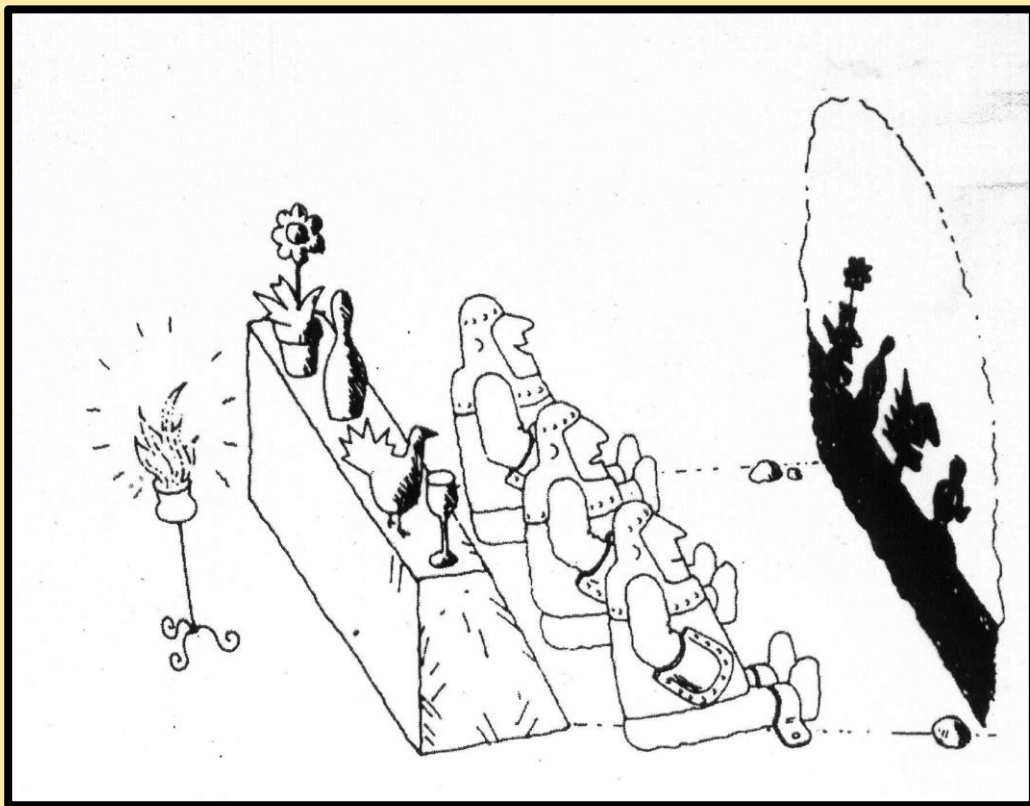
- To understand the value of Socratic pedagogy to serve as a catalyst to build nurses' critical and creative thinking skills and situational awareness
- To grasp the fundamentals of Socratic pedagogy – questioning and metacognition
- To practice Socratic questioning and role-modeling for use in clinical instruction settings
- To discuss opportunities for metacognitive reflections from nursing students and new nurses

Introduction

Our plan today:

- Rationale for Socratic pedagogy and mindful teaching in nursing education
- Introduction to Socratic techniques
- Demonstration
- Brainstorming
- Q&A and discussion

Plato's Cave



Plato's Cave

Socrates: “Education isn’t what some people declare it to be, namely, putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes.”

“Our present discussion shows that the instrument with which each person learns is like an eye that cannot be turned around from darkness to light without turning the whole body.”

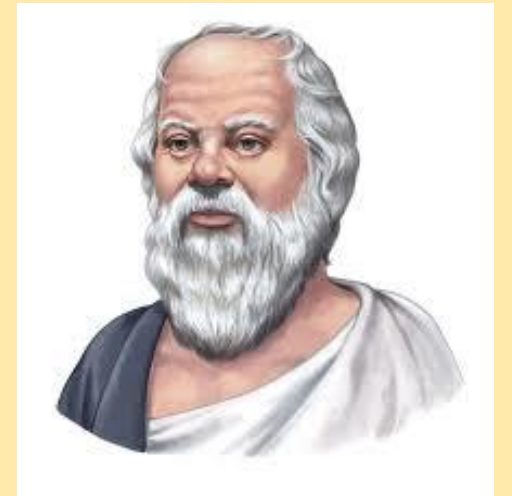
(Plato, 518c, trans. 1992c).

Rationale: Why Socratic teaching in nursing education?

- Tell us about the challenges you encounter working with nursing students or new nurses.
- Major recommendation from the Carnegie Foundation report, *Educating Nurses: A Call for Radical Transformation*:
“Expand the focus on critical thinking to an emphasis on clinical reasoning and multiple ways of thinking” (Benner, Sutphen, Leonard, & Day, 2010, p. 89).
- Clinical nurse educators can use Socratic teaching to bridge the knowledge-action gap that new graduate nurses often experience by helping each of them learn to think like a nurse.

Rationale: Why Socrates?

- What image do you have of Socrates?
- Historical Socrates – a teacher before all else in his life.
- Tried, convicted, and executed for corrupting the youth.
- The character of Socrates in Plato's works = model teacher.



Rationale: New teaching methods needed

- Nurses must learn a tremendous volume of knowledge, skills, critical thinking, ethical reasoning.
- “Nurse educators are faced with the need to do more than help students recall facts...; they are challenged to assist students to learn how to learn for a lifetime” (Rogge, 2001, p. 69).
- New nurses need to know how to apply and synthesize what they have learned in the classroom, but they also need to know how to continue learning, processing, and synthesizing new information throughout their career.

Rationale: New teaching methods needed

- Benner, Hughes, and Sutphen (2008): Nurses' thinking must include much more: "reflection, induction, deduction, analysis, challenging assumptions, and evaluation of data and information to guide decision-making."
- Benner et al. (2010) recommend a movement away from simple emphasis on critical thinking to an emphasis on multiple ways of thinking, including "the ability to reason as a clinical situation changes, taking into account the context and concerns of the patient and family...as well as critical, creative and scientific reasoning" (p.85).

Rationale: “But I need to cover content!”

- Nurse educators are faced with the stress of covering more and more information.
- Yet, “covering” something also means to obscure it.
- Even if it were possible to give students and new nurses all essential information needed in their practice, it would be counter-productive to try to do so.

Rationale: What is Socratic teaching?

- Not a consistently defined term
- Often misused (Kost & Chen, 2015)
- Philosophy of teaching based on the model of Socrates in Plato's dialogues
- Teaching as guiding: Requires active engagement from the learner and thus is particularly valuable for teaching in the clinical area

Rationale: What is Socratic teaching?

- Question-driven
- Learner-centered
- Builds confidence and reliability by helping learner think through why they do what they do: why they make certain decisions, why they look at certain situations in a particular way.

Rationale: What is Socratic teaching?

- Not about asking questions with specific answers in mind
- Engagement in dialogue, asking students and new nurses to think and be creative in their answers
- Engaging students and new nurses in dialogue helps them connect the dots between what they learned in Pathophysiology or Pharmacology class and what is happening here, now with their patients
- And it can help them retain and apply in the future

Rationale: What does Socratic teaching accomplish?

- “A blind man can follow the road when it’s straight and even.”
- A new nurse who has learned the course content or a particular skill may do well when situations are typical, relaxed, or straight-forward but is more likely to make an error if the situation is more complicated or he/she is under time pressure.
- Socratic dialogue helps the student or new nurse more reliably make the right decision in a complicated situation.

Rationale: What about efficiency?

- Are you concerned that Socratic teaching is less efficient than lecture?
- By asking questions and engaging in dialogue with students or new nurses, you can guide them to think about what to notice in their patients, what they can expect will happen.
- Help them catch any problems, misunderstandings, or false assumptions sooner and more efficiently than without dialogue.

Rationale: An example

Teacher: Luisa, tell us about the patient you cared for today.

Luisa: Well, he has X diagnosis and is struggling with Y. He wasn't feeling very well today.

Teacher: What is your understanding of X diagnosis? Luisa? Others?
(Nurses give responses.)

Teacher: John, I notice you included the detail of "abcd" when others did not. Do you think that detail is important here?

John: Yes.

Teacher: Why? Can you explain your reasoning to us?

John: Uh.....

Teacher: (laughs gently) Can someone help John out? Why might this detail be important?

Rationale: When to use Socratic teaching

- Whenever an instructor wants to help students make connections between things.
- Designed to break ideas and questions down into component parts.
- If a student or new nurse is feeling overwhelmed with data or options, a teacher can help him or her focus: “What data do you have? What have you observed? What do you think you need to focus on within all that data? Why?”

Techniques and principles: Teaching as an act of caring

- Socratic teaching should always grow out of respect and care for students.
- Not embarrassing students and calling them out, not trying to catch them in a mistake or expose gaps in their knowledge.
- Excellent for catching students' gaps and mistakes, but it can be done in a respectful and caring way (Kost & Chen, 2015).
- Not “guess what I’m thinking.”

Techniques and principles: Socrates as gadfly

- Like a gadfly, “I never cease to rouse each and every one of you, to persuade and reproach you all day long and everywhere I find myself in your company” (*Apology* 30e-31a).
- An instructor who calls out a student or new nurse – respectfully, from a place of care – on a questionable decision, may sometimes seem like a gadfly, but he or she is nurturing that nurse.

Techniques and principles: Socrates as midwife

- Socrates' mother was a midwife.
- Helped students “deliver” ideas; helped find good couplings.
- The other side of the gadfly.
- Socrates says he is “barren”: Socratic veil.



Techniques and principles: When to turn Socratic

- Not for delivering new content.
- Use when a student or new nurse does something questionable or shows a gap in knowledge.
- You might say, “you did (or said) something that surprised me. Tell me your reasoning.”
- Or “you chose X instead of Y. Why did you do that?” By starting from a learner’s statement or action, the learner is already invested and engaged in the conversation, ready to learn.

Techniques: Making connections

- “Why did you do X?” “Because of Y.” “But the patient also has a P situation. How does that connect? Is there a conflict there?”
- Students and new nurses are often focused on tasks and specific skills and may not see the connections between bits of information.
- The learner should be encouraged to say what he or she actually believes (not what they think you want to hear).

Techniques: Analogies

- Analogies help make abstract concepts more concrete.
- If a student is having trouble starting an IV and does not realize it's because the patient is dehydrated, you might suggest, "Think of a sponge that has been sitting on the counter for a day and is all stiff. If you wanted to use it for cleaning, what would you do first?"
- A new nurse who is stumped in the simulation lab on a patient with a history of bed rest and is complaining of abdominal pain, the instructor may probe to see if the new nurse considers the possibility of constipation. The instructor might ask: "What happens if you don't take the garbage out regularly?" (Beitz, 2013).

Techniques: Examples

- Examples and counter-examples nudge learner to probe knowledge and connections – “does this example fit what you are saying?”
- A new nurse may insist that it is always important to get patients out of bed because it enhances blood circulation. You might say: “Well, this patient has a suspected head injury. Would your rationale for getting patients out of bed hold for this patient?”

Techniques: Putting it into practice

- Questions can be planned ahead of time, but the majority of the teacher's questions must largely be determined by what the students say.
- A responsive, genuine inquiry in reaction to student actions and statements.

Demonstration

We need volunteers!

Socratic dialogue on
“professionalism”

DEBRIEF



Let's brainstorm!

Please use Handout 1



Metacognition

- Gives learners a chance to reflect on their own learning.
- Deepens comprehension and increases knowledge retention.
- Can be discussion or written or in some other form.
- Let's brainstorm some ways to use this – Handout 2 – try to come up with some specific exercises you can use.



Final debriefing and Q & A

- Questions?
- Ideas to share?



References

- Beitz, J. M. (2013). Power up your patient education with analogies and metaphors. *Wound Care Advisor*. Accessed at http://woundcareadvisor.com/power-up-your-patient-education-with-analogies-and-metaphors_vol2-no5/
- Benner, P., Hughes, R. G., & Sutphen, M. (2008). Clinical reasoning, decisionmaking, and action: Thinking critically and clinically. Chapter 6 in R. G. Hughes, Editor, *Patient safety and quality: An evidence-based handbook for nurses*. Rockville, MD: Agency for Health Care Research and Quality. Accessed at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK2643/>
- Benner, P., Sutphen, M., Leonard, V., & Day, L. (2010). [*Educating nurses: A call for radical transformation*](#). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kost, A., & Chen, F. M. (2015). Socrates was not a pimp. Changing the paradigm of questioning in medical education. *Academic Medicine*, 90(1), 20-24.
- Plato. (trans. 1992c). Republic. Trans. G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett.
- Rogge, M. M. (2001). Transforming pathophysiology instruction through narrative pedagogy and Socratic questioning. *Nurse Educator*, 26(2), 66-69.