WOULD Socrates USE THE “SOCRATIC METHOD” FOR CLINICAL INSTRUCTION?
A TECHNIQUE FOR IMPROVING SMALL GROUP TEACHING

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TODAY’S OBJECTIVES

• Define the characteristics of the Socratic Method and distinguish it from ‘pimping’
• Illustrate how the Socratic Method is used in clinical teaching
WHAT IS “SOCRATIC”?  

• Socrates (as depicted by Plato)  
  – Athenian philosopher of 4th century BCE  
  – Promoted intellectual development by asking questions  
    • Recorded by Plato in several dialogues  

• Believed that true knowledge was inherent in human character  
  – Knowledge was discovered by introspection, not transmitted through teaching or experience
### LEARNING MOMENT

**STIMULUS-RESPONSE ROLES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kingdom</th>
<th>Stimulus</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Interactions</th>
<th>Health Professions Education Example</th>
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<tr>
<td>Didactic</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>teacher</td>
<td>T: &quot;2 plus 2 equals 4&quot;</td>
<td>Lecture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Socratic</td>
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<td>student</td>
<td>T: &quot;What does 2 plus 2 equal?&quot;</td>
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<td>S: &quot;Four&quot;</td>
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<td>Inquiry</td>
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<td>&quot;Just in time&quot; Learning</td>
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<td>T: &quot;Four&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discovery</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>student</td>
<td>S: &quot;What does 2 plus 2 equal? Four?&quot;</td>
<td>Problem Based Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOCRATIC ≠ “PIMPING”

• Socratic Method
  – Students express what they DO know
    • “sounding”
    • Schema activation
  – Questions are formulated to
    • Give the teacher a basis to ask follow-up questions
    • Guide student to synthesize knowledge
      – ‘leading questions’

• ‘Pimping’
  – Teacher generated questions
  – Emphasize what a student does NOT know
  – Questions are formulated to expose ignorance
WHY USE SOCRATIC TEACHING?

• Teach critical thinking skills
• Assess (formatively) learners’ current knowledge
• Inspire learners to build on their pre-existing knowledge
THE LEARNING CYCLE

Try It Out
Hey! It Works!

New Data

What Can I Do With It?

New Ideas (Abstract)
Active Use
Feedback
Sensory Input (Class)
Reflection (Study)

What Does It Mean?

J. Zull; S. Dutch
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

• Professional hierarchy in medicine, well-established

• *Psychological Safety*, refers to a sense of interpersonal trust & being valued in a work team (Edmondson, et al)

• Leader inclusiveness - “words and deeds that invite and appreciate others’ contributions”
  – Mediate status differences
  – Promote learning, and involvement in QI in practice
WHAT DO WE KNOW?

• Abundant literature on:
  – clinical teaching (Irby, Ende)
  – effectiveness of pedagogies for clinical and small group teaching (PBL, TBL, One minute preceptor)
  – how people learn (cognitive psychology)

• “The Socratic Method is not clearly defined as a tool for clinical teaching” (Robert Oh, 2005, p. 537)
SOME COMMON PRINCIPLES

• Authentic problems
  – Complexity of clinical practice

• Activation of prior knowledge

• Social construction of knowledge, situated learning, “psychological safety” (Edmondson)

• Mechanisms to promote self-directed and self-correcting critical thinkers

• Engaged students – interested teachers
SOCRATIC TEACHING IN CLINICAL REALM
(THEORY INTO PRACTICE)

• Format @ Nebraska
  – Rounds
  – “High Impact” small group case discussion
  – Interactive junior lecture series
  – Senior General Internal Medicine Elective
    • Interactive class (Internship survival skills)
    • Small group solving diagnostic dilemmas
SOCRATIC TEACHING - FUNDAMENTALS

• It’s OK not to know / Psychological Safety*
  – Edmondson (1999)
  – Essential (but how?)
• Sounding (“Stretch you” vs. “Stress you”)
• Think out loud
• Socratic versus Pimping
  – Relevance
  – Integration of info/data the learner knows but hasn’t assembled
  – The AHA!! Moment
"On the surface, the aim of pimping appears to be Socratic instruction. The deeper motivation, however, is political. Proper pimping inculcates the intern with a profound and abiding respect for his attending physician while ridding the intern of needless self-esteem. Furthermore, after being pimped, he is drained of the desire to ask new questions”

(Brancati, 1989)
SOCRATIC TEACHING
STRATEGIES/SUGGESTIONS

• Location
• Teachable Moment
• Learner’s job is to replace folks at next level
• Recognize patterns
• Specific facts/info are essential for care of the patient (Hx, Px, Meds, & Test results)
• Identifying the “Dodge”
SOCRATIC TEACHING - LEAD-INS

• “Put this together for me.”
  – (the student/resident knows more about patient then I do)
• “They think . . .” - “Who is they”?
• “What do we need to know today”? 
AC TIVITY FOR THIS SESSION

• Consider instances from your own experience of both “Socratic teaching” including psychological safety and “pimping”.
  – Think of yourself both as a teacher and as a learner
  – Consider the context of the event, what elements of the context encouraged or discouraged psychological safety?
• Relate to the other people at your table one event from your own experience that illustrates either “Socratic” or “pimping” (10 minutes total)
• Choose one story from your group to tell to the larger group (10 minutes)
CONCLUDING REMARKS

• Best fit for complicated medical problems
• Rewarding
• Cost
• Building confidence
• Psychological Safety
• Socratic vs. Pimping
Would Socrates Use the “Socratic Method” for Clinical Instruction?
How the Socratic Method Can Improve Bedside and Small Group Teaching

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Psychological Safety:

“In psychologically safe environments, people believe that if they make a mistake others will not penalize or think less of them for it. They also believe that others will not resent or penalize them for asking for help, information or feedback.”

~Edmondson

“The essence of psychological safety, then, is that we can imagine a needed change without feeling a loss of integrity or identity. Only if I can feel that I will retain my identity or my integrity as I learn something new or make a change, will I be able to even contemplate it.”

~Schein

Examples of Socratic Questions for Clinical Teaching

O’Dell’s Favorites

Put this together for me (from the H&P)
What do we need to know today to take care of “Mrs. Smith”? Are you sure?

Probing rationale, reasons and evidence

Why is that happening?
How do you know this?
Can you give me an example of that?
What do you think causes ... ?
What evidence is there to support what you are saying?

Probe implications and consequences

Then what would happen?
What are the implications of ... ?
How does ... affect ... ?
How does ... fit with what we learned before?
Why is ... important?

Conceptual clarification questions

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?

(Adapted from Changingminds.org http://changingminds.org/techniques/questioning/socratic_questions.htm)
References


