



**TEACH LIKE SOCRATES: GUIDING SOCRATIC  
DIALOGUES AND DISCUSSIONS IN THE CLASSROOM -  
BOOK REVIEW**

**Nesrin Ozturk<sup>i</sup>**

İzmir Democracy University

College of Education

İzmir, Turkey

[orcid.org/0000-0002-7334-8476](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7334-8476)

**Abstract:**

16 centuries ago, Socrates implemented a pedagogy of critical thinking where he helped others move from premise to premise to a discovery. In the current context, the 21st century's stakeholders are bombarded with a great amount of information and should still engage in critical thinking to discern what is important, reliable, and valid or not, to apply, analyze, and evaluate information, as well as to create and collaborate for new knowledge. In this sense, Socratic pedagogy can be an effective tool for such competencies and thereby, it is important for teachers to develop knowledge and skills to practice Socratic methodologies in mainstream classrooms. As published materials may offer teachers support with their professionalism, *Teach Like Socrates: Guiding Socratic Dialogues and Discussions in the Classroom* was reviewed for its efficiency and practicality for classroom instruction.

**Keywords:** Socratic pedagogy, critical thinking, book review

*Teach Like Socrates: Guiding Socratic Dialogues and Discussions in the Classroom* (151 pages) was written by Erick Wilberding and released by Prufrock Press in 2014. In this book, Wilberding argues that Socratic methods have not been widely understood or adapted for daily teaching and the success of such instruction may depend on the expertise and temperament of the questioning teacher. Therefore, he skillfully presents the tenants of Socratic pedagogies for those who intend to learn and implement them in their classes throughout 8 chapters.

In Chapter 1, the author reviews the life of Socrates in Athens during the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC. Socrates did not have any schools or regarded himself as a teacher. Indeed, Socrates taught that his wisdom consisted in the awareness that he knew nothing, and the unexamined life is not worth living. Therefore, he did not lecture but just coached the youth to ask questions adeptly to those who made claims. He engaged people of all types

---

<sup>i</sup> Correspondence: email [ozturknesrin@gmail.com](mailto:ozturknesrin@gmail.com)

in dialogues to sift out the truth of claims. During those encounters, he applied logic to arrive at appropriate conclusions, which did not usually please his interlocutors. Accused of corrupting the youth and not believing in the gods, Socrates was found guilty and condemned to death.

In Chapter 2, Wilberding distinguishes two Socratic methods. Using excerpts from the dialogues of Plato (i.e., Xenophon, Alcibiades, and Meno), the author explains characteristics of the first method which examines claims and concepts. Those characteristics include personally relevant concepts, Socratic ignorance, use of inductive questions, cycle of analysis, application, evaluation, use of analogies, examples, hypotheticals, and open-ended conversations. Wilberding also presents the second method that guides a process to obtain a solution to a problem or a correct answer to an issue. The author states that these two methods are comparable regarding inductive questioning, and they might be linked.

In chapter 3, Wilberding explains how to prepare and conduct a Socratic dialogue. Although a Socratic dialogue was one-on-one tutoring session, in contemporary classrooms it may be in a form of discovery learning. For Method 1, teachers may assemble a Dialogue Binder in three steps. First, precise objectives that nominate a personally relevant concept are set and elements including conceptual definitions and structure of the dialogues are determined. Then, brainstorming is done to create an inductive outline that guides to stops and opens to analysis. At this stage, inductive questions are generated as well as analogies, examples, or hypotheticals are written down to navigate others to the conclusion. Finally, one reviews the plan and reflects on an effective sequence knowing that many dialogues do not conclude. In such cases, teachers may solicit a summary and direct student to further investigation. For Method 2, the teacher guides students to a logical solution of a problem through inductive questions. They, indeed, facilitate the passage from 'We do' to 'You do'. In this method, teachers' knowing the steps to the solution and rephrasing the questions patiently is important.

In Chapter 4, Wilberding discusses some characteristics required for Socratic dialogues. Teachers are to be good models of Socratic questioning, be knowledgeable about inductive outlines, create a safe and positive environment, listen to students patiently and carefully, teach students basics of argument building, summarize the discussions, provide students with instructional aids, and encourage their participation in and reflection on the dialogues.

In Chapter 5, Wilberding explains how to teach students to plan and conduct a dialogue via Socratic Method 1. For this, he reviews induction and some mistakes (i.e., slippery slope and order bias) that can surface the sequences of questions. He utilizes short excerpts mostly from the work of Plato and Xenophon to describe how students can proceed through the dialogues and spot mistakes. At the end of the chapter, the author provides three detailed structured lesson plans to teach students induction and recognize logical mistakes, if at all. These, indeed, adeptly illustrate the process of method 1 for practitioners.

In Chapters 6, the author explains how to prepare and conduct a Socratic discussion in three steps; (1) selecting the material for objectives, (2) setting the content, exploratory and analysis questions that lead to evaluation, and (3) preparing extension activities. Wilberding specifically emphasizes that materials may have complexity, ambiguity, or conflicts to stimulate discussions; thus, discussions can enable genuine collaborative work. Moreover, a reflection on the form and content of the discussion should be allowed.

In Chapter 7, Wilberding discusses leadership types, i.e., autocratic, democratic, and laissez-faire for discussions. Depending on the students' proficiency with discussions, all can be utilized. Still, the aim is to develop students' skills for democratic discussion; therefore, they can increasingly attain the confidence, freedom, and expertise to conduct their own discussions without any interventions. In this chapter, characteristics of democratic discussion are described, and one alternative flow is theoretically presented. At the end of the chapter, the author offers instructional practices to facilitate democratic discussions. Moreover, Wilberding emphasizes teachers' evaluating Socratic discussions via the objectives, nature of questions, and students' reactions and competencies with critical thinking skills. For this task, he provides an evaluation chart reflecting students' participation during the discussion and competencies of critical thinking.

In the last chapter, Wilberding revisits the necessity of critical thinking in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the effectiveness of Socratic practices in classrooms. While Socratic pedagogy guides student to think more critically and solve problems via an examination of assumptions, principles, reasoning, evidence, consideration of implications and consequences, and a critique of alternatives, it may also promote the idea of Democracy as a by-product. Also, in the appendix section Wilberding provides practitioners with templates for planning 6 steps of Socratic pedagogy, typical questions, student sheets, and suggestions for discussion-texts.

Overall, in *Teach Like Socrates* Wilberding clearly and skillfully explains the most famous and the most misunderstood teaching method, the Socratic method for developing critical thinking. The book is a detailed full package on Socratic method for its potential audience i.e., teachers or students (K7-12) who might want to implement it. However, potential students might not easily engage in self-studying it due to its complexity. Indeed, the book mostly presents theoretical understandings of Socratic teaching. Therefore, it may not help middle or high school students to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, alone or without teachers' guidance, clarification, and feedback.

As a teacher educator, I believe *Teach Like Socrates* can efficiently support teachers' instruction for an inclusion of Socratic pedagogies. It might be used as a reference book by teachers for its flow, unity, comprehensiveness, and practicality. The book includes various instructional practices such as, templates for Socratic method 1, sample lesson plans, discussion games, example dialogues from students, and discussion evaluation chart. Teachers can adopt or adapt them. However, the content of these

practices might not be appealing to some because the procedures of Socratic practices were illustrated mostly via the examples of Socrates' dialogues on ethics. While Wilberding argues that any content teacher can implement Socratic pedagogies in their classes, it would be much effective to incorporate examples of Socratic practices for example, in math, English, science, social sciences, and even in art classes. Moreover, although I appreciate Wilberding's provision of lesson plan templates and evaluation charts, I believe teachers would make most benefit of their examples. For this purpose, the author could provide instructional excerpts or class scenarios and then, utilize these templates to reflect the flow of Socratic pedagogy.

*Teach Like Socrates* is one of the available materials that might be adapted for Socratic teaching. While it presents a deep understanding of teaching critical thinking via Socratic methods, teachers had better study it in accompany with content-based practical artifacts and example sessions.

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

I, Nesrin Ozturk, declare no conflicts of interests.

### **About the Author**

Dr. Ozturk currently works at Izmir Democracy University, Department of Educational Sciences, Turkey. Her research interests focus on literacy practices, metacognition, educational philosophy, and teacher education. Dr. Ozturk's passion for contributing to a democratic and just society motivates her to empower the youth and celebrate freedom of mind.

Creative Commons licensing terms

Author(s) will retain the copyright of their published articles agreeing that a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0) terms will be applied to their work. Under the terms of this license, no permission is required from the author(s) or publisher for members of the community to copy, distribute, transmit or adapt the article content, providing a proper, prominent and unambiguous attribution to the authors in a manner that makes clear that the materials are being reused under permission of a Creative Commons License. Views, opinions and conclusions expressed in this research article are views, opinions and conclusions of the author(s). Open Access Publishing Group and European Journal of Education Studies shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage or liability caused in relation to/arising out of conflicts of interest, copyright violations and inappropriate or inaccurate use of any kind content related or integrated into the research work. All the published works are meeting the Open Access Publishing requirements and can be freely accessed, shared, modified, distributed and used in educational, commercial and non-commercial purposes under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License \(CC BY 4.0\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).