

CONNECTED EDUCATION
EVERY LEADER, EVERY
TEACHER, EVERY LEARNER



THE TEACHER AS MIDWIFE

THE SOCRATIC METHOD

A BRIDGE Knowledge Product



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LINKING INNOVATORS IN EDUCATION

The following document details 1 of 7 innovative ideas as shared by Xolani Majola, a participant of the Axis Education Forum 2016. Here, you will find:

- a) An introduction to the Socratic Method of teaching**
- b) Resources to help you introduce this style of teaching in your classroom**



“My art of midwifery is in general like theirs; the only difference is that my patients are men, not women, and my concern is not with the body but with the soul that is in travail of birth.”

— Socrates

Xolani Majola began by citing **the Socratic metaphor of the teacher as midwife**. Rather than simply passing information onto his learners, Socrates asked probing questions to help them arrive at their own conclusions. Teaching them to think seemed at times like the travail of childbirth.

What is the Socratic Method of teaching?

The Socratic Method involves a shared dialogue between teacher and learners. The teacher leads by posing thought-provoking questions and learners actively engage by asking questions of their own. The discussion goes back and forth. The aim of the questioning is to probe the underlying beliefs upon which each participant's statements, arguments and assumptions are built.

**The Structure of
Using The Socratic Method:
(The exception technique)**

- 1. Focus on a common sense statement.**
- 2. Find an exception to that statement.**
- 3. Reject the statement if an exception is found.**
- 4. The respondent reformulates the statement to account for the exception.**
- 5. Keep repeating the process until a statement cannot be overturned.**

Example:

Q: "What is Justice?"

- 1. A: 'Justice is the equal distribution of goods.'**
- 2. Find example of when everyone receiving the equal measure of something is harmful or obviously unfair, such as food distribution that does not account for medical/dietary needs of individuals. You can also use an example when an issue of justice has nothing to do with distribution.**
- 3. Reject statement, ask again: "What is Justice?"**
- 4. The respondent reformulates the statement to account for the exception.**
- 5. Repeat until an exception cannot be found.**

Learning to philosophise in the classroom

Xolani continued to explain his conception of the teacher as a mediator between two worlds, that of ignorance and knowledge. Given this role, he argued that philosophy should be a prescribed subject in all high school Life Orientation curriculums and a mandatory subject for pre-service teachers in all universities across South Africa. The idea of learning to philosophise in class reasons that learners only fully develop when encouraged to take active and deliberate steps to respond to the questions about existence that they raise. Xolani underscored the importance of studying philosophy by referencing further benefits, including its capacity to develop one's critical thinking. Studying philosophy also teaches the following skills:

- the ability to write clearly and critically
- the ability to bring to light unnoticed presuppositions
- the ability to explain complex ideas clearly, to tease out connections and implications and to see things in a broader context.

To learn more about the Socratic Method and how it might be applied in your classroom, click [here](#).

To learn more about how you can incorporate Philosophy in your teaching, click [here](#).