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The Socratic Method
—Why it Still Matters, also in the English as a Foreign Language Classroom—

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1) Introduction

Computerization, the internet, globalization and particularly artificial intelligence (AI) have dramatically transformed the way people and societies interact. This affects education, especially mass-education. It forces us to rethink the purpose of education. How successful was mass-education throughout the twentieth century? Was the aim achieved by making sure that every child goes to school where it can memorize the knowledge of the experts? After all, it was these education systems that guided the world towards robots and AI. Was this wise? Do future generations still need to be educated, or can we just leave everything to robots and AI?

This article tries to answer some of these questions by recalling the 'Socratic method'. It will particularly look at what benefits it could have for the world in the twenty-first century. In the next section, Socrates the philosopher, who spent his life developing, using, living this method and at the end dying for it, will be introduced. It will also describe the world into which he was born and lived his life—in order to better understand him. After all, he is the man, credited with the idea of 'education for all people', as some claim (Mueller quoting Cicero, p. 37). In the third section, the article will explain the Socratic method; how it is meant to work and for what reason. It will look at the 'Sophists method', the most popular teaching method in his time as well. This should help us to understand better the uniqueness and purpose of the Socratic method. The next section will look at the usefulness of the Socratic method in our high-tech age by highlighting some problems of current societies and education, and how we could use the method to approach them. In the fifth section, the article shows how the Socratic method could be applied in the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom to demonstrate how this approach can empower EFL students to become critical thinkers, effective communicators, and engaged learners. In the sixth section, it will reflect on why and in what way the Socratic method still matters. Finally, it will conclude that the Socratic method has a real potential to improve our democracies, and that English teachers may be in a much better position to use the

Socratic method than many realize.

2) Who was Socrates?

Socrates was a philosopher born in 470 or 469 BC in Athens to a stonemason and a midwife. Although this made him middle class, Paul Johnson suggests that by the way he employed his powerful intellect he became "the first classless person in history" (Johnson, p. 7). He was born at a time when Athens had started developing its democracy. When he was in his early twenties Athens experienced its 'Golden Age', the Age of Pericles, which lasted from 445 to 431 BC. By the fifth century BC, Athens had become a democracy, as the culmination of a long struggle between a small number of land-owning families of the aristocracy and great numbers of the poor. Pericles, elected annually as the first citizen of the state, extended and consolidated the empire of the Athenian city-state, while strengthening within Athens the new political doctrine of egalitarianism, which meant equal rights for all citizens (though not for women and slaves) under the law. This meant that citizens got the same basic education, and could participate in political life through direct democratic debate and voting. There was freedom of speech, and the city government was viewed as a model of justice for the known world.

At this time, most of the Greek communities were under the leadership of either the Athenian Empire (which was democratic, commercial, and industrial) or the Spartan Empire (which was authoritarian, militaristic, and agricultural). The Peloponnesian War, which broke out in the spring of 431 BC, was fundamentally a struggle between Athenian democracy and the authoritarianism of Sparta. Democratic Athens surrendered to Sparta in 404 BC. Subsequently, a revolution was staged by the aristocrats, resulting in a vicious reign of terror known as the Rule of the Thirty. They represented the rich and noble families who had been virtually destroyed by the long years of war waged by democratic Athens. When democracy was restored and the Rule of the Thirty came to an end, Socrates was tried by an Athenian jury in 399 BC and sentenced to death.

Lavine argues that the purpose of the trial was to frighten Socrates away from Athens so that he would not continue to weaken the morale of the exhausted democracy with his constant public criticisms of democratic government. "The Athenians had no desire to impose a death sentence upon him, nor did they wish to make a martyr of him" (Lavine, p. 14). But Socrates would not compromise. To escape or to propose any penalty, however trivial, would have been to admit guilt. "It was for the truth of his philosophy that he was willing to die" (Lavine, p. 14).

According to Lavine, Socrates's philosophy had three main points. First, the only true wisdom is knowing that you know nothing. Second, do not be concerned with your bodies or your money, instead, primarily, care about the improvement of your soul. Third, virtue is knowledge. To know what is good is to do what is good. Evil, wrongdoing, or vice are due to a lack of knowledge or to ignorance, and to nothing else. "No one does evil voluntarily".

Socrates insists that when people do an evil act, they do so with the thought that it will bring them some benefit. People spend their lives striving for power, prestige, or wealth, thinking that one of these is good and will make them happy, but they do not know what is truly good. Never trying to know what is good for human beings is to live a life of striving to achieve something but never finding happiness. Socrates calls such a life unexamined, leading to his famous statement: "The unexamined life is not worth living" (summarized from Lavine, pp. 15–16).

Although Socrates was a critic of Athenian democracy, his "criticism was a democratic one, and indeed of the kind that is the very life of democracy" (Popper, p. 202). "As a good democrat, he found it his duty to expose the incompetence and windbaggery of some of the democratic leaders of his time. At the same time, he opposed any form of tyranny" (Popper, pp. 136–137). He felt that the way to improve the political life of the city was to educate the citizens in self-criticism (Popper, p. 138). Socrates taught us that we must have faith in human reason but at the same time beware of dogmatism. He had the great egalitarian and liberating idea that it is possible to reason with a slave and that there is an intellectual link between all humans, a medium of universal understanding, namely, 'reason'. His faith, writes Anthony Gottlieb, "consisted not in a reliance on revelation or blind hope but in a devotion to argumentative reason. He would not be swayed by anything else" (Gottlieb, p. 3). He insisted that man is not merely a piece of flesh—a body, but that it is our reason that makes us human, and enables us to be more than a mere bundle of desires and wishes. Our reason makes us a self-sufficient individual and entitles us to claim that we are an end in ourselves (Popper, p. 203).

Plato, to whom we owe most of our Socratic dialogues, was born into one of Athens's most aristocratic families. His birth came three years into the war with Sparta and a year after the death of Pericles, meaning he was too late to experience the golden age of peace and glory. His father was a descendant of the last Athenian king, and his mother was a descendant of Solon, the aristocratic reformer who authored the constitution that established Athenian democracy (Lavine, p. 12). Plato was twenty-eight years old at the time of Socrates's trial. He had been studying with Socrates for eight years, although he

had known him as a family friend since his earliest childhood. In the dramatic dialogue called *The Apology*, Plato presents Socrates's defense and an account of the trial's course that is believed to be substantially accurate (Lavine, p. 13). Plato was a genius and the very first academic. After Socrates's death, he founded a study place called the Academy, which was "the earliest university" (Johnson, p. 10).

It is not the purpose of this article to solve the puzzle of who the real originator of the 'Socratic method' is; Socrates or Plato or a combination of these very different personalities. As such, it is irrelevant for our examination. 'Plato's Socratic method' is simply the only one we have available. But to know the context and environment of the place and time when it was created should help us understand why it is still important in the twenty-first century, in the Age of High-tech.

3) What is the 'Socratic method'?

Socrates believed that true knowledge resided within individuals, but often lay dormant, obscured by preconceived notions and unexamined beliefs. Through persistent questioning, he sought to help people give birth to this knowledge, a process he likened to midwifery. By exposing contradictions and inconsistencies in their thinking, he guided them towards a deeper understanding of themselves and the world around them.

His approach to education focused on developing critical thinking rather than just memorizing facts. He believed education should not be about filling a person with information, but about igniting a desire to question, analyze, and evaluate the world. His questioning was designed to cure a form of intellectual conceit that clouds our judgment about our own values. Most of us go through life acting as if we already know what our goals should be and what is truly good or bad. We rarely take the time to critically examine these assumptions.

Socrates argued against the idea that knowledge can be improved simply by reading and memorizing texts. He believed that this method leads not to genuine wisdom, but to the illusion or appearance of knowledge. Instead of developing true understanding, people who learn this way merely hold opinions. Aspasia had told him about the danger of this misunderstanding: "the man who holds a correct opinion, without knowing the reasoning behind it, is like someone who happens by chance to be walking along the right path. He wouldn't know how to find it again if he got lost" (Aspasia in Robertson, p. 76). The distinction of appearance and reality in our daily lives is a key element of Socratic philosophy perfectly illustrated in Plato's famous *Allegory of the Cave* (Plato, *The Republic*, *Book VII*); a powerful metaphor for the journey from ignorance to enlightenment. It

illustrates the painful process of freeing oneself from false beliefs (like the shadows on the cave wall) and the resistance one can face from those who are still trapped in the world of illusions, the cave[1]. Socrates stressed that we must actively question what we read. He believed in testing ideas by looking for exceptions or situations where they might not apply. The Socratic method is an active thinking process that seeks to challenge our definitions, assumptions, and rules by continually questioning them. This approach forces us to think for ourselves, especially about our most important values and goals. Whereas the earlier philosophers taught moral maxims, or rules, Socrates encouraged his students to question them. He felt "that true moral wisdom requires some degree of openness, flexibility and adaptability in our thinking", that "it is healthier in the long run for us to learn to think for ourselves than to depend too much on memorizing the sayings of others" (Robertson, p. 109). We come to know ourselves best, Socrates believed, in conversation with others about the most important things in life. We typically apply a different moral standard to other people than to ourselves. (Robertson, p. 83)

What should the conversations of the Socratic method include? Farnsworth mentions twelve points:

1. **Everything is put on the table**. Everything is investigated. No view escapes questioning as soon as it has been suggested by someone.
2. **Purpose of the investigation**. The participants in a debate want to get closer to the truth. They are not seeking to assert a hidden agenda, to elevate themselves above others or to emerge as the winner of a debate.
3. **Contradiction is welcome**. Doubt is a natural and welcome reaction to the position held. Criticism and dissent are a duty of friendship and are expressed and accepted in this spirit, even—or especially—when a strong conviction is challenged. We can be wrong, and if not, there can still be a piece of truth in the criticism we make. We do ourselves a favor by pointing out errors of reasoning or inaccuracies. Being able to confidently admit mistakes is a sign of good sense.
4. **Arguments are met with arguments**. The Socratic approach does not allow certain arguments to remain unanswered because they are despicable and should not even be voiced. However, if someone holds an erroneous opinion, it is our task to point this error out to them.
5. **Reason comes first**. Arguments are judged on the basis of their quality, i.e. according to their justification and reasonableness, but not according to the identity of the speaker. The assumption that a certain person's way of thinking requires special

respect (or special skepticism) also needs to be justified and substantiated—for example, by the fact that a person obviously has access to facts or experiences that are not available to others, and that the answer to a question depends on this.

6. **It is argued in the sense of elenchus (logical refutation)**. In order to conduct a joint investigation, an amicable basis is first found if possible. Each side then helps the other side to recognize incompatibilities between its own position and this basis. Compatibility and consistency are important tests for a chain of reasoning.
7. **Self-criticism**. One's own partiality is questioned. We tend to bend things to our will when the end result is only what we want and what is pleasant for us, and often we are not even aware of this. The participants in the discussion should bear this risk in mind and appreciate contradiction all the more.
8. **Skepticism towards groups**. Common opinions and quick consensus are mistrusted. A room full of people who agree on something that is being discussed controversially outside the room is not healthy.
9. **Manners**. Inquiry should be thorough, firm to the point of relentless, but always polite. Sarcasm and other forms of irony are primarily directed at ourselves and otherwise reserved for those who claim to know all the answers. Name-calling and insults are not allowed. No one will be shouted down. If someone is persistently wrong, he is punished enough by his error, which may be seen through by others. Statements made by others are interpreted favorably, but at the same time, objections are better received in a clear rather than a weak form.
10. **Openness**. The participants in the discussion express their thoughts openly and are not sanctioned for doing so. On the contrary, an unpopular statement is appreciated. Even if it is wrong, it serves the cause, namely to bring people closer to the truth. If someone is prepared to make themselves a target by defending a certain point of view, others who are no longer exposed in this way are more likely to agree with this point of view. An opinion must be expressed so that it can be tested and found to be true or false.
11. **Insults**. All participants try to express their views in such a way that no one feels personally offended or insulted. Likewise, efforts are made to accept replies without feeling offended or insulted. Any insults or offense given or felt are seen as an obstacle to finding the truth.
12. **Humility**. Conclusions are provisional. No matter how plausible they may seem, no matter how vehemently one may advocate them, there is always some remaining doubt. The participants in the discussion are aware of their own ignorance and know

about the blind spots in their perception. They keep in mind how often others were just as convinced and yet were wrong. All of this results in a humble attitude towards our knowledge and our certainties.

(Summarized from Farnsworth, pp. 350–353)

This sounds like a tall order and somewhat idealistic, but it is useful if participants of a discussion keep it in mind.

Despite his popularity with his followers and the common people of Athens, Socrates was not the 'pop-star' among contemporary philosophers. Particularly, the elite were annoyed by his relentless questioning. The most celebrated philosopher of the era was Protagoras, the first person to adopt the title of Sophist, meaning 'expert' or 'wise man'. To understand how unusual Socrates's approach was, it is helpful to compare it to the Sophists.

Sophists were teachers who offered to educate young men for a fee. Socrates was highly critical of their approach, believing they prioritized rhetoric and persuasive techniques over genuine pursuit of truth. He felt that the Sophists corrupted the very essence of education by charging for their service, turning it into a commodity rather than a noble pursuit. He believed that knowledge gained for the purpose of personal gain or social advancement was inherently shallow. An education obtained with money, could lead to a false sense of knowledge, and therefore bad actions. Socrates noted that orators could deliver impressive speeches by memorizing Protagoras's words. However, if you asked them to elaborate on a specific point, they would be unable to answer. These individuals make genuine inquiry difficult because their responses are just prepared speeches, not true understanding. Socrates thought that rhetoric differed from learning in that it produces belief in the absence of knowledge. However, Gorgias, a Sophist, viewed language as 'an all-powerful drug' capable of bewitching the mind and swaying emotions, since words could cause pain or pleasure, evoke fear or courage, and ultimately "allow a skilled orator to persuade anyone of anything with surprisingly little effort" (Robertson, p. 176).

4) How can the Socratic Method protect people in the twenty-first century from rhetoric, 'the all-powerful drug'?

As we have seen in section three, the question of how to distinguish between appearance and reality in our daily lives, was a recurring theme of Socratic philosophy. As Robertson points out, it is easy to confuse the two, but "feeling good is not the same as being good" (Robertson, p. 59). We often act as if knowing a term means we understand

the concept behind it, but true comprehension requires much more effort. Anyone can memorize words, even in a language they do not speak, without grasping their meaning. This is especially true for definitions, slogans, and maxims, which often lead to overly simplistic generalizations. A single exception can easily disprove these broad statements. Therefore, we must be careful not to confuse our opinions and the mere appearance of knowledge with genuine knowledge.

One of the greatest challenges we face today is how to defend ourselves against rhetoric. Today's Sophists are called 'influencers'. We are easily manipulated into believing things. We are the victims, not only of other people's rhetoric but also of our own. We frequently exaggerate, trivialize, and generalize, and are selective with the facts, thereby persuading ourselves to believe things that may be false. Socrates protected himself against rhetoric by questioning the Sophists and exposing the contradictions in their thinking. He also questioned himself. Robertson suggests that we should train ourselves to spot cognitive distortions and irrational thoughts wherever they occur. By becoming mindful of these thinking errors, we can make it harder for others to deceive us. We can start by keeping a daily record of how often we catch ourselves engaging in catastrophic thinking or making overgeneralizations in our thoughts and speech (Robertson, p. 230).

Aaron T. Beck described four common error types:

- **exaggerating or trivializing**: extreme thinking; catastropheizing; overestimating; polarized extremes; black and white thinking; all or nothing
- **selective thinking**: selective memory; selective hearing; selective abstraction; information out of context; ignoring or dismissing relevant facts; cherry-picking information; failing to look at the whole picture
- **jumping to conclusions**: arbitrary inference; making unfounded assumptions; without sufficient evidence; mind reading; jumping to conclusions about what other people are thinking
- **overgeneralization**: we assume that something true in one situation is true in general;. always or never; stereotypes and prejudices

(Summarized from Beck in Robertson, pp. 228–229)

If we can spot our own biased thinking, in this way, and distance ourselves from distorted thinking, we stand a much better chance of protecting ourselves against the rhetoric of others, including influencers on the internet, social media and other 'masters'

of oratory, such as politicians, CEOs, talk show masters and the permanent assault of commercials in the mass media.

5) Applying the Socratic method in the EFL classroom

Needless to say, Socrates did not say anything about EFL nor did he have foreign language education in mind, so we have to think ourselves how to apply his method to the EFL classroom. Keep in mind that Socrates did not teach wisdom, he told the way how everyone individually can find 'his own' wisdom. Plato's Socratic dialogues are not accurate transcripts of real conversations, and are unlikely to have happened in that way; always a classroom with very few students, all very eager to study and learn, and answer every question exactly in the way for Socrates to get the message across. This means, we do not have to 'copy' and memorize Socrates.

The Socratic method promotes critical thinking, deeper understanding of texts, and improved communication skills—all crucial for language acquisition. It shifts the focus from teacher-centered to student-centered learning. Students can learn to analyze information, formulate arguments, and evaluate different perspectives. They have opportunities to practice speaking, listening, and expressing their ideas. They should move beyond surface-level comprehension and engage with the underlying themes and ideas of a text. So they become active participants in the learning process, which can lead to increased motivation and engagement.

Perhaps, spelling and grammar could be left to the computer. They are not important knowledge in the Socratic sense and can nowadays easily be drilled by using computers or smartphones. The speech contest, very popular at Japanese schools, would most likely not have been one of his favorites, given his criticism of teaching rhetoric.

So what practical strategies are there for adapting the Socratic method in the EFL classroom?

The teacher should act as a facilitator, guide, and moderator, rather than lecturer, and be aware of the challenges of implementing the Socratic method in EFL classrooms, such as varying language proficiency levels, cultural differences, classroom management issues. Potentially sensitive topics should be handled in a respectful and inclusive manner. Furthermore, the teacher should promote intercultural understanding and avoid cultural stereotyping.

It would be best to start by establishing clear rules for discussion (take some inspiration from Farnsworth's list in section 3). For example you could use these rules:

- **Speak in English**. You may allow brief moments of use of their first language for clarification, but the default language of speaking should always be English.
- **Listen respectfully to others**. Students should be taught to pay attention when their classmates are speaking. And let the speaking person finish making his point, before starting to speak oneself. This not only shows respect but also helps them understand different perspectives and potentially different accents.
- **Wait for your turn to speak**. You may encourage students to raise their hands or use another signal to show they want to contribute. Most importantly prevent students from talking over each other and ensure everyone gets a chance to speak. Also, tell the students to speak with a clear voice, but not to yell.
- **Respect differing opinions**. Teach students that it is okay to disagree, but they should do so politely and respectfully. In fact, disagreement is very welcome. However, the students should focus on the topic, not on personal attacks.
- **Do not worry about making mistakes**. The classroom is a safe space for practice. Assure students that errors are a natural part of learning and that the goal is to communicate, not to be perfect.
- **Ask for clarification if you do not understand**. Students should not be afraid to ask for a word to be repeated or explained. This is a vital communication skill. Encourage them to use phrases like, 'Could you repeat that?' or 'What does 'X' mean?'
- **Everyone must participate**. To ensure the discussion is dynamic and that all students get a chance to practice, make it a rule that everyone must contribute at least once. This can be as simple as asking a question or agreeing with a classmate.
- **Keep your contributions concise and to the point**. This helps to keep the discussion moving and prevents a few students from dominating the conversation.

Whatever rules you choose, it is important to create a supportive and encouraging classroom environment where students feel comfortable taking risks with their language and expressing their ideas, even if they make mistakes. Try to foster a sense of community and encourage peer support. Incorporate movement and interaction to maintain student engagement. And, like Socrates, do not forget some humor.

Moreover, the teacher should provide language support (pre-teaching vocabulary and phrases, sentence starters, etc.), and could also use visual aids and realia, give students think time, brainstorming time, and allow small group discussions if the class is big. Make clear that the focus is on meaning and not on accuracy, grammar and pronunciation. Furthermore, the teacher could also provide opportunities for students to paraphrase and

summarize.

Always remember, it is a foreign language for the students. This is generally challenging, especially for lower level students. Thus, be patient and flexible. Start with shorter, simpler texts and gradually increase the length and complexity as students' language skills improve. In order to make it more interesting, different types of texts should be used such as, short stories, poems, excerpts from novels, articles, essays, speeches, film clips, song lyrics, even images or artwork and current events. The text should be relevant to the students' age and interests, and be culturally sensitive and appropriate for the students' backgrounds. It should contain complex themes and ideas that can be explored through discussion. Luckily there is a lot of graded reading material available off-and online for EFL teachers. You know your students best, their interests and level. You could have a class discussion about this in order to filter out their interests. It is also a work of try and error. This fits the Socratic method aim that not only the students but also the teacher is learning.

After reading a text and preparing for discussion, the students can engage in a guided discussion, led by the teacher. The teacher should ensure that all students have an opportunity to participate (see discussion rules list above). The ideal would be to have very small classes of one to six students in constant dialogue and engagement, but this is rarely the case, especially in Japan, my context. So, for the discussion the students can be divided in a small group of students sitting in the center, while the rest of the class observes (Fishbowl), or the students are divided into two circles, with the inner circle engaging in the discussion and the outer circle observing (inner / outer circle), or the entire class participates in the discussion (whole class discussion). With bigger classes it would be difficult to have fruitful discussions in which all students can participate. While guiding the discussion the teacher should introduce the different types of questions and their purpose:

- **Open-Ended Questions**

  Example: "What do you think is the best way to learn new English vocabulary?"

  Purpose: To encourage longer, more thoughtful responses than a simple "yes" or "no." This type of question gets the discussion started, allows students to share opinions and experiences, and practices using a variety of sentence structures.

- **Probing Questions**

  Example: "You said you find movies helpful. Can you give me an example of a time when a movie taught you a new word or phrase?"

Purpose: To encourage students to elaborate on their initial answers. Probing questions push students beyond surface-level responses, promoting deeper reflection and more detailed language production.

- **Clarifying Questions**

  Example: "You mentioned 'it's too hard.' When you say 'hard,' do you mean that the grammar rules are complicated, or that you forget the words easily?"

  Purpose: To help students clarify their thinking or correct ambiguity in their previous statement. This is crucial for learners, as it helps both the student and the rest of the class understand the intended meaning.

- **Follow-Up Questions**

  Example: "Mark thinks that watching movies is the best way. Do you agree with him, and why or why not?"

  Purpose: To build directly on a previous response and move the discussion forward by involving another student or introducing a contrast. This keeps the conversation flowing and encourages students to listen actively to their peers.

- **Hypothetical Questions**

  Example: "If you suddenly had to move to an English-speaking country next week, what three things would you do this week to prepare?"

  Purpose: To ask students to consider different scenarios, often involving an imaginative or 'what-if' situation. This encourages them to apply language skills to a new context and can be less intimidating than discussing their immediate reality.

At all-time use cognitive flexibility. Be flexible with hearing and listening different accents, sounds and uses of 'Englishes'. Avoid the rigid thinking of 'the perfect, correct English'.

After the discussion the students could be given some time to reflect on the discussion and their own learning, for example by using self-reflection journals, where students can write about their learning experiences and reflect on their own participation in the discussion as well as summarizing key points, and connecting the discussion to their own life experiences. Students can also provide feedback to each other on their participation and ideas. The teacher should emphasize the importance of providing constructive feedback to students, focusing on both their strengths and areas for improvement. The emphasis is on the students' thinking and engagement, not on grammatical accuracy. Teachers can use checklists to track student participation, critical thinking skills, and

communication skills.

A rubric for the students to use as a guide could look like this:

Post-Discussion Reflection and Feedback Rubric

This rubric will guide you as you reflect on your experience, write a short summary, and provide feedback to a classmate.

Self-Reflection & Summary (Student Writing)

This section is about your personal learning and how well you can express it in writing.

Criteria	Excellent (A)	Good (B)	Developing (C)	Needs Improvement (D)
A. Summary of Key Points	Clearly and accurately summarizes three or more main ideas from the discussion. The points are written in the student's own words.	Clearly and accurately summarizes two main ideas from the discussion.	Summarizes one main idea, or the summary is vague / partially inaccurate.	The summary is missing, very brief, or shows little understanding of the discussion.
B. Reflection on Personal Learning	Clearly expresses a strong and meaningful personal takeaway or new understanding gained from the discussion. Shows deep self-awareness.	Expresses a clear personal takeaway or new understanding gained from the discussion.	Mentions a general feeling or idea about the discussion, but the personal connection is weak or unclear.	Does not include a reflection on personal learning or simply restates a key point.
C. Connection to Life Experience	Makes a clear, specific, and relevant connection between the discussion topic and a personal experience or life goal.	Makes a clear and relevant, but general, connection to a personal experience or life.	Attempts to make a connection, but it is vague or not very relevant to the topic.	No attempt to connect the topic to personal life / experience.
D. Participation Self-Assessment	Honestly and thoughtfully assesses own participation (e.g., was prepared, listened well, spoke clearly twice or more), identifying both a strength and an area to improve.	Assesses own participation clearly, mentioning one strength or one area to improve.	Gives a general statement about participation (e.g., "I spoke a little") but lacks specific reflection.	Does not include a self-assessment or assessment is very minimal.

E. Language Use & Clarity (EFL Focus)	Writing is clear, easy to understand, and uses vocabulary and grammar structures appropriate to the class level accurately with very few errors that do not affect meaning.	Writing is generally clear. Errors in vocabulary or grammar are present but do not prevent understanding.	Errors in vocabulary or grammar sometimes make it difficult to understand the intended meaning.	Many errors severely hinder communication and understanding.

Peer Feedback (Student to Classmate)

Students will use this section to provide constructive feedback on their partner's participation in the discussion and their ideas.

Feedback Element	Excellent Feedback	Good Feedback	Developing Feedback	Needs Improvement
A. Focus on Ideas & Content	Feedback clearly identifies a specific idea the classmate shared that was interesting or new and explains why it was helpful to the discussion.	Feedback identifies a good idea the classmate shared.	Feedback is general (e.g., "Good ideas") and does not mention a specific point.	Feedback is missing or not relevant to the discussion content.
B. Focus on Participation & Skills	Feedback highlights a specific speaking or listening skill the classmate used well (e.g., "You asked a great question about...") and provides one polite, specific suggestion for future improvement.	Feedback highlights a specific positive participation point (e.g., "You spoke clearly").	Feedback is general or limited to "You talked a lot."	Feedback is missing or focuses only on general social comments.
C. Clarity and Tone	Feedback is written in a polite, encouraging, and easy-to-understand tone. The suggestions are constructive.	Feedback is polite and clear, though perhaps a little brief.	Feedback is difficult to understand or the tone is too casual / unfocused.	Feedback is missing, unclear, or not polite.

6) Why does the Socratic method still matter?

As we have seen in section three. The Socratic method is not easy to put into practice. So why should we go through the trouble? Why should we change our habits, our teaching method, and be careful when bringing AI into the classroom? Why should we not simply use the pleasure and convenience of AI?

We are experiencing that—our democracies—are in danger of falling apart. Something seems to be going wrong. May this have something to do with the way we have been approaching education?

Democracy thrives not only on institutions, but also on the thinking and cooperation of real people, their expressing themselves and their search for mutual understanding. A constant, argumentative debate with individual political demands is necessary. As Mueller reminds us, "Institutions are necessary, but only the people working in and between them can speak, listen, reflect, and respond. They form the lifeblood of an institutional framework that enables stability and permanence" (Mueller, p. 95). This requires the right and the common sense of freedom of speech in the public space. However, in order to act together, it is not enough for everyone to voice their convictions and worldviews, their interests or needs as loudly as possible. Where common problems need to be solved, diversity, criticism, dissent and individuality must also be accompanied by unifying forces. In democracy, this unifying energy is not ensured by the strong hand of Hobbes' Leviathan leader (Hobbes), nor is it entrusted solely to the workings of Adam Smith's 'invisible hand' (Smith), religious believes, or the 'magic of AI', but requires, in addition to the provision of appropriate forums, a practice of reasonable dialogue among all participants. It is exactly this interpersonal, reasonable dialogue that Socratic teaching provides to democracy.

Furthermore, democracy is based on the equal calling of all members of the community to participate in shaping the legal order that is binding on all. However, the actual willingness and ability to fulfill this calling cannot be taken for granted. It is not a given, but must be acquired, taught, practiced, and exercised in historical processes. A democratic culture must be developed and continually renewed through self-reflection and mutual reflection, social participation, and exchange.

Socrates taught the way to examine our own thinking and confront it with the critical minds of others. He also taught us that this is possible for all who are willing to learn, not only the most talented and educated. As Mueller points out, "This would also be the ideal according to which laws should be enacted in a democracy, laws that can be accepted by the community" as a whole (Mueller, p. 36). With this, Socrates also corresponds with the fundamental concerns of contemporary political ethics, according to which, in a democracy, "the binding objectives of collective action must be developed through public debate and a struggle for understanding, and must not be imposed through suggestion,

persuasion, or force" (Mueller, p. 40).

The concept of democratic order assumes that the political skills necessary for a community are accessible to everyone and can be learned by anyone. Institutions such as schools, colleges, universities, and other educational establishments are essential for this, but so are forums that encourage the free exchange of opinions and information (media, free public space for discussions, speeches, and gatherings). The aim of such education should be to acquire the ability to observe and judge, which allows learners to perceive and formulate social and political conditions in their environment and to classify and critically assess them, either independently or in dialogue with others. In any case, education should also serve to promote the formation of free opinion in schools and training, and enable students to experience methods and styles of democratic debate in appropriate subjects.

Socrates wanted to make citizens competent by education, and to become aware of themselves, as well as of their limitations, and to be sensitive to common concerns. Citizens, who would not give in to political power, consequently resulting in a better and more just state. According to him, such a development must be worked out from the bottom up, from the culture of communication between citizens, through the acquisition or strengthening of their own autonomy of independent and collective thinking, through the attainment of sovereignty in dealing with equal discussion partners, with their dissent, their hesitation, and their agreement. It is about establishing and deepening a culture of responsible speech, listening, and understanding, which may also require questioning one's own certainties, prejudices, or ingrained beliefs.

However, after Socrates death his student Plato established the Academy in Athens, and Plato's student Aristotle established the Lyceum. Thus, they established education firmly as an elite project. Socrates' idea of 'education for all' had left the stage. So did soon after also democracy itself in Greece as well as in Rome.

7) Conclusion

This article tried to show that the democratic crisis of the twenty-first century with its mutual shouting 'contests', refusing to listen to people with different views, refusing to answer questions, ridiculing the opponent, stereotyping, exaggerating, or simply resigning and giving up on politics, may have a lot to do with the way humankind has been approaching and putting education into practice. It tried to show that the answer

to these problems are not to 'outsource' the thinking to Artificial Intelligence, and that critical thinking cannot be 'forced' upon people by a school subject. This would be rather a contradiction. Instead implementing the Socratic method into education and society, and thus let people learn by doing may be more successful.

Socrates was not an opponent of democracy. In the contrary, he pointed out its weaknesses (e.g. demagogues, a missing counterweight to the almighty people's assembly), and hinted at its huge potential (e.g. inclusion of really all, women, the poor, outsiders, immigrants, refugees), in order to improve it.

It is easy to get carried away by emotions, pulled in by political oratory, without any pause for analysis, particularly, but not only on social media, so that opinions are experienced as though they are facts. Powerful rhetoric can resemble a form of hypnosis. Socrates kept interrupting orators with questions. "The Socratic method could be called a form of dehypnosis, designed to awaken us from the trance of rhetoric" (Robertson, p. 191).

Will humankind return to the 'cave of ignorance' with AI? Or will humankind awaken and have a comeback with the knowledge of not knowing, taught by the Socratic method? It is up to us. This article shows that implementing the Socratic method into education could help to improve the quality of our troubled democracies. It also explained how the EFL classroom, though not the natural home of the Socratic method, may nonetheless not be a bad place to try it, given that language is the key ingredient of communication, dialogue and discussion.

Notes

1) The allegory describes a group of people who have lived their entire lives chained inside a cave, facing a blank wall. A fire behind them casts shadows on the wall, and the only reality they have ever known are these shadows. They mistake the shadows for real objects. One day, a prisoner is freed and dragged out of the cave. Initially, the bright sunlight hurts his eyes, and he struggles to see the real world around him. He is confused and longs to return to the familiar darkness of the cave. Eventually, his eyes adjust, and he begins to see the real objects that were once just shadows. He realizes that his former reality was an illusion.

   The freed prisoner returns to the cave to tell the others about the outside world. He tries to explain that the shadows are not real, but the other prisoners, who are still chained, mock and threaten him. They cannot comprehend a reality beyond the shadows they have always known, and they see him as a crazy person. If he were to try and unchain them and bring them outside, they would likely kill him.

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