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# THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS' SOCRATIC PRACTICE: A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF TEACHERS' SOCRATIC PRACTICES: A HERMENEUTIC  
PHENOMENOLOGY

By

MARK A. JEDRZEJCZYK

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the  
College of Education  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree Doctor of Education  
in Curriculum and Instruction

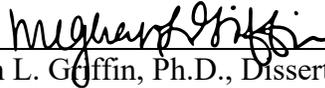
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March, 2022

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MARK A. JEDRZEJCZYK

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## DEDICATION

For mine own Elizabeth,

To whom even long-suffering Penelope in all her glory  
Cannot compare in beauty and dignity.

*She* bore a household, a child, and a legacy  
With equal parts shrewdness and longsuffering  
While her many-minded husband struggled against time and fate.

As did you.

But you better her in wisdom and strength.

For you carried me

When I was lost on the windy plains

Of my own mind.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Thank you, Mom and Dad, for letting me read as many books as I wanted and rarely grounding me from reading. Thank you, Nana and Papa, for letting us use the condominium when we were in Florida for intensives. Not only did you give us a place to stay, but you gave us the confidence to keep going. The ancient Greeks claimed to understand hospitality, but they should have taken lessons from you. To my sister-in-law Naomi Lindstrom: you were the best au pair ever. We could not have made it through intensives without you. I do not have the faintest idea what an au pair *is*. However, you are one of the best people I know. Thus, by the transitive

property, you must be one of the best au pairs as well. But seriously—thank you, Nay, for your calm, collected presence.

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I would be remiss if I did not mention the long-dead Søren Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard saved my life and started me on this path. He taught me to love philosophy, made me comfortable with doubt, and introduced me to Socrates. May I one day be a knight of faith rather than a knight of infinite resignation. Until then, thank God for grace.

## Abstract

This hermeneutic phenomenology studied the lived experiences of four high school teachers' Socratic practice. The purpose of the study was to describe the essence of high school teachers' lived experience of Socratic practice and explore what the teachers' lived experiences suggested about their understanding of Socratic practice. The data for this study were collected in semi-structured interviews with four teachers. As a hermeneutic phenomenological study, the researcher did not bracket himself. Instead, he clarified his reflexivity and examined transcripts of the written interviews through a hermeneutic circle. The study found four significant themes among teachers' descriptions of their lived experiences with leading Socratic discussions: being delighted, being troubled, being a dialogue-builder, and being Socratic. The four themes were also broken down into subthemes. The subthemes for being delighted were being delighted by different perspectives, being delighted by student ownership, and being delighted by student growth. The subthemes for being troubled were being challenged with engagement, being time-bound, being self-doubting, and being conflicted. The subthemes for being a dialogue-builder were being process-oriented, being goal-oriented, being growth-oriented, being clear about expectations, being in control, and being empathetic. Finally, the subthemes for being Socratic were being a guide, being argument-followers, being observant, and being a gadfly. The teachers' experiences suggested some disagreement about Socratic practices. The study also described the differences between Socrates's and the teachers' approaches to the Socratic method. The study's findings emphasize a need for further research into the definition, purpose, and nature of Socratic practices in the classroom.

*Keywords:* Socratic method, Socratic seminars, Socratic discussion, teaching strategies, teaching challenges, Socratic circles

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the 1920s, a Grecian court denied a pardon for a man long dead, though a lawyer pursued the case and argued that the man's conviction and execution were unjust. However, the court denied the request because the guilty man, Socrates, was convicted two millennia ago under a different political system (Waterfield, 2009). That Socrates considered the judgment just was not a factor in the judge's decision. In fact, the lawyer may have regretted the case had the court accepted the argument. After all, the court may have declared Socrates a hostile witness due to his questions about the nature of things. Yet Socrates's method of asking questions to discover truth lingers beyond his death in the realm of modern education. His teaching method, if the method can be called teaching, remains vital in classroom practice throughout the world. However, the literature on the use of the Socratic method in the classroom largely does not address the essence of teachers' experiences; the teachers' state of being Socratic remains as obscure and enigmatic as Socrates himself.

This study contributes to the literature by describing the essence of an experience that Socrates described as painful, numbing, and, in some respect, dangerous. The term "Socratic practice" was chosen to characterize the broad understanding of Socratic approaches that exist within the modern educational context and reduce theoretical assumptions about the researcher's particular understanding of the Socratic method. This chapter details the background of Socratic practice, the theoretical framework, the researcher's positioning within the study, and the study's

purpose and problem statements. Furthermore, the chapter enumerates key terms, methodology, and the significance of the study.

## **Background of the Study**

### **History**

Researchers have struggled to uncover the historical Socrates. If Socrates recorded any writings, no record exists. Thus, the only records of Socrates are the stories written by his contemporaries and later authors (Sheehan, 2007). Thus, Brun (1962) argued that “Socratic thought dominates history to such an extent that the man himself eludes historical research” (p. vii). Yet, the authors who knew Socrates had different motivations for writing about him and often used Socrates as the mouthpiece for their own views. Therefore, historians have the *Socratic problem*. Biographers acknowledge the existence of a historical Socrates. However, they are uncertain as to the extent of agreement between the character of Socrates in posthumous works and the historical Socrates (Brun, 1962).

*Elenchus*, the method Socrates used in the works of Plato, was a form of dialectic by which Socrates showed that his interlocutor’s claims were inconsistent and violated the laws of non-contradiction. Elenchus involves exploring a moral proposition through a series of questions and answers to determine whether a person’s position is logically consistent (McPherran, 2010). After such a conversation with Socrates, his dialogue partners were left confused. Yet, Socrates believed that perplexity was the beginning of wisdom. Thus, elenchus was the tool Socrates used to bring people to wisdom (Flanagan, 2006). In *Socratic dialogues*, two or more people typically participated in informal conversation. Socrates claimed that he conversed with people to teach Athenians to think about the nature of virtue. Indeed, in the *Apology*, Socrates claimed that the purpose of his approach was to produce virtue (Plato, 2002).

The famous allegory of the cave explains Socrates's view of learning and the role of the educator. In this tale, Socrates described prisoners in a cave who see only shadows on the walls and, having only that experience, believe those shadows are the objects themselves. A prisoner, for example, who sees the shadow of a horse might come to believe that this shadow is an actual horse. Socrates suggested that the person who escapes, leaves the cave, and sees the sun begins to understand the very nature of things. Such a person sees because their eye has been directed toward the light, not because anyone has placed sight in their eyes. In the same way, argued Socrates, every student has the power of knowledge in their soul, and the teacher's role is, and can only be, a guide (Plato, 1991). Thus, Socrates in *Theaetetus* argued that the teacher is like a midwife of the truth: Like a midwife who simply delivers what is already there, the teacher neither gives birth to truth nor places truth in another person. Because birth is associated with pain and the midwife is associated with delivery, the midwife of truth, argued Socrates, is also associated with pain. However, Socrates claimed to be a midwife who guided people through the pain to gentle peace at the end (Plato, 1992). As a teacher, then, Socrates did not claim knowledge of the conversation's content. Instead, Socrates was one who "watches over the labour of [human] souls" (Plato, 1992, p. 12) in search of truth.

### **Modern Forms of Socratic Practice**

In modern times, Socratic educational practices are similar in that they use questions to elicit responses. The practices can vary with respect to the spatial organization, the nature of the questions and anticipated responses, the text of the conversation, the goals of the conversation, and whether the class is student-led or teacher-led. Mintz (2006) distinguished between two specific approaches to Socratic practice: one used almost exclusively in law schools and another used mainly in elementary schools to colleges. The Socratic method's law school form, Mintz

(2006) wrote, was used in 97% of freshman law school classes as of 1996 and is historically related to Harvard Law School's Socratic approach. The tactic used in Harvard Law School refers to the professor calling upon students to answer questions without warning; thus, the approach can produce fear and anxiety (Gersen, 2017). In this approach to Socratic practice, classrooms can contain over 100 students arranged in rows, with the teacher serving as the focal point of conversation. Hence, argued Mintz (2006), a sense of community is limited, and egotism and individualism dominate; the approach is not so much about dialogue as scoring points.

Mintz (2006) argued that the cold-calling approach has the goal of eliciting students' correct answers. Thus, the strategy presupposes that the teachers have the correct answer: To demand correct answers is to know the correct answers from a position of superior knowledge. Therefore, the approach places the teacher at the center of the classroom practice; teachers command their class and test their command. Consequently, Mintz argued that the law school approach is not Socratic in the sense that Socrates did not seek facts and, instead, asked broad questions that did not allow for simple, factual responses. Therefore, the law school form of Socratic practice is Socratic in respect to asking questions, but the law school form is not Socratic with respect to asking students to respond with facts rather than reasons and certainty rather than perplexity.

The second form of Socratic practice is more prevalent in elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and colleges. This practice can be considered a broad method of responding in all language-based communications (Strong, 1996) that encompass various classroom practices intended to develop reading and thinking skills. These classrooms tend to be smaller than the law school classrooms, with usually between 10 and 15 students (Mintz, 2006; Strong, 1996). The *Socratic seminar* includes small group discussion, an organization of the

classroom in a manner symbolic of equality and collaborative learning, and spontaneous discussion with the end goal of discovery (Altorf, 2019; Balbay, 2019; Barr, 1968; Burns et al., 2016; Strong, 1996).

The practice's particular goal may vary from teacher to teacher or subject to subject based on the instructor's specific objectives. Tredway (1995), for example, suggested that Socratic seminars provide a context in which students learn essential social and reasoning skills, improve critical thinking in both students and teachers, and build self-esteem. In addition to improving critical thinking, the Socratic seminars can also be used to uncover students' hidden assumptions (Balbay, 2019), make people into philosophers, and create a sense of community (Altorf, 2019).

According to Strong (1996), a specific form of Socratic practice, the *Socratic dialogue*, was developed by Scott Buchanan. Buchanan was a founder of St. John's College's New School in 1937. In New School, education was entirely discussion-based and centered around key texts. Thus, Socratic dialogue refers to conversations surrounding the discussion of challenging texts. Strong called Socratic dialogue the Socratic seminar. Within the Socratic seminars, as implemented at St. John's College and similar programs, the focus is the reading of challenging texts and a conversation surrounding those texts that follow "the argument wherever it leads" (Barr, 1968, p. 4). Within this context, the teacher is removed from the center of the classroom and placed in a learner's role. Indeed, at St. John's College, the title "tutor" has replaced the title "professor" because the school believes that discussion leaders should shape the conversation, ask difficult questions, and help students understand the text and themselves through deep inquiry (Strong, 1996). Hence, Socratic seminars' sole authority is not the teacher but reason itself. The teacher, then, is part of the circle and does not stand at the center of the discussion.

Through Mortimer Adler in the 1980s, the concept of the Socratic seminar became a key curricular innovation in the Paideia program (Strong, 1996). As proposed by the Paideia Institute, the great books/classical education movement placed Socrates and the Socratic method at the center of their pedagogy (Adler, 1984). Chowning (2009) suggested that the historical roots of the Socratic method could be found in Adler and the Paideia program and offered advice in applying the seminars to science classes, referring to this approach as the Paideia seminar. Adler viewed the teacher as a coach who, despite perhaps having superior knowledge of their content area, teaches students primarily through a discussion format in a room with chairs arranged around tables so that the classroom's compartment is one of collaboration rather than didactic instruction (Adler, 1998). Thus, Magrini argued (2014) the Adlerian position assumes a view of "Socrates-as-teacher," neglects Socrates's claims of ignorance, and assumes that Socrates knew where he was guiding the conversation. Consequently, the Adlerian view of the Socratic method still centers the classroom around the teacher but at an offset: The teacher can be viewed as part of the group but as a shepherd, nudging students in the proper direction.

Finally, a third form of Socratic practice used in education today is *Socratic questioning*. In a study of California's teacher education programs, Paul et al. (1997) suggested that Socratic questioning was the most popular method of teaching critical thinking in California schools. However, they also observed that few teachers could clearly define critical thinking or how to teach it. Paul and Elder (2008) described Socratic questioning as a means of asking questions in such a way that students' ideas are carefully scrutinized. Unlike Adler's Socratic seminars, Socratic questioning is teacher-centric and teacher-guided. Socratic questioning is Socratic in the sense that, historically, asking questions is associated with the Socratic method (Golding, 2011; Schneider, 2013).

## **Philosophical Framework**

A theoretical framework conveys the researcher's working assumptions and makes those assumptions explicit to clarify research goals and provide guidance for research-based decisions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Consequently, the theoretical framework provides a foundation, guidance, and boundaries to the study. However, because this study adopted hermeneutic phenomenology as the philosophical framework to provide the boundaries for study, the term theoretical framework more accurately describes the researcher's approach because phenomenology studies the lived experience as demonstrated in reflection and consciousness and does not attempt to interpret a phenomenon through a theoretical lens (Peoples, 2020).

Phenomenology is both a philosophy and a methodology (Kafle, 2011). Thus, Peoples (2020) claimed that the theoretical framework for phenomenological research is always phenomenology as the methodology is rooted in philosophy. Kafle (2011) argued that the researcher acquires an understanding of the research process through the philosophical literature of phenomenology. Phenomenology, as a philosophy, emphasizes existence or the relationship between an extant being and the world. Consequently, phenomenological research describes lived essences or an individual's shared understanding of an experience or concept (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). That is, phenomenology examines the essential meaning of the world as the meaning reveals itself to the human consciousness (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

Phenomenology originated with Edmund Husserl, whose philosophical framework was founded on a subjective willingness to understand new experiences (Moustakas, 1994). Husserl's transcendental approach sought to suspend the subjective experience and its preconceptions to get at the true essence of scientific phenomena (Kafle, 2011). Hence, science's preoccupation with natural explanation assumed that those objects had an understandable meaning—that is,

science took the intelligibility of the world for granted and assumed the essential meanings of the world that science was attempting to describe. For example, Lindseth and Norberg (2004) argued that the biologist does not need to explain the essential meaning of tree, as the familiar meaning needed no obvious explanation.

However, this study used a later development, the hermeneutic phenomenological approach. Martin Heidegger, based on Husserl, developed the hermeneutic phenomenological approach, and van Manen further refined Heidegger's approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kafle, 2011). In Heidegger's view, thinkers cannot separate themselves from their object of study, nor can they separate themselves from their preconceived notions. That is, the thinker cannot suspend the subjective (Kafle, 2011). Instead, researchers are *Dasein* or "in the circumstances of each one's own existence" (Peoples, 2020, p. 31). To put it another way, people are being-in-the-world (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2020). Thus, the researcher cannot fully remain objective as Husserl proposed because people are actively engaged in the process of living and cannot separate themselves from that process. Instead, the researcher strives toward the object of study through revision of preconceived notions. The researcher approaches the problem with fore-conception that must be amended and changed as the researcher adds new information to the researcher's perceptions of the world (Peoples, 2020). Thus, hermeneutic phenomenological researchers uncover (*aletheia*) the wholeness of the subject's lived experiences through a spiraling process of revisiting and revising their own understandings (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Huttunen & Kakkori, 2020).

Aletheia is a sort of practical discovering; that is, *Dasein* is a knowing through the experiencing of the thing rather than primarily through theory. However, aletheia is not a denial of truth, for Heidegger suggested three kinds of truth: propositional truth, the truth of entities,

and the truth of being. Aletheia belongs to the second category of truth, the uncovering of entities as they are, that they are. Consequently, Heidegger did not deny the correspondence theory of truth but, instead, argued that propositional truth can only exist and be known through being-in-the-world (Huttunen & Kakkori, 2020). Indeed, Heidegger argued that the modern world, through the Romans, understands truth as veritas; that is, the correspondence of idea to object. However, the phenomenological researcher uncovers the truth in the same way that an observer of art uncovers the truth in the experience of the art. That is, aletheia, as truth, is the experience of meaning and meaningfulness (van Manen, 2016). Consequently, aletheia points to the hermeneutics of hermeneutic phenomenology: The interpretation of the text of other's lived experiences to reveal through description other people's shared lifeworld concerning the phenomenon in question (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

### **Problem Statement**

The essence of Socratic practice as lived by teachers is an area that has minimally been explored in the literature. Researchers, in general, have examined either the effectiveness of Socratic practice in producing particular outcomes or simply describing the methodology (Balbay, 2019; Burns et al., 2016; Chowning, 2009; Strong, 1996). Some literature describes the individual's lived experiences as Socratic practitioners (Altorf, 2019). However, the description of the practice tends to focus on the researcher's experience as a model rather than a rich description of the teachers' inner experiences. Investigation into how teachers experience Socratic practice is an understudied area and could lead to a better understanding of the fundamental challenges and insights teachers have of Socratic practice rather than theory, which could provide potential guidance for educational leaders implementing Socratic practice in their schools or classrooms.

Van Manen (2016) noted that phenomenological researchers often discover research topics through their subjective experiences. Thus, the research problem emerged from the researcher's experience as an instructor who makes use of the Socratic practice. In the researcher's lived experience, he has noticed that Socratic practice is often discussed but rarely understood. When teachers speak about Socratic practice, they generally discuss the methodology and not their experiences. However, the researcher's experience of implementing the Socratic method in his classes has been a story of confusion and suffering. Often, students' questions have caused him to experience aporia, or confusion. The classroom's physical structure has appeared to the researcher to affect student behavior. Furthermore, the researcher has often experienced doubts about his skills, wondering whether his approach was effective, useful, and engaging. Thus, the researcher's being-in-the-world has led to curiosity about other teachers' lived experiences with Socratic practices.

The extant literature, as noted earlier, cannot be categorized generally as phenomenological. For example, Burns et al. (2016) examined the effectiveness of Socratic teaching methods in producing an understanding that knowledge is socially constructed. Other studies examine Socratic practice's efficacy in reading groups or critical thinking (Balbay, 2019; Cruchett, 2017; Sahamid, 2016). Research has been conducted on how teachers perceive the Socratic method. A doctoral study by Edwards (2019) described how teachers perceive the Socratic method's role in enhancing students' critical thinking skills. Nevertheless, the study was not phenomenological, for the study did not explore the essence of teachers' experiences. Finally, a substantial body of literature addresses methodology. Colombos (2020), for example, discussed how to apply the Socratic practice in therapeutic and educational interventions, and Paul and

Elder (2008) discussed a taxonomy of questions, kinds of questions, and the theory of the Socratic method.

This study adds to the literature by using phenomenology to describe the lived experiences of teachers who have implemented Socratic practices. Even Plato explored lived experiences only to a degree. In the allegory of the cave, for example, Socrates described the teacher's experiences as difficult and unpleasant. The teacher who returns to the cave loses the ability to see the darkness and is mocked by those who know only shadows. In fact, foreshadowing his own death, Socrates claimed that the teacher would be killed by those who live in the cave (Plato, 1991). When the literature addressed individuals' lived experiences, the research tended to either focus on the student experiences or described teachers' experiences for the purpose of illustration and training. For example, Gersen (2017) discussed how trauma survivors might react to Socratic practice; however, Gersen did so in a primarily theoretical manner rather than a phenomenological manner. Gersen provided advice about her own experiences and practices but did not attend to the practice's essence. Instead, the focus was on the theory and the practical implications of the practice.

Similarly, Altorf (2019) reflected on her experience as a facilitator but within the framework of using Socratic practice to build community. Although Altorf (2019) framed the Socratic method within the context of phenomenology, she did so as a means of suggesting that Socratic practice involves interpreting phenomena and understanding others' lived experiences. Hence, the report's focus is primarily on theory and how theory should inform practice as triggered by her own experience of Socratic practice. Thus, the literature is deficient because when phenomenological experiences are addressed, the experiences are addressed tangentially rather than as things-in-themselves. Yet, as van Manen (2016) noted, phenomenological research

does not aim at laws, rules, or theories. Instead, the aim is a description of what lived phenomena mean.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to describe the essence of high school teachers' lived experience of Socratic practice. At this stage in the research, the Socratic practice was generally defined as a method of classroom instruction that uses non-judgmental questions to encourage the development of understanding, empathy, and a clearer understanding of objective reality (Balbay, 2019). However, the purpose of phenomenological research is not to theorize, define, or develop theories (van Manen, 2016). Thus, the preliminary definition of the Socratic method served as a description of the researcher's philosophical assumptions as he engaged in the spiraling process of hermeneutic phenomenological research.

### **Overview of Methodology**

This hermeneutic phenomenological study examined a heterogeneous group of four teachers. The research subjects were delimited to teachers in high school who had experience with Socratic practice in their classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using an interview protocol (see Appendix A). The goal of phenomenology is to arrive at the essence of individuals' lived experiences. Consequently, the researcher described those experiences rather than generating a theory of those experiences (van Manen, 2016). Hence, the data were analyzed in a spiraling process that allowed for the continual revision of the researcher's fore-conception to arrive at a fusion of horizons.

### **Research Questions**

This study addressed the following primary research question: "What are the lived experiences of high school teachers implementing the Socratic method?" The study addressed

one secondary question as well: “What do teachers’ lived experiences of leading Socratic discussion suggest about their understanding of the Socratic practice?”

### **Research Design**

Phenomenological research typically uses a heterogeneous group of from three or four participants up to 10 to 15 participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Moustakas (1994) pointed to literature that encouraged interviews of between five and 25 participants. However, van Manen (2016) said that phenomenological research has no exact requirement for interview subjects and that data saturation should not be the goal since phenomenology examines unique phenomena that may occur a single time in the data. Moreover, van Manen (2016) argued that the sample should be individuals who can verbally express their understanding of the phenomenon. Furthermore, van Manen suggested the relationship between interviewer and interviewee should be friendly. In addition, the participants had experience leading classroom discussions using Socratic practice and, thus, have experience with the phenomenon in question (van Manen, 2016). These qualifications were chosen to avoid such diversity that the researcher would be unable to find common themes but sufficient heterogeneity to discover essences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Hence, the study used a criterion sampling strategy: subjects were teachers known to be capable of describing their own experiences and who reported experience implementing Socratic practices in their classes.

Before conducting the study, the Southeastern University Institutional Review Board was asked to grant approval for the study. Once the institutional review board granted approval for the study, written authorization was requested from study participants. The purpose of the study was described as well as any potential risks, benefits, and rights. Interview subjects were given a consent form before any interview. The form detailed their rights, potential risks, and the

possible benefits of the study, as well as a description of the purpose of the study. Names and identifying information were obscured during the final publication for the protection of the teachers' privacy. Any data obtained during the research study were stored securely on the researcher's password-protected computer in password-protected files and will be permanently deleted from storage after five years.

### **Data Collection**

Data were gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews. When possible, interviews were in the teacher's classroom or another comfortable, safe location because the subject's comfort is essential to producing quality data (van Manen, 2016). As a result of the pandemic and issues relating to cost and distance, some interviews were conducted via Zoom. Interview questions were prepared and asked of the subject. Interviews were recorded and stored locally on the researcher's password-protected computer before being transcribed into text via speech conversion software. The researcher reviewed the transcription while listening to the interview recording to ensure the transcripts' accuracy. The transcripts were sent to the interview subject for a final review of accuracy. Interviews were semi-structured, as recommended by Peoples (2020), to allow for the researcher to address the topic and enable the researcher the flexibility to explore issues that may be relevant to the study. Interview questions focused on the participants' lived experiences of Socratic practice rather than their perceptions.

### **Analysis**

Data were analyzed through a spiraling process that did not proceed in a linear fashion but, instead, returned to the data in a process of revision and reflection (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2020). Because hermeneutic phenomenology—and phenomenology in general—is a methodology for describing essences, the word analysis does not align with the study's goals

considering analysis breaks concepts down into parts. Rather, phenomenological researchers aim to understand a phenomenon as a whole. Thus, the study was an explication of the phenomenon using, in accordance with hermeneutic phenomenology, a hermeneutic circle to allow the parts to inform the whole and the whole to inform the parts (Peoples, 2020).

Interview transcripts were first read through several times to gain a sense of the overall content. The transcripts were annotated in the margins with memos during this pre-coding process, and critical passages were highlighted. A codebook was created. Condensed meaning units were developed from relevant passages. Subthemes were assigned to passages identified by the researcher as sharing similar linguistic or conceptual messages. Subthemes were then compared for redundancies or inconsistencies and modified as necessary. At that point, subthemes were arranged and rearranged into groups that shared conceptual similarities, and themes were created around those similarities (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004; Peoples, 2020).

Van Manen (2016) cautioned against a formula for seeking themes and suggested, instead, an intuitive process. Thus, despite the appearance of analytical linearity, a spiral approach was used by the researcher, for the phenomenological understanding of the essence is always partial and developing as the researcher attempts to read the book of the lifeworld (Kafle, 2011). For example, potential codes were noted during the pre-coding process, and marginal notes were made during the coding process; then, the development of themes led to a re-examination of codes. Furthermore, data analysis included reflective writing as the researcher considered the parts, the whole, and the relationship between the researcher's theoretical assumptions and own lifeworld. The process of reflection through journaling allowed the researcher to grow more aware of his fore-conception and how his fore-conception impacted his

interpretations (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004; van Manen, 2016). In addition, van Manen (2016) suggested three ways of viewing the transcripts. He suggested reading transcripts as a whole story, at the level of a paragraph, and at the level of a word or phrase. Furthermore, van Manen (2016) argued that the researcher should use each approach with an intuitive and complex “process of insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure” (p. 319) and that the researcher should ask questions about how the part relates to the whole and the whole relates to the part to find a “shared understanding with the world” (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, p. 147). As a result, the analytical conclusions emerged as a work in progress rather than a single, linear, definitive conclusion.

### **Limitations**

Four teachers were interviewed during the study, meeting the requirements for a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). However, more subjects may have added insight into teachers’ experiences. In addition, all teachers were female. Two participants were from the same Christian private school, and two participants were from different Christian classical education organizations. Three of the four participants lived in the same geographical region. Thus, the participants’ gender, narrow geographical region, and religious orientations could be limitations. Furthermore, the researcher only interviewed each teacher once. Additional interviews and classroom observations may have provided more insight into teachers’ experiences. The use of videoconference software for two interviews limited the researcher’s ability to create a comfortable atmosphere for interview subjects, a key component of interview research, according to van Manen (2016). Participants might be more likely to discuss difficult issues and personal challenges in person than in video conferences (Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009). Thus, the mode of interview for those two participants might be a limitation.

Finally, the researcher's fore-conceptions were a limitation of the study due to the nature of his lifeworld's interaction with other lifeworlds. That is, despite the spiral process of interpretation, the researcher's fore-conceptions about Socratic practice may have an impact on his interpretation, considering the researcher could not arrive at a pure state of hermeneutic reduction (van Manen, 2016). As a result, the nature of being-in-the-world is a limitation of this study.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The following words and phrases are key terms for the study.

- **aporia:** perplexity, confusion, or difficulty as part of a dialectic discussion (Fullam, 2015)
- **daimon:** An inward warning of error (Plato, 2002)
- **Dasein:** “in the circumstances of each one's own existence” (Peoples, 2020, p. 31) or the way that a human and his or her activities interact with and give meaning to the surroundings, objects, and things, while, simultaneously, the way those same surroundings, objects, and things reflect back and make meaning in the Dasein (Wrathall, 2006)
- **elenchus:** a systemized question and answer process that is directed by the teacher and depends on student involvement (Boghossian, 2006, p. 716)
- **fore-conception:** “preconceived knowledge about a phenomenon” (Peoples, 2020, p. 34)
- **fusion of horizons:** the end result of the hermeneutic circle as understanding becomes complete and an understanding between the researcher and the researched object emerges (Suddick et al., 2020)

- **hermeneutic circle:** the spiral process of dialogue by which the parts of the object and the author’s fore-conception repeatedly return to and are integrated into a complete conception of another object of study (Suddick et al., 2020)
- **lifeworld:** “the world of everyday lived experience” (van Manen, 2016, p. 312) that is “both the source and object of phenomenological research” (van Manen, 2016, p. 312) or how the objective world reveals itself in human experience (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004)

### **Significance of the Study**

This research added to the body of literature by addressing teachers' lived experiences as they engage in the Socratic practice. Educators and instructional leaders may discover how practitioners experience the method through a narrative exploration of Socratic practitioner’s experiences. By providing this rich description, the researcher may provide insight that may lead to increased empathy and understanding of the struggles and successes of those who attempt to engage in Socratic practice in the classroom.

### **Summary**

This hermeneutic phenomenological study of Socratic practice among high school teachers shares the same openness that Socrates had when he engaged in dialogues. Concerning the subjects, the researcher considers himself, like Socrates, no more than a midwife to the truth—not himself a source of ideas, but helping others bring forth their own ideas (Vivilaki & Johnson, 2008). Within the context of phenomenology, the researcher seeks to draw out the lifeworld of teachers’ experiences of Socratic practice to understand the essence of their shared experiences. In doing so, this study unveiled the vague and secret world of teachers’ lived Socratic practice.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the phenomenology of Socratic practice among teachers. The following literature review will describe the broad history of Socratic practice from Socrates's own time through the modern-day. Phenomenology, as a research methodology, does not attempt to interpret a phenomenon through a theoretical lens nor examine a phenomenon's effectiveness. Instead, phenomenological researchers seek to understand the phenomenon as it is lived (Peoples, 2020). Consequently, the literature review describes how Socratic practice has been understood and lived throughout educational history. This background is part of the fore-conception of the researcher within the framework of hermeneutic phenomenology. Thus, the researcher's explication of Socratic practices' history forms part of the fore-conceptions that lead to a fusion of horizons (Peoples, 2020).

### **Foundations of Socratic Practice**

#### **The Historical Socrates and His Method**

According to Sheehan (2007), Socrates was born in either 470 or 469 BCE in the city of Athens. Socrates was, of course, the progenitor of the eponymously named Socratic method. His mother, Phaenarete, was a midwife. Sheehan noted that Phaenarete's name meant making virtue visible, a name appropriate for the mother of a man who called himself the midwife of truth and virtue. Socrates's father, Sophroniscus, was a stonemason, a career that would not have been highly regarded in ancient Greece (Winspear & Silverberg, 1960). Despite his low upbringing,

Socrates would have been likely to have had the usual Greek education in music, gymnastics, and grammar. The Greek word for this form of education is paideia. The goal of paideia was to educate the totality of the student in culture and ethics (Jurić, 2013). Athens was at its cultural heights during Socrates's youth, having entered its golden age after establishing peace with Persia after a long war and extending the Athenian empire across the Mediterranean Sea (Brun, 1962; Sheehan, 2007).

Around the age of 40, Socrates seemed to have experienced an awakening in his intellectual and social life (Taylor, 1976). Socrates's friend, Chairephone, came to him with a message from the oracle at Delphi. The oracle claimed that Socrates was wiser than every other man. Socrates, however, rejected the idea and expressed confusion about the riddle for, he said, "I am very conscious that I am not wise at all" (Plato, 2002, p. 26). From that moment onward, Socrates sought to discover if he was, in fact, the wisest man alive. Thus, Socrates spent the remainder of his life pursuing philosophy and testing Athenians to see who might be the wisest. Socrates spent his time primarily in the agora, or marketplace, where he challenged tradesmen, aristocrats, and humble citizens with "questions about goodness, truth, and beauty" (Guttek, 2011, p. 35). Despite this pursuit of wisdom and encouragement of discussion, Socrates did not consider himself a teacher. He did not teach children about moral truth and, thus, was not part of the formal paideia. He also did not charge money for his teaching like the Sophists. He did not charge money, in part, because, unlike the Sophists, Socrates did not claim he could teach virtue (Plato, 2004; Scott, 2000). Instead, Socrates asked probing questions that demonstrated the ignorance of his interlocutors. Thus, Socrates claimed that no one knew just what virtue and goodness were (Guttek, 2011; Smith, 1997). Socrates himself claimed to be as ignorant as anyone

else. The greatest wisdom, asserted Socrates, was the knowledge of one's own ignorance (Plato, 2002).

Socrates, in modern terms, was a poor educator. He failed to transform many of his students for the better. In fact, "students" such as Alcibiades or Critias may have become worse because Socrates's method required humility rather than arrogance (Scott, 2000). However, as a democrat and lover of wisdom, Socrates persisted in asking questions of Athenians regardless of their social status or actual interest in truth. Thus, Socrates's pursuit of the good, true, and beautiful was egalitarian (McPherran, 2010). However, Brun (1962) argued that many Athenians disliked Socrates for his incessant challenges and, therefore, the Athenian citizens put Socrates trial for denying the city's gods, introducing new gods, and corrupting the city's youth. Socrates, asserted Brun, insisted that his practice of asking questions in pursuit of wisdom was a divine mandate and for the good of the city. Though Socrates could have chosen to be defended by a professional, Socrates maintained his innocence and defended himself. Thus, wrote Brun, rather than tailoring his approach to his audience, Socrates continued his practice of asking questions and challenging propositions. Socrates's self-defense failed, and he was executed in 399 BCE (Gutek, 2011). Yet, Socrates died as he lived, asking questions. Even as the poison that would kill him coursed through his veins, Socrates engaged in questions and dialogue with his friends about the nature of the good and the true (Brun, 1962; Gutek, 2011).

### **Socrates's Method**

Socrates was famous in Athens because of his discussions with the people around him, Delić and Bećirović (2016) claimed. The subject of his conversations, they wrote, included justice, virtue, friendship, and temperance. Consequently, to engage with Socrates was to participate in a conversation on how humans should live their lives. The conversations were

student-centered and focused on developing a deep, rich understanding of the ideas being explored, argued Delić and Bećirović. However, Socrates never once claimed to have a specific way of studying problems; instead, his method, known as elenchus, is inferred by later scholars (Boghossian, 2012). Indeed, Vlastos (1994) asserted that the method was not named until modern times. The literature reveals disagreement on the nature of Socrates and elenchus. For example, Robinson (1971) argued that there are two definitions of elenchus: a broad definition and a narrow definition. Broadly, elenchus is simply asking questions that challenge the truth claims another person makes. More narrowly, however, elenchus is a method of cross-examination and refutation.

Socrates left no writings of his own. Historians only have accounts of Socrates through his contemporaries like Plato, Xenophon, and Aristophanes and later authors (Sheehan, 2007). Thus, modern biographers are presented with the “Socratic problem”: biographers know that Socrates was a historical figure but disagree as to what degree the authorial character agrees with historical personality (Brun, 1962). Yet, while Xenophon presented Socrates as a simple, moral thinker, Plato presented the Socrates most familiar to modern readers: a radical, challenging thinker with a singular focus on discovering how to live a virtuous life (Sheehan, 2007). Thus, the discussion of Socrates and his methods tend to analyze the Socrates of Plato because Xenophon’s Socrates lacks many of the innovations in belief and reasoning found in Plato (Gendron, 1999; Vlastos, 1982).

### ***The Socratic Method***

Vlastos is widely credited for his studies on Socrates’s elenchus in the works of Plato (Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar, 2006). Vlastos (1982) characterized elenchus as Socrates’s “main instrument of philosophical investigation” (p. 711). Vlastos argued that the Socratic elenchus of

Plato—which he termed the “standard elenchus”—was an accurate reflection of the historical Socrates’s approach to exploring inconsistencies within an interlocutor’s beliefs about moral truths. Vlastos maintained that the process consisted of four steps. First, the interlocutor made a statement of beliefs that Socrates viewed as false. In a second step, Socrates asked the interlocutor questions that led the interlocutor to agree to a separate set of independent premises. Vlastos contended that, in the third step, Socrates challenged the initial statements with the different collection of independent premises. In this step, Socrates claimed that the two sets of premises contradicted each other. Thus, Socrates claimed that the contradiction demonstrated that the initial premise was false in the final step.

Vlastos (1982) contended that the standard elenchus contained several essential features. First, elenchus was not investigated through elenchus. The method was not used to analyze the method, and Socrates used elenchus only in moral inquiry. Second, Socrates assumed the intellectual honesty of the participants when he applied his method. That is, the goal of elenchus was truth rather than winning the argument. Consequently, Socrates assumed that the claims the interlocutor made reflected the honest opinion of the participant. Third, the reasons for the questions that Socrates asked to form the second set of independent premises were never explained. Instead of drawing from first principles, Socrates simply asked the participants if they agreed with the new set of premises. Thus, Socrates’s elenchus broad philosophical claims were avoided. Fourth, Socrates allowed the interlocutors to say what they believed. Finally, Vlastos submitted that Socrates claimed to have disproven the initial claim by the end of the process.

Boghossian and Lindsay (2018), however, described five steps to the Socratic method and placed elenchus within the context of the Socratic method. The first stage of the Socratic method, according to these authors, was “wonder.” During this stage, a question was put forth by either

the facilitator or the participants. For example, wrote Boghossian and Lindsay, dialogue participants in the *Meno* wondered what it meant to be virtuous, and, in the *Republic*, participants speculated on the definition of virtue. In the second stage, hypothesis, a tentative answer to the question was offered by participants in the conversation. Boghossian and Lindsay (2018) characterized the third step of the Socratic method as elenchus and defined elenchus as asking “systemized questions that target the hypothesis for refutation” (p. 247). Boghossian and Lindsay argued that the hypothesis was challenged in this stage to determine if it was faulty. If the proposition survived the testing, the hypothesis was thought to be true knowledge or at least a step toward gaining knowledge (Boghossian, 2006; Boghossian & Lindsay, 2018). During the elenchus stage, Socrates often used a counterexample to test the hypothesis and show that the hypothesis was false and the interlocuter’s claim to knowledge was, thus, disproven (Boghossian, 2012). After challenging the hypothesis through elenchus, the fourth stage was entered: the hypothesis was either accepted or rejected. Here, the conversation partners either agreed that the elenchus undermined the hypothesis or not. If the hypothesis was rejected because of the counterexample, a new hypothesis was adopted, and the dialogists returned to step two and tested the initial hypothesis with another counterexample (Boghossian, 2012). However, if the counterexample was rejected, the hypothesis was tentatively accepted, and other counter examples were examined (Boghossian, 2012). When enough counterexamples were explored and the hypothesis could not be rejected, the fifth and final stage of the Socratic method was to act according to the claim. Thus, behavior changed in this non-verbal stage as a result of the Socratic practice (Boghossian & Lindsay, 2018).

In contrast, Haroutunian-Gordon (1990) argued that Socrates did not have a method or, if Socrates did, he did not follow any particular sequence or applied the method inconsistently. For

example, Haroutunian-Gordon contended that Socrates, in the *Phaedo*, espoused a method known as the “method of hypothesis” (p. 140) but failed to use his own method. The four steps method suggested by Haroutunian-Gordon consisted of first, developing a hypothesis about the nature of a thing; second, accepting premises that agree with the hypothesis; third, testing any challenges to the hypothesis to see if they are internally consistent; and fourth, if the challenge and hypothesis were shown to be consistent, the hypothesis was to be accepted.

However, despite Socrates’s claim of this method, Haroutunian-Gordon (1990) submitted that Socrates did not follow the steps. For example, at one point in the *Phaedo*, Socrates rejected a hypothesis but not because the hypothesis was internally inconsistent. Socrates deduced that the soul is immortal but failed to examine direct challenges to his assumptions in a different place. Nevertheless, Haroutunian-Gordon suggested that Socrates’s advocacy of a method may have been an expression of intent in the *Phaedo* rather than a perfect execution. A teacher, wrote Haroutunian-Gordon, may claim to follow a method but not actually follow that method. Thus, Haroutunian-Gordon asserted that the Socrates of Plato’s *Phaedo* might have had the intent but failed to fully live up to that intent.

Haroutunian-Gordon (1988) asserted that Socrates discussed in the *Philebus* a method that he claimed to practice continually. In the *Philebus*, Socrates proposed an approach that consisted of looking for a single form, then looking for another and another and another until each form of a thing had been discovered in the investigation of the nature of the thing being studied. Haroutunian-Gordon reasoned that a reader, in considering Socrates’s attempt to persuade Philebus and Protarchus that a life of reason was better than a life of pleasure, would expect Socrates to follow the method he espoused. Based on four examples of Socrates’s failed attempts to apply the method, Haroutunian-Gordon concluded that Socrates did not intend to

suggest an overriding practice that should be universally applied. Rather, Haroutunian-Gordon maintained that Socrates's method was determined by the question being addressed and that Socrates was working in an ill-structured teaching environment. As a result of this environment, Socrates was continually adjusting his plans based on the students' needs. Thus, Haroutunian-Gordon proposed that Socrates's method was not intended to be a set of universal principles to be applied in all circumstances. Instead, Socrates's approach was determined by the pedagogical problems being addressed.

### *Aporia and Humiliation*

In Plato, Socratic practice focused on a dialectic that turns the soul to the light (Fullam, 2015). The allegory of the cave illustrates the process. In the tale, Socrates describes a cave in which people are chained to rocks and forced to look at a cave wall. On that cave wall are moving shadows projected by a fire and figures in front of the fire that cast the shadows. The chained individuals have lived this way their entire life; thus, they believe that the shadows are the objects themselves, and the only way to convince them otherwise is to unchain them and pull them into the sunlight above ground. However, in Socrates's story, those people would be unwilling to leave the comfort of their cave and their previous understanding. Thus, Socrates described an education that includes force and tension because of the difficulty of getting people to abandon their previous beliefs for new insights (Blosser, 2014; Plato, 1991).

The allegory of the cave illustrated an essential element of Socratic practice, for the people of the cave did not perceive the actual object and were blinded and confused by the sun when they emerged in the upper world. Thus, the process of elenchus may bring about humiliation and confusion as the teacher asks questions that challenge what students believe about morality, life, or their previous understanding (Blosser, 2014). The Greek word for this

state is *aporia*: a state of perplexity, confusion, or difficulty as part of a dialectic discussion and a recognition of error and ignorance. Socrates used elenchus to lead his interlocutors to a state of *aporia*, bringing them to admit their ignorance, just as Socrates himself does (Fullam, 2015; Plato, 2004; Weiss, 2006).

Weiss (2006) asserted that Socrates used *aporia* to shame and humble the arrogant. Thus, because the initial speakers thought themselves to know something they did not, the speakers could be said to be in a state of *hubris* (Gendron, 1999). Weiss (2006) claimed that the humbling of the interlocutor is an essential element of elenchus and that Socrates used the practice for four reasons: to show people's souls, to demonstrate their ignorance, to destroy their claims, and to humiliate them. Weiss further claimed that Socrates considered these as features and gifts of his method, rather than as problematic consequences, for Socrates asked his friends to use the same approach with his children when he was gone. Furthermore, Weiss noted that in Socrates in the *Republic* claimed that he reasoned with the citizens in Athens for the city's good. Thus, according to Weiss, the process of tearing down and humiliating was an essential element of moral discovery and the process of genuinely knowing truth. Consequently, the humiliation that resulted from *aporia* was good because it redirected people toward moral truth.

Many individuals who Socrates spoke with deserved to be humiliated because of their immoral beliefs; however, some of his dialogue partners did not deserve such ignoble treatment (Brennan, 2006). Yet Boghossian (2012) argued that humiliation was not a central feature of Socratic practice. Instead, the point of the Socratic practice was to show the interlocutor that they did not know something that they thought they knew or that their beliefs were inconsistent. Boghossian challenged the view that Socrates's goal was *aporia* and perplexity, asserting such an interpretation was a misunderstanding of the *Meno* when Socrates

engaged the slave boy in a discussion about how to find twice the area of the square. Socrates helped the slave boy see errors in his reasoning. However, Boghossian asserted that Socrates's ultimate goal was to encourage the slave boy to become interested in what was true, not simply confuse him about what was unknown.

Furthermore, Boghossian (2012) distinguished between two kinds of perplexity: first, perplexity that emerges from what is unclear or confusing; and second, bewilderment that is a consequence of engaging in novel and challenging problems. The Socratic method, argued Boghossian, produces neither kind of perplexity. Instead, the subject matter introduces the perplexity independent of the pedagogy. Boghossian, therefore, maintained that some students might feel shame and confusion because of the Socratic method because the subject matter is difficult. However, he concluded that the *aporia* was a psychological consequence of the content matter rather than a pedagogical goal of Socratic practice, as people may feel joy and excitement about discovering their ignorance. However, he acknowledged that poor teachers may use questions to humiliate and that some students may feel humiliation and confusion in the learning process.

### ***Socrates and Socratic Education***

Socratic education is an active dialogue between Socrates and his conversation partners (Blosser, 2014). However, Socrates explicitly denied being a teacher (Mintz, 2014). Boghossian (2006) claimed that Socrates did not see himself as a teacher. Other authors argued that Socrates considered himself a teacher but of a different kind (Blosser, 2014; Mintz, 2014). Another author asserted that Socrates was, therefore, being ironic when he claimed not to be a teacher (Vlastos, 2007).

Blosser (2014) argued that Socrates in the *Meno* challenged the Sophists' assumption that knowledge can be sold to another person like a commodity. The character of Meno was a product of the traditional methods of education of the day. Thus, Meno believed that knowledge comes from an external source rather than from discovery through an individual's own efforts. Consequently, Meno expected a teacher would transmit information that could be integrated through memorization and rote practice. Meno, who studied under Sophists such as Gorgias, expected teachers to communicate a clear set of information they intended to teach. Socrates, however, claimed he was not a teacher like the Sophists. However, Blosser (2014) asserted that Socrates did not begin the dialogue in the *Meno* in a state of ignorance but, instead, had an end in mind. The central question in the *Meno* surrounds the question of virtue: what it is and how it could come to be learned (Blosser, 2014; Plato, 2004). Socrates claimed that Gorgias gave students the answers about virtue. Socrates, however, guided students into discovering the answers for themselves. Because Meno anticipated a Gorgian style of education, he quickly became frustrated with Socrates's unwillingness to give answers. Thus, Meno eventually admitted that his understanding of virtue was inadequate and that neither Socrates nor Meno understood what virtue was or the source of virtue.

Despite the dialogue being nominally about virtue, Blosser (2014) asserted that the *Meno* was fundamentally about the nature of education. Meno failed to understand the Socratic teaching model, and Socrates encouraged Meno to think differently about education. Socrates, argued Blosser, conducted his dialogue with the slave boy to allow Meno to watch the kind of questioning and teaching Socrates had in mind. Though Socrates ostensibly claimed that he knew nothing, Socrates guided the slave boy to answers through well-formed questions. Socrates also challenged Meno's notions through a discussion about the Sophists with Anytus. Though

Socrates failed to produce evidence of learning in *Meno*, Blosser suggested that Socrates had clear goals in mind in the *Meno*.

Blosser (2014) argued that the allegory of the cave in the *Republic* similarly illustrates the activity of Socrates. In the allegory, the teacher pulls people from the darkness, draws them above ground, and turns their eyes toward the light. Thus, the teacher had a goal in mind and attempted to direct the student toward the light. Blosser said that Socrates, therefore, was a teacher but one that encouraged active rather than passive learning and that his methods were not teaching in the sense that the techniques did not match the methodology of the age.

In contrast, Diener (2007) analyzed Socrates in the *Meno* by focusing on Socrates's relationship with the slave boy. Diener claimed that Socrates believed that teaching and learning were inexorably intertwined. Learning is recollection, argued Socrates, and when teaching occurs, learning (or recollection) occurs and vice versa. Thus, Diener asserted that Socrates's assertion that "if there are no teachers then there are no learners" (p. 142) was the logical equivalent to the statement "if there are learners then there are teachers" (p. 142). According to Diener, the logic follows: because Socrates directly linked teaching and learning and the slave boy learned, Socrates taught the slave boy. However, Diener argued that Socrates only appeared to challenge his own claims about education by asserting that he was not a teacher; instead, Socrates was challenging a narrow idea of teaching as imposing knowledge on a student. Vlastos (2007) argued that Socrates's denial of being a teacher was, indeed, deliberately ambiguous: Socrates was not a teacher in the sense of transferring information but was a teacher through questioning.

Diener (2007) derived five principles of Socratic teaching from the *Meno*. First, the teacher has some knowledge the students do not. Socrates claimed that the teacher must have

knowledge and appear to know where the argument with the slave boy was going. Second, the teacher should show students that they lack knowledge. Socrates did so by questioning the confident boy about geometry until the boy admitted he did not know what he thought he knew. Third, the teacher helps students discover knowledge through pointed questioning. Socrates asked the boy questions but did not give the answers; the questions did not always produce correct responses, but Socrates continued to question until the boy understood the significance of his thoughts. Fourth, the teacher defines success by whether students gain an opinion that can withstand additional questioning. Thus, Socrates ended his lesson when the boy assessed his own reasoning and concluded that the logic was not faulty. Finally, the teacher uses illustrations and examples to test the validity of students' conclusions; Socrates's questions related to the models that he created in the discussion. Thus, Diener claimed that Socrates was a teacher who had genuine goals and objectives and an educational relationship characterized by those five traits.

Boghossian (2006), however, agreed with the claim that Socrates truly did not see himself as a teacher; he cited Socrates in the *Gorgias* when Socrates claimed to be simply a fellow traveler in the hunt for truth. Consequently, Boghossian placed Socrates on the same level as the student. Socrates, then, knew that truth existed but did not know what the truth was and, consequently, pursued truth together with his interlocutors. Although Boghossian (2002) acknowledged a power differential between the teacher and student, he also argued that Socratic practices change the power dynamic because the teacher no longer claims to have all the answers. Consequently, participants in a Socratic conversation become, to a degree, co-equals in the conversation. Thus, Socrates said in the *Gorgias* that he enjoyed showing others that their claims were false and being shown that his claims were false. However, Socrates liked being proven wrong the best (Boghossian, 2003).

Fullam (2015), in response to Jacques Rancière's (1991) critique of Socratic education, framed Socratic education within the context of the *Republic*. Fullam (2015) argued that the *Republic* was an ideal piece to analyze Socratic practices for two reasons: first, Socrates used a variety of techniques, and second, the character of Glaucon allowed Socrates to follow his educational program to its end. Fullam presented Socrates as a complex character who used a variety of techniques to achieve his pedagogical ends. For example, asserted Fullam, Socrates found his perfect student in the character of Glaucon and allowed Plato to show the variety of techniques used in Socratic teaching. Socrates used "negative dialectical questioning" (p. 56) (used in many law schools) to challenge Thrasymachus's claims about justice, bringing Thrasymachus to a state of frustrated perplexity. Thus, Socrates used challenging questions and contradictions to bring Thrasymachus to a state of aporia. Mirroring Vlastos's (2007) and Thrasymachus's assertion that Socrates was perpetually ironic, Fullam (2015) declared that Socrates's claim about not being a teacher was an example of complex irony. That is, though Thrasymachus said that Socrates was simply deceiving people, Socrates was, in fact, a teacher in some respects but not others. Fullam (2015) suggested that Socrates "stealthily stultifies" (p. 64) his audience; Socrates produces aporia in other individuals because of his superior intellect and skill in using elenchus. However, the negative dialectical questioning is followed by a more positive process.

After the stultification achieved through Thrasymachus, Fullam (2015) made the case that Socrates sought "sublimation" (p. 65) of Glaucon's mind. Glaucon's mind was dangerous and passionate, according to Socrates, capable of much good and much evil. Accordingly, Socrates sought to encourage Glaucon to sublimate not only his emotions to reason but also his reason to Socrates's reason. Fullam did not claim the sublimation was intentional; instead, he argued that

Socrates's aloofness and irony had the side effect of producing intellectual sublimation. By using leading questions, argued Fullam, Socrates sought to make Glaucon like Socrates and encouraged intellectual dependence. The *Republic*, then, was the story of an older philosopher "liberating eros" (Fullam, 2015, p. 67) through elenchus and turning eros, or erotic passion, toward philosophy. Socratic education was deeply ironic in the process; Socrates claimed to know nothing but developed a rich, complicated philosophical system through a series of leading questions. In the *Republic*, elenchus both destroyed students and built them up; but, in both cases, the students were made dependent on Socrates.

Mintz (2014) framed the problem of Socrates as a teacher within the context of the *Apology*. Mintz argued that many scholars have attempted to resolve the conflict between Socrates's claim that he is not a teacher with an evident pedagogy by distinguishing between direct instruction and practicing philosophy. Socrates appeared to create a distinction in the *Apology* when he spoke of refusing money for his work and set himself directly against the Sophists. However, Mintz argued, Plato was a careful writer, too meticulous for Socrates to accidentally use the Greek words for "teach" or "instruct" to describe himself when he could have used words that suggested persuasion rather than instruction. Consequently, Mintz inferred that Plato did not wish to imply a clear distinction between philosopher and teacher. Mintz also pointed out that, though Socrates denied a formal Sophist-like relationship between himself and students, he undermined the point by asserting that he had followers he was holding back from exposing the ignorance of Athenian citizens. Therefore, Mintz concluded that although Socrates can be distinguished in many ways from the Sophists and other teachers, the distinction was not absolute.

Instead, Mintz (2014) claimed that the *Apology* was written not as an attempt to characterize Socrates as either a teacher or a philosopher but as a critique of both traditional and emerging Athenian educational models that included the Sophists. Plato presented Socrates as an individual whose instruction exposes the tension between Athenian educational ideals and reality. Traditional Athenian education was centered around the father, who held responsibility for controlling the education of his sons, including selecting good citizens who might provide for their son's education. However, like many cities in Greece, Athens valued like-mindedness and a unified population. Socrates's point, argued Mintz, was that though they accused him of being divisive and teaching strange things, the very model they used encouraged students to learn divisive ideas and contributed to fragmentation. Therefore, the charge of corruption against Socrates was ironic. For though Athens challenged Socrates as a corruptor of youth that produced division, the traditional model of non-common education was already inclined in that direction, even with the emergence of paid teachers like the Sophists. Thus, Mintz asserted that the focus of the *Apology* was the nature of education itself rather than the nature of Socrates as teacher or philosopher. Like many Socratic dialogues which ended in uncertainty, Mintz concluded that the *Apology* provided no answers as to whether Socrates corrupted the youth or whether and to what degree Socrates was a teacher. After all, Mintz asserted, neither question could be answered without understanding the nature and purpose of education.

### **Socratic Practice After Socrates**

After Socrates, Socratic practice often failed to be Socratic. The term "Socratic method" was often used as a tool to support pedagogical innovations that were only somewhat related to the method Socrates practiced. At times, Socrates's name was used to support religious or philosophical beliefs that were tangentially related to Socrates's or Plato's thinking. The

historical Socrates and his method were a valuable tool for asserting academic respectability but were often not Socratic in the Platonic sense. The following review of Socratic practice after Socrates examined the historical view of Socrates as an educator rather than Socrates's broader influence on later philosophers because of the study's concern for Socratic practices as a tool education.

### **In Rome**

According to Brennan (2006), Epictetus was a Stoic philosopher who taught roughly between 60 CE and 130 CE. He was born a slave but was freed in his late teens or early 20s and became a student of a Stoic philosopher. Like Socrates, he wrote nothing and was noted for talking with the people around him. Thus, knowledge of Epictetus is limited to the writings of others. Like Socrates, Epictetus was noted for his poverty, simplicity, interest in virtue, and willingness to speak with anyone. Indeed, Brennan noted, Epictetus referred to Socrates more than any other historical character and quoted Socrates regularly. Epictetus also modeled his life upon Socrates's life. Epictetus's student, Arrian, was a Roman noble who wrote dialogues that featured Epictetus, much like Plato wrote dialogues featuring Socrates. In these dialogues, Epictetus used a form of elenchus to teach others. However, the structure of elenchus changed in the dialogues of Arrian. As a Stoic, Epictetus did not believe in the forms like the Socrates of Plato but instead argued that all humans gain preconceptions about the world through their senses. Preconceptions were concepts about the natural world like "human being" or "water" or even virtue itself. Because the preconceptions are universal, Brennan asserted that Epictetus could use elenchus to help people apply the preconceptions consistently to their daily lives.

However, Brennan (2006) asserted that Epictetus's elenchus was never as well developed as Socrates's elenchus nor as complex. For example, the refutation failed to emerge at times, and

no character demanded it. Furthermore, dialogue partners agreed with Epictetus too quickly, and the arguments were underdeveloped. With Socrates, Brennan claimed that the people's preconceptions led to surprising conclusions through complex, carefully developed arguments and argumentative defeats were understood as an opportunity for further conversation. With Epictetus, however, Brennan pointed out that the counterexample that challenged the hypothesis did not explore contradictions in the interlocutor's definition; instead, Epictetus argued that the interlocutor had the preconception but failed to apply it properly to the circumstance. For example, Brennan maintained that in Plato, Socrates and Laches disagreed on a definition of courage because Laches claimed courage was holding your position in battle, and Socrates countered that it, at times, took courage to retreat. The disagreement allowed Socrates to encourage more conversation about the nature of courage. However, wrote Brennan, disagreement was assumed by Epictetus to be a simple misapplication of knowledge.

### **In Arabia**

In Arabia, thinkers generally viewed Socrates as a moral teacher rather than a philosopher, argued Alon (2006); based on Arabic translations of Plato, Xenophon, and others, Arabic authors interpreted and applied Socrates to their cultural context. Stock wisdom sayings were attributed to Socrates, added Alon, though the same sayings were sometimes attributed to other famous figures. Therefore, historical Socrates was not as important as the usefulness of Socrates in advancing Arabic causes. Socrates combined philosophy and ethics, like Muhammed, and was, therefore, an attractive figure in the Islamic community. However, because of the interplay between Christianity and Islam and Christian leaders' tendency to use foreign wise men to promote their causes, Alon suggested that Muslim leaders may have adopted the same technique. Thus, Socrates served a religious role within Islamic literature and was used to

support Islamic thought, though some considered him to be a dangerous atheist. Islamic thinkers argued that Socrates believed in the value of education and that Socrates asserted spending time in the presence of knowledgeable people would permit people to learn virtue. Thus, wrote Alon, the Islamic Socrates was said to believe that education was “like agriculture, where the teacher is the farmer, the student is the field, and study is water” (p. 326).

### **In Europe**

Schneider (2013) suggested scholarship fell into decay in the West after the Roman Empire fell in that medieval thought focused on religious studies rather than philosophy. However, Schneider maintained that Greek studies continued in the Arabic world and, eventually, were passed back to Europe. Thus, wrote Schneider, though the historical Socrates was lost, Socrates was not wholly forgotten in the West. According to Hankins (2005), Socrates’s thinking was known by Christian writers, including Augustine and Jerome, and non-Christian writers like Cicero and Seneca. Socrates would have also been read in medieval schools. In addition, Socrates was viewed as the model of pagan virtue in the 11th and 12th centuries, and some of Plato’s works were available to Latin thinkers in the 12th century. However, asserted Hankins, the major works about Socrates, including the most of Plato’s dialogues and the works of Xenophon, Aristophanes, Lucian, and Diogenes Laertius, were not explored in Europe until the Hellenistic revival in Italy in the 15th century.

Hankins (2005) added that the rise of humanism led to a revival of interest in classical literature as a means of gaining the moral character of early, great thinkers. The new humanists argued that reading such thinkers would not undermine the Christian faith since if the pagan authors were morally better, they should induce shame in Christians who had been given the power of salvation. Consequently, asserted Hankins, Socrates became yet another tool for

teaching virtue, and scholars attempted to salvage Socrates and fit him within their religious tradition; Socrates was translated and changed into a moral teacher who supported good Christian values.

For example, Hankins (2005) claimed that Marsilio Ficino was the greatest Platonic scholar of the Renaissance and that Ficino viewed Socrates as a moral teacher. Indeed, asserted Hankins, Ficino may have thought of himself as a modern Socrates who also sought to make people pious and good. Skeptics came to Ficino for dialogue, spiritual counseling, and to learn that the secularization of universities was inferior to the church fathers' Platonism. According to Hankins, Ficino used a form of Socratic method to make people good citizens; thus, he avoided lectures and offered few formal classes. Instead, Ficino tried to engage in dialogue and threw banquets like that of Plato's *Symposium*. Consequently, like Socrates before him, Ficino's teaching did not take place in the classroom but in houses and churches or outside the city. Therefore, argued Hankins, Ficino believed that education should be informal, occur between co-equals, and that the teacher did not have an elevated place in instruction.

According to Schneider (2013), many scholars in the 16th century studied Socratic dialogues, including Socratic techniques. However, noted Schneider, the first mentions of Socratic teaching only appeared in the 1700s and were only casually related to the actual texts of Plato. Indeed, the statements about Socratic teaching rarely referenced each other. Generally, suggested Schneider, 18th century Europe viewed Socrates positively. However, a term for a Socratic method or Socratic teaching strategy (described in the present with the word "elenchus") did not appear until the mid-1800 (Vlastos, 1994). The strategy was contrasted with memorization and lecture and presented as means of developing moral and ethical consciousness (Schneider, 2013).

## **In America**

Schneider (2013) maintained that American educators admired Socrates before the 19th century but, as in Europe, did not subscribe to any one definition of the Socratic method. According to Schneider, education was decentralized early in American history, Early American educators encouraged traditional pedagogical methods like memorization and lecture rather than top-down innovations. As the educational system grew, American educators became interested in European instructional innovations, including Socratic practices. By the 1830s, as cities allowed students to join their charity schools and centralization of education increased, systemization, standardization, and professionalism were implemented to manage the scope of the educational system's transformation and overcome the poor reputation of many common schoolteachers. Thus, argued Schneider, the emphasis on professionalism encouraged the adaptation of professional, standardized techniques. The Socratic method had the advantage of being a purportedly historical practice that traced back to the Greeks and could be part of shared teaching techniques. Thus, teachers adopted an instructional strategy called the Socratic method. However, the definition was vague, based on the needs of the times, and standardized in name though not practice. Classroom rules for implementing the Socratic method, said Schneider, were vague and unclear. Thus, Schneider argued that educators were not overly interested in studying the ancient texts; instead, they were interested in appropriating the historical character to provide the basis for their pedagogy.

Schneider (2013) added that the K-12 educational system became formalized through standardized pedagogy and required licenses by the late 1800. Thus, teaching became a profession. However, the Socratic method continued to be defined vaguely and disconnected from Socrates's actual techniques, though the Socratic method was more frequently taught to

teachers and more commonly included in the literature. For example, argued Schneider, many licensing tests had questions about the Socratic method, and the Socratic method was regularly listed as a technique that educators might use in the classroom. However, the definition of the Socratic method was still vague, often broadly defined as asking questions or a method of engaging students in classroom discussion.

By the early 20th century, contended Schneider (2013), interest in the Socratic method had waned. A universal definition had emerged for the Socratic method: teaching through asking questions. However, educators no longer thought the Socratic method was relevant to the needs of the modern age. Whereas the claimed historical lineage of the Socratic method encouraged adaptation in previous centuries, asserted Schneider, the heritage now discouraged adaptation due to the assertion that a change in teaching conditions and the needs of students meant that old techniques were no longer effective. Thus, the assumption was made that the Socratic method was part of an unbroken history tracing back to the Greeks rather than a creation of modern pedagogy. By the mid-20th century, Schneider wrote, the term Socratic method was widely known among teachers in K-12 education.

### **Modern Approaches to Socratic Practice in Law Schools**

A parallel form of Socratic practice emerged at the collegiate level. The Harvard Law approach to Socratic practice makes use of “negative dialectical questioning” (Fullam, 2015, p. 57) and is, in this respect, relatively faithful to Socrates’s elenchus. Although less common in the research literature than other Socratic practices, the Harvard Law approach is used at a graduate level to train law students to prepare them for litigation (Fullam, 2015). In this instance, the Socratic method refers to calling on students in class and asking them to give reasons for their positions and arguments to support those positions. However, instructors using the Harvard Law

approach generally do not ask students to volunteer responses, nor do they answer questions that students ask. Instead, the instructor calls on as many students as possible during a class session to encourage whole-class engagement (Gersen, 2017). However, some authors argued that this approach abuses Socratic tradition and is a cruel practice (Gersen, 2017; Rud, 1997).

Schneider (2013) asserted that prior to Christopher Langdell, the Harvard professor who created the approach, Harvard Law School's foremost pedagogical approach was the lecture. Teachers would read aloud from textbooks or summarize legal rules (Fessenden, 1920). However, law schools at the time were concerned with how to distinguish themselves as a legitimate, superior, and formal mode of education. They sought to justify their superiority to a law book and an internship (Schneider, 2013). When Langdell joined the Harvard faculty in 1870, he proposed that students be assigned original cases to read, began to publish casebooks himself, and engaged students by asking them to analyze casebooks, despite resistance from other faculty (Kimball, 2009). Gersen (2017), a professor at Harvard Law, described the goal of the approach to look for "conflicts and justifications" (p. 2343) in students' arguments. Gersen argued that the Harvard Law approach to Socratic practice was relevant in the 21st century for two reasons: teaching through questions guides students into independence, and verbal practice teaches students how law is practiced.

### **Modern Approaches to Socratic Practice in Education**

Three primary approaches to Socratic practice are found in education today. The first form, the Harvard Law approach, was discussed earlier and is primarily used in law schools (Fullam, 2015; Mintz, 2006). Fullam (2015) claimed that a second major form is used mainly in K-12 schools. Fullam and Mintz (2006) broadly referred to this methodology as "Socratic teaching." Socratic teaching, Fullam (2015) asserted, is the most prominent form of Socratic

education in the scholarly literature. The primary advocates of Socratic teaching have been Matthew Lipman and Mortimer Adler, argued Fullam. Socratic teaching deemphasizes the teacher-directed classroom in favor of Socratic seminars, or discussions, in which students ask and answer their own questions about a text. Unlike the historical Socrates's approach, this form of Socratic practice deemphasizes leading questions and eschews claims of correct answers to the questions being discussed (Fullam, 2015). In contrast, a third form of Socratic practice called Socratic questioning follows the historical practice of associating the Socratic method with asking questions (Paul & Elder, 2008; Schneider, 2013).

### **Socratic Seminars**

According to Fullam (2015), Mortimer Adler popularized the Socratic seminar in *The Paideia Proposal*, as did Matthew Lipman in *Philosophy for Children*. Schneider (2013) claimed that the Socratic seminar's historical lineage traces back to John Erskine of Columbia University and Alexander Meiklejohn, president of Amherst College and, later, founder of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Experimental College. At the beginning of the 20th century, educators were concerned with a rising anti-intellectualism and an educational system that turned toward vocational training rather than learning for the sake of learning. Schneider observed that the Socratic seminar was understood to be a means to encourage liberal arts studies through the reading and open-ended discussion of great books.

John Erskine, an English professor at Columbia College, has often been credited with being at the root of the Socratic seminar tree, wrote Schneider (2013). Erskine thought that Socrates was a powerful symbol of intellectual life. In 1917, Erskine proposed a radical 2-year program involving reading and discussing important historical texts. Although Erskine's proposal was interrupted by World War I, wrote Schneider, his student Mortimer Adler carried on

Erskine's legacy. Adler loved Socrates's dialectic and was invited to join the faculty of the University of Chicago in 1930 by its president, Robert Hutchins. Hutchins was committed to building a liberal arts education and was concerned that vocational training, which was the trend at the time, did not encourage students to learn for learning's sake. Thus, contended Schneider, both Adler and Hutchins embraced the ideal of a liberal arts education to shape students while acknowledging that historical liberal arts educators did not use their methods. For Hutchins and Adler, Socrates was a discussion leader who promoted free conversation of ideas surrounding books. At around the same time, wrote Nelson (2001), Alexander Meiklejohn founded the Experimental College at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In the Experimental College, students were led by "educators who subtly concealed their own prior role as philosopher-kings in order to cultivate a sense of freedom" (p. xii). Thus, teachers in Meiklejohn's school hid their wisdom. Rather than telling students what to think, the teachers turned students toward knowledge through questions and conversation (Nelson, 2001).

According to Schneider (2013), when Hutchins proposed a Committee on Liberal Arts in 1936 and invited Scott Buchanan (a follower of Alexander Meiklejohn) to join Adler on the committee, the move was resisted by faculty. The symbol of Socrates, wrote Schneider, was insufficient to overcome resistance from the faculty of the University of Chicago about the idea of undergraduates participating in free-ranging great books seminars. Scott Buchanan, as a result, went with Stringfellow Barr to St. John's College, where they founded the New Program, a program around Socratic discussion of important books. In the New Program, Barr (1968) described the discussion as non-antagonistic and designed to understand the nature of things rather than an attempt to win an argument. Indeed, Barr (1968) asserted that dialogue of this sort was a basic human need and a necessary condition for "wholly human lives" (p. 1). St. John's

College's New Program was entirely seminar-based, observed Schneider (2013), and other colleges followed suit (with limited success) or implemented Socratic seminar courses within their traditional or honors colleges. In such programs, the term Socratic seminar took on a life of its own as a description of a program centered around the reading and discussion of a core set of books (Schneider, 2013). According to Strong (1996), the term Socratic seminar was possibly first used by Scott Buchanan to describe the mode of discussion at St. John's College, in which professors are known as tutors because they guided the corporate dialogue rather than "professed" (p. 7).

Unlike the approach modeled by Socrates, Socratic seminars focus on students asking and then answering questions. Socratic seminars are the most popular approach in K-12 education (Schneider, 2013). In Plato, Socrates asks the questions that are responded to by his interlocutors but then challenged by Socrates. Thus, in Plato, Socrates is at the center of the conversation. However, in Socratic seminars, the teacher is a guide, and the students are their own interlocutors (Fullam, 2015; Rud, 1997). Consequently, Adler (1984) described Socratic seminars as a "conversation" (p. 17) and said that the seminar teacher should guide the conversation as a moderator who keeps the discussion focused. Furthermore, Adler argued that the Socratic seminar should be grounded in a work of writing or art. He added that the seminar teacher's task is threefold: to ask questions to shape the conversation, to challenge questions by seeking students' reasons for their beliefs, and to encourage dialogue rather than debate when conflicts arise.

Adler developed a new educational model called the Paideia Program for K-12 education at the same time that Barr and Meiklejohn restructured higher education (Jurić, 2013). *Paideia*, in the ancient Greek world, was the word for an education that encompassed "the totality of the

cultural and ethical experience” (Jurić, 2013, p. 7). Similarly, Adler (1984) described paideia as “a general learning that should be in the possession of every human being” (p. 6). Adler acknowledged the need for direct instruction, especially in elementary school. However, he defined three modes of teaching: lecture, coaching, and Socratic questioning. Adler (1998) added that, in Socratic questioning, “the student bring[s] ideas to birth” (p. 29) through a process that was “virtually all innovative” (p. 28). Socrates did not lead seminars, Adler acknowledged. However, Alder said that the Socratic seminars “help[ed] [students] improve their understanding of basic ideas and values” (Adler, 1984, p. 15). Like Socrates in Athens, Adler asserted that Socratic seminars helped students pursue truth and virtue.

Delić and Bećirović (2016) suggested that Socratic seminars should not be debates but, instead, a collaborative process through which students make discoveries together. They advocated a physical design to Socratic seminars in which larger classrooms are divided into an inner circle of students who discuss the text and an outer circle of students who watch and listen to the conversation. When the students in the inner circle cease asking and answering questions, Delić and Bećirović recommended that the inner circle students and outer circles students swap places. Delić and Bećirović also noted that the length of the conversation may vary and that their approach balances two purposes of education—the building of shared values and free inquiry—with the end goal of encouraging lifelong learning. Finally, Delić and Bećirović suggested that the term Socratic seminar was the equivalent to the term Socratic circle.

However, Rud (1997) argued that Socrates rarely, if ever, encouraged debate between students. He also contended that few seminars rarely succeed in encouraging conversation between students and, although Socratic seminars feature a central text, Socrates’s discussions never centered on a text. Thus, Rud pointed out that Socratic seminars may be Socratic in spirit

but are not Socratic in practice. He also argued that true Socratic teaching should encourage self-knowledge, that such a goal is challenging to attain, and that the modern Socratic method does not guarantee self-knowledge. Many teachers believe, according to Rud, that Socrates was a simple teacher rather than a thinker who made use of various tools including irony. In contrast, Rud pointed out that Socrates was often ironic, challenging, and demanding. He suggested that truly Socratic teaching, thus, is at odds with modern education trends that emphasize the nurturing, supportive teacher.

### **Socratic Questioning**

Paul et al. (1997) suggested a broader application of Socratic practice called Socratic questioning. In a study of California's teacher education programs, the researchers identified Socratic questioning as a popular method of teaching critical thinking and suggested that Socrates used his mode of questioning to demand critical thinking and logical consistency. In interviews with teacher education faculty, Paul et al. showed that faculty members identified Socratic practice as a means of teaching critical thinking. However, they also noted that few teachers had a clear definition of critical thinking or an idea of how to teach it.

Paul and Elder's (2008) conception of Socratic questioning differed in kind from Socratic seminars. They defined Socratic questioning as "[a] mode of questioning that deeply probes the meaning, justification, or logical strength of a claim, position, or line of reasoning" (Paul & Elder, 2008, p. 177) that did not require a specific book or work of art as a focal point. Earlier, Paul and Elder (2007) characterized Socrates as a humble, autonomous, ironic teacher who sought to teach others to think critically, explore new ideas, and uncover their inconsistencies. They also argued that Socrates's method of asking questions was a teaching method called dialectic. Paul and Elder (2007) argued that Socrates's technique challenged poor reasoning,

helped students build stronger arguments, and facilitated students discovering reasoning errors. They also suggested that a primary goal of teachers was to help students develop principles for living life.

In contrast to Adler's Socratic seminars, which are student-centric and dialogue-driven though moderated by the teacher, Socratic questions are teacher-centric in that the teacher asks and controls the questioning (Golding, 2011). Thus, Socratic questioning is Socratic in that it involves asking questions and follows the historical practice of associating the Socratic method with questioning (Schneider, 2013). Paul and Elder (2007) characterized Socratic questioning as "systematic, disciplined, and deep" (p. 2) and focused on foundational matters. Consequently, they described Socratic questioning as not simply asking questions but asking questions that engage students in the higher levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Thus, Paul and Elder argued that Socratic questioning teaches students the art of asking questions. They also suggested that Socratic's dialectical methods may have been intuitive rather than consciously understood. Paul and Elder claimed that the conscious rules for reasoning are the basis for critical thinking and can be taught. Thus, Paul and Elder asserted that the Socratic questioning techniques they described provide teachers with an explicit methodology for conducting Socratic questioning.

Paul and Elder (2008) wrote about three kinds of Socratic questioning: spontaneous or unplanned, exploratory, or focused. Spontaneous or unplanned questioning occurs when a teacher genuinely is interested in what students are thinking (or not thinking) about a given topic and arises spontaneously during a class session. Exploratory questions involve teachers seeking to understand the context and content of students' understanding and are often used to introduce or review a topic after it has been taught. Focused questions are used to explore a specific topic in-depth, in a comprehensive, rigorous manner. Paul and Elder (2007) also suggested that the

teacher model questioning strategies to teach students to ask intellectually productive questions and also use those questions to help students distinguish between knowledge and ignorance. Critical thinking strategies are applied to questions asked of students to elicit responses that provide students clarity between truth and falsehood. Thus, critical thinking strategies provide the foundation for the Socratic questioning practiced by the teacher.

Adler (1984) claimed that the goal of Socratic seminars was to clarify ideas and common experiences and clarify students' understanding of the book or work of art being studied. He also asserted that the discussion should be student-led and teacher-guided. The distinctions are twofold: Whereas Socratic seminars are student-led but teacher-guided, Socratic questioning is teacher-led; and, while Socratic seminars are centered around a human artifact, Socratic questioning is intended to be more broadly applied to the general classroom (Paul & Elder, 2007). Nevertheless, both Socratic seminars and Socratic questioning are concerned with the difference between truth and falsity and the encouragement of clarity of thought (Adler, 1984; Paul & Elder, 2007).

### **Research on Socratic Practice**

The point of a phenomenological study is not to explore or explain a theory but to examine experiences (van Manen, 2016). Consequently, the research into the effectiveness of Socratic practice is not directly significant to phenomenology. However, as a research method, a researcher using hermeneutic phenomenology seeks the fusion of horizons as fore-conceptions merge with the subjects' understanding of the phenomenon (Suddick et al., 2020). The following literature review forms part of the researcher's foreknowledge and suggests the need in the literature regarding phenomenological research into Socratic practice. Thus, this section provides a broad overview of research into Socratic practices.

## **Socratic Practice and Critical Thinking**

Burns et al. (2016) conducted a study of psychology students taking capstone courses at a major midwestern university. One-hundred sixteen participants were divided into a lecture-only comparison group and a Socratic method group. The Socratic method group used weekly readings to discuss student-submitted questions, which were discussed openly in class. Using the Learning Environment Preference (LEP) survey, which measured intellectual development over time, Burns et al. assessed the epistemological changes over the length of the courses being measured. A 2 x 2 mixed-design analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to analyze whether there were differences in the cognitive complexity index (CCI). The difference in mean CCI score with the lecture-only group was not significant,  $F(1.247) = 1.72$ ,  $p = 0.19$ . However, the mean CCI score for the Socratic method group was significant,  $F(1.249) = 30.26$ ,  $p = <0.0001$ . Thus, Burns concluded that the Socratic method group demonstrated an increased capacity to tolerate ambiguity in a 15-week Socratic seminar.

Sahamid (2016) conducted an action-research study of 24 Form Four level, 16-year-old Malaysian students participating in 16 one-hour literature lessons by applying Socratic questioning techniques in English literature classes. Initially, the students' English language skills were mixed: 25% were high proficiency, 54% were middle proficiency, and 21% were low proficiency. During three research cycles, Sahamid collected artifacts such as writing tasks, interviews, journals, and fieldnotes. An analysis of writing was evaluated through Paul's rubric assessment, using Paul's model of Socratic questioning, and interviews were analyzed and coded using a spiraling technique to obtain themes. As a result of the analysis, Sahamid concluded that all groups, over the three educational cycles, demonstrated varying degrees of growth in critical thinking.

## **Socratic Practice and Critical Awareness**

Balbay (2019) used a qualitative study to explore the effect of Socratic seminars using Socratic questioning strategies in increasing critical awareness in teacher education in a spoken English course. Balbay characterized critical awareness as a critical thinking skill that involves the ability to refrain from narrow, subjective opinions when considering phenomena. The Socratic method was the primary mode of delivery in the classroom, and students ( $N = 22$ ) participated in conversations about controversial issues pertaining to teacher education. Using critical research methods, Balbay interviewed the students twice: once at the beginning of the semester and once at the end of the semester. Three themes emerged: education and politics, education and economics, and education and cultural diversity. The students, suggested Balbay, did not recognize the relationship between education and politics prior to starting the course. The students also developed an understanding of how economics or family finances could negatively or positively impact access and learning in English language education courses. Finally, though the students initially were sensitive to cultural diversity, their last interviews pointed toward more specific areas of concern in the classroom. Consequently, Balbay concluded that the Socratic method was an effective means of building critical awareness.

In a quasi-experimental study, Davis and Sinclair (2014) examined the impact of Socratic questioning based on the paideia method on the complexity and nature of interactions in middle school students' conversations with another. Davies and Sinclair selected six schools in New Zealand for the study. The researchers divided middle student participants ( $N = 720$ ) into an experimental group ( $n = 12$  classrooms) and a control group ( $n = 12$  classrooms). Teachers in the experimental classrooms were trained in the Paideia seminar and other stages in the paideia method (the Didactic stage of teaching and the coached project stage). Data were collected three

times during the study. Initially, researchers filmed both the experimental classrooms and control classrooms and coded for the kinds of interactions students had with teachers and other students. Around the midpoint of the semester, researchers analyzed transcripts from Moodle discussions for the experimental group classrooms and filmed the classrooms for the control groups. Finally, researchers filmed both the control and experimental groups engaging in a Paideia seminar at the end of the semester. ANOVAs and *t*-tests were conducted to analyze the data (Davies & Sinclair, 2014).

Davies and Sinclair (2014) analyzed two main categories: the complexity of conversation (i.e., surface or deep) and the nature of the interaction (i.e., student-to-student, student-to-teacher, or teacher-to-student). In the final seminars, 17.4% of the experimental group's responses were coded as deep versus 7.5% of the control group's responses. The difference was statistically significant,  $\chi^2(1) = 39, p < 0.0$ . The increase in deep questions among the experimental group from 7.5% to 17.4% was also statistically significant (Fisher exact test,  $p < 0.001$ ), but the increase among the control group from 5.5% to 7.5% was not statistically significant (Fisher exact test,  $p = 0.07$ ). In addition, deep student-to-student interactions in the experimental group were significantly higher than the interactions in the control group,  $\chi^2(1) = 10.9, p < 0.01$ . Deep student-to-teacher interactions were also significantly greater in the control group compared to the student-to-teacher interactions in the experimental group,  $\chi^2(1) = 6.6, p < 0.01$ . However, deep teacher-to-student interactions were not significantly different between the experimental group and the control group ( $p = 0.18$ ). A  $2 \times 3$  chi-square test found a significant difference between the kinds of interactions in the control group versus the experimental group,  $\chi^2(2) = 58, p < 0.01$ , suggesting that the experimental group differed in the kinds of interactions. Finally, the study suggested no significant difference between the control group and experimental group in

the depth of responses for students of low socioeconomic status,  $\chi^2(1) = 1.6, p = 0.2$ . However, low socioeconomic status students increased their percentage of deep responses in the final seminar compared to the initial seminar,  $\chi^2(1) = 3.7, p < 0.5$ . Students of high socioeconomic status,  $\chi^2(1) = 40, p = 0.01$ , and middle socioeconomic status,  $\chi^2(1) = 8.3, p = 0.01$ , in the control group gave significantly more deep responses (Davies & Sinclair, 2014).

### **Perceptions of the Socratic Practices**

Blake (2018), as reported in her dissertation, examined teachers' perceptions of the Socratic method in online higher education classrooms. The purpose of Blake's study was to explain the instructors' perceptions of how the Socratic method can be used effectively in the online environment to promote critical thinking. The exploratory case allowed the researcher flexibility to explore a poorly understood topic. Blake characterized the Socratic method as a process of questioning assumptions in conjunction with active listening and reflection to discover underlying assumptions and strengthen critical thinking skills. To implement the Socratic method in the classroom, instructors suggested the following strategies: increasing collaboration between teachers and students and students and other students, giving more feedback that directly referenced the Socratic method, and explicitly incorporating the Socratic method into course design. Instructors suggested, too, that the Socratic method was an excellent tool for interventions through discussion boards. Instructors argued that the Socratic method, delivered asynchronously, generally supported high-level critical thinking skills, though some teachers were interested in other synchronous approaches. Finally, Blake's discussion suggested that instructors viewed the Socratic method as a valuable tool in developing problem-solving over time and shaping critical thinking skills that extend beyond academia. Thus, teachers in online

courses viewed Socratic practices as beneficial for developing students' critical and independent thinking skills.

Edwards's (2019) doctoral study also explored teachers' perceptions of the Socratic method in developing critical thinking. In the descriptive qualitative case study, Edwards (2019) defined the Socratic method as "an educational method used to enhance classroom conversations. [It] places great emphasis on reading, listening, talking, and thinking" (p. 6). Edwards interviewed high school teachers and conducted observations of their classrooms. All interviewees asserted that the Socratic method increases critical thinking skills. In addition, three themes emerged during the analysis. First, teachers expressed a desire for more training in the Socratic method. Second, the teachers' comfort level with the method was dependent on their students' grade level, with teachers of 11th- and 12th-grade students expressing more comfort with the Socratic method than teachers of 9th- and 10th-grade students. Third, teachers believed that the Socratic method's usefulness in developing critical thinking skills depended on students' active involvement. Edwards suggested that his study pointed toward the importance of training students in the Socratic method.

### **Case Studies of Socratic Practice**

Using a case study design, Griswold et al. (2017) examined the usage of Socratic seminars in a high school diabetes curriculum used in an 8th-grade class. Griswold et al. described the characteristics of how one teacher used a Socratic seminar in a discussion about data. The teacher showed students two complex charts. One chart compared the effects of a placebo, Metformin (a diabetes medication), and lifestyle changes on overweight pre-diabetics. The other chart compared the effects of a placebo, Metformin, and lifestyle changes on people of various degrees of genetic risk for diabetes. The teacher first asked the students to interpret the

charts by leading with a question about what the data literally communicated. The question led to a conversation about how to interpret the data, which caused a student to observe that some confusion resulted from misinterpreting the results. After the students understood what the graph literally communicated, the teacher asked the students to interpret the data. Students discussed the study's practical implications, how the study was designed, and other deeper questions. Finally, the teacher asked students to evaluate the charts for personal implications and make personal connections to the diabetes study. Many students, during this phase, suggested that they needed to exercise more. Although students gave the seminar high ratings, the researchers observed one major challenge: a few students dominated the conversation. In later seminars, the teacher trained students on the norms for conversation, how to disagree respectfully, and how to read other students' body language. In addition, the teacher used charts to track student engagement and asked students to note one thing they learned during the seminar. The case study concluded that three kinds of questions, in order, should be asked: literal questions about what data shows, interpretative questions about what the data means, and evaluative questions about how the data might apply to each student on a personal level. Finally, the researchers suggested asking students to reflect on and share their experiences in the seminar.

Haroutunian-Gordon (2009) conducted a case study using a grounded theory of two teacher candidates engaging in "interpretative discussion" (p. xi) of texts in fourth-grade classrooms. One teacher taught in an urban setting, and the other teacher taught in a suburban setting. Haroutunian-Gordon described interpretative discussion as an attempt to understand the meaning of text through the form of the text; that is, approaching a text with open-mindedness and seeking to explain the text in their own words. Although Haroutunian-Gordon did not explicitly call interpretative discussion the Socratic method, she framed interpretive discussion in

the context of principles derived from Mortimer Adler's and the Great Books Foundation's concept of shared inquiry. Through rich description, Haroutunian-Gordon examined the experiences of the two teacher candidates as they engaged their classes in conversation. As she explored and described the teachers' experiences in the classroom, she drew four conclusions about teacher preparation programs that teach interpretative discussion. She argued that, first, teachers needed to practice leading discussions. Second, teachers needed to be trained in developing discussion questions. Third, teachers required time to reflect on the discussions they led. Finally, Haroutunian-Gordon concluded that teachers should themselves participate in interpretive discussions.

### **Experiences of Socratic Practice**

Altorf (2019) reflected on her experience as a facilitator but within the framework of using Socratic practice within the Nelson-Heckman tradition to build community. Although Altorf framed the Socratic method within the context of phenomenology, she did so as a means of suggesting that Socratic practice involves interpreting phenomena and understanding others' lived experiences; the reflection itself was not a phenomenological study. Altorf's focus was primarily on theory and how theory should inform practice, as understood by her own experience of Socratic practice. Thus, Altorf's work described Socratic practice within the Nelson-Heckman tradition and explained how a community could come together to investigate the essence of a phenomenon.

Gersen (2017) described her own experience as a student in Harvard Law School in the context of a document that described the Socratic method and the Harvard Law approach. Although the work was not explicitly phenomenological, it was deeply personal, and Gersen described herself as a shy Korean immigrant whose family rewarded reading and the arts but not

confident verbal communication. Thus, in her family, Gersen tended to be punished for asserting herself, asking questions, and speaking up. Consequently, she learned to be quiet and passive. When Gersen (2017) went to Harvard Law School, however, and encountered the Harvard Law School approach to the Socratic method, she “heard her voice” (p. 2320) and “got through with [her] stumbles” (p. 2320). The encounter changed her. She soon actively engaged in the conversation and grew in confidence, independence, and critical thinking skills. Thus, portions of Gersen’s work examined the phenomenon through her lived experiences.

### **Summary**

Socrates died as he lived. He philosophized cheerfully, scolded his friends for their tears, and, after drinking the hemlock, his body grew numb from the feet up (Plato, 1998). Socrates’s method can be traced back to ancient Greece. However, modern incarnations of Socratic practice owe as much to Socrates being an authority figure that vindicates modern practices as they do to Socrates himself. Current research into Socratic practice varies in its rigor and focus but generally shows that Socratic practices improve critical thinking and critical awareness. Teachers and students typically have a favorable view of Socratic practices. Some researchers have described their experiences with Socratic practices. However, definitions of Socratic practice vary throughout the literature and in classroom practices. As Schneider (2013) noted, modern approaches to Socratic practice have become untethered from their textual roots and traditions. This study contributes to the literature by describing the inward experience of teachers as they participate in Socratic practices.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to explore the meaning of teachers' lived experiences with Socratic practices. Hermeneutic phenomenology describes the lived experience of an individual or the essence of an individual's shared understanding of an experience or concept (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). That is, phenomenology examines the essential meaning of the world as the meaning reveals itself to the human consciousness (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Data for the study were collected through interviews with four high school teachers. Following a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, the researcher did not bracket himself and approached the interviews with a consciousness of his fore-conceptions. Through a spiraling process of revisiting and revising his assumptions, the researcher analyzed the data to uncover the wholeness of the subjects' lived experiences as themes emerged (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Huttunen & Kakkori, 2020; Peoples, 2020).

#### **Description of Research Design**

##### **Participants**

Participants in this study were high school teachers with experience using Socratic practice. Participants were chosen based on a criterion sampling strategy: high school teachers who self-identified as experienced with Socratic practice, as the essential criteria for participation in phenomenological research includes experience with the phenomena, an interest in understanding the phenomena, and a willingness to participate in a recorded interview that

produced a published report (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher identified two teachers as experienced in Socratic practice through his relationship with the two teachers. Thus, a convenience sampling technique was applied for the selection of those two teachers. Two participants self-identified as teachers experienced in Socratic practice. Two additional teachers self-reported themselves as having expertise because of their experience leading seminars in classically oriented schools that emphasize Socratic discussion as part of the curriculum. In the end, four teachers were chosen to participate in this study, fulfilling the requirements for phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018; van Manen, 2016). The participants included a high school English teacher from a private high school; a high school social studies teacher from the same private high school as English teacher; a middle and high school teacher associated with a classical education group; and a middle, high school, and college instructor with experience guiding Socratic discussions in different classical association, colleges, and non-profit organizations.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Hermeneutic phenomenology assumes that a “reader” of the world cannot fully separate himself or herself from the world of his or her own experience and pre-knowledge. The researcher must examine the phenomenon’s essence through a spiraling process of revision and reflection. As a result, the researcher’s foreknowing becomes significant in the research processes, as what is foreknown must intersect what becomes known. That is, the researcher must “acknowledge [his or her] implicit assumptions and attempt to make them explicit” (Kafle, 2011, p. 190). Van Manen (2016) argued that personal experience is an excellent starting point of inquiry. He wrote that phenomenologists, furthermore, should attempt to describe their lived relationship with the phenomenon in question insofar as possible.

Thus, the following describes the researcher's experience with Socratic practices. The discussion explicates a specific example of the researcher's lived involvement with the phenomenon and conveys his fore-conceptions. In 2020, the researcher taught a high school critical thinking and writing class using Socratic practice. He asked his class to define the idea of "chair" according to genus and specific difference. However, the students drove the need to define chair as part of a broader conversation about syllogistic form. The class's attempt to develop a syllogistic argument using the word chair led students to define the term before developing the argument. The researcher did not know how to define chair at that moment but felt that "wherever the argument, like the wind, tends, thither must we go" (Plato, 1991, p. 73). He felt pleasure at this process as he interpreted the students' attempts to define chair as the students applying previous lessons on creating definitions.

A few students made preliminary attempts to define chair. However, other students challenged those attempts on the grounds of being either overly specific or overly general. The researcher wanted to contribute but found himself in a state of perplexity. Regarding chairs, he saw no apparent connection between thing, idea, and word. Indeed, he felt—as he often did—a pang of anxiety even though he recalled Socrates's assertion that those experiencing aporia should be glad, for people who experience aporia know that they do not know and can proceed on to true knowing (Plato, 2004). Nevertheless, the researcher experienced a moment of intellectual dizziness and fear. Indeed, in front of his class, he regularly finds himself slack-jawed and confused after discovering that he is ignorant about what is true.

As the researcher—and the class generally—asked questions and engaged in conversation, the discussion led to absurdities, laughter, and expressed frustration as definitions of chair were proposed and rejected for various reasons, including logical inconsistencies. One

student asked if she could use the restroom; half-joking, the student said she needed to leave the room because she could no longer tolerate her ignorance of a chair's true nature. At one point, the researcher and students expressed their doubt about what they should sit on and speculated as to whether tables were, in fact, chairs. The class continued their discussion, stated opinions, and asked questions as the researcher used a form of *elenchus* to explore contradictions in the premises. At times, the researcher felt doubt in his chest about specific assertions and would challenge those claims. Socrates might describe this experience as his *daimon*, a warning against a particular thought or action (Plato, 2002). Like Socrates, the researcher did not experience any positivity from his *daimon*. His heart warned him of a questionable conclusion but did not suggest new alternatives. The researcher expressed his concerns, asked questions, and redirected the conversation when he doubted the conclusion.

After about 15 minutes of discussion, a student suggested breaking down the idea of chair into Aristotle's four causes. This suggestion led to a breakthrough; seeing the final, efficient, material, and proximate causes of chair allowed the class to formulate a definition based on the genus and specific differences. However, the definition led to further problems. The researcher confronted unpleasant truths about chairs; the class laughed when it concluded that a toilet was a particular sub-category of chair or, to the researcher's chagrin, that a beanbag was a chair according to the class's definition. The bell then rang, students left for their next class, and the researcher took a moment to process the fear, confusion, and thrill of the class period.

The researcher's philosophy of Socratic practice was formed by his experience as a student at St. John's College in Annapolis, Maryland. One of St. John's College's New Program founders, Scott Buchanan, may have coined the term Socratic seminar and implemented Socratic dialogue as noted earlier (Strong, 1996). Thus, the researcher's experience with the Socratic

method was in the form practiced at St. John's College: a student-driven discussion that deemphasizes the role of the teacher as such and centers dialogue on a discussion of texts. Key to this practice was following the argument wherever it led, humor, a willingness to make mistakes and display ignorance, and an underlying assumption that dialogue is an essential requirement of human nature (Barr, 1968). As the researcher pursued an educational and academic career, this philosophy has followed him into his classroom, where conversations often follow an unstructured and surprising path as his students attempt to work out the logic of a book, idea, or theory.

Furthermore, the researcher's assumptions about Socrates and the Socratic method are grounded in Plato's Socratics, not Xenophon or Aristophanes (Batista, 2015). Indeed, when the researcher thinks of Socrates, he parallels the understanding of Williams (1992) in his translation of the *Theaetetus*: the idea that the character of Socrates is so fully realized, as a person, that one can hardly speak of Plato at all. In line with hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher believes that the text of Socrates is such that "Socrates is a perpetual mystery... present[ed]... never 'as such' or 'in himself,' but always in a continually shifting, and therefore life-like, context with an ever-varying set of interlocutors" (Brann et al., 1998, p. 1). Like the interlocutors, the reader of Plato must engage in a never-ending conversation to unveil the text's meanings. Thus, the Socratic task of uncovering meaning through dialogue is paralleled by readers' attempts to uncover meaning as they read—and the hermeneutic phenomenological charge to uncover meaning in the lived world. Indeed, Heidegger thought that Socrates was the model for doing philosophy. Gonzalez (2006) said Heidegger believed that the "truth of the matter in question shows itself... in the very act of questioning" (p. 426) and suggested that Heidegger disagreed with Socrates about the character of dialogue and the role of the logos. Thus, said Gonzalez,

Heidegger placed authentic dialogue within the soul as a silent engagement with the thing itself, rather than just the words being spoken.

In regards to educational theory, the researcher agrees with Socrates when he argues that education is a process by which the eye of the soul is “turned around from that which *is coming into being* [emphasis in original] together with the whole soul until it is able to endure looking at that which *is* [emphasis in original] and the brightest part of that which *is* [emphasis in original]” (Plato, 1991, p. 197). However, the researcher does not follow Socrates’s belief in an uncreated, perpetually reincarnated soul that recollects knowledge it once knew. Nevertheless, Socrates and the researcher share two critical assumptions about ontology. First, “knowledge exists independently from the observer” (Boghossian, 2006, p. 717). Thus, following Boghossian (2006), the researcher presupposes that people can have shared experiences that permit mutual understanding while having unique perspectives. Furthermore, the researcher believes that individual cases can point toward universals (Altorf, 2019). Second, along with constructivists, Socrates and the researcher also assert that the teacher should be a fellow traveler toward truth with the students (Boghossian, 2006). The role of the teacher is to be a biting fly that irritates the city with its incessant questions (Plato, 2002). A good teacher functions as a “torpedo-fish” (Plato, 2004, p. 15) that “makes anyone who approaches and touches it grow numb” (Plato, 2004, p. 15) because Socrates, as Meno puts it, “exist[s] in a state of perplexity... and put[s] others in a state of perplexity” (Plato, 2004, p. 15).

Thus, the researcher’s fore-conception of Socratic practice may differ from the fore-conception of Socratic practices of other teachers regarding the purposes, goals, the teacher’s role, and the teacher’s experience of Socratic practice. The researcher’s fascination with this

topic, then, is grounded in his own experiences and interest in other instructors' practices as they use Socratic practice, whatever the form.

### **Measures for Ethical Protection**

The study was first approved by Southeastern University's institutional review board. Participants in the study were given a description of the study's purpose on a form describing the study's risks, rewards, and procedures. Participants read, signed, and dated the informed consent. The researcher collected and securely stored the form, and collection procedures involved the recording and transcription of the interviews. Upon completion of each recorded interview, the audio was transcribed using a password-protected transcription website. Participants were then asked to verify the transcripts. Digital recordings and written transcripts will be stored on the researcher's password-protected computer for five years. After five years, all data will be permanently deleted. Participants' names have not been associated with the research findings, and only the researcher knows the identity of the participants. Pseudonyms have been used in the final report. Given the nature of the study, individual responses have been reported. However, all possible efforts have been made to protect individual identities. All data, including the interviews, have been stored on a password-protected computer in password-protected files.

### **Research Questions**

Two questions guided this study:

1. What are the lived experiences of high school teachers implementing the Socratic method?
2. What do teachers' lived experiences of leading Socratic discussion suggest about their understanding of Socratic practice?

## **Data Collection**

### **Instrument Used in Data Collection**

The data collection instrument (see Appendix A) was an interview guide with nine questions. As recommended by Peoples (2020), interviews were semi-structured to allow the researcher and participants the flexibility to explore issues that may be relevant to the study. Interview questions focused on the participants' lived experiences rather than their perceptions. Some phenomenological researchers suggest refraining from sharing personal experiences as part of the bracketing process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, van Manen (2016) noted that, at times, the interview subject might struggle to describe a life experience. In such instances, the researcher may share a story to illustrate the kind of life experience the researcher seeks. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher does not seek to bracket himself (Peoples, 2020). Thus, the researcher occasionally shared experiences that modeled the stories he was seeking. The interviews were between 15 and 61 minutes long and occurred in two teachers' classrooms and over videoconference for the two remaining teachers. After completing the interviews, the researcher took field notes on his observations and experiences during the interview process.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Creswell and Poth (2018) described nine strategies used to validate qualitative studies. They suggested that validity be established by using at least two of nine validation strategies. The study uses four strategies of nine strategies discussed by Creswell and Poth. First, the researcher solicited participant feedback by asking subjects to review and evaluate their interview transcripts for accuracy. Second, the researcher generated a detailed, thick description. Third, the researcher examined negative case analysis or discomfoting evidence. Fourth, as a hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher's reflexivity was clarified (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Reflexivity is the researcher's self-consciousness of his participation in the research; the work of hermeneutic phenomenology is to convince the reader of the study's validity, in part, through clarification of the researcher's reflexivity (Cohen et al., 2000).

Reliability was ensured through the use of a computer with a high-quality microphone to ensure the accurate recording of the interviews. The audio recording was transcribed using online transcription software, then listened to and verified against the audio recording (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher explored his growing understanding through fieldnotes and the data analysis process as another means of ensuring reliability; Peoples (2020) noted that a phenomenological study that completely affirms the researcher's biases lacks credibility. Furthermore, Peoples argued that rich descriptions of the phenomenon support reliability. Cohen et al. (2000) agreed, adding that reliability is affirmed when the thick descriptions are accompanied by enough of the transcript that readers can form their own interpretations. The author added that, at some point, the validity and reliability of a study becomes a question of usefulness or whether the reader can apply the research in their own lives. Thus, argued Cohen et al. (2000), "the findings of a hermeneutic phenomenological study can be judged only in the context of the intellectual discourse it joins and creates" (p. 92).

### **Data Analysis**

Hermeneutic phenomenology explores the whole of a phenomenon. Thus, the word analysis does not accurately reflect phenomenological practices considering that analysis breaks concepts into parts, and phenomenological research is designed to understand the whole. Instead, the study explicated the phenomenon using a hermeneutic circle to allow the parts to reflect the whole and the whole to describe the parts (Peoples, 2020). Heidegger, the progenitor of hermeneutic phenomenology, argued that phenomenology should be concerned with a person's

mode of being in the world—Dasein—rather than being itself. That is, hermeneutic phenomenology is concerned with ontic meaning rather than epistemological meaning. Such insight cannot be planned because it is being struck by an original idea that emerges unexpectedly. Heidegger would have likely rejected hermeneutic phenomenology as a method of data analysis (van Manen, 2016). Thus, van Manen (2016) cautioned against a formula for seeking themes and suggested, instead, an intuitive data analysis process.

No assumption can be made about the researcher's objectivity in hermeneutic phenomenology. As a result, the researcher did not bracket himself. Since the researcher is Dasein or living in the sensory world, he has unavoidable assumptions, presuppositions, and lived experiences that produce a fore-conception of the phenomena (Peoples, 2020). To mitigate this fore-conception, the researcher used the hermeneutic circle to conduct data analysis; that is, in the analysis of transcripts, the data were examined as a whole, broken down into codes and themes, and then synthesized. However, the spiraling process did not proceed linearly but, instead, returned to the data in a process of revision and reflection (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2020). The spiral approach to data analysis was used because the phenomenological understanding of the essence is always partial and growing as the researcher attempts to read and revise his perception of the lifeworld (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kafle, 2011). In attempting to read and revise his perception of the lifeworld, the researcher amended his preconceptions of the phenomenon through the revision process (Peoples, 2020).

Potential codes were noted during the precoding process, marginal notes were made during the coding process, and the development of themes led to a re-examination of the codes. Furthermore, data analysis included reflective writing as the researcher considered the parts, the whole, and the relationship of the parts and the whole between his fore-conceptions and own

lifeworld. The process of reflection through journaling allowed the researcher to grow more aware of his fore-conceptions and how the fore-conceptions impact his interpretations (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004; van Manen, 2016). The researcher followed van Manen's (2016) three ways of viewing the transcripts during the analysis process. Van Manen suggested reviewing the texts as a whole story as well as at the level of a paragraph and at the level of a word or phrase. He also argued that phenomenological researchers use each approach with an intuitive and complex "process of insightful invention, discovery, and disclosure" (van Manen, 2016, p. 319). In addition, the researcher asked questions about how the part relates to the whole and the whole relates to the part (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004)

Following Lindseth and Norberg (2004), the researcher conducted a "naïve reading" (p. 149). The researcher used a phenomenological attitude to develop and write down a first impression of the transcript to be proven or disproven by further analysis. During this stage, the researcher sought to gain an overall understanding of the transcript. During this part of the spiral analysis, the researcher highlighted passages and added memos that contained the researcher's preliminary thoughts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2020). The second stage of the spiraling analysis involved structural analysis, which consisted of reading and re-reading the interviews with the naïve understanding considering that fore-conceptions cannot be escaped but can be developed through reading with an open mind, as Lindseth and Norberg (2004) suggested. A spreadsheet contained the codebook in which meaning units and condensed meaning units were listed and broken down into themes and subthemes. During the third part of the analysis, comprehensive understanding developed through summarizing the themes and subthemes, then re-reading the interview transcript again with a naïve understanding and an awareness of the researcher's fore-conceptions. The researcher's fore-conceptions and growing awareness of his

fusion of horizons were recorded in a separate fieldnotes document and used to describe his reflexivity (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). To reiterate: the spiraling process seems linear but is non-linear. The researcher returned to the data again and again as he revised his understandings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This hermeneutic circle is the process by which the parts of the object and the researcher's fore-conception repeatedly return to and are integrated into a complete conception of the object of study (Suddick et al., 2020).

### **Summary**

Hermeneutic phenomenology describes the lived experiences of individuals or the essential meaning of the individuals' understanding of phenomena (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lindseth & Norberg, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Chapter 3 described the process of collecting the data, the researcher's role and his fore-conceptions, the researcher's ethical responsibilities, the hermeneutic circle, and the methods used for producing valid and reliable results.

## IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of Socratic practice among teachers. Thus, the study was designed to examine teachers' lived experiences as leaders of Socratic practices. As a hermeneutic phenomenology, the focus of the first research question (i.e., "What are the lived experiences of high school teachers implementing the Socratic method?") was on the teachers' Dasein or being-in-the-world (van Manen, 2016). That is, how teachers are as they participate in Socratic practices. The second research question (i.e., "What do teachers' lived experiences of leading Socratic discussion suggest about their understanding of Socratic practice?") addressed teachers' understanding of Socratic practices based on their being-in-the-world.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

Hermeneutic phenomenology addresses the whole, not the parts. The goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is to use the parts to inform the whole and the whole to inform the parts to describe the essence of lived experiences (Peoples, 2020). Thus, analysis and data collection focused on collecting teachers' lived experiences with Socratic practices. Interviewees were individuals who self-reported as being experienced with the Socratic method and who had a willingness to participate in a recorded interview (Moustakas, 1994). The interviews were conducted both in-person and via videoconference. The results were transcribed and sent to the participants for verification and revision.

A hermeneutic circle was used to conduct data analysis. A hermeneutic circle is a process by which the parts of the object and the researcher's fore-conception repeatedly return to and are integrated into a complete conception of the object of study (Suddick et al., 2020). Data analysis was non-linear as the researcher returned to the data due to his always-partial understanding of the individuals' lifeworld (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Kafle, 2011). In doing so, the researcher revised his preconceptions of the phenomenon through the revision process (Peoples, 2020). The researcher's fore-conceptions and growing awareness of his fusion of horizons were recorded in a separate fieldnotes document and used to describe his reflexivity (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

During the first phase, the researcher conducted a "naïve reading" (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004, p. 149), during which the researcher used a phenomenological attitude to write down his first impression of the work. Following the approach described by Lindseth and Norberg, the researcher's process included a second stage involved a structural analysis consisting of reading and re-reading with the naïve understanding in mind. A spreadsheet containing a codebook was developed. Meaning units were created, and condensed meaning units were written and assigned subthemes. The subthemes were then assigned to themes. The third part of exploration, comprehensive understanding, involved summarizing the themes and subthemes, then re-reading the interview transcript again with a naïve understanding and an awareness of the researcher's fore-conceptions, as suggested by Lindseth and Norberg. The researcher's fore-conceptions and growing awareness of his fusion of horizons were recorded in a separate fieldnotes document and used to describe his reflexivity in the results of the research.

While using the hermeneutic circle, the researcher revised the themes, subthemes, and condensed meaning units based on his growing understanding of both the phenomenon and his understanding of phenomenology. For example, the researcher realized that his coding failed to

capture the teachers' Dasein. As a result, he rephrased condensed meaning and recoded themes and subthemes. Following the example given by Lindseth and Norberg (2004), the researcher recoded using "being" words to capture the activity of teachers' being-in-the-world. Based on the similarities of the subthemes, themes were constructed and associated with subthemes (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004). Table 1 presents a summary of the themes and subthemes.

**Table 1**

*Themes and Subthemes*

<b>Themes</b>	Being delighted	Being troubled	Being a dialogue-builder	Being Socratic
<b>Corresponding Subthemes</b>	Being delighted by different perspectives	Being challenged with engagement	Being process-oriented	Being a guide
	Being delighted by student ownership	Being time-bound	Being goal-oriented	Being argument-followers
	Being delighted by student growth	Being self-doubting	Being growth-oriented	Being observant
		Being conflicted	Being clear about expectations	Being a gadfly
			Being in control	
			Being flexible	
			Being empathetic	

Passages that focused on teachers' lived experiences and their understanding of their lived experiences were collected. Because the goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is to address the essence of lived or shared experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994) and the essential meaning of the world as the meaning reveals itself to the human consciousness

(Lindseth & Norberg, 2004), the researchers' findings are based on the subthemes that two to four teachers shared. However, van Manen (2016) noted that the number of experiential descriptions does not define the saturation of the data; rather, the phenomenologist looks for what is unique to the particular experience.

### **Findings by Research Question**

The researcher asked nine open-ended questions during the interview process. The questions were designed to elicit answers to the two research questions that guided the study:

1. What are the lived experiences of high school teachers implementing the Socratic method?
2. What do teachers' lived experiences of leading Socratic discussion suggest about their understanding of Socratic practice?

The results of the research questions have been described. All teachers who participated in the study were high school teachers. However, some participants surprised the researcher by describing experiences with Socratic practices that occurred outside the high school classroom. Two participants talked about their Socratic practices in their middle school or college classrooms. One participant described events that occurred in non-academic settings. The research questions asked about high school teachers' lived experiences with Socratic practices. However, the questions did not define the age group or the location where those practices were to be implemented. Since these teachers were high school teachers and their descriptions were part of their lived experiences, the data were included in the results.

### **Research Question 1**

The first research question was "What are the lived experiences of high school teachers implementing the Socratic method?" Teacher A was a social studies teacher at a private school

who used Socratic seminars mostly in advanced placement (AP) classes. She was delighted by watching students grow. She also enjoyed looking at ideas from different perspectives. She was troubled by the time constraints inherent in preparing and leading Socratic practices and, before she experimented with Socratic seminars, the potential of losing control of her classroom. She also struggled with the value conflicts that emerged from the conversations. For example, Teacher A had to balance the needs of a student who spoke too much against the needs of other students to participate in the discussion. Despite the value conflict, Teacher A experienced a great deal of joy when students participated in the conversation, especially when she and the students gained new perspectives from individuals with different lived experiences. Teacher A experienced the conversations generally as an organic process whose main challenge was a lack of sufficient time. Although Teacher A did train her students to converse in a seminar format, she experienced the Socratic method as an observer who implemented processes to make the conversation flow; she made sure that students were prepared and engaged but minimally intervened.

Teacher B was a teacher in a classical education association and worked primarily with middle and high school students. She experienced the challenge of negotiating between her belief in biblical truth and wanting students to follow the conversation where it led. She practiced leading students into doubt and out of doubt by carefully asking chosen questions. Teacher B taught students to participate in discussions, though conversations were more structured with middle school students than with high school students. Teacher B saw shy students developing and growing throughout the semester as they became more comfortable with the format. She was distinct, however, in her emphasis on the significance of the prompt question as a means of giving Socratic discussions shape and character and her willingness to intervene directly with

targeted questions when students were “speaking on untruths.” When she doubted herself, Teacher B did so in terms of the quality of her questions. Thus, Teacher B’s experience of Socratic practice was as a questioner. She participated in the Socratic discussion as a gadfly that stung students into motion.

Teacher C was a high school English literature teacher who taught AP and regular-level high school students at a private school. She experienced Socratic practices as a mutual conversation and experienced joy when students were fully engaged in talk. She experienced the process of training students to participate in a conversation and built dialogue through scaffolding; Teacher C modeled the process, started small, and used student leaders as examples. She experienced uncertainty about where the conversation would be going and, in fact, liked the ambiguity. She expressed a preference towards discussing poetry because it was “open to interpretation.” However, Teacher C was self-doubting about her questions and whether her students were ready to participate in the Socratic conversation when her students did not engage in conversation. Her goal was to produce engaged, critical thinking students. Teacher C was the teacher who most referred to her classroom discussions in terms of the first-person, plural. That is, she frequently talked about “us” and “we” when she discussed Socratic practices in the classroom and “love[d] to have that dialogue going.” Thus, Teacher C experienced Socratic practice as a conversation partner and fellow member of a thought journey.

Teacher D led Socratic seminars with middle school, high school, and college students. She also trained parents and teachers to conduct Socratic seminars. She experienced Socratic practices as a process with rules and expectations and especially emphasized her experience of the time-bound quality of the conversation. She stressed the experience of being a dialogue-builder. Her dialogue-building included clear expectations for inner and outer circles, a document

with a list of expectations, and a precise timeframe during which conversation would occur. She experienced having to be flexible with how seminars were conducted depending on the class size, amount of time she had, and the age and skill of the students. She engaged in discussions as someone who guided the conversation to make it work properly and did not, generally, participate directly or extensively. For example, Teacher D once told students, “Don’t talk to me, talk to each other.” Teacher D encountered Socratic seminars as a technician. She guided students according to certain rules and strictures and intervened only when necessary.

### **Research Question 2**

The second research question was “What do teachers’ lived experiences of leading Socratic discussion suggest about their understanding of Socratic practice?” Teacher A understood Socratic practices as a means for correcting modern social polarization. Thus, she understood Socratic discussion as an opportunity to expose students to the ethical ambiguities that hide at the heart of human certainty. Although she initially understood Socratic seminars as something that would cause her to lose control of her classroom, she scaffolded expectations to train students to participate. Thus, she understood leading Socratic practice as a skill that could be developed rather than something innate. Although she believed in moral truth, she thought that moral truth was elusive and that Socratic practice was a means to allow students to see both sides of an issue and learn to respect others’ perspectives. Students asked Teacher A to have Socratic seminars, and she referred to the practice as a “fun” thing she often could not do in AP classes before the AP exam due to time constraints. Thus, she thought of Socratic practices as enjoyable and an activity that students valued and appreciated. Because she expressed a struggle with what to do with a student who spoke too much at the expense of others, Teacher A also thought of seminars as an opportunity for students to participate fairly and equitably. She also

understood Socratic practice as student-led rather than teacher-led and, thus, minimized direct participation in the conversation. As Teacher A said, “most teachers” intend to lead discussions where the teacher is “the observer.”

Teacher B considered the Socratic practice to be a means of pursuing truth. She used her questions to guide students, often toward a specific understanding of the world, though she acknowledged that the conversations were often unpredictable. Her doubts related to the quality of her questions, and she understood those questions as the core feature of Socratic practice since the prompt questions provoked changes in student attitudes and conceptions about the world and helped students understand where the class was heading. Teacher B directly linked the prompt questions to her students’ conclusions; she was “excited” about “how kids come to different conclusions through different promptings.” She understood the classroom environment to be important, associating a more casual setting with being willing to engage and ask questions. She understood Socratic practice as a conversation about ideas and loved watching students continue the classroom conversation in the lunchroom, recommending that Socratic seminars be conducted just before lunch for that very reason. Ultimately, Teacher B understood Socratic seminars as a process of asking questions with a purpose.

Teacher C thought of Socratic practice as a means toward togetherness. She repeatedly used a plural first-person pronoun (i.e., we) when speaking of conversation in the seminar. She understood togetherness as an essential aspect of the practice and, thus, preferred topics that would spur on conversation. That togetherness was achieved through a slow journey that taught students to be comfortable with participation. Teacher C experienced fear of sharing her thoughts with groups; therefore, she empathized with students’ fears. She believed that the Socratic journey needed to be paced appropriately based on students’ capacity for participation. Although

she understood Socratic practices as something that needed to be scaffolded, she also thought the discussion was something some students “loved.” She had a growth mindset and observed students develop throughout the semester. She viewed Socratic discussions in the classroom as something that should be student-led but also considered herself a participant in those conversations. She told students, “When a teacher does something like [a Socratic seminar], we are open” to following the conversation where it goes. Thus, she understood Socratic practices as something that, at its core, was an exploration of ideas together.

Teacher D understood Socratic discussion in terms of skills and expectations. Although she said that Socratic discussions might lead to unexpected discoveries and go in unanticipated directions, Teacher D often described Socratic practices in terms of techniques and expectations. She laid out expectations and rules for students and redirected them when they spoke directly to her as a pedagogue or when they violated other discussion norms. She also stressed a time-bound conception of Socratic practices in the classroom, describing moments when the constraints of time-limited conversation or an increase in temporal space freed the conversation. Teacher D thought of class size as a significant limitation to the effectiveness of Socratic practice and understood Socratic conversation as an activity best relegated to smaller groups. She expressed the importance of being a facilitator in the conversation because, “If you’re not facilitating properly, [students will] get off-topic.” She thus understood Socratic practices as a technique with rules and guidelines that others could be trained to use and apply in their classrooms. However, she thought of Socratic practice as something valuable beyond the classroom and as a tool that could help alleviate conflict through listening and careful questioning.

## Themes

### Theme 1: Being Delighted

All four teachers reported being delighted by Socratic seminars; that is, teachers' lived experiences included the experience of delight directly resulting from their engagement in Socratic practices in the classroom. Teachers all shared experiences of joy, though not all objects of enjoyment were shared among teachers. Teachers were delighted when they encountered different perspectives, engaged learners, and student growth.

#### *Being Delighted by Different Perspectives*

Three teachers, for example, reported delight about the students' sharing different perspectives during the discussion. For example, Teacher A said:

[International students] have a more global perspective. They can see things ... from the outside in... We're teaching them in American style and things like that, but they've had experiences elsewhere. They're coming in from the outside. So, I think it's helpful to hear what their perspective is, or if they've shared, "Back in China," or "Back in Korea, this is how things would be, or this is how we see things." ...because some of that I wouldn't know unless you told me, right?

In this example, the teacher described the experience of discovering a line of thought she had not previously considered as a direct result of including students from different social contexts. She revealed in an understanding she could not have discovered except through discussion.

That taking-pleasure-in-different-perspectives was also represented by Teacher B saying that it was "really exciting to see how kids come to different conclusions through different promptings." Similarly, Teacher C "enjoyed using poetry because that's open to interpretation." Teacher A, a social studies teacher, also deliberately chose her topics based on the topic's

openness to interpretation as she enjoyed the interplay between different perspectives. Thus, teachers reported delight at unexpected ideas that stemmed from students' backgrounds, the content they were discussing, or the sort of questions that were being asked.

### ***Being Delighted by Student Ownership***

The teachers described their delight at student ownership in the conversation, whether in or out of class. Teacher C described a moment in which she experienced pleasure at students engaging in such a way that they took control of the conversation:

I did have one or two students who would get up and draw on the board and be like, "This is what I'm thinking." And those moments were really exciting for me because it's like, "Oh, my goodness, they're just taking total control." And I do like that I love when they are able to do that.

Teacher C relished the times when her students engaged in the conversation such that they took control of the conversation and, as the teacher, she could participate as an on-looker to a conversation that took on a life of its own.

A lived experience of delight in conversation that represented students owning their learning was also described by Teacher C in the following manner:

The way that our schedule works is my class is three hours in the morning, and then [students] have lunch right afterward. And I love it because I can just walk through their lunchroom and hear them still discussing what we just talked about.

Teacher C "loved" the experience of overhearing a conversation because the discussion extended from the classroom into the lunchroom. Thus, Teacher C suggested that schools should offer Socratic seminars before lunch so that students could naturally continue the dialogue.

Teacher D expressed a similar sentiment. She described a time when students owned their discussion:

And [the discussion leader] asked a question, a specific question, because she was struggling with where to place this idea in her Venn diagram. And it just took off again.

So that's nice about a Socratic discussion; you have these real deep conversations.

Teacher D described her pleasure at this experience, saying, "And the neat thing is that when they get it, and they go from one topic to another, and it flows." Thus, Teacher D also expressed the experience of enjoying when students take ownership of a discussion, and the conversation moves in an organic, student-guided direction.

### ***Being Delighted by Student Growth***

Teachers expressed delight in student growth. Students, especially early in the semester, often struggled to understand how Socratic seminars should work or remained silent instead of conversing with their classmates. Yet, teachers reported enjoying watching students develop in skill and confidence throughout the semester. As Teacher A said, "[As students learn how to prepare for Socratic seminars], it's fun to see that process as they move along." Teacher C expressed a similar sentiment:

It was neat to see that progression, you know, when you first start the year, they're kind of shy, but then halfway through [the semester], they're like, "Wait a second, well, let me show you what I mean." And they are getting so excited in that.

Teacher C enjoyed the progression of growth over time and the way students showed growth in the quantity and quality of their conversations. Indeed, Teacher B said that "the change in [shy] kids who, beginning of the school year won't talk at all" and were fully participating in Socratic circles by February was a positive experience for her.

## **Theme 2: Being Troubled**

Teachers did not report being tried, imprisoned, or forced to drink hemlock like Socrates. However, they reported encountering troubles in their Socratic practices. Their problems included the experiences of struggling with student engagement, being constrained by time, doubting themselves, and experiencing values conflicts during the seminars.

### ***Being Challenged With Engagement***

Teachers broadly discussed experiencing challenges with how students engaged in conversation. One significant challenge two teachers described was large class sizes. Although Teacher A resolved the problem by using inner and outer circles, she mentioned the difficulty of running a Socratic discussion in large classes due to the challenges of keeping students on task. Teacher D was placed in a similar situation when she was asked to lead a room of 200 students. She divided the group into sub-groups and, after the discussion, selected random groups to describe what they learned.

Teacher C mentioned the challenge of engaging students when students lacked experience with Socratic seminars. However, she saw growth in students as the semester developed. Teachers A and D mentioned the inverse of this problem. As mentioned earlier, Teacher A experienced the challenge of dealing with a student who dominated the conversation. However, she noted that she generally did not have problems getting students to talk during discussions. Teacher D faced the challenge of the wrong kind of engagement while working with middle school students. She described their lack of focus:

Especially with a middle school [student], if you just ask a question, if you let them all talk, they just fight at each other, without thinking through things, without listening, and without providing support.

Teacher D also noted that engaging middle school students once led to students misunderstanding or misremembering her statements and misreporting what she said to parents. She also described experiencing the challenge of having rich, engaging conversations with students in a Socratic discussion when she had too little time. Teachers, at times, reported problems getting students to speak but often associated the problem with their prompt questions, as discussed later in the subtheme of being self-doubting.

### ***Being Time-Bound***

All teachers reported the experience of being time-bound in the context of Socratic seminars. Teacher C mentioned that she limited early Socratic discussions to 10 minutes and increased the time students had as they developed their discussion skills. Teacher D repeatedly reported the challenge of not having enough time with students to conduct a discussion. She was highly aware of time in the context of seminars, repeating the subtheme of being time-bound multiple times in her interview. For example, she stated that students are “supposed to talk about [the question], and they have a certain amount of time. And I always timed it.” Teacher D was explicit about being time-bound to her students: “The process is, is that you get to talk for a certain timeframe. And then after that timeframe, it [the discussion] stopped.” Thus, Teacher D’s being time-bound led her to express that time-boundedness to her classes; nevertheless, she did not experience time as a completely rigid structure. For example, she did not cut students off when the time was up, for she added, “Even if [the Socratic discussion] stopped in the middle of a sentence, or at the end of a question, I usually try to let somebody finish.”

Teacher A also experienced being time-bound and allowed students to finish their thoughts, suggesting that the flexibility of allowing students to complete their thoughts minimized their frustration with time limits:

I would expect kids to complain [about all the prep and not having a chance to share] but they don't usually... I'll give them [a warning that the seminar is ending and] let everyone have their final say. So, maybe that's why that doesn't happen as often.

Teacher A also expressed that being time-bound was one of the most frustrating parts of leading Socratic discussions because she wished for more time for discussion:

I usually schedule only a single class period to do it... We have the prep time, and then we have a single class period, and then we'll do a debrief the next day. So, that is my most negative in that aspect.

### ***Being Self-Doubting***

Teachers communicated the experience of doubt during seminars, especially concerning the quality of their prompt questions. Teacher A was uncertain if “doubt and confusion” were the right words to describe her experience but added, “I guess sometimes I feel like, ‘Did I ask the right questions?’” Teacher C described self-doubt with regards to her questions when classes did not participate:

About two years ago, I had one class where I tried [Socratic seminars]. And it wasn't going anywhere. There was no conversation. I would ask a question. And then I kept thinking to myself, “Am I asking the wrong questions?” I mean, “Why aren't they engaged?” And so, there have been times when I've doubted.

Indeed, Teacher C began to wonder whether she, rather than just the questions she was asking, was the problem. She asked herself, “What's wrong with me? Why can't I get these kids to engage in this Socratic seminar?” However, she used the experience to rethink her approach and reflect on whether she should have prepared her students better for Socratic discussion.

When Teacher D received feedback that her middle school students were misrepresenting her questions to parents, she asked herself each week, “Should I do this? Should I not do this? And what’s going to work?” She, too, expressed doubt about the quality of her questions in the context of being time-bound:

I did get one time where they all looked at me like, we don’t really [want to talk]. They talked for three minutes, and they were done. I’m like, “Okay, so the question wasn’t really good.” Because maybe the question wasn’t good, you know? Or maybe they didn’t understand what the question is trying to get at.

She also described an experience of self-doubt, especially when she began leading seminars:

So, that’s where the doubts sometimes come when you first start implementing it. And [the] wondering is: “Did this go the way I wanted it to go? Was there enough conversation? Or was the question a good question? Did I design this properly? Did I explain it properly?”

### ***Being Conflicted***

All teachers provided examples of being conflicted. Teacher A discussed being conflicted when dealing with a student who spoke too much and said of her experience, “I don’t want to squash [the dominating student’s] enthusiasm. But, also, I don’t want the other kids not to have that chance [to participate].” Teacher A described a tension between the desire to allow students to speak their minds and the desire for all students to engage. She wanted students to participate; however, when one student spoke too much, that student prevented other students from participating. Thus, the teacher was conflicted. She valued engagement but did not want to restrict any student’s desire to talk.

Teacher B expressed a tension between valuing biblical truth and releasing control of the conversation to go where it led. She said, “I think when I’m trying to get biblical truth across [to] the kids is where I find it hardest to allow them to go down a path where they’re speaking on untruths.” Teacher B resolved the tension by directly intervening in the conversation and asking questions that guided students to her understanding of biblical truths. However, like Teacher A, Teacher B experienced being conflicted between two different goals.

Teacher C reported a conflict between her desire for safety and her desire to engage in conversation with the class. As she said, “I don’t want to leave myself out there. I look vulnerable. And I think that that’s something that through the year the kids overcome, especially those who are afraid.” She used that conflict to empathize with her students. Still, she had to choose between her safety and the vulnerability of participating in and modeling the Socratic conversation she wished to see in her class.

Teacher D’s conflict was a direct result of students misreporting what she was saying in class:

I started using the Socratic circles, and [the middle school students] would go home and [their] moms would say, “Susie said that you said [something],” and I’m like, “I didn’t say that!” So that was the first time I had, I got feedback that I said things that I did not say. But then I also have to attribute it to the eighth-grade brain. So, every week, it was like, “Should I do this? Should I not do this? And what’s going to work?”

Thus, Teacher D had to deal with the tension between using Socratic practices with her students and avoiding misrepresentation. She questioned whether she should take that risk. However, Teacher D resolved the conflict by accepting the misrepresentation as characteristic of the age

group and accepting that misrepresentation was a normal part of the risk of leading Socratic discussions.

### **Theme 3: Being a Dialogue-Builder**

All teachers shared the lived experience of training students to participate in Socratic discussion. In being dialogue-builders, teachers experienced being process, goal, and growth-oriented. They also were clear about their expectations and empathized with their students. Although they maintained control of their classrooms, they were also flexible in their approach to Socratic practices.

#### ***Being Process-Oriented***

Teachers described lived experiences of being process-oriented; that is, teachers reported the experience of how the implementation of classroom processes impacted Socratic discussion. The teachers' procedures included developing discussion questions, enforcing rules for how seminars were conducted, and laying out expectations for student preparation. The physical structure of the room also became part of the process of how the dialogue was conducted. All four teachers discussed the experience of being process-oriented, and their descriptions were especially pronounced when it came to training students to participate in Socratic practice. For example, Teacher A stated:

We scaffold the expectations. In the very first Socratic seminar, I tell everybody, "My goal for you is to come prepared with your reading and your notes. And then you need to speak up once of your own volition; if someone asks you a question, that's not of your own volition."

Teacher A described the lived experience of leading the semester's first Socratic seminar. She explained how the process of participation worked and laid out her expectations for the

conversation. The same teacher also told students that they could not participate unless they were prepared for class and that their grades would be docked if they did not participate. Thus, Teacher A described how her classroom would function before, during, and after Socratic discussions if expectations were not met.

The other teachers reported similar concerns for student preparation. For example, Teacher B explained some of her procedures:

[I] have prep sheets for the younger [students] that they need to fill out which, once I started implementing [seminars], they have to hand that in prior to coming to class so that I know that they're ready, and they have to come up with comprehensive questions, interpretive questions, so that I understand how they're understanding the text, and then critical thinking questions.

Like Teacher A, Teacher B linked the preparation process for the seminar with actual participation in the seminar and used the preparation work to examine student comprehension. Teacher B also had students come to the seminar with six questions prepared so that students could “fully engage” in the seminar. Thus, Teacher B also experienced being oriented toward the preparation process for the purpose of student engagement in conversation. Both Teacher A and Teacher B considered student preparation essential to Socratic practice.

The room's physical structure became part of the process of engaging in Socratic discussion. The teachers reported the significance of students' physical arrangement when they used Socratic seminars. The physical arrangement impacted the process. For example, Teacher B said:

But with my middle schoolers, I just put them in a circle. For middle school, I do an inner circle and an outer circle. The inner circle [students] are the only ones who are talking

and addressing the issue. And then, the outer circle is watching specific students. And they have [to] give them like an observation sheet that they're to use to watch that specific student for different things.

Thus, Teacher B experienced concern about how students' arrangement shaped Socratic practices and students' behavior. Students on the outside circle observed, and students on the inside circle spoke. Thus, Teacher B described the process through which her students' organization impacted behavior.

Teacher C noted that she went through expectations of how her Socratic discussions would work. In short, she explained the process to her students. She also experienced Socratic discussions as a process over time. The subtheme of "being time-bound" further explored how teachers encountered time in Socratic discussions. However, Teacher C experienced the discussion as something that developed gradually. Thus, she trusted the process and anticipated her students' eventual growth: "I've had some kids [who] are like, "I don't want to do this." And they'll just sit there, and I go slow. So, it's okay, at first, if they're just sitting there, as long as they're nodding their heads."

Teacher D also anticipated a process of growth by gradually increasing expectations for students. As she said, "If you have ten expectations, you work on three or four of them for two or three weeks, and then you add more." Like Teacher C, she experienced the seminars as a process in which students changed as they began to understand and implement teacher expectations.

### ***Being Goal-Oriented***

The teachers also experienced being goal-oriented as they conducted Socratic discussions. That is, teachers all had ends in mind as they shaped the conversations in their classrooms. Their ambitions differed to a degree, but all teachers wanted to produce critical,

flexible thinkers who took responsibility for their own education. For example, Teacher A wanted students who valued listening to and responding to other people's opinions. Yet, she also wanted to challenge students' thinking.

Teacher C frequently used the word "we" in the interviews, suggesting that she was oriented toward her goal of "want[ing] that conversation" with students through the experience of being with students in their conversations. In other words, Teacher C wanted a conversation with her class. She experienced the realization of her goal by being part of the discussion rather than being separate from it. Instead of being a distant observer or someone who minimally intervened as an objective observer, Teacher A was goal-oriented as part of her being-in-the-world of the discussion. She was also oriented toward giving voice to the voiceless:

I like the Socratic seminar. I will use it in all of [the] classes that I teach... because I do believe that those kids have to find their voice. And they have to be able to just give their opinion, share their thoughts.

Teacher C lived out the twin goals of conversing with students and giving students voices by giving herself a voice in the conversation. She was part of the "we" of the conversation. Yet she also had goals of producing critical thinkers and developing literary criticism skills.

Teacher D emphasized pedagogical objectives in seminars. She noted that when the "topic was bullying, that's the bottom line, you have to address bullying. That's your requirement." Teacher D experienced the necessity for there to be alignment between the content of the conversation with her pedagogical objectives. Yet, she also described a goal of producing critical thinkers when she said, "They've begun to demonstrate that they can do this, and they can think deeply... we are in the right direction." Teacher D's recognition of deep thinking as a

sign that she was in “the right direction” suggests that she experienced the seminar as someone oriented toward the end of building deep thinkers.

### ***Being Growth-Oriented***

As briefly mentioned earlier, three of the four teachers relayed experiences related to being growth-oriented. They understood that leading Socratic discussions was a process of becoming rather than a state of being. Teachers experienced an awareness that they were not perfect at leading seminars and had room to grow. For example, Teacher A created a SMART goal to feel more confident in conducting seminars each year, which suggests she experienced Socratic seminars as a process of personal growth. Yet, teachers also understood that students could not be expected to have mastered discussion skills right from the start. As noted earlier, Teacher D anticipated student growth by gradually increasing the expectations for students. She scaffolded expectations for her students, anticipating that they needed time and training to become skilled in dialogue.

Teacher B discussed her growth-oriented attitude toward seminars when she relayed that she did not expect students to be proficient at discussion right away and needed time to develop their skills:

We’re going to build ourselves up to maybe an entire class, which I would have seniors do. I like to take it easy so that they learn because it’s really a learning experience for the kids. And it really helps the seminar go a lot better towards the end of the year as we practice doing [seminars].

Indeed, Teacher B, in discussing her experience with seminars, revealed that she reflected after a particular seminar and realized that she needed to grow as an educator and to be more patient with students’ growth. Teacher D relayed a similar experience of being growth-oriented when she

said that she loosened up the structure of seminars as students grew more mature or in response to students' needs. She also suggested that teachers needed to learn how to "facilitate" Socratic dialogues.

### ***Being Clear About Expectations***

The teachers' lived experiences with Socratic practice included being clear about expectations when developing and leading seminars. Teachers used these expectations to shape the form of discussion. They modeled or provided models for their expectations and provided explicit instructions. Teacher A, for example, chose students to be exemplars of Socratic practices. Through leading discussions, the exemplar students showed the class what Teacher A expected. Teacher B also used student leaders to be clear about her expectations. However, Teacher B also discussed modeling her expectations through leading a short seminar:

I tried to model [my expectations] for them. I wouldn't necessarily choose a student leader at that point, I would just be the one that would be leading the conversation, and it would be short, so it might be only 10 minutes.

Teacher D described the experience of laying out expectations as well. She explicitly explained the rules for conducting Socratic seminars, with the inner and outer circles, in her syllabus. Other expectations were also included: "The first few times, we actually gave them four or five expectations, which [we] are supposed to be looking for. And that's how we do that." However, Teacher D also described moments when she had to be clear about expectations during the seminar discussion itself. For example, she had a situation when students continued to address her directly rather than other students. As a result, Teacher D had to tell the class, "Don't talk to me, talk to each other."

## ***Being in Control***

Teachers reported the experience of being in control of their seminars. That is, they intervened and engaged in the conversation as they felt necessary and expected students to follow their instructions. In this way, they shaped the conversation into alignment with their processes and goals. Teacher B was the most explicit about control when she described times when students might veer into “untruths,” and she intervened: “So, from the outside, it is an agenda to some extent because I don’t want them to walk out of that circle thinking untrue or unbiblical things.”

However, being in control did not always mean preventing students from believing falsehoods. Teacher C reported controlling when and how seminars were conducted. She was responsive to students’ enthusiasm but was explicit about the topic of conversation, the fact that they had to formulate questions, and that they were going to conduct a Socratic seminar at a particular time. She oversaw her classroom and her students:

I’ve had a couple of kids that were [doing] their summer reading. They read *The Stranger*, and they had to formulate questions as part of their assignment. And [with] questions, I said, “What we’re going to do is at the beginning of the year, we are going to have a Socratic seminar.”

Teacher D was in control when she described her leadership of the seminars: “The second question is read. I say, ‘You may begin,’ and then they start talking.” When conducting seminars with high school cadets in a non-profit organization, Teacher D used a bell to maintain control in a large room with many students: “[The classroom noise] was like ... a bus, you know. I’d have a bell-type thing to make them stop talking.”

### ***Being Flexible***

Although teachers were in control in the classroom, they were also flexible and responsive. Teacher A offered Socratic seminars in her AP class after AP exams were completed because students asked her to do so. Teacher C talked about flexibility within the seminar as the conversation could go in unpredictable directions when students were highly engaged:

When you have the groups of kids who just want to take off with it, and they come prepared, and they are ready, and I always tell the students [that] when a teacher does something like this, we are open. I don't know where the conversation's going to go. And so, I just need to kind of be open to that.

Teacher D spoke the most about her experience with Socratic discussions and flexibility. She talked about shaping dialogues because students would get off-topic. She also planned a Socratic seminar then canceled the seminar because students were unfocused. At other times, she modified the questions or students' physical arrangements based on class size, age, or time allotted to the conversation. When she led online college-level seminars, she modified her approach to inner and outer circles because of the limits of videoconferencing.

### ***Being Empathetic***

Two teachers reported an ontic state of being empathetic toward students in service of being dialogue-builders. This empathy formed a basis for the teachers' understanding of students' being-in-the-world and classroom adjustments to student needs. For example, Teacher D noted that she did not leave the timing of conversations open-ended because students, particularly students who were newer to Socratic practice, might feel uncomfortable:

There's a question given to the group, and they're [the students] supposed to talk about that, and they have a certain amount of time. And I always timed it. I didn't leave it open-ended because the students are uncomfortable.

Thus, the teacher's empathy—or the capacity to understand the feelings of others—led her to be concerned about the timing of the discussion to minimize feelings of discomfort. Teacher C also reported empathy for the students that resulted in her being flexible, growth-oriented, and process-oriented:

We're having a conversation here. And I'm scared, in some sense, of having a conversation. So, the kids must feel that way as well. Like, oh, no, I don't want to leave myself out there. I look vulnerable. And I think that that's something that through the year the kids overcome, especially those who are afraid. I've had some kids [who] are like, "I don't want to do this." And they'll just sit there, and I go slow. So, it's okay, at first, if they're just sitting there, as long as they're nodding their heads. They're looking like they're engaged in the conversation.

Teacher C's self-reflection and experience suggested to her the lived experiences of her students as they engaged in Socratic conversation. She was scared to engage in conversation with them and, thus, believed students must be scared as well. Consequently, Teacher C was willing to go slow with them. She was process-oriented and growth-oriented because of her empathy for her students because Teacher C understood what it meant to be afraid.

#### **Theme 4: Being Socratic**

Socrates described the true teacher as someone who guided the eyes to the light rather than using direct instruction to put vision into the eye (Plato, 1991). He referred to himself as a stinging fly that forced the Athenians into intellectual motion through incessant questions (Plato,

2002). Socrates suggested, in the *Republic*, that he and his dialogue partners should follow arguments where they lead, though the conversations could be unpredictable (Plato, 1991). Socrates was also keenly observant of his interlocutors, for he “watch[ed] over the labour of [human] souls” in search of truth (Plato, 1992, p. 12). In these respects, the teachers interviewed reported the experience of being Socratic.

### ***Being a Guide***

In the allegory of the cave, Socrates described prisoners in a cave who saw only shadows on the walls and, having only that experience, believed that the shadows represented real objects. Thus, the prisoners needed a guide to lead them out of the cave (Plato, 1991). Socrates also portrayed himself as a midwife of truth who assisted people through the pain of intellectual childbirth to the gentle peace at the end (Plato, 1992). The teachers also described being a guide as part of their experience with Socratic practice in the classroom.

However, the teachers experienced being guides often to the form rather than the content of the conversation. That is, teachers frequently described being midwives of conversation rather than midwives of truth. For example, Teacher A said, “Once in a while, I’ll interject if I feel they need to get a little jumpstart or if they need a redirect, but actually, more often than not, they don’t need it.” Thus, Teacher A nudged and redirected, but she was not an active guide that led students toward specific conclusions.

Teacher B described her experience of leading a Socratic conversation as one of guiding students’ thinking when she said that she “would try to gear my questioning then towards them thinking through something biblically or trying to find answers to something within the scriptures.” In the same way that a guide has a destination in mind and takes people on a journey, Teacher B led students to a particular destination. She was an active guide with a destination in

mind. Sometimes, when Teacher B thought topics had moved too far into “untruth,” she would stop the class from moving forward. She called her active control of the conversation an “agenda” because she did not want students to leave less knowledgeable about the truth after classroom discussion. Thus, she would choose questions that would allow students to think in a biblical framework. Hence, Teacher B’s guidance was more direct, at times, than other teachers’ guidance. Consequently, she emphasized the prompt question as an essential part of being a guide: “I think a prompt question is really important for the kids to know where we’re heading.”

In contrast, Teacher C deemphasized her role as a guide to precise conclusions. Rather, she allowed her students to lead the conversation. Though Teacher C led discussions early in the year, she also asked for volunteers or sought out students to lead seminars. Although she shaped how the conversation was conducted and chose the topic, she did not describe leading students to specific conclusions. Teacher D, too, deemphasized her role as a guide to specific inferences. She guided the quality of conversation, but not the content. Although she chose the topic, she allowed the conversation to move organically. Thus, she said, “I had to teach them to talk to each other in middle and high school.” She redirected students who attempted to speak to her and described interrupting when the conversation was not focused on the topic. She deliberately avoided being a leader of the conversation and guided the form rather than the content of the conversation.

Teacher D told a story also of a time when she moderated a conversation between a student and some adults. She described this event as a time when she did not intend to lead a Socratic seminar but ended up implementing Socratic tools in her daily life when she dealt with a conflict between a student and an adult. Teacher D described herself as a moderator rather than a teacher in this story. She steered the participants by asking questions rather than being pedagogical or taking on a controlling role.

### ***Being Argument-Followers***

In the *Republic*, Socrates told his friends that they must follow the argument like the wind (Plato, 1991). That is, Socrates described accepting the unpredictability of lived conversation. Three teachers described a similar experience as they led a Socratic discussion. Teacher A, for example, said, “I want it [the conversation] to take its own path.” This inclination to follow the conversation like the wind is an element of the teacher’s flexibility, as noted earlier, when Teacher C said:

When you have the groups of kids who just want to take off with it, and they come prepared, and they are ready, and I always tell the students, you know, this is when a teacher does something like this, we are open. I don’t know where the conversation’s going to go. And so, I just need to kind of be open to that.

Teacher B made a similar point about the unpredictability of the conversation: “And you know, they end up going all over, which is somewhat the point. You don’t know where it’s going [to] end up and where it’s going to go.” Thus, Teacher B’s essential experience included following the conversation where it led. Teacher D described a similar event:

A lot of the students, they kind of went with [the conversation]. It flowed, and it went in a direction that I didn’t [expect]. They went deeper in another direction than I expected, but it was a very good conversation. So, either direction would have been fine. But, it went in the direction that I least expected it to go.

### ***Being Observant***

Teachers described being observant as part of the Dasein of their Socratic practice. That is, three of four teachers described times when they were careful to pay attention to how their students were responding to Socratic practices as lived out in discussions. For example, Teacher

A discussed a negative experience when a student “dominated” a conversation and how she observed other students’ reactions to the conversation:

[A negative experience is] when a personality dominates in a negative way and instead of wanting to stay on topic wants to pontificate about their opinion on something. [There was] a young man who was one of the better students, but he didn’t want to let the others have a chance to have their say... I could see the frustration on the other kids' faces like, “I have something valuable to say, too, but so and so’s not letting me in.”

Teacher A observed the classroom culture change as the student controlled the conversation and perceived how other students reacted.

Teacher B also experienced being observant, though in the context of being a gadfly. She watched as students began to experience doubt and needed a break from the conversation to reflect on their assumptions about the world:

And I see kids beginning to doubt what they’re thinking to really kind of take a step back and be like, “Well, can we just [take a] timeout here? And let me think about this because I don’t know,” and they don’t want to keep answering questions.

Teacher B experienced using Socratic practice also as an opportunity to observe student performance and student understanding:

[I] have prep sheets for the younger ones that they need to fill out, which, once I started implementing [Socratic seminars], they have to hand that in prior to coming to class so that I know that they’re ready, and they have to come up with comprehensive questions, interpretive questions, so that I understand how they’re understanding the text, and then critical thinking questions.

Teacher B watched to see whether students were engaged in conversation when she said, “And I see [the students’] dynamic changing of wanting to ask more questions, wanting to be more engaged” as they grew more comfortable with Socratic practices. Teacher C also discussed accepting quietude during early seminars because “[Students are] looking like they’re engaged in the conversation.” Thus, being observant was a key element of the teachers’ lived experience of Socratic practices.

### ***Being a Gadfly***

Socrates referred to himself as a gadfly, a stinging fly whose questions prodded Athenians into motion (Plato, 2002). Similarly, three teachers’ lived experiences with Socratic practice included being gadflies. They asked questions and challenged students’ assumptions. Teacher A, for example, stated:

My main goal with Socratic discussions [is] that they ... come in with some preconceived ideas, but then have those challenged by their own readings, as well as their own discussions within the group...

Teacher A desired to challenge students’ assumptions, though she structured the class so that the gadfly was the reading and the group discussions. She created a situation when the class could challenge itself. Like Socrates, she dared students to be ignorant when she told them, “You don’t have to have all the answers.”

Teacher B gave an example of being a gadfly and described the essence of her experience as an active one: “When kids, especially in high school, they, you know, they are pretty darn sure they know the answer to something. And then as you keep prodding...” The gadfly, then, actively stings until the students understand that they do not know the answer. However, Teacher

B described a scenario in which she did not stop at the admission of ignorance but prodded students into a knowing:

I [gave] my seventh graders the prompt of “[Are] the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim gods the same? Do we worship the same God?” It’s what I do every year for the last seven years. And it’s been really interesting. Initially, when you ask the students, I would say the majority would be like, “Well, yeah, I mean, we all say, ‘It’s all one God. Yes, I think we all worship the same God.’” And as we dig deeper into the questioning to see these light bulbs go on, like, “Oh, my gosh, I don’t think we worship the same god.”

Thus, Teacher B used Socratic practice to ask questions and prodded students until they reached specific conclusions about reality.

Teacher D described her lived experience as a gadfly but emphasized the evidentiary requirements of logical assertions. She scaffolded her expectations. However, as students grew more familiar with Socratic seminars, her demands for support and evidence increased: “And then I started saying, ‘Okay, some of these thoughts are great. Some of you are supporting your thoughts, but not everybody is [supporting] theirs.’ I need you to start supporting your thoughts.” She emphasized the experience of asking questions and demanding source-based evidence as well:

You always reference your source: What is your source? If you have an argument, What is your source? And from a Christian perspective, if we’re using a text, if we’re using literature, then you can also bring in Scripture: What [does] the Word of God say about this topic? What scripture verse would you have that would support that? And why would that scripture verse work?

Teacher D, like Teacher B, challenged students to support their arguments. Both teachers described a community with shared beliefs and practices by referencing the Christian perspective. This common frame of reference appeared to allow them to probe students' thinking for arguments that were weak or inconsistent with the community's claims about reality.

### **Evidence of Quality**

Hermeneutic phenomenology describes the lived experience of an individual or the essence of an individual's shared understanding of an experience or concept (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Following hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher did not bracket himself and approached the interviews with a consciousness of his fore-conceptions. Through a spiraling process of revisiting and revising his own assumptions, the researcher analyzed the data to uncover the wholeness of the subject's lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Huttunen & Kakkori, 2020; Peoples, 2020). The researcher described a phenomenology of his own experience with Socratic practices as a means of making his assumptions or foreknowledge explicit (Kafle, 2011). Teachers were interviewed, and the data were collected and transcribed. After the interviews were conducted and during the analysis process, the researcher created a written record of the merging of his own experience with the phenomena and the teachers' descriptions. During this process, the researcher recorded and considered his fore-knowledge and the developing fusion of horizons (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

Throughout the analysis process, the researcher used a hermeneutic circle to conduct data analysis: the data were examined as a whole, broken down into codes and themes, and synthesized. The spiraling process did not proceed in a linear fashion. Instead, the researcher returned to the data in a process of revision and reflection (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2020). During the analysis process, the researcher followed van Manen's (2016) three ways of

viewing the transcripts: he reviewed the texts as a whole story, at the level of a paragraph, and at the level of a word or phrase. Following Lindseth and Norberg (2004), the researcher examined the transcripts using three steps. First, the researcher conducted a “naïve reading” (p. 149) of the text to gain an overall understanding while annotating and making notes in the text’s margins. Second, the researcher then conducted a structural analysis: The researcher read with his fore-conception in mind and developed a codebook where meaning units, condensed meaning units, subthemes, and themes were developed. Third, the researcher re-read the transcripts and summarized the themes. The researcher’s fore-conceptions and growing awareness of his fusion of horizons were recorded in a separate fieldnotes document and used to describe his reflexivity in the results of the research.

Table 2 presents examples of coding as evidence of quality.

**Table 2***Examples of Coding as Evidence of Quality*

Meaning Unit	Condensed Meaning Unit	Subtheme	Theme
Once in a while, I'll interject if I feel they need to get a little jumpstart, or if they need a redirect, but actually, more often than not, they don't need it.	I am not actively involved in the conversation except to guide it	Being a guide	Being Socratic
I usually schedule only a single class period to do it... we have the prep time, and then we have a single class period, and then we'll do a debrief the next day. So that is my most negative in that aspect.	I am challenged by a lack of time	Being time-bound	Being troubled
Another thing I think that's interesting is the way that our schedule works is my class is three hours in the morning, and then they have lunch right afterwards. And I love it because I can just walk through their lunchroom and hear them still discussing what we just talked about.	I love hearing students engage in conversation outside of class	Being delighted by engagement	Being delighted
We're having a conversation here. And I'm scared, in some sense, of having a conversation. So the kids must feel that way as well.	Because I am scared of having a conversation, the students must also be scared	Being empathetic	Being a dialogue-builder

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggested that validity be established using at least two of nine validation strategies. The study used four of the nine strategies Creswell and Poth discussed.

First, the study sought participant feedback by asking them to review and evaluate transcripts of

their interviews for accuracy. Second, the study generated a rich, thick description. Third, the study looked for negative case analysis or discomfoting evidence. Fourth, as a hermeneutic phenomenology, the study clarified the researcher's reflexivity. Reliability was ensured by using a computer with a high-quality microphone to produce accurate recording of the interviews. Reliability was further ensured by challenging the researcher's perspective through fieldnote writing and the data analysis process. Peoples (2020) noted that a phenomenological study that wholly affirms the researcher's biases lacks credibility and that rich descriptions of the phenomenon support reliability. Thus, some differences between the researchers' biases and the researcher's reflexivity will be discussed in Chapter 5. Cohen et al. (2000) added that reliability is affirmed when descriptions are accompanied by enough of the transcript that readers can form their own interpretations.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore teachers' lived experiences with Socratic practices. Hermeneutic phenomenology describes the lived experience of an individual or the essence of an individual's shared understanding of an experience or concept (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Four significant themes were uncovered through the analysis of the teachers' descriptions of their lived experiences with leading Socratic discussions: being delighted, being troubled, being a dialogue-builder, and being Socratic. Chapter 5 presents the discussion of the findings.

## V. DISCUSSION

The study's objective was to describe teachers' lived experiences with Socratic practices. Hermeneutic phenomenology describes the lived experience of an individual or the essence of an individual's shared understanding of an experience or concept (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Data for the study were collected through interviews with four high school teachers. Following a hermeneutic phenomenology methodology, the researcher did not bracket himself and approached the interviews with a consciousness of his fore-conceptions. Through a spiraling process of revisiting and revising his assumptions, the researcher analyzed the data to uncover the wholeness of the subjects' lived experiences as themes emerged (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Huttunen & Kakkori, 2020; Peoples, 2020).

### **Methods of Data Collection**

This study was a phenomenology of Socratic practice. As a hermeneutic phenomenology, the study's purpose was to explore the essential meaning of teachers' being-in-the-world as they led Socratic practices. The researcher used a criterion sampling strategy to select four high school teachers who self-identified as being experienced with Socratic practice, were interested in understanding the phenomenon, and were willing to participate in an interview (Moustakas, 1994). Two of the teachers were selected by convenience sampling, as the researcher knew they had experience with Socratic practices. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with each of the four teachers over several months using an interview guide (see Appendix A),

transcribed the interviews, and sent the transcriptions to the subjects for verification. After each interview, the researcher recorded his experiences and understandings in a logbook. The data were analyzed using the hermeneutic circle. The data were reread multiple times for analysis in a non-linear process as the researcher gained more access to the teachers' lifeworld and experienced a fusion of horizons (Suddick et al., 2020).

### **Summary of Results**

Teachers experienced Socratic practice as both a challenge and a joy. They were also somewhat Socratic in their methods. Although teachers were guides, argument-followers, observers, and gadflies, they often focused on the form of the conversation rather than pursuing specific conclusions. That is, many teachers frequently were midwives of conversation rather than truth. Unlike Socrates, they were also explicitly pedagogical about their approach to setting up discussions. Teachers were dialogue-builders who paid attention to process, goals, and student growth; in doing so, teachers were clear about their expectations, flexible, and empathetic but in control of their classrooms. Thus, the teachers' lived experiences with Socratic practices included teaching students to participate in the seminars.

Teachers experienced troubles. They were challenged, in class, by student engagement. For example, students did not respond to prompt questions or the teachers' classes were too large. Teachers were time-bound, which impacted the implementation of their Socratic practices. They also experienced being conflicted when they had choose between conflicting values as they guided the conversation. Teachers also experienced self-doubt, which was often related to their skill in asking good questions. Despite these troubles, teachers frequently were delighted due to their Socratic discussions. They experienced joy when they encountered new ideas and new

perspectives. Teachers also were delighted when students took ownership of the conversations and demonstrated growth in their conversation skills.

The researcher uncovered four themes with corresponding subthemes. Three subthemes comprised the theme of being delighted: being delighted by different perspectives, being delighted by student growth, and being delighted by student ownership. Being troubled was the second theme. Four subthemes formed the second theme: being challenged with engagement, being time-bound, being self-doubting, and being conflicted. The theme of being a dialogue-builder, the third theme, included subthemes of being process-oriented, being goal-oriented, being growth-oriented, being clear about expectations, being in control, being flexible, and being empathetic. Being Socratic was the fourth theme; this theme contained the subthemes of being a guide, being argument-followers, being observant, and being a gadfly.

### **Discussion by Research Question**

#### **Research Question 1**

The first research question was “What are the lived experiences of high school teachers implementing the Socratic method?” The teachers’ lived experiences included being delighted, being troubled, being a dialogue-builder, and being Socratic. The teachers found the need to teach Socratic practices to their students: that is, they needed to build a dialogue. In doing so, they scaffolded expectations, set clear goals, were explicit with their expectations, and were flexible yet in control of their classrooms. The researcher was surprised that dialogue building included so much articulated, direct training of students because his experience with the practice had little to no direct training, and Socrates himself did not explicitly teach his students a method, though he was a model to followers who imitated him (Haroutunian-Gordon, 1988;

Plato, 2002; Vlastos, 1982). Thus, teachers may consider training students to participate in Socratic dialogues an essential part of, and precursor, to Socratic practices.

Teachers acted as gadflies and challenged students' assumptions just as Socrates had done. However, they did not refer to any specific methodology. Thus, the participants did not describe the Socratic elenchus as part of their lived experiences. Teachers did not mention a strategy of asking questions to explore logical contradictions, and conversations were not generally focused on moral questions (McPherran, 2010). Instead, Socratic practices tended to explore new ideas or challenge preconceived notions. The participants also took an interest in allowing students to express their thoughts or showing students to reason and provide evidence. Only one teacher referred to the sort of intellectual numbness that Socrates would produce in his interlocutors because of elenchus; what was core to Socrates's practice seemed to be less critical to the teachers' experience with Socratic seminars.

Being time-bound was a common challenge for teachers: they described the length of their seminars and struggled with having limited time to train students and conduct seminars. The teachers were very conscious of time as having a significant impact on their practices. The teachers, too, tended to doubt themselves when questions failed to produce high levels of engagement; the assumption seemed to be that lack of student engagement resulted from poor questions or lack of scaffolding rather than a feature of the questions or the participants. Interestingly, this position seemed to conflict with the teachers' descriptions of being gadflies and one teacher's comfort with silence in the classroom since intellectual numbness suggests the possibility of students being quiet out of uncertainty. Thus, teachers may have experienced a lack of engagement in different ways at different times. This contradiction could be explained in terms of the teachers' broad goals and what delighted them: teachers were delighted by student

growth (often characterized by an increased willingness to speak) and general student engagement. They wanted students to engage in conversation together and take ownership of their education. Thus, silence or lack of engagement seemed to suggest, to the teachers, that they failed to achieve their goals. Only one teacher mentioned truth as a goal of Socratic seminars. That same teacher was the only one who mentioned being comfortable with silence. Although that teacher sometimes doubted the quality of her questions, she seemed to come closest to expressing Socrates's experience of being a gadfly and torpedo-fish in pursuit of truth.

Unlike Socrates, who asserted that he was troubled by ignorance and uncertain about truth, teachers did not report self-doubt about their understanding of the topics. The self-doubt occurred in the quality of the questions rather than some essential aspect of their topical understanding; this self-doubt, too, was a surprise to the researcher, who is frequently troubled by doubt during Socratic conversations and quickly discovers his ignorance with regards to essences of things. The researcher also has experienced doubt about the quality of questions, but his doubt tends to center on objects of knowing. For example, as the researcher mentioned earlier, he once failed to understand the essence of a chair and pursued that understanding with his class.

The teachers' lived experiences included guiding the conversation and being argument-followers. Like Socrates, they did not view themselves as pedagogues during the conversation. Thus, teachers generally allowed conversations to flow organically if students stayed on topic and followed the teachers' expectations for discussion. Consequently, the teachers led a Socratic discussion with rules and limitations in mind; the conversation could only flow if certain boundaries restrained it. The researcher was surprised by the theme of control in the classroom, considering that he experienced Socratic practice as a loss of control. His own lived experience

of leading Socratic seminars centered around students taking control of the conversations, though he, in retrospect, recognized that the loss of power only occurred in a context of the conversation in which implicit or explicit discussion rules about process, goals, or content were followed and respected.

## **Research Question 2**

The second research question was “What do teachers’ lived experiences of leading Socratic discussion suggest about their understanding of Socratic practice?” Socratic practices among the teachers appeared to be more directly linked to a modern version of the Socratic method than the classical Socrates. The teachers’ understanding of Socratic practice’s purposes varied to a degree, though significant similarities existed in how they implemented the method, especially when it came to using inner and outer circles. This uniformity of implementation may suggest a growing agreement of how the Socratic method should be implemented in the classroom and supports Fullam’s (2015) assertion that modern Socratic seminar techniques are preeminent in K-12 education. As noted earlier, only one teacher referred to the sort of intellectual numbness that Socrates would produce in his interlocutors because of elenchus; what was core to Socrates’s practice seemed not to be a concern for most of the teachers. The lack of intellectual numbing further supports the possibility that the teachers’ understanding of Socratic practice is more in line with 19th and early 20th conceptions of the Socratic method than the Socrates of Plato (Schneider, 2013). Furthermore, two teachers thought that students enjoyed and valued Socratic practices. They did not express a need to justify using Socratic seminars in the classroom, suggesting that they thought there was no question as to the benefits of the Socratic method as a teaching technique. Thus, the lack of justification points to the possibility that the

early 20th century argument mentioned by Schneider about the relevance of Socratic discussion in the classroom is closed.

Furthermore, the teachers' experiences with doubt when questions failed to engage students and their delight when students did speak up implies that teachers may have linked Socratic practice's effectiveness with students' tangible engagement. Edwards's (2019) dissertation suggested that teachers connected the Socratic method's usefulness in developing critical thinking skills to students' active involvement in the discussion. Though teachers in the current study did not link critical thinking to engagement, they appeared to view verbal engagement as either a goal or an essential element of Socratic practice. Thus, teachers appeared to understand active, explicit engagement as essential to what they were accomplishing in the classroom. However, the form of engagement also did not need to be verbal. One teacher, for example, was content if students showed engagement by nodding their heads.

Interestingly, the teachers' doubt when students did not demonstrate tangible engagement suggested that they understood perplexity, generally, as something that comes from what is unclear or confusing. Boghossian (2012) distinguished between confusion caused by a lack of clarity and perplexity caused by challenging problems. However, teachers tended to assume the former rather than the latter and seemed to blame themselves for students' silence. They appeared to assume their questions were unclear rather than challenging. Socrates sometimes stultified his interlocutors to the point of anger or silence, as with Polemarchus in the *Republic* (Plato, 1991). Yet most teachers associated lack of engagement as the result of poor questions rather than the result of good questions.

Despite the doubt in their questions, teachers understood student preparation as important to students benefiting from a Socratic discussion. As Teacher D noted, "The more they put into it,

the more effort they put into [preparing for discussion], the more they get out of it.” The teachers consistently suggested that students benefited most when they prepared for their classes, which may be why teachers created a structure for students to prepare by asking for notes and questions to be brought to class. However, teachers also thought that the composition of students could also impact the quality of engagement. Teacher D, for example, suggested that one class struggled to have a productive conversation because “they just want[ed] to have fun.” Although Teacher C also pointed to being “disappointed” when some classes came to discussion unprepared, she also suggested that some classes “just don’t want to converse, they don’t want to put themselves out there.” Thus, the teachers provided several explanations for the lack of student engagement but also blamed themselves.

The teachers understood Socratic discussion as something that could be taught, as suggested by their emphasis on scaffolding. However, they did not appear to think that Socratic practices could be taught through simple explanation and used explicit instruction as well as modeling to teach the process. The teachers also intervened in the conversation as necessary. All teachers mentioned using inner and outer circles during class. Although teachers discussed using a single circle or informal Socratic practices, they appeared to understand the inner and outer circles to be an excellent approach to problems with engagement, particularly with younger students or large classes. Thus, they tended to follow the process discussed by Rud (1997) and Delić and Bećirović (2016). However, teachers did seem to think that seminar rules could be less rigid as students grew older and more experienced. Thus, they understood Socratic practice as something that could be learned, internalized, and developed with time and effort.

Consequently, teachers understood Socratic discussion as something that needed preparation and reflection. They prepared both their students and themselves. The preparation

took time and effort. Thus, Socratic practices were understood to come at the cost of classroom time and preparation time. Nevertheless, the teachers' enjoyment and belief in the value of Socratic discussion pointed toward a belief in its value in advancing their classroom goals.

## **Discussion of Themes**

### **Theme 1: Being Delighted**

All four teachers reported delight because of their Socratic practices. The teachers seemed to find Socratic practices rewarding on an emotional level. Three subthemes formed the basis of their satisfaction: being delighted by different perspectives, being delighted by student ownership, and being delighted by student growth. The teachers' enjoyment of the Socratic discussion was not a surprise to the researcher due to his delight in the classroom conversation; the researcher has also enjoyed exploring diverse ideas in discussion. Indeed, the teachers' delight in different perspectives aligns with Balbay's (2019) study on developing critical awareness. Balbay suggested that Socratic questioning strategies helped students avoid biased, subjective opinions and gave them broader perspectives. Additionally, Burns et al. (2016) conducted a study that suggested Socratic seminars can help students learn to tolerate ambiguity. Similarly, the current study adds to the literature by suggesting that teachers can take pleasure in opening students' intellectual horizons and that teachers' own critical awareness can grow during Socratic discussions.

The delight in student ownership and student growth seems to be tied together. Student ownership in the conversation seemed to be limited at first while the teachers trained students how to engage in Socratic dialogue. However, teachers perceived that as students grew, students conversed more and were better prepared for the conversation. Thus, students experienced decreased ownership of the conversation. Teachers enjoyed the way students embraced their own

learning. Hence, the delight of growth appears to have led to further happiness for teachers as students demonstrated their developing skills and used them in student-led conversations.

## **Theme 2: Being Troubled**

The teachers discussed being troubled because of challenging experiences during implementing Socratic practices. Four subthemes formed the stratum of this theme: being challenged with engagement, being time-bound, being self-doubting, and being conflicted. Of the subthemes, being time-bound interested the researcher the most because of its unexpected emergence as a subtheme. Although Haroutunian-Gordon (2009) discussed teachers' need for time to reflect on their discussions, the literature contains little discussion of the consequences of time in the context of Socratic discussion and how teachers experienced temporality. However, the teachers were especially conscious of time limitations on their discussion and discussion preparation, and the participants experienced Socratic seminars as a process that occurred in time and was limited by time.

When teachers discussed their experiences of self-doubt, the researcher was surprised by the nature of their self-doubt. As discussed earlier, the teachers tended to experience doubt about the quality of their questions rather than the nature of the problem being explored. The teachers wondered about the essence of a good question and compared their questions to their idea of a good question; the ideal question seemed a query that would produce much engagement and debate. The teachers' doubts about the nature of a good question point toward Haroutunian-Gordon's (2009) and Edwards's (2019) assertions that further training on the Socratic method might help teachers with classroom implementation. Further training may have the effect of giving teachers guidance on the nature and essence of a good question.

Although one participant said she did not struggle with students speaking too little during the discussion, she reported an experience with a student speaking too much. The one student's over-engagement led to the other students' under-engagement. Griswold et al. (2017) reported a similar problem in their case study of Socratic seminars of a high school diabetes curriculum used in an 8th-grade class. Other teachers reported troubles with students not engaging enough, and one teacher reported problems with students speaking to her rather than to other students. Therefore, the teachers expressed that engagement problems could occur in various forms. Contrary to the Harvard Law approach, the teachers did not describe calling on students to encourage whole class participation (Gersen, 2017). Instead, they seemed to expect full class participation to be an outgrowth of their classroom expectations for student-led conversation. Broadly, then, the teachers followed Alder (1984) in designing discussions that were student-led and teacher-guided. The teachers' struggle with engagement seemed to result from their reduced involvement in the conversation and an expectation that students would take a leading role in shaping the conversation.

### **Theme 3: Being a Dialogue-Builder**

The participants reported being dialogue-builders. In doing so, the teachers experienced being process, goal, and growth-oriented. They were clear about their expectations and empathized with their students. The teachers maintained control of their classrooms but were also flexible in applying Socratic practices. In addition, the teachers expressed a goal of developing deep, critical thinkers. Teacher D, for example, celebrated a milestone when her students showed that they could "think deeply" in discussion together. The teachers' interest in deep conversations was mirrored by the research of Davies and Sinclair (2014), which shows that Socratic questioning following the paideia method increased deep student-to-student

interactions. Additionally, Blake's (2018) dissertation on the Socratic method in online higher education classrooms supports the teachers' perceptions that Socratic practices can help develop critical thinking skills.

Being growth-oriented seemed to be a crucial factor that enabled the teachers to tolerate some of the challenges they faced as they implemented Socratic practices. For example, Teacher B anticipated student growth throughout the semester and discussed a time when a lack of student participation challenged her. She had wondered if she had not prepared the students properly. Her reflection on the experience and decision to learn from the disappointing seminar led her to change her approach and develop further processes that would lead to student growth. Thus, because Teacher B interpreted her challenges as an opportunity to grow, she was able to overcome some challenges pertaining to engagement.

#### **Theme 4: Being Socratic**

The theme of being Socratic included four subthemes: being a guide, being argument-followers, being observant, and being a gadfly. Being Socratic meant, broadly, following practices that Socrates used. For example, the teachers reported challenging students' assumptions and, thus, were gadflies—in some respect—like Socrates. However, the data suggest that the teachers' questions had limits. Socrates often asked questions of his fellow Greeks until they were angry, upset, or confused (Blosser, 2014; Weiss, 2006). The teachers asked questions to challenge students and enjoyed exploring ambiguous or complex topics. Yet, the teachers also reported feeling empathy for their students. The teachers seemed to be careful not to make students too uncomfortable. Teacher C, for example, empathized with her students' fears, and Teacher D carefully timed her first seminars to make sure that the length of the seminars did not make students uncomfortable. Thus, although the teachers may have caused

students some discomfort, they were also careful to avoid causing the wrong kind of discomfort. Only one teacher expressed an explicit limit to being a gadfly: Teacher B ensured students were left with positive knowledge rather than doubts. In contrast, Teacher D emphasized being a gadfly concerning supporting evidence. Furthermore, Teachers A and B liked conversations with ambiguity. For the most part, then, the teachers seemed to be comfortable with uncertainty as an outcome of a Socratic discussion.

The teachers were Socratic concerning aspects of his method but did not mention virtue or goodness as an end goal of the discussion. The tendency to use leading questions and deemphasize correct answers follows modern Socratic seminar practices (Copeland, 2005). Indeed, as guides, the teachers tended to deemphasize their role in the conversation, as Adler (1984) suggested, with limited shaping of the content of the conversation. However, the teachers' approach was in contrast with Socrates's approach of rarely encouraging debate or discussion between students (Rud, 1997). The teachers often encouraged students to follow conversations where they led; however, they did not express an experience of being at the center of the conversation.

The researcher was curious about whether the teachers might express an experience of something like Socrates's daimon, which warned Socrates against acting or speaking in specific ways, especially regarding moral actions (Plato, 2002). One teacher did describe an experience of being conflicted when students were "speaking untruths" and followed the warning to redirect students toward her understanding of biblical truths. Her experience seemed to be the most akin to Socrates's inner warning, yet the Socratic daimon did not emerge as a subtheme in this study. However, the failure of the subtheme to emerge does not mean that the teachers did not have such an experience. Asserting so would be the fallacy of appealing to ignorance.

## Study Limitations

The study was limited to four teachers who self-identified as being experienced in Socratic practices and were willing to participate in the study, fulfilling the requirements for a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). However, more subjects may have allowed for further data saturation and may have provided additional insight into the teachers' experiences. Furthermore, two teachers were from the same Christian private school, and the two remaining teachers were part of different Christian classical education organizations. In addition, all participants were female, and three of the four participants lived in the same geographic region. Consequently, the religious orientation, location, and gender of the teachers could be considered a limitation, though the purpose of phenomenology is not generalizability (Peoples, 2020).

The researcher interviewed each teacher only once. Additional interviews and direct classroom observations may have yielded further insight; therefore, the number of interviews and lack of direct observation might be considered a limitation. The use of videoconference technology could have been another limitation because people may be more likely to discuss difficult issues and personal challenges in person than in video conferences (Sedgwick & Spiers, 2009). Finally, as Dasein himself, the researcher's fore-conceptions were a limitation of the study; researchers who apply hermeneutic phenomenology work from the assumption that they cannot achieve a state of pure objectivity (van Manen, 2016). Despite the hermeneutic circle used in the analysis, the researchers' fore-conception about Socratic practices may have impacted his capacity to fully uncover (i.e., *aletheia*) the essence of the phenomenon as it exists in each teacher's lifeworld.

## **Implications for Future Practice**

The teachers' responses to the interviews suggested a few lessons for educators interested in using the Socratic method in their classrooms. First, the teachers had considered building a dialogue essential for success, especially in the early stages of the school year. This emphasis on dialogue-building suggests that teachers who plan to use the practice should train students in how to engage in dialogue with each other. Teachers should be clear with their expectations, goals, and processes. Teachers should try to understand how students might experience seminars through imagination. Alternatively, teachers might seek to participate in seminars themselves and examine their own lived experiences, as Haroutunian-Gordon suggested (2009).

Second, teachers should expect challenges along the way with student participation and the way that time limits both the preparation for the discussion and the conversation itself. Teachers can expect to be disappointed by the dialogue and experience self-doubt from poor student engagement. However, following Boghossian (2012), teachers should remember that perplexity may emerge from a lack of clarity or challenging content. Teachers should not assume that their questions were unclear but should ask whether the question encouraged students to reflect on difficult ideas. Doubt in the quality of the questions was common; however, such doubt may allow teachers to reflect and grow as seminar leaders, as Teacher C described in her reflection on the experience. The implication for practice is that challenges may come, and self-doubt may be essential to the experience of leading Socratic conversations. Thus, teachers should anticipate and accept challenges as part of the process and as opportunities to grow as teachers and discussion leaders.

Third, teachers can anticipate being a guide in the conversation, not the final say, though they may choose to participate in the discussion to varying degrees. However, teacher

participation means releasing control, which results in a conflict for teachers who value control in their classroom. Turning the eyes to the light, rather than placing sight into the eyes (Plato, 1991), is part of the experience of leading a Socratic discussion. Thus, teachers should accept that they must find a new role as a guide rather than a pedagogue in their classroom. Teachers' questions become a tool of causing students to think new thoughts rather than giving them answers, though teachers should recognize that their questions shape students' conclusions. Teachers might benefit from training in the difference between confusing or unclear questions and good questions that might produce positive stultification and deep thoughts on a complicated subject. Hence, teachers might benefit from studying Paul and Elder's (2007) system of Socratic questioning. Doing so may relieve some self-doubt.

Fourth, teachers should look past the struggles and conflicts and anticipate being delighted because of the experience despite all the challenges. Socrates suggested that happiness was found in virtue (Plato, 2004). Although phenomenology is not an approach for developing a theory, and Socrates himself did not claim to know whether virtue could be taught, the teachers seemed to find the greatest happiness when the conversation aligned with their classroom virtues or the highest ends of their classes. Teacher A, for example, articulated a goal of teaching students to explore diverse perspectives and found delight when diverse perspectives were explored. Teacher C wanted students to develop their own voices and talk honestly with each other and, thus, found joy when the conversation blossomed. Thus, teachers who plan to implement Socratic practices in their classes might take a few moments to define the virtues they expect to recognize and rejoice in them.

Lastly, the researcher, in his reflexivity, would like to suggest that teachers spend time reading Socratic dialogues as a preparation for leading their own discussions. The teachers who

participated in this study described their experience with being dialogue-builders and how they provided models and expectations for their students. The researcher can think of no better place for teachers to learn Socratic discussion than the model of Socrates himself. Teachers may find value in connecting Socratic practice to its source and transforming nominal dialectical continuity to actual dialogical continuity. Socrates was the master questioner and helped his students develop a deep understanding of concepts (Delić & Bećirović, 2016). In studying Socrates, teachers may discover how to ask the same sort of probing questions Socrates had asked. Certainly, the researcher's experience with studying Plato's dialogues taught him to grow comfortable with self-doubt and the sort of questions that lead students to a state of healthy aporia.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study addressed the lived experiences of four teachers as they led Socratic discussions. However, more research into the Socratic experience of teachers as a phenomenon is warranted since the teachers were all Christians who worked within liberal-arts classes. Phenomenological research into public school teachers' experiences with Socratic practices as well as teachers' lived experiences within science and math classrooms might prove valuable. Additionally, the teachers appear to have slightly different goals for their seminars; qualitative investigation into the different goals and outcomes that teachers have might yield interesting insights into why teachers use Socratic practices in their classes and how teachers' goals impact the mode of conversation.

One teacher's assertion that she was interested in how specific questions lead to different outcomes points toward another potential quantitative study: how questions impact student outcomes and understandings. Paul and Elder (2008) described three different kinds of questions

and gave examples of each kind. Although the teachers did not reference Paul and Elder, a study into the kind of questions asked during seminars and how they influence students might help teachers understand the effectiveness of certain types of questions in achieving their discussion goals. Furthermore, the teachers' emphasis on dialogue-building suggests the value of studying the effectiveness of scaffolding techniques in producing productive Socratic conversations.

Balbay (2019) suggested that Socratic seminars using Socratic questioning strategies may help students develop critical awareness—a broader, more objective perspective about the world. In the current study, one teacher said that her critical awareness developed because of leading Socratic seminars, and several teachers expressed enjoyment at discussions about topics that encouraged debate and different perspectives. Thus, future qualitative studies might explore how Socratic practices lead teachers to develop their own critical awareness.

Finally, the literature contains broad and contradictory definitions of Socratic practices. Qualitative research that lays out a taxonomy of Socratic approaches may help researchers categorize the kind of Socratic practice they see in the classroom. This categorization may help researchers who seek to understand the effectiveness of Socratic discussion in the classroom to compare the various approaches. Indeed, further exploration of the similarities and differences between the modern practice of the Socratic method in the school and its historical roots could be revealing. For, as Socrates argued, humans cannot know much about whether a thing can be taught and learned without first knowing what it is (Plato, 2004).

### **Conclusion**

When educators use Socratic practices, they link their classrooms with a rich historical context or, at least, evoke the rich historical context. Training students to participate in discussions goes beyond the historical Socrates, who had followers but did not explicitly teach

his method. Fortunately, the teachers in this study were not forced to drink hemlock because they conversed with students and asked them questions. Nevertheless, the teachers experienced challenges as they led their classes in discussions. Like Socrates, the teachers experienced joys and pleasures as they talked with students and taught them to converse with each other. Similarly, Socrates found no greater pleasure than philosophizing with his friends. Even on his deathbed, Socrates continued to converse with his friends about the nature of the beautiful and the good. Yet, the teachers' goals in their classes varied. Though all the teachers emphasized asking questions and communal engagement and encouraged deep thinking, they described some disagreement about the ends of Socratic practice. This disagreement evokes a question that Socrates may have asked in his state of divine ignorance. Although this study contributes to the literature by exploring teachers' lived experiences with Socratic practices, teachers and researchers alike might benefit by perpetually asking themselves, "What is Socratic practice?"

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## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Questions**

1. Describe how you implement Socratic practice in your classroom.
  - a. Give an example of a time where the arrangement of your room influenced your Socratic practice.
  - b. Give an example of a time where your subject matter influenced your Socratic practice.
2. Give an example of how students have responded to the implementation of Socratic practice in your classroom.
  - a. Share a time you have had a positive experience implementing Socratic practice.
  - b. Share a time you have had a negative experience implementing Socratic practice.
3. Give an example of how Socratic practice in the classroom caused you to experience moments of doubt and confusion.
4. Give an example of how Socratic practice in the classroom relieved you of doubts and confusion.
5. What else would you like to add about your experiences with Socratic practice?