Bir Teknik
Sokratik Sorgulama ile Yönlendirilmiş Keşif

M. Hakan TÜRKÇAPAR[1], Melis Sedef KAHRAMAN[2], A. Emre SARGIN[3]

[1]Prof. Dr., Hasan Kalyoncu Üniversitesi, Psikoloji Bölümü, Gaziantep
[2]Psikolog, Adalet Bakanlığı, Ankara
[3]Yard. Doç. Dr., Üsküdar Üniversitesi, Psikiyatri Bölümü, İstanbul

Özet

Sokratik yöntem, antik dönem Yunan filozofu Sokrates'in felsefi düşünüşü ve bilgiyi soru sorarak öğretme yöntemidir. Sokrates'in öğrencilerine bilgileri sorular sorarak öğretmesi Sokratik dialog adıyla bilinir. Bu anlamda sokratik sorgulamayla aslında karşısındakine yeni bir şey öğretilmemekte sadece bilinen anımsatılmakta ve tekrar bulunmaktadır. Bilişsel davranışçı terapi sürecinde kullanılan Sokratik süreç ve bunun terapideki uygulama biçimi ise yönlendirilmiş keşif (Guided Discovery) olarak adlandırılır. Yönlendirilmiş keşif için pek çok farklı teknik kullanılabilir ancak Sokratik sorgulama en sık kullanılan ve en etkin tekniklerden bir tanesidir. Bu yöntemle bir seri soru ile aslında danışanın bilebileceği ancak farkında olmadığı bilginin farkına varmasını amaçlanır. Sokratik sorgulama danışanın iyi dinlenmesinden ve yansıtmadan faydalanılarak sorun tanımlanması, inceleme, değerlendirme yaparak alternatifler bulma, açığa çıkan yeni bilgilerin kullanılarak yeniden tanımlama yapmak ve son olarak da eski çarpık inancın sorgulanması ve yeni bilgi ışığında bir sonuca varma ve uygulama aşamalarından oluşur. Bu aşamalar esnasında kullanılan soru tipleri bilgi edinmeye dönük sorular, çeviri soruları, yorum soruları, geçmişteki benzer durumlara ilişkin uygulama soruları, analiz soruları ve analitik sentez sorularıdır. Bu yazıda Sokratik Sorgulama-Yönlendirilmiş Keşfin bu aşamaları örnek görüşmeler üzerinden gözden geçirilecektir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Sokratik sorgulama, yönlendirilmiş keşif, bilişsel, terapi, bilişsel psikoterapi.

Abstract

Guided Discovery with Socratic Questioning

"The Socratic method" is a way of teaching philosophical thinking and knowledge by asking questions. It was first used by in ancient times by the Greek philosopher Socrates who taught his followers by asking questions; these conversations between them are known as "Socratic dialogues". In this methodology, no new knowledge is taught to the individual; rather, the individual is guided to remember and rediscover what was formerly known through this process. The main method used in cognitive therapy is guided discovery. There are various methods of guided discovery in cognitive therapy. The form of verbal exchange between the therapist and client which is used during the process of cognitive behavioral therapy is known as "socratic questioning". In this method the goal is to make the client rediscover, with a series of questions, a piece of knowledge which he could otherwise know but is not presently conscious of. The Socratic Questioning consists of several steps, including: identifying the problem by listening to the client and making reflections, finding alternatives by examining and evaluating, reidentification by using the newly rediscovered information and questioning the old distorted belief, and reaching a new conclusion and applying it. Question types used during these procedures are: questions for collecting information, questions revealing meanings, questions revealing beliefs, questions about behaviours during similar past experiences, analytic questions and analytic synthesis questions. In order to make the patient feel understood, it is important to be empathetic and summarize the problem during the interview. In this text, steps of Socratic Questioning-Guided Discovery will be reviewed with sample dialogues provided for each step.

Key words: Socratic questioning, guided discovery, cognitive, therapy, cognitive psychotherapy.

DEFINITIONS

Socratic Method: Ancient Greek Philosopher Socrates' (BC470 Alopeke, Attika-BC 399 Atina) way of philosophical thinking and teaching knowledge by questioning. Socrates taught students by asking questions, a method known as *The Socratic Dialogue.* It depends on the idea that humans have a priori information of everything in their mind, as some other Ancient Greek Philosophers also argued. Using the Socratic Method the person is not taught something new, rather the known is found again and recalled. Since it depends on revealing the existent knowledge which a person has, it is known as *Maieutics* (Aydın 2008). Within the classical Socratic Method, the interrogational questions are first used to discuss the person's false/deficient premise *(e.g. Lying is bad)*, followed by questions which will reveal examples that contradict this premise *(e.g. "Would you tell truly where a person is in the situation that the person who asks you is looking at him to kill him although he is innocent?" "No"; "Then can we say that lying is good?" "Yes")*. Then under the light of this new knowledge the previous premise is rejected and revised *(e.g. If so, can we say that lying is not always bad but sometimes good?)*.

The Socratic Method is seen as a major component of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) by the founders of CBT, Aaron T. Beck and Albert Ellis, because changes in the cognitive area are the main objectives of CBT. These changes do not occur when a therapist directly tells the client what the rational and realistic thoughts are or when the therapist advises the client to think in a realistic and rational way.

The type of Socratic Method which is used in CBT is known as *Guided Discovery*. Young and Beck explained the importance of Guided Discovery with these words: *"We have observed that patients often adopt new perspectives more readily when they come to their own conclusions than when the therapist tries to debate with the patient. In this respect, the cognitive therapist is more like a skilled teacher than a lawyer. He/she guides the "student" to see logical problems in the student's present position; to examine evidence that contradicts the students beliefs; to gather information when more is necessary to test a hypothesis; to look at new alternatives that the student may never have considered, and to reach valid conclusions after this exploration"(Young and Beck 1980b).*

Cognitive changes occur through *The Socratic Process*, which includes *Socratic Questions*. Young and Beck stated that hypothesis testing, empiricism,

setting up experiments, inductive reasoning, weighing advantages and disadvantages, etc., are tools that a therapist can use in the process of guided discovery. They emphasized the importance and effect of questioning as critical (Young and Beck 1980b). They remarked that skillfully-phrased questions presented in a logical sequence are often extremely effective (Young and Beck 1980b). Socratic questioning enables an individual's discovery, evaluation and reformulation of his cognitions. With the help of these questions, information is collected from the client, client's ambiguous and abstract complaints are presented as tangible and particular problems, cognitions (automatic thoughts and beliefs) are revealed, the validity of the irrational beliefs is examined, the consequences of the clients' maladaptive behaviors are investigated, and decision making is reached through searching for new approaches (Stallard 2005).

Asking questions in The Socratic Way is the main methodology in CBT. Hence, the 7th item in Cognitive Therapy Rating Scale, which was composed by Young and Beck (1980), is devoted to assessing the guided discovery skills of the therapist during a session. In this scale, which is designed to evaluate and measure therapist competency and specific strengths and weaknesses, over 6 points is desirable. Those therapists who help their patients to see new perspectives through guided discovery for the most part of their sessions and who use questioning appropriately can reach 4 points or above. The ones who use persuasion, debate and lecturing during a session score less than 4 points. As for the therapists who seem to use "cross-examining" and put the patient on the defensive mood or force the client to adopt therapists' point of view, they don't get any points from this item (Young and Beck 1980).

With the help of the questions that are directed successively, the person to whom questions are directed is led to reevaluate his beliefs rationally. It can resemble a research which is conducted cooperatively. With the pertinent questions, not only is the clients' interest aroused, but the client also learns new information based upon what he already knows.

The characteristics of Socratic Questioning

These are questions which the client has the essential knowledge to respond to and that aim to reveal that information which the client already has. They target revealing information which is appertaining to client's problem, but which is out of the client's awareness due to his/her clinical situation. They are

questions which are oriented to focus attention on this knowledge. The Socratic process is collaborative and leads the person to reach meaningful and beneficial new results and understandings. The newly revealed knowledge and the previously revealed consequences are evaluated and a new opinion is formed.

Socratic Questioning with Guided Discovery

Guided discovery is the general name of the techniques, including Socratic questioning, which are oriented to enable clients to reach more realistic, suitable and useful cognitions about themselves and their lives (Kazantis et al. 2014). Socratic questioning is a form of guided discovery with verbal content.

When undertaking guided discovery via Socratic questioning with a series of questions the aim is for the client to recognize the information that he/she already knows but that is not in his/her awareness due to his/her mood or current state of mind. It depends on listening to the client effectively, summarizing the revealed new information and leading the client to reevaluate the new information through applying to previous irrational belief. There are five techniques which are used for Socratic questioning (Padesky 2000, Padesky and Greenberger 1995). These are:

1. Informational questions: The aim of these questions is to reveal the client's beliefs about the problem, understand the facts and the reasons that make client believe this way and then reveal the reality about the client and his/her situation completely.

2. Empathic Listening: Following the client's statements carefully to understand him/her by putting ourselves into the client's shoes. Listening to selected words, images, similes, themes, beliefs, strengths and weaknesses, and understanding and noting these. In this process attention should be paid not only to the client's words but also to nonverbal messages. Namely, in comparison with to other people, what does the client not have that other people are likely to have in this kind of situation, what is missing, what does the client not experience, does it not exist at all or is the client not aware of them, what are those that he has difficulties to tell you?

3. Summarization is the crucial component of the process. In the Socratic process there are two types of summarization that have importance: one of them is the client's authentic belief or knowledge about his/her problem that is being verbalized and the other is the new, realistic,

functional and beneficial belief or knowledge revealed through Socratic questions that is being summarized.

4. Analytical Synthesis Questions: These are final phase questions which are focused on understanding what the client has understood from the questioning and revealed information.
   – Which conclusion have you derived from this? Do the things that you say conform with your…. belief? According to this what can be helpful? If your close friend was in your situation, what would you say to her?

5. Application Questions: These questions are used in the end to discuss how the new information will be actualized.

The Phases of Guided Discovery with Socratic Questioning

The phases of guided discovery with Socratic questioning will be explained through the case presented below:

Ahmet is a 26 year old male client who has been having depressive symptoms after his failure to pass a professional examination. After a pretty successful student life, he graduated from the medical faculty; however, due to failing the residency training entrance examination, he couldn't begin his residency training. He had to continue work as a general practitioner. When he was interviewed about his failure to pass the exam, within his evaluation about the incident, he indicated that he believes he is "totally unsuccessful and loon". After clarifying the connection between the client's mood and this thought, the therapist and client decided to discuss this thought together.

Now the phases of "guided discovery" will be explained through examples from interview with Ahmet who shows indications of test anxiety and subsequently depression. The thought which was examined through the Socratic method was; *"I cannot be successful no matter what I do, since for that reason there is no need make an effort anymore".*

The phases of guided discovery and their application will be presented through this sample case.

1. Definition

Guided Discovery includes listening to the client's problem, understanding and reflecting the client's

thought-belief connected with his/her problem and determining the accompanying emotions and behaviors. In this phase, the client is asked informational questions (Overholser 1993). The biases of the important "universal definitions" and generalizations that have impact on a person's filtration, interpretation, direction and prediction of what happens in his/her life are determined (Stallard 2005). Then, verification of these is done with the client.

Example Questions:

What is the problem?

Why it is a problem?

What constitutes the problem?

How severe it is?

How often?

How long have you been having this problem?

Are there times that it gets totally better?

Can you give an example of that situation?

When is the last time that you lived such a situation? Can you explain?

When, where, how?

What did you feel?

What did you think?

What did you do?

What is the problem part of this?

What did you do in the past?

Sample Interview Section I: Definition

Interview:

T: Welcome. How do you feel this week? (Informational Socratic question)

C: I am pretty pessimistic; I can say that I feel blue generally.

T: You feel blue and pessimistic (feedback). Is it related with any specific situation or event or does it just pop up? (Informational Socratic question)

C: The same situation, nothing new has happened. I rather spend my time at home, I only putter about, sometimes there are situations that I feel bad.

T: Has there been such a situation recently? (Informational Socratic question)

C: When I was preparing to come here, I felt disinclined to come here.

T: What was your emotion when you felt disinclined to come here? (Informational Socratic question)

C: Hopelessness

T: Now, I want you to answer my question thinking about that moment. What was just going through your mind at the moment when you felt hopeless and disinclined to come here? (Informational Socratic question)

C: Anyhow it would not work and I thought that I am unsuccessful and there is no point to make effort unnecessarily.

T: How did you decide to come here? (Informational Socratic question)

C: Since I have to stick my appointment which I have with you. If there may be a little...?

T: Firstly congratulations for your determination to come. It is important for you to do this despite your negative thought.

C: It is not a big deal to do this.

T: Why is it not a big deal? (Informational Socratic question)

C: Everybody can do it; it is easy to come here.

T: If you remember we talked about the characteristics of depression. It may be not a big deal for a person who has not got depression but considering your situation I find it important.

C: Yes

T: If you want, this negative thinking can be our topic? How about that?

C: This is already my most important problem, the thought that nothing going to work.

T: Well, can we say that the conclusion that you draw from your life is "nothing going to work" these days, is that true? (Summarization)

C: Yes

T: There should be some reasons that cause you to think like this? Can you think what they might be?

C: The most recent example is the examination that I took. I could not pass even though I took it for second time. I had made effort but it did not work. I don't think this can change, so I think that there is no point to make effort unnecessarily anymore.

In this section, it is necessary to listen to the client carefully, then to understand and to reflect client's thought-belief related to his/her problem.

– *That is to say that you feel that you are an unsuccessful person because you failed the exam,*

Summarizing of revealed information and clarification of the belief once again:

– *You think that you are an unsuccessful person; therefore there is no reason to make effort.*

2. Examination-Evaluation and Finding Out Alternatives

Then, the client is asked informational questions to determine different and inconsistent examples. With questions which have potential to bring up different information or data related to the issue, it becomes possible to bring the new data and information to the client's awareness, to test the definitions especially to determine if there are exceptions or not. The investigation of the rational inconsistencies and examples which do not correspond to universal definitions lead limiting the client's definitions (Overholser 1993).

"Did you have a similar problem before?"

"How did you get out of it? Do you think the same solution would work?"

"Do you have any idea that would help?"

Sample Interview Section II: Examination-Evaluation and Finding out Alternatives

T: What does it mean to you to be unsuccessful?

C: Not being able to get the work done.

T: In this situation the work that you could not get done is the examination and since you failed it, you tell you are unsuccessful.

C: Yes, a substantial situation which I failed.

T: Alright, "I am unsuccessful" is a statement. "I could not get the adequate score from the examination for specialty in medicine the second time I took it" is another statement, lets write them down, which one is more realistic?

C: Aren't both the same?

T: If you look overall it is true but when you consider the information both give, which one informs better and describes the situation better?

C: Of course the second one.

T: Can you please read both statements again?

C: Ok, I am reading: "I am unsuccessful"

"I could not get the adequate score from the examination for specialty in medicine for the second time I took it"

T: *Is there any difference in terms of the emotion they constitute?*

C: *The first one is more negative and hopeless; second one is more realistic and less hopeless.*

T: *Now, let's look at the thought "I cannot be successful anymore, nothing going to work". You had a long school life and you have taken many exams.*

C: *Yes*

T: *Have you ever failed any of these exams?*

C: *Yes, I had difficulties about biology in secondary school, I got a bad mark and also in high school I had difficulties about chemistry, even have had the worst mark of my school life.*

T: *What happened then?*

C: *I became furious at that period. I was thinking that I didn't deserve that mark and my teacher was unfair to me by giving me that mark. I studied a lot and got a high mark from the second exam.*

T: *Then, you got a higher mark from the second exam in comparison to the first exam? What can be related to this higher mark do you think?*

C: *Actually I studied a lot after my anger to that low mark*

T: *Then can we say the mark you got from an exam is related to the study?*

C: *Of course*

T: *I want to ask you something else. Is there anyone who fails from an exam when they first take it but become successful at their second try?*

C: *Yes, of course, also pretty much*

T: *How do you think this change can be explained for people who fail at their first tries but be successful at their next try?*

C: *I don't think the difficulty level of the examination would change much. Exams are more less similar. The participants' state of being prepared and experienced may vary.*

T: *What are the determiners of preparedness?*

C: *Person's studies for the examination*

3. Reassessment

It begins with summarization of the more realistic, functional and beneficial new knowledge which revealed through questions (Overholser 1994). The ob-

jective is internalization of this realistic, suitable and beneficial knowledge and integration of it with cognitive structure or development of new cognitions.

For example:

-Then can we say….?

-What are the conclusions that you draw from this?

-According to this what can be helpful for you?

-If your close friend was in this situation, what would you tell him/her?

-If one of your close friends who loves and cares you learns all of these, what would he/she say?

Sample Interview Section III: Reassessment

T: *How can we summarize what we have talked about until now?*

C: *A person can have difficulties and failures when he does something for the first time.*

T: *Great*

C: *The result can change at the subsequent attempts*

T: *Yes*

Alright, I wonder what can be related to the change in the result through subsequent attempts?

C: *One's preparedness and studies, as to whether he/she learned the topic*

T: *Then can we say if one does a task for the first time, he may have difficulties and may fail, but if he works on it and keep on doing it, she/he can do better gradually?*

C: *Yes*

4. Conclusion and Application

It is the comparison of more realistic, suitable and beneficial new beliefs with the old beliefs that are less likely to be realistic, unsuitable and not beneficial that constitutes the problem. The aim of the questions that are used in this phase is for the client to compare his/her belief or thoughts which constitutes the problem with the more realistic, suitable and beneficial beliefs or thoughts. It aims to lead the client to compare both and to make him/her think about which cognition is more suitable to the situation. After the comparison with the irrational belief and the reevaluation of the old belief in the light of new knowledge, the objective is to develop a new behavior-attitude. The advantages and disadvantages of each possible alternative attitude/behavior/solution are discussed. At the application phase, the chosen alternatives and their possible consequences are examined.

What do you think should be done?

How would it work better?

What are your profits in doing so?

Losses?

What is the worst possible outcome?

How it is going to emerge?

If so what do you plan for it?

Can you think where and when you will do it?

How do you think it will go?

Do you think is there anything else that you can do to reach a better outcome?

Sample Interview Section IV: Conclusion and Application

T: *If one has difficulties and fails when he does something for the first time but he does better gradually when he strives and persists on it, how appropriate it is that you see yourself as unsuccessful because of your first failure from this?*

C: *It is not appropriate.*

T: *All right. How does this thought affect you in terms of behavior?*

C: *It keeps me away further from studying and the examination*

T: *If we remember our more realistic determination under the light of what we recently discussed, "One could have difficulties and may fail when he does something for the first time but he does better gradually if he strives and persists on it", what could you do in your situation if you act according to this?*

C: *According to this?*

T: *Yes*

C: *Can begin to study*

T: *So, in light of this new information what can you do about this instead of giving up?*

C: *Can study*

T: *Shall we make a plan about this? Would you like it?*

C: *Of course it would be very nice*

CONCLUSION

The Socratic Method is the main verbal technique of cognitive behavioral therapies. The Socratic process is orientated to revealing a client's knowledge

which is not in his/her awareness due to his/her mood or situation, and enabling the client to reach a new outcome (knowledge) by using the information he/she already had and which he/she now has retrieved. With the help of questions that are directed one after the other, the client is enabled to evaluate the validity of his beliefs rationally and is led to reach realistic, meaningful and beneficial new results and understandings about himself. However, the questions need to be carefully used and artfully applied with a careful timing. According to Beck, the patient may feel cross-examined or attacked if he feels the questions are being used to "trap" him/her (Beck et al. 1979). Stallard stated that the therapist should focus on the client's views and ideas, adopt a gentle and curious approach, break up questions with summaries, take a break if the session feels like an inquisition, and use non-verbal methods to conduct the Socratic process collaboratively (Stallard 2005).

Thus, a principle value of CBT Guided Discovery is that revealed knowledge is more likely to be embraced and applied owing to the fact that it is coming from client's own repertory and derived from his own experiences. This encourages the client to accept, adopt and act on the new knowledge and begin to move forward recovery.

References

Aydın H (2008) Sokrates'in Felsefesi Işığında Sokratik Yönteme Analitik Bir Yaklaşım, Üniversite ve Toplum Bilim, Eğitim ve Düşünce Dergisi, 8:2.

Beck AT, Rush AJ, Shaw BF et al. (1979) Cognitive therapy of depression. New York, The Guilford Press.

Kazantzis N, Fairburn CG, Padesky CA et al. (2014) Unresolved Issues Regarding the Research and Practice of Cognitive Behavior Therapy: The Case of Guided Discovery Using Socratic Questioning. Behaviour Change, 31: 1-17.

Overholser JV (1993a) Elements of the Socratic method: I. Systematic questioning. Psychotherapy, 30, 1: 67-74.

Overholser JV (1993b) Elements of the Socratic method: II. Inductive reasoning. Psychotherapy, 30, 1: 75-85.

Overholser JC (1994) Elements of the Socratic method: III. Universal definitions. Psychotherapy, 31, 2: 286-93.

Padesky C (2000) Audio tape: Socratic Process (SQ1).

Padesky C, Greenberger D (1995) Clinician's guide to mind over mood. New York: Guilford Press.

Stallard P (2005) Think good-feel good: A cognitive behaviour therapy workbook for children and young people. England, John Wiley & Sons, p: 51-56.

Young JE, Beck AT (1980) Cognitive Therapy Rating Scale (CTRS). http://www.beckinstitute.org/SiteData/docs/CTRS122011/338812377f0513fe/CTRS%2012-2011_portrait.pdf