Review:
Socratic Dialogue in Education

*E*nquiring Minds is the first publication of mostly German texts translated into English. It is a reflection of the growing interest in Britain, the USA, Australia and other English-speaking nations in learning more about Leonard Nelson's Socratic Dialogue. Until now, those of us interested in learning about this method were limited to the few papers available in English by Heckmann, Boele, Kessels and most importantly, the short, poetic paper by Nelson himself which is also included in this recent publication. There are texts originally written in English (most notably in Australia, anything by Stan van Hooft), but these are few and far between. Hence, the arrival of this volume is much anticipated. The book is published by the Society for the Furtherance of Critical Philosophy, an organisation promoting Socratic Dialogue methods. Those familiar with this organisation and those who have only recently discovered Socratic Dialogue as an approach to doing philosophy alike will find *Enquiring Minds* an informative text. Notably the authors recognise that this is a guide only and cannot replace the teaching that comes from the experience of participating in actual classroom dialogue.

Chapters by Rene Saran and others detail how Socratic Dialogue has been implemented in the classroom and the problems that they faced. Of particular interest is a chapter by Heckmann who discusses the very real problems of conducting such sessions with children and the constraints of the school schedule. While it may seem impossible to use the technique given these constraints, Heckmann and other authors illustrate how it may be adapted for such use.

Notable is the chapter by Mechthild Goldstein on using Socratic Dialogue for mathematical problem-solving. As Nelson had a focus on mathematics in his own teachings, and because participants must strive for consensus in the Socratic Dialogue as a method for arriving at a definitive conclusion, this seems an appropriate application for this type of dialogue.

One criticism, but hardly avoidable given the nature of an edited book, is the repetition in some of the chapters. Many authors restate or repackage information already included elsewhere, which means reading can at times be somewhat repetitive. However, as many of the chapters require an

introduction to Socratic Dialogue, this is bound to happen.

It is clear from the collection of essays in this book that the contributors differ in their views of the role of consensus in Socratic Dialogue. In the Socratic Dialogue outlined by its founder Leonard Nelson, the conclusion of consensus without compromise characterises the method and is indeed what separates it most greatly from other types of dialogue (such as Matthew Lipman's community of inquiry which employs a similar process without the demand of consensus). The aim of consensus as an outcome of the dialogue produces rigorous examination throughout the dialogue. Many of the contributors acknowledge consensus as a major feature of Socratic Dialogue, but some seem to dismiss its importance in practice. Dieter Krohn even goes so far as to say that consensus is not the aim and while it may have been Nelson's aim, it is not practical to enforce it as a conclusion to dialogue. Despite differences such as concrete experiences and other steps in the Socratic Dialogue, when consensus is omitted from the method, it is hard to see how the method differs from other methods that use philosophical dialogue. I would suggest that the term 'modern Socratic dialogue' be used to describe this new method within which consensus is not required. However this distinction is not included in this book. Broadly speaking, all methods of philosophical dialogue, with or without the emphasis on consensus to reach a definitive conclusion, fit under the category of the Socratic Method, of which Socratic Dialogue, modern Socratic dialogue and Lipman's community of inquiry are only three examples.

It is difficult to see how Nelson, who was adamant that achieving consensus made for a better dialogue and the discovery of 'truth', would be satisfied that his name and paper included in the final chapter of *Enquiring Minds* are connected to these modern adaptations of his method. If both the modern and original approaches to Nelson's method are to be collated in the same edition, the distinction should be made that the two have very different outcomes and certainly appear to be different forms of dialogue altogether. This is perhaps not the fault of the editors or indeed the authors, but lies with those who believe that a Socratic Dialogue is a Socratic Dialogue, with or without consensus.

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