



About Nelsonian Socratic Dialogue

What is Nelsonian Socratic Dialogue?

Nelsonian Socratic Dialogue (NSD) (named after its founder Leonard Nelson) is a small group inquiry and discussion activity for 6-10 people. The group could be a collection of individuals, with no connection other than that they have enrolled for the activity. Or it could be a workplace team that is using the activity to promote team-building.

NSD developed from the process described in Plato's writings about Socrates, known as **Plato's Dialogues**. In these Dialogues, Socrates attempts to find meanings of certain concepts, such as 'Justice.' He does so by eliminating everything that Justice is not. By contrast, **Nelsonian Socratic Dialogue** wants to find out what something *is*, not what it is *not*. An NSD could last for a few hours, days, weeks or months.

The Purpose of Nelsonian Socratic Dialogue

In the 1920s, German philosopher Leonard Nelson adapted the dialogue process for the purpose of education. Hence, modern day versions of Socratic Dialogue based on his work bear his name.

An NSD aims to answer a fundamental question. The question is chosen by the participants and reflects something that is important to them. Insights are drawn from the participants' own experiences. It is what they have actually experienced that matters, not what theory they have learned from a lecture or a book. From a set of particulars (the participants' experiences) the aim is to articulate a Universal or 'core meaning.'

Once a question has been chosen, such as 'what is X?,' examples of experiences of X are drawn from all the participants. By voting on them, one is chosen for discussion. The discussion and exploration then proceeds according to certain rules, which are given to participants. The discussion is guided by a trained facilitator.

Benefits of Socratic Dialogue

The subtler purpose of the dialogue is the self-development that occurs in the participants. Engaging in the type of listening, thinking and discussion activity that takes place requires patience, deep reflection and thorough concentration.

In the course of the dialogue, participants share ideas and learn about each other. They learn how to cooperate and reach consensus, an important part of the dialogue's ability to proceed.

For convenience of delivery, we have developed a 5x2-hour session version of the activity, available to private groups and workplaces. Private individuals benefit by developing excellent discussion, reflective thinking and cooperation skills and having fun. Workplaces additionally benefit by promoting team harmony, cooperation, and improved communication and understanding.

If you would like to be a philosopher for a few hours and have lots of fun, get in touch. If you are a workplace, it could be a team-building activity. If you are a private individual, you can put your name down as interested. When we have enough ready participants, we will schedule a course.

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