

Socrates in the Classroom



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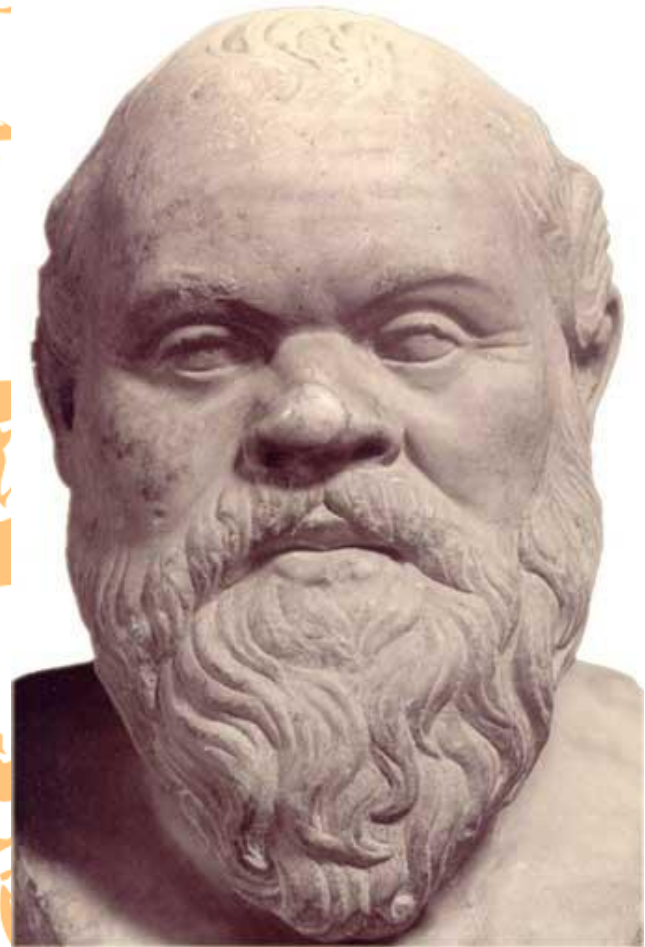
Research questions



- How are goals and effects of the Socratic dialogues described in literature? How are Socratic seminars described as a method in literature?
- How do the seminars differ from other types of classroom dialogues? How are the effects of Socratic dialogues achieved? What critical events and actions threaten the seminar? How do participants develop and protect the seminar culture?

Socratic seminars

- Antique tradition: Socrates, Plato, Aristotle
- 1899- 1930:
 - Swedish Popular Education, *Folkbildning*: Hans Larsson, Oscar Olsson, Ellen Key
 - Das Sokratische Gespräch: Leonard Nelson
- Contemporary methods:
 - The Paideia Seminar: Mortimer J Adler
 - Great Books' Shared Inquiry: Robert M Hutchins
 - Sokratiska samtal: Lars Lindström, Ann Pihlgren



Major Goals of the Seminars

- Enhance society by preparing all citizens to participate in open, negotiating dialogues and assuming the responsibilities as citizens
- Personal education (making life worthwhile)
- *Education* and deeper understanding in subject matters
- Participation in “the Great Conversation” of mankind

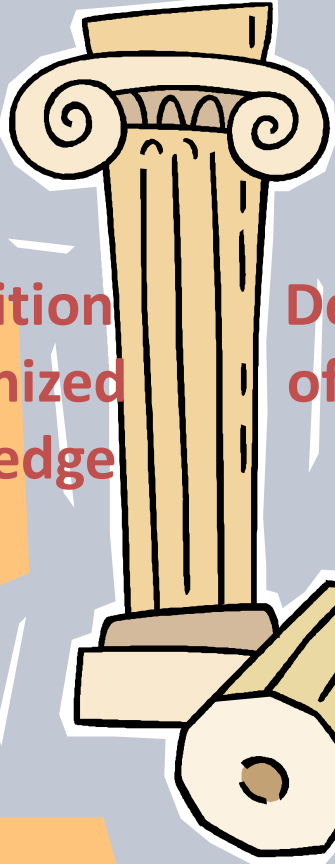


“Relatives”



- P4C (Matthew Lipman)
- Philosophy with children (Gareth B Mathews)
- Deliberative dialogue
- John Dewey’s “recitation”

Mortimer J. Adler's cognitive columns




Acquisition
of organized
knowledge

Teacher as
didactic



Development
of intellectual
skills

Teacher as
coach



Enlarged
understanding
of ideas and
values, creating

Teacher as
"the first among
equals" / mid-wife

www.paideia.org

www.greatbooks.org

Learning to think in seminars

- Learning is interactive and contextual:
 - Habits of mind becomes intellectual/dialogical virtues and later intellectual and moral character/practical wisdom
 - Interpersonal learning becomes intrapersonal
- Intellectual virtues: critical inquiry and refutation
- Dialogical virtues: cooperating to do this



Suggested Seminar Plan

- Reading/interpretation
- Pre-seminar: personal and group goals set
- **Seminar:**
 - **Opening question,**
 - **“Textual” analysis**
 - **Questions of evaluation**
- Post seminar: personal and group goals evaluated

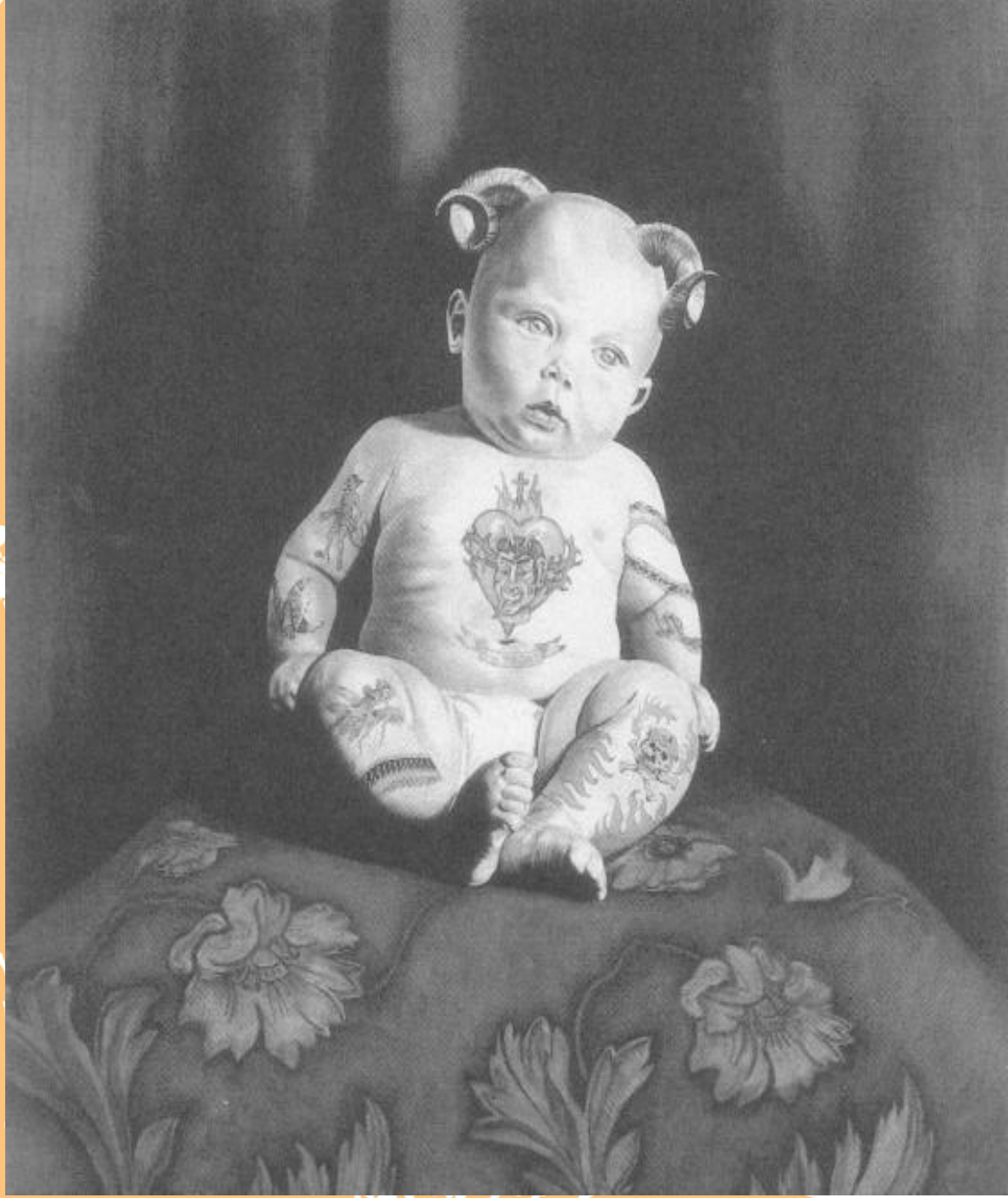


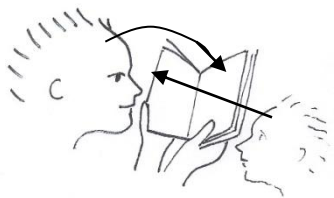
Socratic Seminar Rules



- Shared inquiry through thoughtful dialogue
- Listen attentively to what others say
- Many alternative answers
- Be prepared to reconsider and maybe change your opinion

Diabolo baby by Mariana Gartner

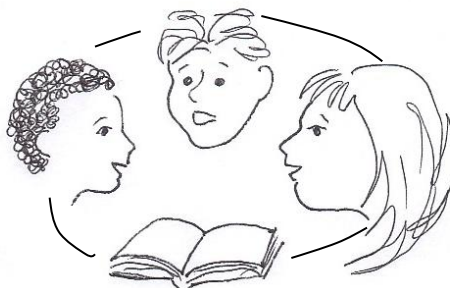




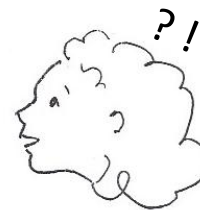
1. Individual reading/interpreting
Be aware of and distancing Self



3 a. Opening question
and thinking pause
Self pre-judgment



3 b. Text analysis
Distance to Self



3 c. Relating ideas to Self

4. Goals evaluated
Focus on
dialogical
virtues

2. Goals set
Focus on dialogical
virtues

3. Socratic seminar

Practices established over time



Positive Effects on:



- Critical thinking skills
- Language skills
- Self-esteem and higher awareness of self (character)
- Social climate
- Ability to solve conflicts

The seminar study



- 101 students five years old to grade nine
- 5 teachers held recurrent seminars with 7 groups
- Seminars filmed during three years on three occasions
- Group interaction analyzed closely through a phenomenological approach

Procedures



- Body language, direction of glances, and verbal group interaction were analyzed closely
- A phenomenological approach
- The analysis focused on how the seminar culture was taught and understood, and if the intended methodology was important.
- Closely reported extracts of the seminar actions after a new idea was presented, or after someone had broken the seminar rules, were made.
- Analyzed by “educational connoisseurship” and “educational criticism”.

Socrates in the classroom



- Learning the game
- Teaching the game
- Rule breaking
- Playing the game
- Intellectual habits
- Distribution of power

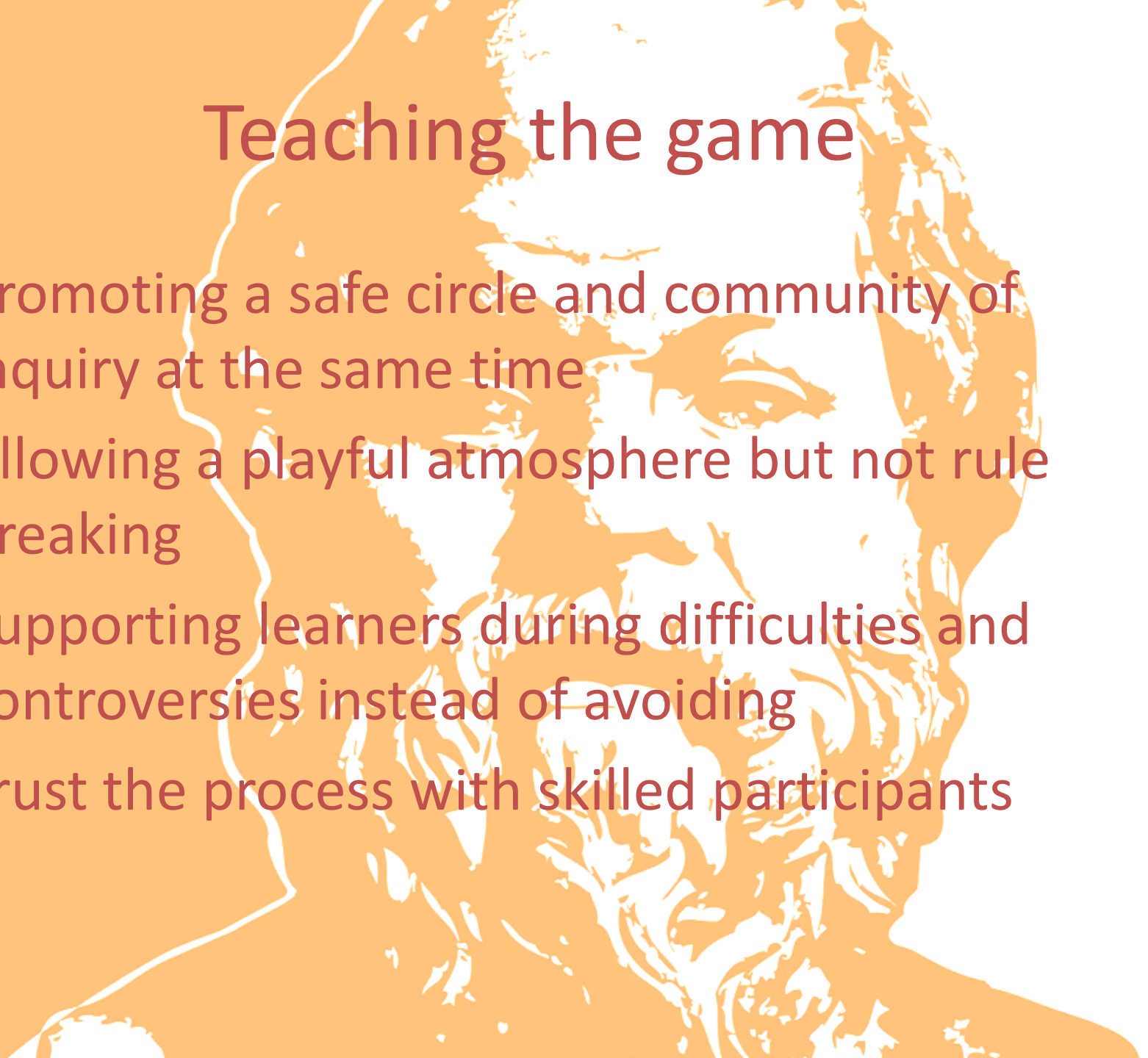
Learning the game



- Three stages of learning:
 - 1) understanding what the seminar game is about
 - 2) testing the game by focusing on the rules
 - 3) focusing on the intellectual content
- Differences between inexperienced learners of all ages and more skilled participants bigger than age differences
- Younger children more dependent on the facilitator
- Participants of all ages were able to philosophize and improve this from practice

Teaching the game

- Promoting a safe circle and community of inquiry at the same time
- Allowing a playful atmosphere but not rule breaking
- Supporting learners during difficulties and controversies instead of avoiding
- Trust the process with skilled participants



Rule breaking

- Rules were broken because they were
 - A) not understood
 - B) broken intentionally to manipulate or to test
 - C) broken for something considered a higher purpose
- The game was restored if:
 - verbal interruptions were treated in an intellectual manner
 - when necessary open corrections
- The seminar outcome was dependent on whether the participants considered the seminar to be safe

Playing the game



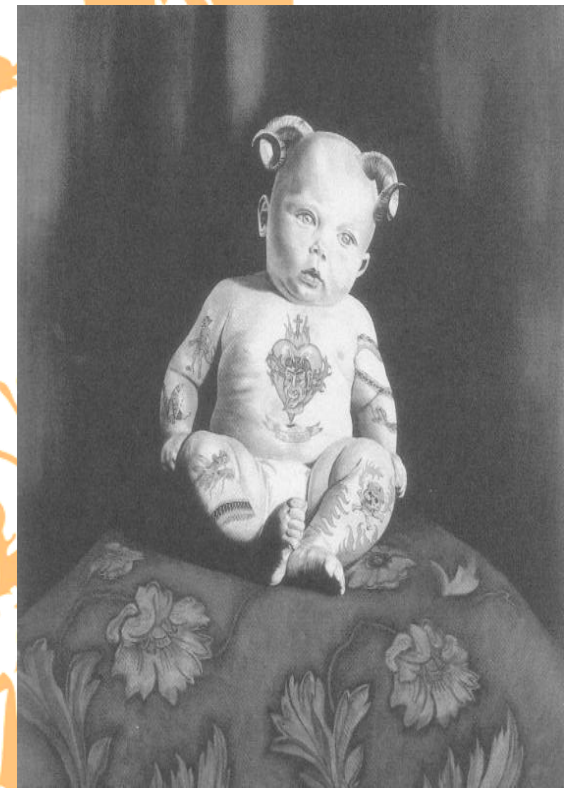
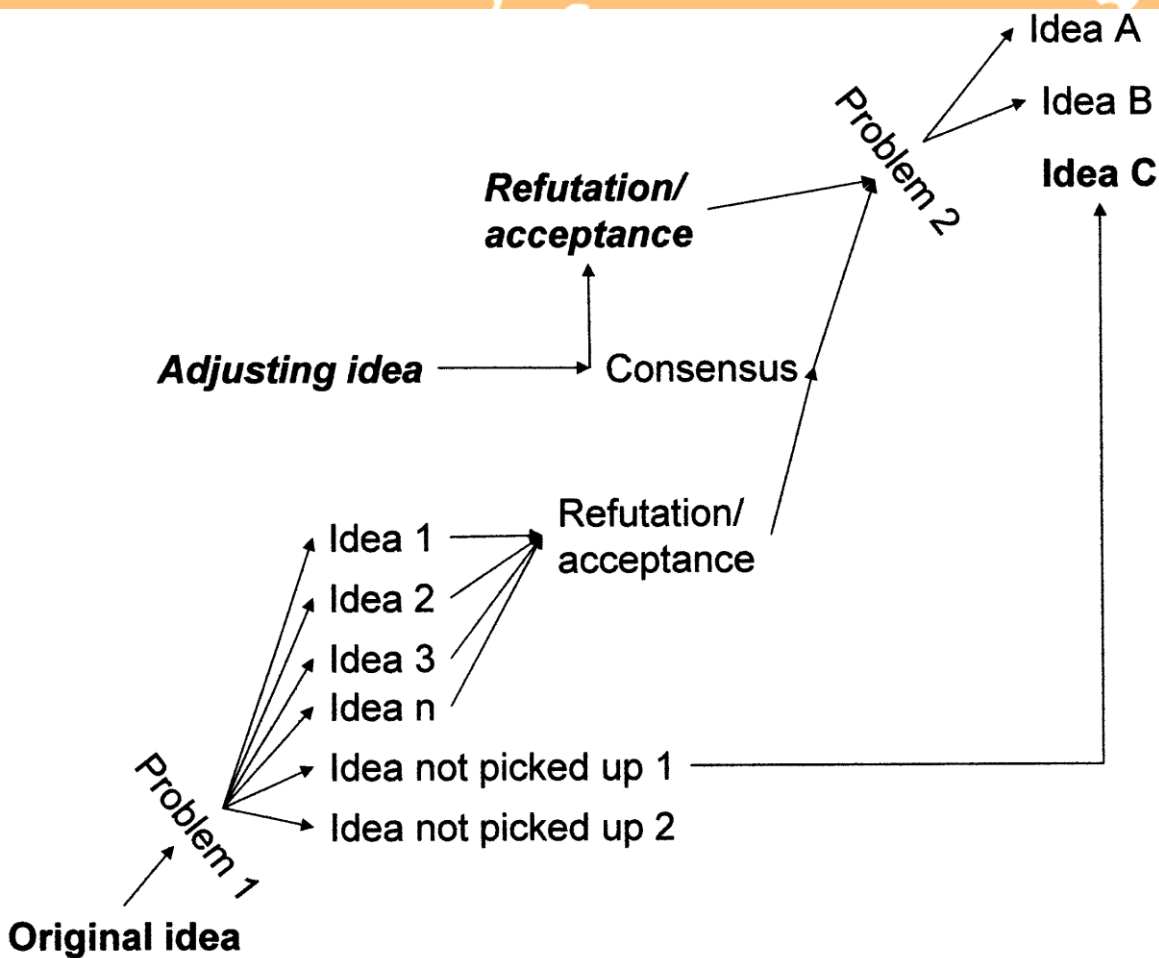
- Learners: I-R-E
- “Silent interaction” in skilled groups carried the advanced group cooperation
- Intellectual process carried out by verbal participation
 - Longer pauses than everyday conversation
 - No acceptance for changing subject
- Non-verbal, unofficial interactions to construct sub-groups

Intellectual habits



- Intellectual habits relied heavily on dialogical virtues, ensuring a context where “bold” ideas might be tested
- The ritualized structure supported this
- It was essential to grasp that the individual should not be held personally responsible (or rewarded) for ideas
- The relationship was built anew in every seminar

Advanced intellectual process



Distribution of power



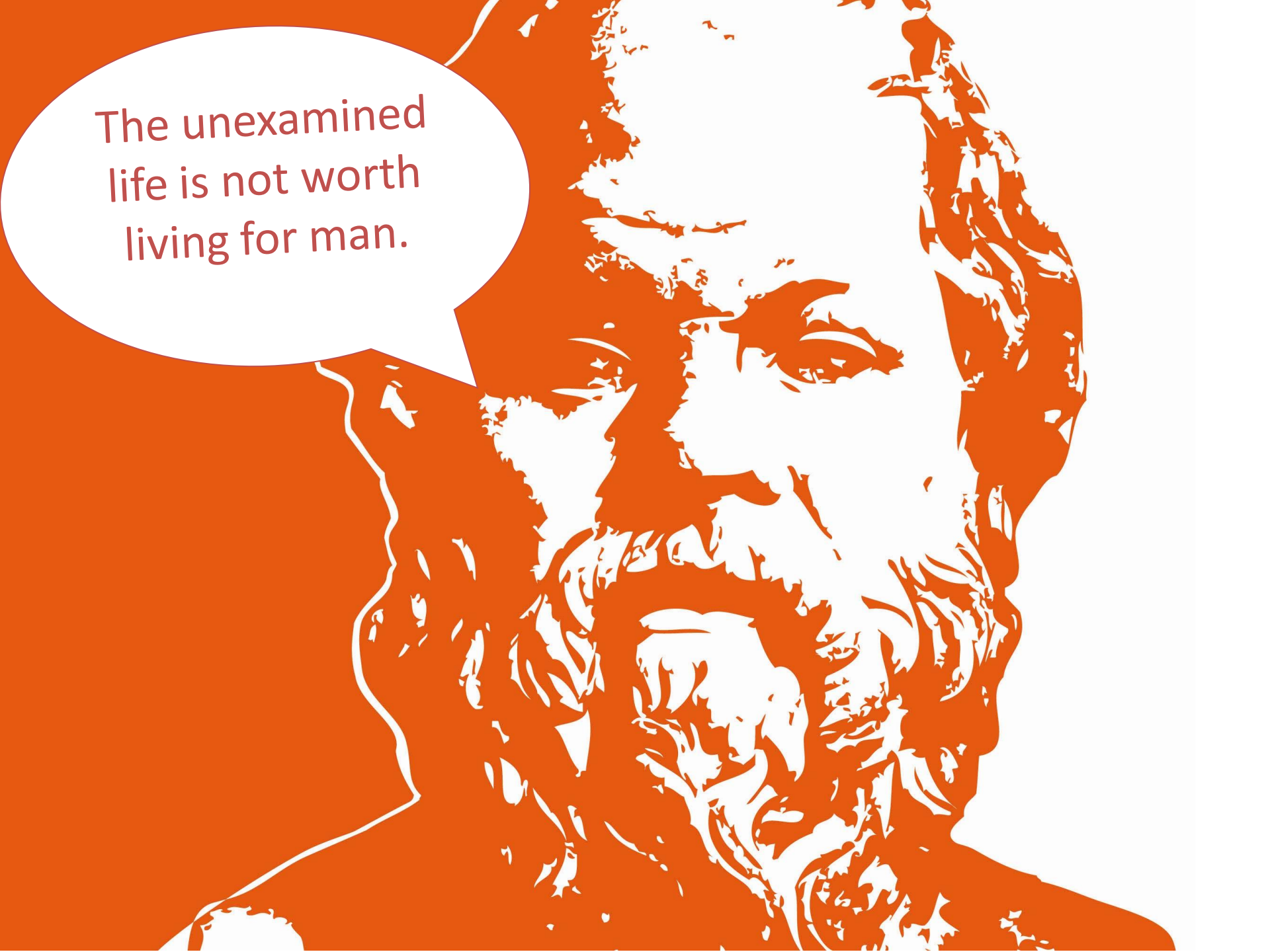
- The distribution of power changed to a more polyphonic interplay if the facilitator:
 - realized how the role as facilitator differed from being a teacher or a “master”
 - realized that the role must be different in a group of learners than when the group is skilled, and acted accordingly
 - refrained from controlling what values were explored AND, at the same time, actively exerted the rules of the game
- And if the participants, or most of them, agreed to participate in the game
- And if sub-groups were not allowed to change the distribution of power



www.urplay.se

”Jakten på det demokratiska
klassrummet”

Freinetskolan Mimer



The unexamined
life is not worth
living for man.