We need to talk about Wittgenstein: the practice of dialogue in the classroom and in assessment

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Abstract

Is philosophy the pursuit of knowledge, as first year students with a dictionary sometimes write? With an aim to inspire and encourage philosophical inquiry, offering an invitation to participate in a process of discovery? Or are philosophers charged with teaching the history of such pursuits—*who* argued, proved, disproved what?

On the first account, philosophy is a subject that resists information-transmission, and requires exploration, creativity, discussion and dialogue. On the second, teaching centres on information-transmission, etching old ideas into the minds of budding scholars, in short time slots. Though there need not be a division, there is a need to recognise where approaches differ. In this way we can ensure sufficient time and space for the sometimes unquantifiable: imaginative, creative pursuits in philosophy, with space for independent, original thinking. This paper explores these ideas alongside approaches to teaching, and offers a paradigm for incorporating dialogue in the learning and practice of philosophy.

Keywords: philosophy, Wittgenstein, dialogue, education, Newman

Introduction

John Henry Newman describes the outcomes of a liberal education as more than just memorising and reiterating facts and ideas. Gaining knowledge and *enlarging* the mind, 'consists, not merely in the passive reception into the mind of a number of ideas hitherto unknown to it, but in the mind's energetic and simultaneous action upon and towards and among these new ideas, which are rushing in upon it' (Newman, 1960: 101). In other words, learners need to be engaged in their own learning and to participate in the formation of ideas.

The practical implications of such ideals come to the fore when teaching ideas that require substantial thought about what is learned: thinking *about* ideas or facts, rather than simply memorising them. But what happens when a learner *wants* facts? Or to be more precise, to know something that is definitely or contingently the case, 'of which we may have empirical or a posteriori knowledge', which somehow corresponds with truth (Mulligan and Correia, 2013). For example, in discussing with students about the nature of philosophy, a question about the fact of the matter is common: *yes, ok, but what is philosophy*? A desire for facts is at least part of the reason why some final year philosophy students continue to appeal to dictionaries in their attempt to answer questions about philosophy. To such a student, a dictionary is emblematic of a place where facts can be found, not a description of practice. But to understand philosophy is to engage in its practice: to explore and assess things that are presented as facts, including questions like *what is a fact?* Simply: there can be few indisputable facts about philosophy, because philosophy often begins by questioning whatever seems indisputable. For the student who wants to know things, who wants facts of the matter, encouraging philosophical inquiry and dialogue can be difficult. It is not as simple as *here is an idea; now think*. Yet inquiry is key for training minds in philosophical thinking.

To resolve this tension between rote learning and analysis, this paper describes my attempt to weave philosophical practice into formal assessment for a module on Ludwig Wittgenstein—Twentieth-century philosopher (there's a fact). This was attempted by including written group dialogues as a summative assessment for the module. To explain this paradigm, this paper has three sections. First we consider what differences there might be between *learning about philosophy* and *engaging with the practice of philosophy*. The next step will be to introduce Wittgenstein as a thinker whose work requires active engagement, and to champion the use of dialogue in this approach. Finally, we will consider the practice of the students and the work produced as a result of this approach, with some final conclusions and ideas for future work.

Learning philosophy or learning philosophical thinking?

To begin this inquiry, we might consider what philosophy does. On the one hand, the study of philosophy requires people are careful in their thinking and language—especially in analysing and structuring arguments. Its study should encourage analysis of assumption and inspire intellectual humility,

with a self-analysis that is crucial to understanding the world and one's situation in it. Since it encompasses many—potentially all—other subjects, it has an interest in all human endeavours, from mathematics and logic, through ethics, aesthetics and metaphysics, to science and technology. On this account, philosophy is very useful.

Yet not everyone is convinced by such claims. Woodruff (1998: 23), for instance refutes the idea that philosophy *teaches students to think*:

> Philosophers of today sometimes justify their subject in the general curriculum by claiming (among other things) that it teaches students to think—or at least to think better. The arrogance of this claim does not go unnoticed among their students, who have done a great deal of thinking before they come under their care. And if the students had not, if they did not already know how to think, and to think well, what hope could their teachers have of overcoming this deficiency with teaching?

While philosophy does not teach students *how to think* per se (something that all people can do), it does encourage students to think critically, carefully and cogently (something not all can do immediately, but many can develop—particularly through the study of philosophy). That students come to philosophy with the ability to think seems certain, but they can and should leave philosophy with that ability sharpened. Just as any ability will, in most cases, improve with time, effort and practice, the study of philosophy should include just that kind of sustained cultivation of the mind, rather than a more specified learning of particular facts or skills. But how do we include this in our teaching practice? The answer is complex, but cannot stem from a desire to address a 'deficiency' as described by Woodruff since this assumes much about both teacher and learner. To develop thinking abilities does not necessitate that something requires fixing, just as to benefit from improvement does not imply that without this there exists deficiency. A fine wine may improve over time, but this does not mean after only a short period it is necessarily *deficient*.

Newman's description of *learning for its own sake* is pertinent here, since it includes 'a knowledge of first principles and *relations* rather than of mere facts' (1960. xx, italics added). The learning of relations is highlighted because these are often complex. For as many connections, conjunctions and similarities, there are disjunctions and differences, as well as a myriad of other ties between things. Relations are not

simple even when the individual components appear to be. For the question *where is my coffee?*, it might suffice to identify a physical location, such as where the coffee stands in relation to a table or the laptop. But in all such accounts an assessment and judgement is made about which relation to prioritise (where it sits) and which to ignore (what other furniture may be close, or the time of the coffee's creation). This in turn sheds light on other judgements that are made about coffee and our expectations of where to find it. For instance, the reply to the question might be *in a cup*, which is potentially a facetious or comical answer, and not generally helpful in assisting someone to know where coffee can be found.[1] All of which is before thinking about why I have asked someone the question in the first place—is he or she responsible for my coffee, either in its creation or its location? Where the example is a more complex relation, such as between concepts (i.e. coffee as something to drink, compared with coffee as social convention, as in *let's meet for coffee*), the complexities increase. Understanding the complexities of relations is not a simple thing, and is not something that can be taught as rote.

In Newman's defence of what he terms a *liberal* or *complete* education, knowledge is seen as 'valuable for what its very presence in us does for us' (1960: 78),[2] thus in its transformative potential. He further claims that a person who has learned to think, reason, compare, discriminate, analyse will 'be placed in that state of intellect in which he can take up any one of the sciences or callings…with an ease, a grace, a versatility, and a success, to which another is a stranger'. *Mental culture* is therefore 'emphatically *useful*' (Newman, 1960: 125). But how does this happen if the motivation for taking philosophy is not accompanied by a passion for inquiry, and more broadly, for learning?

Students come to university for many, often complex, reasons, which include a belief that a university education will lead to a better job, pay, or standard of living. Some students want something to do, to avoid other work, or were expected to study.[3] Having knowledge of philosophy is not itself sufficient to inspire *versatility,* and to be educated in matters of fact, without questioning their constitution, does not provide the basis for the sorts of transferable skills described by Newman as 'freedom, equitableness,

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[1] A case can be made to the contrary of course, but this is really my point.

[2] Pelikan (1992: 33) notes that Newman's 'polemic against utilitarianism had a special edge because of the campaign to eliminate from the curriculum, also in the university, traditional fields of inquiry that could not be justified on the grounds of their usefulness'.

[3] The impact of student fees on motivation and expectation cannot be underestimated. Quite what the impact will be in the long term remains to be seen.

calmness, moderation, and wisdom…a philosophical habit' (1960: 76). Things a student can *know* about philosophy and the wanting of such knowledge or certainty can and does affect what they do with the information they are given. Students sometimes think of information as an end in itself, rather than as something to analyse. This can be seen in the mangled ad hoc comments that are transcribed from lecture to essay, seemingly without further thought. Trying to encourage such students to question what they learn is not always easy, especially because *telling* them to question can defeat the purpose: *so if we question this now, will you then tell us the answer?*

Talking about Wittgenstein

The first time I taught a class about Ludwig Wittgenstein—philosopher of language (another fact, this one involving complex relations)—the philosophical essays that the students submitted contained lots of facts. Facts about when he lived and died; facts about what he wrote and defended; even facts about when he argued with other philosophers. The good ones contained ideas, discussion and analysis as well, but even these focussed primarily on sources and dates, evidence and *what must be the case* because of such research. There was rarely a reflection on why any of it mattered, and the impact that it had on each one of them as students of philosophy. More than this it was not clear that the information in the essay reflected thoughts that the students had themselves, nor even that these were ideas they had spent much time talking through (*dia-logos*), whether to themselves or with others.

This is unsurprising. The essay question had not asked for these aspects. The students had been taught a number of Wittgenstein's ideas as well as facts about his life and work, or so they perceived it, on which they were asked to critically reflect in an essay. This is what they did and some did it very well. But how many, I pondered, had truly engaged in the philosophical wonder that is such a striking aspect of Wittgenstein's approach? Indeed, Wittgenstein's work is often concerned with the nature of certainty, and he generally claimed that he did not want to invent philosophical theories. As Goldstein (1999: 179) notes, readers are apt to become confused if they believe that Wittgenstein is 'setting out a definite

position'. In fact, 'very often he is just, as he once put it, having a conversation with himself, tête à tête'.[4] This is not the only concern.

Wittgenstein held that a person cannot always be *told* something. Sometimes, indeed often, she has to *see it for herself.* This idea is expressed in many different ways throughout his texts, and to understand what it means is no mean feat. Yet to understand it authentically, or from within, requires such understanding. To do this well, I argue, requires dialogue. This includes general ideas of being in dialogue *with*, for instance, Wittgenstein as author or with the texts themselves, but it also requires much more than this. The reader must herself understand and experience the philosophical problems with which she is presented, and to do this requires philosophical engagement in the form of dialogue with others. As Wittgenstein explains in his *Preface* to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (*TLP*), 'Perhaps this book will be understood only by someone who has himself already had the thoughts that are expressed in it' (*TLP*, 3). If they have not had these thoughts—and this is particularly unusual for philosophers—, then they need to work out through discussion what this may mean for their understanding of the text. The passive consumption of philosophy is nowhere facilitated in Wittgenstein's work.

Thus it is that to enable students to learn about Wittgenstein, they need to reach these perspectives, or to 'see the world aright' (*TLP*, §6.54*)* directly and for themselves. They cannot simply be told. This requires the same collaborative engagement from today's students as Wittgenstein expected from those in his own classes. Teaching this account of philosophy while using more traditional methods (lectures, seminars, even tutorials) is not easy. The ideas are complex, the writing often obtuse, and there is much that is hidden. The *TLP* for instance is not a textbook, as Wittgenstein tells us in the *Preface*, and that is certainly true. It is not an easy text to understand, and this is not an accident. In 1930, for instance, Wittgenstein explains the 'danger in a long foreword', because 'the spirit of a book has to be evident in the book itself & cannot be described' (1980: 10).

Despite this, some of Wittgenstein's ideas have been used extensively—in some cases misused—in educational philosophy, in particular his discussions on what it is to learn.[5] Less often discussed is

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[4] Cf. Heal (1995) on the topic of dialogue in the *Philosophical Investigations*.

[5] Papers that make thoughtful use of his ideas on rule-following include Burbules & Smith (2005) and Peters (2000).

Wittgenstein's own particular teaching style. It is well documented that learning from Wittgenstein was difficult, arduous and challenging. As an elementary school teacher he has been depicted as authoritative, aggressive and even threatening: 'his high expectations and his stern means of enforcing them had baffled and frightened all but a minority of his pupils' (Monk, 1990: 212). His students at Cambridge University seem not to have fared much better. In fact, many of his brightest undergraduate students may not have understood much of what was taught. 'Norman Malcolm, for one, has said that, though he was aware that "Wittgenstein was doing something important", he "understood almost nothing of the lectures" until he restudied his notes ten years later' (Monk, 1990: 422). Whether this is primarily due to the esoteric nature of the topic under examination, or Wittgenstein's own teaching style would be difficult to assert. What is clear however is that this statement seems in tension with contemporary emphasis on the importance of utter clarity in understanding what is being learnt.

For similar reasons some have called lectures pointless since the material could be 'put…into print' (Laurillard, 2002: 94), while some describe 'the uselessness of traditional lecturing' (Brockbank and McGill, 1998: 13). Of course, one person's *useless* is another's inspiration. Some students enjoy lectures, especially good performances, rather like good theatre—they can stimulate thought, imagination and understanding. That this may not be true for a bad lecture is no more than we might also say of a bad seminar or any other learning experience. When so much depends on the teacher's individual style, it seems difficult to discredit one method wholly in favour of another. As Ramsden notes, lecturing is not itself the reason for poor learning, since any teaching method can be given 'in an information transmission way or in a way that makes learning possible', especially where *learning* is to be understood as more than just memorising. In this way, 'any teaching method—from an expensive ICT-supported simulation to a one-hour lecture—is only as good as the person who interprets it. There are no sure-fire formulas in university teaching' (Ramsden, 2003. 156).

What is key is the will to 'inspire his or her students through linking personal insights from research and the excitements of scholarship to the process of learning' (Ramsden, 2003: 148). Wittgenstein's classes were clearly inspiring to at least some of his students. In the published notes written by Wittgenstein's

students during his classes, the emphasis on dialogue with Wittgenstein is everywhere apparent.[6] These often read like Plato's Socratic dialogues since they include frequent student interruptions, questions and comments, along with Wittgenstein's careful, thoughtful responses. When Wittgenstein isn't sure, then the question is thrown back to the students.

Yet Wittgenstein's lectures would struggle to meet QAA guidelines. He regularly excluded students he thought incapable, personally selecting just a handful for his classes; there was a lack of clear course structure in advance; emphasis was on spontaneity and creativity—in short, a commitment to genuine philosophical inquiry with the participation of his students. Perhaps in contemporary structures, Malcolm would have come away with a better understanding of some specific details, but what would have been lost? Other students including G. E. M. Anscombe took a lot from the lectures, continuing Wittgenstein's work long after his death. It is questionable whether Wittgenstein, Anscombe, or any of the other students who continued to write or work in philosophy would have covered so much philosophical ground if the time had been taken up with more analysis of, say, philosophy's past, or in meeting clearly defined and expected outcomes. What I am highlighting is not a defence of Wittgenstein's method—I wouldn't advocate it, nor adopt it within my own teaching methods—but instead it is to show that leaving space for uncertainty, for an absence of facts can be helpful, even if this does not guarantee student inquiry instead of superficial learning. Even apart from the chosen teaching method, the subject matter covered by Wittgenstein was, and still is, extremely difficult, leaving some students confused even when employing a range of approaches. In such instances, motivation is key.

To inspire deep rather than superficial learning requires an ability to relate concepts to new ideas, previous knowledge and everyday experience (Marton and Saljo, 1997), as well as that students 'aim to understand ideas and seek meanings' (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999: 3). Motivation is important in this since students should 'have an intrinsic interest in the task and an expectation of enjoyment in carrying it out' (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999: 91). Curiosity, understanding ideas, seeking meaning and the desire to discover underlying principles are primary to the study of philosophy. On this reading, simply teaching

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[6] Cf. Wittgenstein (1988) as just one example.

the history of philosophy may not in itself inspire deep learning, especially if certainty or indisputable facts of the matter are sought.

Motivation is of course complex, and can be affected by practical—teaching environments, time and workload (Case and Gunstone, 2002)—as well as by metaphysical issues. In the latter we can include: perceptions of what it is to be human (Brockbank and McGill, 1998: 18); 'assumptions concerning the nature of human beings and their knowledge' (Winch and Gingell, 2004: 479); and perhaps even the individual beliefs and philosophical leanings of teachers. As Reid (1962: 93) observes, 'philosophical thinking, for example in education, is an activity of the person', which means that 'the attitudes and feelings and interests, or the limitation of these, of the person affect intimately not only the way in which he behaves, but the range of illumination of the thought itself.' What is significant in these accounts is that it is not only method that affects learning and teaching.

One way to circumvent this is to adopt student-centred approaches that centre on the role of *discovery*. The Socratic method, especially as propounded in Plato's dialogues, promotes discovery learning. In the *Meno* for instance, the teacher (Socrates) seemingly does not instruct the student (the boy slave), but instead asks questions that allow the student to come to an understanding for himself.[7] The teacher still facilitates the student's learning, just as Socrates provides the framework for the discussion, but student discovery is crucial. As Barrow (1976: 35) highlights: 'The teacher does have to know what he is doing: Socrates could not have directed the slave in any meaningful way had he not known what the solution was, what he was looking for and, hence, when and in what way the slave was going wrong at certain points.'[8] In a similar vein Laurillard (2002: 159) notes, 'Discussion between students is an excellent partial method of learning that needs to be complemented by something offering the other characteristics, if students are not to flounder in mutually progressive ignorance.'

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[7] This is an over-simplification of a complex dialogue that examines various topics including learning as recollection, virtue, knowledge and belief. For our purposes Plato's text serves as an example of learning and teaching through dialogue, leaving aside questions about recollection. Plato's depiction of what it is to teach as set out in the *Republic* may also be of interest, but there is not space to consider this here. For analysis of Plato's views on education as found in the *Republic* see LoShan (1998).

[8] It is worth noting that the character of Socrates claims not to be a teacher; a claim much debated and disputed. Also worth noting is that Plato's portrayal is of his mentor, who in life had been put to death for, among other charges, corrupting the young.

The notion of guiding students toward an answer suggests a method of philosophical investigation that engages the attention of the student and invites her on the journey of discovery. Key to this is that 'it involves a genuine dialogue between two persons concerned not to "win" but to lose something of their own ignorance'[9] (Barrow, 1976: 42). In a similar vein, Gadamer (2001: 530) asserts that 'one can only learn through conversation.'[10] This is described elsewhere as his 'commitment to philosophical enquiry as an invitation to critical dialogue' (Cleary and Hogan, 2001: 519). That the dialogue is critical may not be the only relevant criterion. It should also enable 'critically reflective learning' so that it 'engages the person at the edge of their knowledge, their sense of self and the world as experienced by them' (Brockbank and McGill, 1998: 57).

Active engagement with what is being learned is antithetical to passive consumption of information, and such engagement involves responsibility: 'Self-education must above all consist in this, that where one perceives one's shortcomings, one strengthens one's own resources (*Kräfte*) and that one does not relinquish this responsibility' (Gadamer, 2001: 535).[11] This is also the case for Plato whereby in genuine dialogue the emphasis on learning falls to the individual. This can be described as 'correct opinion secured by sound reasoning' (Barrow 1976: 43) whereby the student has not 'meekly imbibed a lot of information and opinion' but has instead examined and questioned throughout, with ownership over what is learned (Woodruff, 1998: 19).

Talking with Wittgenstein and with others

From the discussion sketched above, there are a number of ways to inspire deep learning. These include the use of dialogue to promote inquiry and the questioning of facts; active engagement that promotes autonomy and responsibility for learning as well as for developing one's own ideas; development of critical thinking that recognises the complexity of facts and relations; willing to recognise that not all knowledge and understanding can be imparted (some must be experienced, including imaginatively);

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[9] Of course, whether Socrates' opponents in the dialogues are presented in this light, or even given adequate opportunity to represent their ideas is contentious. An example of a dialogue that does not fit this charge would be the *Philebus*, where Socrates is not shown to have 'won' the discussion by the end of the text.

[10] Though Gadamer's discussion concerns school education, the general points are relevant here. In a similar vein Brockbank and McGill (1998: 54) say 'Learning is a social process', while Ramsden notes (2003: 160) 'Teaching is a sort of conversation'.

[11] Cf. Woodruff (1998: 14) and Reid (1962: 105).

understanding that there is value in the process of looking for answers or in trying to establish, defend and critique facts. To this we can also add a willing to negotiate and defend a position, while recognising that consensus and certainty is not always possible.

To encourage deep learning in the module on Wittgenstein that I teach, I ask the students to reflect on one of a number of core ideas by the philosopher. These are then discussed informally in small group dialogues over a number of weeks, and from this discussion a topic proposal is prepared and submitted to the tutor. The proposal forms the starting point of a group tutorial where we discuss ideas, resources and methods for working as a group. After the initial meeting students continue their group dialogues and begin to prepare their written material, from which a section is then presented to the rest of the class.

The group presentations take place in a seminar, which allows space for student questions and discussion. These presentations have been sometimes quite creative, as students explore different dialogue genres. Some groups have used a chat show format, one opting for a *Question Time* approach, with Wittgenstein and his contemporaries debating their ideas in front of the audience. Others offered short theatrical skits, including a doctor's surgery in which a patient tries to explain a pain in the way that Wittgenstein puzzles about in the *Philosophical Investigations (PI)*, or a Big Brother type game show in which participants debate Wittgenstein's ideas more generally. Typically the presentations are scripted, though some groups have opted for topic headings under which they present their ideas more generally. Though assessed, and thus with a grade incentive, the presentation represents only a small proportion of the overall assessment (20%). From this task the tutor can identify issues in understanding, how the group cohere and offer formative feedback for the final piece. So far this has been recognised by students, who have generally been as interested in the feedback as opportunity for improvement, as they have the grade—which is not always the case for summative assignments.

The feedback and discussion arising from the presentations feed into the last set of small group dialogues, and then into the final written dialogue, which each group prepares. At each stage of spoken dialogue (both among the students, and in the presentation) as well as for the written (in the initial topic proposal which is not assessed, and in the final written piece) there is limited opportunity for retreating only to sources and books. The written dialogue, reflecting the sincere discussion of all participants, must be

carefully expressed and set out, but also show engagement and development of the different ideas. In this way, the module attempts to prohibit the passive consumption of philosophy.

To facilitate the dialogue a number of factors are taken into account, as highlighted in the previous sections. These include motivation and space for conversation. The motivation aspect can be one of the more intrinsically difficult aspects to account for, given, as we see above, this can play out differently for different students, as well as for the same students at different times and for different reasons. In order to mediate this, the intrinsic motivation that comes from a summative assessment was adopted. The hope that this would be complemented by motivation that originates in the students themselves was sometimes realised, but generally in line with the question of space. How this played out depended very much on the students themselves, with all the variables already noted.

In terms of guidance, students were offered three broad topics within Wittgenstein's work. Having already undertaken one individual assignment (on the *TLP*), students understood something about working with a Wittgenstein text, knew some secondary sources, and how to think about the philosophical ideas in context—one of the required set texts is Monk's (1990) biography. A few weeks into the module students were encouraged to form small groups and begin discussion on how they would undertake the dialogue. On the three occasions that this module ran, student groups were mainly self-selecting. Students picked classmates based on different factors; some described selecting people with whom they thought they could debate, or others who they thought would work hard for the project.

The assignment guidelines require that groups discuss a topic in relation to Wittgenstein's *PI* using primary and secondary sources. The three options are: (1) The idea of a private language (§§ 242-281, inclusive); (2) Language-games and a form of life (§§ 23 to 24, and 65 to 100, inclusive); (3) Rules and philosophical theory (§§ 101 to 133, and 196 to 241, inclusive).[12] To support this some guidelines are offered:

> A written dialogue is a record of discussion on a particular subject. It should show your
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> engagement with the other members of your group as you work through Wittgenstein's ideas and

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[12] References are to the *PI*.

discuss issues arising. You will also need to show that you critically analyse the claims that he makes. In the first instance it may involve your working on an individual textual analysis (as you will have already done for your first assignment), and then you can use the ideas, criticisms and questions that arise from this as a basis to begin your dialogue with the group.

How you go about preparing the dialogue is up to you. In the past, some groups have met and had actual discussions while either taking notes, or digitally recording the conversation. Some have set up online blogs, so that they did not need to meet in person as often. Some did both. Whichever approach you choose, make sure you give yourself enough time to write up and edit the work before you submit it. You should take care to adapt the language of the work such that it is suitable for an academic piece of work.

In addition to the above, students are offered recommendations for the development of a good written dialogue, alongside standard academic requirements. These include: (1) skill in identifying and evaluating one's own arguments, including awareness and analysis of presuppositions; (2) an ability to argue in a sustained, yet open-minded manner, showing willing to understand as well as to constructively engage with the viewpoint of others in the group towards critical understanding of the text (3); understanding and successful application of relevant theoretical debates; (4) evidence of the development of critical self-awareness through the process of dialogue. The aim in these guidelines is that students do not simply talk *at* others about Wittgenstein, as can sometimes happen in a seminar—especially when directed primarily to or for the lecturer—but talk *with* each other about the work, as well as engage in dialogue with the text.

For the actual dialogues some students met face to face and regularly, while others used computer-mediated communication or conferencing. In this way, students could communicate in 'real-time' (synchronous, e.g. Skype) or via group e-messages (asynchronous, e.g. Facebook) where they can read messages left by others and add their own responses. Using these mediums students continue philosophical discussions outside the classroom in a way that is both structured and self-monitored but with less pressure and at their own pace. One obvious advantage to this, as Laurillard (2002: 148) notes, is that it allows students to 'take time to ponder the various points made' to which they then contribute in their own time. Dysthe (2002: 349) thinks this is particularly valuable to students who in a classroom may

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'have problems expressing themselves quickly enough to take part'. Since the tutor is not directly involved in this student-led group assignment, they have to rely on themselves to organise, and so the task promotes group management skills. To support this, groups are required to meet with the tutor bi-weekly, or more often if there is need, to discuss what they are working on, and how the dialogues are going.

Reflecting on these experiences, including the above methods, and reading student feedback, the outcomes have been broadly positive. The room for conversation that this approach has encouraged steers students away from the idea that there are only facts of the matter to be stated and defended. The dialogues show debate, discussion, and importantly, disagreement. Sometimes disagreement is resolved, but more often than not the presence of disagreement is accepted when by the end consensus is not found. In the dialogues that achieved upper second or first class grades, the source and sometimes necessity of disagreement is also considered, and where the students come to accept this more deeply, the understanding of Wittgenstein's statement that 'A theory is without value. A theory gives me nothing' (cited in Monk, 1990: 304)—particularly as it leaves out too much—can also be better understood. As Monk notes, in 'understanding ethics, aesthetics, religion, mathematics, and philosophy, theories were of no use'; in these spheres it is the deed that is primary.

Nevertheless certain aspects of facilitating student dialogue have proven challenging at times, even if this is one of the most rewarding features when groups work well. Convincing students to talk to and rely on each other for support, understanding and discovery has not been easy. The reliance on me as the source for certainty has proven difficult to shake, especially without wishing to compromise my role as tutor. Thus I've repeatedly uttered the sentence *it's not that I don't have an opinion on x, it's that I want you to think and discuss together what you think about x.* This is not a simple matter to resolve, nor am I more certain about how to overcome such reliance beyond the methods adopted above.

In his defence of a liberal education Newman argues against those who 'insist that Education should be confined to some particular and narrow end, and should issue in some definite work, which can be weighed and measured…as if every thing, as well as every person, had its price' (Newman, 1960: 115). He does not go so far as to deny there is an end, but rather to 'deny that we must be able to point out, before we have any right to call it useful, some art, or business, or profession, or trade, or work, as resulting from

it, and as its real and complete end' (Newman, 1960: 125). As Pelikan (1992: 33-34) explains useful ends are not utterly negated by Newman:

> This definition does not imply, as many of its critics and even some of its defenders have occasionally supposed, that the liberal learning which is the university's reason for being must never produce anything useful or have any 'sequel' or consequence; it means only that its pursuit is not to be justified principally on those grounds.

Even accepting this, and with some of the positive outcomes in the approach I note here, the ends are not always easy to see or to measure. Some student work did not improve substantially between the presentation and the final piece, and some students didn't stop looking for undeniable facts. Nevertheless, the impact of the dialogues has been to affect some change in what students will expect from understanding Wittgenstein, and that at least is a start. The search for facts may not be abandoned, but the acceptance that relations between things affects what we understand facts to be is at least more easily accepted.

Conclusion

It is not easy to draw a line between learning facts about philosophy and its past, and the practice of philosophy. In the Wittgenstein module students learn a lot about Ludwig Wittgenstein the man and the philosopher. They do learn some facts about his life and ideas (when, where, what), and even after the dialogue process has begun, the tendency to seek certainty remains. Perhaps given a rigid structure of secondary education and assessment, this tendency is unsurprising. What I find surprising is that a student who wants to study philosophy can yet resist uncertainty. Then again, if a student studies philosophy as a way to learn facts about philosophers and their ideas, then it is not unreasonable for the student to expect to have knowledge of such by the end—travel normally takes you somewhere, after all. The dialogical approach in an assessment task is one attempt to wean students from the idea of knowledge as end point. In a similar vein, Pelikan (1992: 37) asserts, 'An overemphasis on intellectual knowledge, many today would charge, has made the university sterile and two-dimensional, depriving it, and human society through it, of the depth dimension that comes from other ways of knowing, especially ways of knowing that would be regarded as instinctive or intuitive or poetic.'

What then the middle ground between teaching philosophical ideas, and inspiring philosophical practice? Gore, Bond and Steven (2000: 77) suggest that standardisation, *best practice* as conformity—that which is quantifiable and measurable—should sit alongside a view of education 'as a practical art rather than a scientific process'. In the latter the emphasis is on 'creativity, innovation and exploration of alternative and sometimes-contradictory perspectives', with an acceptance 'that it is not possible to know everything' (Gore et al, 2000: 77).

Quality, standards, benchmarks and a need for consistency across universities in content and assessment (form and measurement) may be important, but this is alongside, not to be prioritised above, creativity and a willing to engage with the uncertain. As Reid suggests, 'Examinations have their real importance, but obviously many of the things which are of vital importance in a person's growth are not examinable in this way.' (Reid, 1962: 21). The dialogue assessment for the Wittgenstein module is my attempt to move away from a model of knowledge as end point. It seems, so far, to have had *some* success in addressing a few of the concerns noted in this paper. Beyond this, one of the more profound aspects for me as an educator has been to accept that I cannot know how much change this brings about. Rather like the fact of the matter where Wittgenstein is concerned, I shall just have to live it and see.

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