Should Teacher Ignorance be cherished or denied? The case for collaborative learning.

Introduction

What role does real ignorance play in teaching and learning? As far as learning is concerned, we almost expect to find that real ignorance precedes learning and that this real ignorance disappears once something has been taught. It is a type of zero sum game where ignorance + knowledge describes the full set. The more ignorant you are, the less knowledge you have and vice versa. One might expect that teachers know what pupils come to learn and that once learners have learned what the teachers know, they can move on. Something is wrong with this 'transmission' model, however. Teachers too learn things when they teach. They sometimes come to understand what they teach much better than before and they learn how to teach. Indeed learning and teaching is not a static process because learning is an ongoing and lifelong activity. It implies the desire to understand, which Aristotle spoke about, and which is an imperative levied on all, no matter what their age or their level of knowledge. Even established experts learn items they may have overlooked or may only be coming slowly to understand in their attempts to explain them. On the other hand, if we think of learning as a static zero sum game, then we might come to think of teacher ignorance simply as a useful ploy, a clever trick to get learners involved or to raise the standard of engagement of the class group, a method of camouflage which allows them to construct questions that seem to be sincere but end up being only an introductory ploy prior to giving instruction to learners. This issue is identical to the problem of Socratic ignorance. Was Socrates really ignorant or was he simply pretending to be so? Commentators have differed on this point in the past.

Irwin tended to think of Socratic ignorance as a ploy, a type of '*techne*' used for the purpose of education, a device invented to soften the ground, as it were, to enable instruction to follow. This is the instrumentalist thesis. We can see this approach well represented in teachers who ask questions to which they already know the answers. Questions then become instruments, designed to encourage learning but they are not genuine in the sense that they do not signal ignorance. They do not open up genuine inquiry in which teachers themselves are also participants. This is because the teacher knows the answers already. If teacher 'ignorance' is false, then it may be used as a starting point for the method of 'elenchus'. Preliminary skirmishes around questions of courage and the like simply present an excuse then for the principal interlocutor (Socrates or Plato) to teach some lesson. Vlastos (1991) however disagrees, holding the view that Socratic ignorance is real and noting the difference between the early plays of Plato and the later plays. He points to the inconclusiveness of many of the early plays and notes the consistent way that the knowledge typified as expert (Gorgias, Isocrates) is separated from the knowledge typified as non-expert (Socrates). The inconclusiveness of these dialogues (some of which are mentioned below) demonstrates the genuineness of Socratic ignorance, that his protests of ignorance are genuine and announce his own inquiry. Roochnik agrees with Woodruff about the importance of the critical role played by the twofold distinction between expert and non-expert-knowledge (Roochnik, 1998, p. 236) and, by implication, the significance of Socratic ignorance. So the issue is whether a teacher's access to knowledge can be genuinely non-expert (supporting the thesis that Socratic ignorance is genuine) or whether teaching requires false ignorance and has to end up fundamentally as a kind of instruction, however presented using student-friendly methods.

Notwithstanding the fact that the knowledge that has the rigour of mathematical precision (*arithmos*) can be taught in a step by step fashion, the issue of debate is whether the knowledge based on the *elenchus* (Socratic engagement in questioning, involving the refutation of the learner's assumptions) requires in the teacher a more radical process of personal transformation (real questioning) than mere play-acting (false questioning). Learning in the ancient world tended to prevaricate on this point also. Stoic Sermons and Instructions prevailed over dialogues. By contrast the Socratic learning of the early dialogues then tended to stand out. Xenophon (*Memorabilia* 4.2) in the words of Gulley identified the *elenchus* as 'a step on the road to self-knowledge, for it prompts a person to examine himself, to find out what sort of character he is and to realize his abilities' (Gulley, 1968, p. 45). Does this definition only refer to the learner or does it refer to the teacher also? A broader field of learning outcomes than the one that takes the shape of *arithmos* would seem to be required. It is not enough to rely on expert knowledge. Expert knowledge relies on 'experts' who hold the knowledge and exercise it in different ways, and this includes instructing those less expert than they are. They may use various learning methods designed to increase participation and to achieve better learning outcomes but teacher ignorance is never real and the underlying metaphor of transfer prevails. Many teachers are very skilful at doing this. Clever experts who are also good teachers have learned different ways of enabling learners to achieve the knowledge and skills at least to a certain measurable standard and they have worked carefully to develop the curriculum that would enable these outcomes. They might find themselves in two minds to decide between Piaget and Vygotsky on the question of the relative importance of social processes in the achievement of learning but in general they would accept that if students want to learn x, it is presumed that an expert who knows x and who has found some good way of teaching x will help them on their way.

Most people agree that school curricula are shaped around the type of knowledge that is determinate, unproblematic, teachable—arithmetic knowledge. And yet schools also try to shape their pupils in a moral sense, pointing to a deeper level of transformation and a broader set of learning outcomes. Moreover, the path of real ignorance might be altogether more dangerous since neither teacher nor student would know exactly where they were going nor what attitudes they would end up with as a result of the process. The path of simulated ignorance in contrast would simply require judicious use of ploys to expose the need for learning and would be quite satisfied to induce compliance with established knowledge and the acceptance of corresponding social roles.

However, what might follow if Socrates was actually ignorant and if the knowledge he sought to develop in his students was not determinate but always remained fairly vague. The Socratic method of *elenchus* (see Roochnik, p. 245) would then become an undertaking to examine and explore the learner's experience and to push it forward in the direction of wisdom. The assumption that wisdom is possible would be a requirement of such inquiry. In this way of thinking, the key question concerns how well the learner has reflected upon his own experience. Socrates is on hand to help with this. Immediately some groundwork examinations begin to occur if we actually take human situations as valid starting points for the inquiry. Alcibiades, for instance, is invited to consider his own impetuosity and ambition, having been endowed with all the talents. Lysis is asked to consider why his parents do not allow him take the chariot out. Ion is asked about his lack of interest in poetry, Charmides about his indecisiveness and his headaches. None are being instructed about what to do. More importantly, Socrates outlines no fixed procedure for achieving a fulfilled life. And yet what Alcibiades learns about himself and his life will have implications for his happiness and that of others in society, for we remember that he was one of the tyrants who wreaked havoc on Athens following the Spartan victory, even precipitating the victory. Everyone reading or listening to the tale of Alcibiades' education remembered his role in the destruction of Athenian democracy. Similarly, in

Plato's accounts of the education of *Charmides, Alcibiades, Lysis, Meno*, expert knowledge is never as significant as the success or acknowledged failure of the life-changing impact of a Socratic education. While an outcome in the direction of wisdom was never assured, a certain kind of trust in the process of inquiry seemed to be required.

Obviously the Socratic *elenchus* would require some change in mindset compared to any ritualised rote learning that has sometimes come to replace education in schools. While schools might attempt to achieve success not only through formal learning of the arithmetic kind but also through co-curricular or extra-curricular activities, the pressure of public examinations invites teachers to cast aside child-centred principles in favour exam success. The point at issue here relates to the didactic patterns at work in the classroom. What forms of teaching and learning might be appropriate as an antidote to the 'expert knowledge' which arithmetic systems, machines, computer software, and robots now exercise more efficiently than any human teachers? While endorsing Socratic ignorance in a strong sense, this paper suggests that the *collaborative learning movement* might further authentic Socratic ignorance in a contemporary idiom. To make this case, a working definition of collaboration is required followed by some accounts of where it has been tried and tested.

I Definition and Evidence

Just a gentle tweak to the Wikipedia entry gives this working definition 'collaborative learning requires the mutual engagement of all participants in a coordinated effort to solve a problem.' If we include the teacher as part of a collaborative process, then the teacher too must engage in solving the problem. In other words, teacher ignorance must be real rather than contrived. Or if the teacher stands aloof from the process, then the groups concerned must engage in a form of common inquiry without any teacher instruction at the end of the process. Parents in a private system might say: why are we paying for this? A state curriculum body might say: why are we funding this? University students might say: why are we paying for this? The answer from the collaborative learning movement is that this is a very relevant way to achieve knowledge.

For the sake of structure, it may well be of interest to separate the case of the use of collaborative strategies in ordinary post-primary classrooms from their use in third level contexts even if this distinction does not touch on basic principles. The latter sample allows us to examine its use with prospective teachers or those preparing to be teachers, for here the novice teachers understanding of the process will be key. Two particular fields of literature seem relevant to teacher preparation.

First the issue of professional knowledge. It is accepted by the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) that Masters level students should be capable of engaging in unpredictable situations. This is a definite step beyond rote actions and rote facts. In order to engage in unpredicted novel situations, the transformation has had to have occurred in the person and to be a constant feature of the behaviour of the person. These are not stimulus-response situations but once off and often unique situations where trained individuals have to exercise their knowledge and judgement in the face of unexpected occurrences. The character of this kind of professional knowledge is not of an expert arithmetic type because professional knowledge requires adjusting to new circumstances and 'creating' the knowledge required in new situations. It requires time-dependent judgement. While there may be predictability about certain knowledge such as the way an engine functions, there is general unpredictability when we try to explain how to manage the machine in the event of a nuclear strike. Teachers need to deal with unpredictable situations also even if not quite as dramatic as a nuclear strike. Even if they are advocates of a subject area but still only remain on the fringes of knowledge about the subject matter to be taught, they need to deal with the 'freshness' of the knowledge in reception of students. Incumbents must make decisions and exercise professional

judgements in mostly unique circumstances even when they might be ignorant of vast content and skills. Expose its need for review, make it public in a sense, call it forward before the court of reason, expose its assumptions, merge it with other experiences already historically established and launch hypotheses experimentally into live situations: these are the tasks related to the deepening of experience. There are no arithmetic experts on these frontiers but only thinkers who sometimes interpret situations correctly, sometimes incorrectly. Teaching presents an unpredictability that can never disappear.

Research over the past twenty years has opened up ways of moving beyond isolated teaching to norms that reflect professional learning communities. And yet knowledge is thought to be static and private to accord with static standards and private assessment markers. Contrary to what one might expect, when pre-service teachers successfully collaborate in a professional learning community, they willingly share, reflect and take risks in a community setting with their peers (Vescio et al., 2008). Collaboration goes hand in hand with strategies that de-privatize experiences of learning to teach (Newmann and Marks, 1996, Vescio et al., 2008, p. 81). Furthermore, the adoption of a PLC (Professional Learning Community) structure announces a trend that runs against the norm. Vescio, for instance, found 11 US studies that favoured the adoption of professional learning communities as a core part of in-school teacher preparation. Not only did this promise 'deep learning' (Dunne and Rawlins, 2000) but it exposed the need in professional life for critical friends and more extensive interpersonal supports (Stoll et al., 2006). Such critical friends were considered to have a probable influence on the novice teacher's morale (Vescio et al., 2008, p. 85).

The establishment of a professional learning community (PLC) implies support for patterns of learning that differ from individualistic patterns. Dobber et al. noted the collaborative structure built into the foundational qualification of Dutch teachers (*Stichting Beroepskwaliteit Leraren* or SBL) and focused in particular on the teacher preparation programme at the VU Amsterdam. This course had been structured around four key collaborative modules, each with a different objective– the subject matter group, the mentor group, the reflection group and the research group. These groups operated with greater or lesser success depending on the set objective of the collaboration. While the reflective group worked best as CL, the collaborative structure began to fragment and to disappear when students were under pressure to produce some report. One reason for this, Dobber suggests, is that not all student teachers had learned to become effective regulators (leaders, contributors) simply by working in groups (Dobber et al., 2014, p. 90). Often the norms of private, stable knowledge took over. While the appropriacy of co-regulation or shared democratic responsibility appeared obvious in reflection groups, this judgement did not apply when students were required to prepare a report (e.g., the research group) or indeed in the other groups centred around subject areas and general pedagogy where more traditional authority patterns took over. Vescio concludes that 'Our experience in establishing PLCs suggests the reforms are fragile when district actions undermine PLC principles' (Vescio et al., 2008, p. 81, footnote 1).

The second element is collaborative learning. Collaborative learning resonates with the challenge to know oneself. Some resonances can also be found when Piaget points out the importance of dissonant voices along the pathway of learning. Dissonance challenges the model of knowledge proposed in traditional learning theories. Clarity and confusion intermingle and perform their own kind of mental dance as people grapple with contrary positions, often confusing them and causing them to question their own understanding further. In the meantime, learners need to adapt to situations that are not totally familiar. Ironically, university contexts are better placed to induce this examination of assumptions as they are free from some of the constraints imposed by State control of curriculum. But research indicates that for all these proposed freedoms, many students think that

the option to self-examination amounts more to a waste of time than a positive opportunity. Let us look more carefully at this research. Why do many students, as highlighted in the research, unwittingly view 'Socratic' ignorance as a waste of time? Why do they prefer rote learning and the rapid assimilation of facts? Why have students formed the belief that the best way to learn is sitting in front of a computer on their own or receiving clear instruction from a master teacher or a well-made robot? Why do they expect to be rewarded for evidence of memory and fact-regurgitation rather than self-transformation?

This fragility is found in other studies and in contexts where student teachers face the choice of using or not using collaborative strategies in their own classrooms. Ruys et al. for instance, surveyed 369 student teachers and found that even while collaborative learning is quite frequently used with some success in teacher education, 'teacher educators still mostly use traditional teaching methods in their lessons' (2010, p. 545). This trend is rather disappointing for those supporting a PLC but it is echoed also in Donche and Van Petegem's study (2011). Donche et al. found that students who do not volunteer to participate collaboratively in training will not value it in their classroom later on (2015). Similarly, Damșa et al. noted the importance at college level of collaborative structures to achieve some sense of shared epistemic agency. They noticed the importance of active sharing and noted 'the way in which group members take one another's opinions and insights into account and create space for one another's contributions also reflects this joint epistemic effort' (2010, p. 167). Hence they stressed the 'knowledge creation' thesis of Paavola and Hakkarainen (as referenced p. 146) to suggest that learning requires sustained collaborative activities focused on shared objects of study and hence shared epistemic goals (Muukkonen et al. 2005). This research suggests that when knowledge is not simply transferred as a block but is treated essentially as a process of inquiry not content, then collective inquiry becomes more valuable. Indeed knowledge changes its profile and becomes valued for the process of interchange rather than for the internal logical generation of ideas.

Indeed elementary classrooms report less problems than second or third level colleges when collaborative learning strategies are adopted. Webb et al., for instance, found that collaborative techniques enhanced pupil language engagement in a mathematics classroom, as signalled by the way children were motivated to respond to teacher prompts with ever increasing elaboration and explanation (Webb et al., 2009). A similar result showed itself in the study of Wood, Cobb, and Yackel (1991) who found that by 'asking students to explain their methods for solving problems and refraining from evaluating students' answers, teachers helped create expectations and obligations for students to publicly display their thinking underlying how they solved mathematical problems.' (as cited in Webb et al., 2009, p. 65). Goddard noted that higher scores in maths and reading were recorded when there was higher teacher collaboration while Hatano also found that when collaborative structures were well designed they forged more solid results than traditional approaches, and also that they required a general acceptance of the need for the co-construction of knowledge (Hatano, 1993). We return to the question asked by Levine and Marcus, namely 'What kinds of teacher collaboration are most likely to improve what teachers and, ultimately, students can learn during their time in school?' (Levine and Marcus, 2010, p. 390). There are cognitive elements certainly. Webb notes with Cohen the importance of open-ended tasks) and the setting of explicit teacher guidelines to acknowledge the contribution of low-status students (Meloth and Deering, 1999). Golbeck and Molimany (2013) link collaborative practice to problem-solving.

Why then at college level, apart from teacher preparation courses, are the results less positive? One possible reason is the way standards-based assessment instruments are relentlessly applied to individuals. An argument might be made that these stresses push knowledge into an individualised

shape where groups are generally viewed as competitors rather than accomplices. Kennedy, for instance, concluded that 'many countries worldwide, including Scotland, have adopted standards-based CPD frameworks which measure individual competence against set descriptors. It is no wonder then that assessing the value of collaborative CPD in an individualised way is a real challenge'(2011). Under such stresses few students think naturally of group thinking in positive terms. Many students, on the contrary, think of group work as hampering, blocking, dampening, thwarting, dulling and generally blunting individual progress. At University however, a more radical transformation should be achievable even if the evidence does not support it.

Webb (2013) also studied student dialogues to identify the communication processes that might be tied to cognitive change. In this study, her focus on adult communication and learning considered both the positive and the negative effects of collaborative learning. It is clear that positive effects would require the learning to be real (Socratic ignorance to be real) while negative effects might well suggest that the learning is artificial (Socratic ignorance is only a ruse). Among the positive outcomes she found that the literature supported group interactions that enhanced student understanding of issues. Students used conversation to fill in the gaps in their knowledge and confronted the fragmentary nature of their understanding (Chi, 2000). This need to confront the gaps came to the fore especially when students had to present their ideas in public and thus to formulate their ideas as explanations that claimed to be relevant, coherent, complete, accurate and understandable (Webb, 2013, p. 20). Notwithstanding the fact that student teachers tended to learn the value of communication anyway when they stand in front of groups only to discover that what they thought they understood clearly was not so clear to others or even to themselves and that consequently they had to admit to being confused on certain points. In theory, the general grappling for clarity or skill competence which normally occurs in a well-functioning collaborative group exposes the need to remedy these weaknesses in the process of learning, thus pointing to the need for robust patterns of political engagement in groupwork settings. The ability to listen, to change tack, to be open to novel interpretations, to admit unclarity on occasion, frames the kind of learning these students needed. Webb is particularly insistent on the link between explanation and clarity, suggesting that any formal attempt to link these two aspects of learning together effectively enhanced the quality of their learning outcomes, thus reflecting Nell Noddings contention that explanations forged using common peer to peer interactions are particularly important (as cited Webb, 2013, p. 20).

Of course one has to recognise certain negative aspects of collaborative work also. Adults in particular have problems exposing weakness in their knowledge and may not be as open to collaboration as elementary school children. There may be many reasons for this. One reason may be a certain cynicism in the face of teacher questioning. Indeed many engaged in collaborative work thought of it as a kind of time-wasting game. Webb offered the following list of cognitive negatives: that students often decided not to share precious ideas; often did not 'agree' with 'agreed' positions; chose not to seek help if required in order not to lose face before others. They also often opted to disengage from the process and showed a lack of political skill in losing motivation to reengage. Lopata et al. noted the 'free-rider effect' which is a common criticism of collaborative work and the tendency for groups to divide up work unevenly, due perhaps to different levels of engagement or ability in the group (2003). There are then negative socio-cultural group forces such as the tendency for students to divide into high status and low status performers in the group, thus leading to an increase in the pressure on some to engage in social loafing and in others to give in to their frustration and to engage in solo runs to achieve the required standard on behalf of the group.

There is also the assumption that valuable knowledge is fixed and static and that once you have it, you hold it. So the student who wants to speak with authority is tempted to repeat, rephrase and restate what the lecturer or teacher has said already since this body of knowledge represents the authorised presentation of private static knowledge (See Webb et al., 2006). But perhaps the most serious negative rejection of the process of collaborative learning is to be found in students who once again use the system to hide. Students who do not wish to expose the contingent character of their own knowledge will hide their own ignorance, will not seek help if they need it and will try above all to remain invisible (Long et al., 2012), thus responding to a culture of learning that tells them to be quiet, to work alone and while they might eventually perform in public, to rely on being brainy enough to absorb everything in private. Hiding ignorance is the contrary of hiding knowledge but the reason is the same: private knowledge always out-trumps public knowledge. When private expertise applies to students then, as Lieberman and Miller suggest, school cultures accept the status quo as the default position. As Nelson states, 'Norms of privacy, long established as part of school culture, are protected when teachers avoid asking each other questions that probe into the nature of what students learn as a result of specific instructional practices' (2010, p. 176). Hiding ignorance, of course, is not formally caused by collaborative learning structures but may be exposed more by them than by traditional methods of learning because of the demands made on learners. What conclusions can be drawn from these considerations?

II Two Significant Features

Two features might be highlighted as significant. The first is the issue of time, the length of time spent in the collaborative process itself. The student is addressed directly by peers and obliged to think out his position following the discipline required by reference to the Delphic oracle. 'You do not enter here unless you are prepared to change'. This is quite succinctly repeated as a counsel in Rilke's words 'You must change your life'. There is no opportunity to dive or duck. It is less easy to see how self-transformative change will follow from short-term engagement with collaborative work. When applied to short-term learning frames such as those endured by college-level students constantly under pressure to score well on tests, to produce reports in rapid order and to enjoy only a very time-limited engagement with content, then a general personal learning transformation is not so assured. However it is not assured using a traditional methods either! However, when viewed over the long-term development of children where learning is marked by openness to new things over weeks and months, the eventual change in the child's knowledge and experience enables deeper transformation. Concerning time, the learning outcomes may be impacted by any of a number of factors:

- a short timescale from the beginning to the end of the operation
- a form of competitive interaction rather than cooperative interaction
- performance indicators put up front to show that there is no time for elaborate reading or change and that the new performance standard will be required in a matter of weeks
- the student's unwillingness in such conditions to reveal weakness, gaps in knowledge or understanding or competence in order to achieve a result
- the tendency not to inquire into any extra gaps that might appear under pressure to achieve a result
- the idea that this learning phase will soon be over and thus that frequent necessary engagement (as in offices or enterprises) will not be required (See Abrami et al., 2000 on the need for frequent engagement)

The second feature is the requirement of parity. Parity does not mean sameness in a democratic structure. One expects a wide spectrum of skills and competencies even when students are deemed to be of similar standard. If the same person always dominates proceedings, as a teacher normally does, then the teacher becomes the focus and the others become satellites and we are back to either the cognitive constructivist or the social constructivist pattern of teaching and learning. We have to remember the fact that in the Dutch experiment mentioned above (Dobber et al., 2014) this fall-back position easily resurfaced when the groups came under pressure to deliver quick outcomes over a short time-scale. This shows that even a well-constructed form of collaboration that embeds parity as a basic principle, easily fractures into the familiar inequalities of teacher and learner, or high-status student and low-status student, and the norms of individualist learning returns. One needs to be brave to trust the democratic learning potential of a collaborative group, particularly the ability of the structure itself to maintain parity between members and to ensure that each member has the opportunity to contribute to the overall product.

While Hakkaraainen et al. propose the idea of knowledge creation as central to the task of collaborative teams (2013, p. 58), one would also expect to find included practices of meaning-making. The term artefact is then extended from table lamps or torches to 'symbolic material artefact' (p. 62) which include under this heading 'questions', 'theories' that enable participants 'to be brought up to the same level of knowledge required by the distribution of expertise' (p. 66). It is clear that a shared *experience* as distinct from a shared *practice* is essentially ambiguous. Does it mean that two or more people sharing the experience are living through the same experience such as a flood or earthquake or some outrage or other (call this shared experience SE)? To say so it does not necessarily claim that each person has an identical experience that is shared (SE_i). When it comes to shared experiences, it might be necessary to speak of experiences shared in the round (SE) as distinct from experiences that are shared in a numerical sense (SE_i). In an environment where the object of collaboration is to share experiences rather than to produce artefacts (although there is nothing to prevent the production of the latter), the distinction between SE and SE_i becomes central to the task of agreeing a common position and establishing a common outcome. If we are liable to conflate these two (i.e., SE and Se_i) as normally happens in private learning, then the social aspect of learning disappears from view. Further work on this is required.

Conclusion

The collaborative learning movement (CLM) is based on the assumption of real ignorance and the establishment of learning structures that work on the basis of real inquiry. As such CLM renews the view that Socrates could teach out of his own genuine ignorance. The challenge is for teachers today to achieve the bravery to do this also. One benefit of this process is the facilitation of the student's voice. Collaborative learning methods in lecture halls and classrooms can for this reason be central to the promotion of the student's voice. The capacity to share experience seems to require both substantial engagement time and a form of democratic parity that enable this deeper transformation to take place. It has been the thesis of this paper to suggest that only sharing of a particular type (genuine collaborative learning) promises to generate the reflection required for the development of professional judgement or any long-lasting educational benefit of this kind.

As an experienced person, you can of course draw on a whole stream of facts, memories, accounts from people, in order to help you form your judgement about what you experience and to overlay these understandings on the rawness of your own experience. But you need a particular structure to enable you to distinguish between the 'ownness' of your perspective and the 'truth' of your

perspective. Talking about the rawness of one's experience, naming it, corelating it with others, refining it to discover its public features, all these efforts make experience more precise to oneself and bring about something of the truth in oneself. And they help to deepen it. Yet in all exchanges, there is always a mixture of the everyday expression, the cliché, the half-baked notion, the assumption, the mindless platitude, the noise of chatter. All aspects contribute to personal insight yet not all are equal in depth. They hold the 'ownness' of one's experience up to public scrutiny. Sometimes quite quickly we adults lose the unique freshness of a particular event, cover it over with norms and take refuge from rawness of our own perspective by means of strategies of familiarisation that inoculate us against having to confront something new. The collaborative exchange exposes the many compromises of we make to our being-in-the-world. Heidegger is still saying that we need to tap into primary experience a bit more, to recognise its positive value, to dwell in its pre-verbal and pre-literal profile as an antidote at least to being swamped by the idle chatter of the everyday, even if this latter should never be comprehensively avoided. A collaborative process then enables this rawness to achieve collective expression and mutual understanding in a manner that is relatively novel. Professional teachers who become practiced at this process, become sensitive to the management of raw experience in students confronted perhaps for the first time by a thought, a fact, an emotion but by their truth as well. It is this truth that enables a student to live in the middle of things and to notice the genesis of learning as it happens. This is inquiry in a real sense and not simply a game precipitated by a bogus form of questioning. It signals the possibility of continuous lifelong learning.

The process of learning in a collaborative sense is quite different from knowledge understood as a static possession, held internally in the individual and only communicated if desired. Collaboration in the sense proposed here is not merely the sharing of experience already achieved but it is the creation of knowledge, the generation of a new way of looking at oneself and facts in the light of this human to human exchange. It requires learners willing to deepen their own raw experience rather than hide behind the simple collective presentation of a group experience. This was the challenge proposed by a Socratic education and it was not always successful, if by success is meant the production of moral character. But it was real nevertheless. The freedom it taught was to launch into an inquiry yet to be seen, a target that is caught up in a dynamic relation, never static, constantly in flux, always adjusting to new stimuli, new thoughts, new information, and involving an active community of learners. The collaborative learning movement offers the opportunity for human to human interaction. This dynamism reflects what good teachers know only too well as they deal with learning events in their pupils, the multiple blocks in learning that can occur, the stubborn blind-spots in themselves that militate against remedying the learning blocks in their students. It might be utopian to wish for the abandonment of our static models that measure standards but not processes. But at least we have the example of Socrates who sought to do it. Indeed the collaborative learning movement is only the latest manifestation of the age-old truth that humans need to reflect on their experience in order to learn. Should teacher ignorance be cherished or denied? Why cherished of course.

Dr Fiachra Long

School of Education
University College Cork

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