

## Teaching with Twitter | 09.29.14 Stephen Baldrige & Christopher Long

Please find a list below of additional resources from the “*Teaching with Twitter*” webcast. If you wish to print only certain resources, you may click their respective links to jump directly to them in the packet.

Please note that the hashtag discussion for this webcast is **#aitwitterteach**

### Pre-Webcast Resources

1. [Blogging Scoring Rubric](http://www.academicimpressions.com/preconference/BloggingScoringRubric.docx) – *Page 2* – this rubric, designed by Chris Long, facilitates a creative and lively philosophical dialogue online by encouraging strong writing in blog posts and comments. This is also available in Microsoft Word format for personal use from this link:  
<http://www.academicimpressions.com/preconference/BloggingScoringRubric.docx>
2. [Interaction Rubric](#) – *Page 3* – this student comment rubric delves into quality of comment and the impact on discussion
3. [Teaching Philosophy](#) – *Pages 4-19* – “Cultivating Communities of Learning with Digital Media: Cooperative Education through Blogging and Podcasting”, by Christopher P. Long. *Teaching Philosophy* 33:4, December 2010.

## Blogging Scoring Rubric

Professor Christopher Long

This rubric is designed to facilitate a creative and lively philosophical dialogue online by encouraging strong writing in blog posts and comments. These criteria will be used for the qualitative evaluation of the blog posts and comments.

Criteria	Unacceptable (0-69 pts)	Acceptable (70-79 pts)	Good (80-89 pts)	Excellent (90-100 pts)
<b>Frequency</b>	No or infrequent participation	Participates once a week	Participates 1-2 a week, but postings are not distributed	Participates frequently and consistently
<b>Initial Posting</b>	No or few postings	Posts are adequate, but reflect superficial engagement with the material	Posts are well developed and engaged with the material; lacks conceptual clarity	Posts are conceptually sophisticated, engaged in a substantive way with the material
<b>Follow-up Postings</b>	No or few comments on blogs of others	Comments are shallow contributions to the discussion; does not enrich discussion	Comments elaborate on existing posts with further comment/observation	Comments analyze the posts of others, extends the discussion in new directions, relates comments to previous online or classroom discussion
<b>Content Contribution</b>	Posts irrelevant information, tangential to discussion	Repeats some previous content, does not add substantively to the discussion	Content is factually accurate, but does not include much conceptual nuance or development	Posts draw directly upon the material to make a creative and substantive point that extends beyond the material
<b>Clarity &amp; Mechanics</b>	Unclear, disorganized, unedited	Open and respectful tone, some typos, some organization	Organized, well-edited and thoughtfully composed	Organized around a central point/argument, concise, even striking formulations, clear, easy to read style
<b>Reference &amp; Support</b>	No or few references or support for position	Appeals to personal experience, but not to the work/experiences of others	Incorporates the work/experiences of other students, scholars and experts	Uses references to literature, readings, personal experience, experts, etc. in ways that strongly support the main position
<b>Connections</b>	Establishes no or few connections with other blogs, websites, articles, etc.	Infrequently establishes connections to other blogs, websites, articles, etc.	Regularly establishes connections to internet resources and other sources of contemporary culture, news and politics	Consistently draws course material into connection with issues of the day by integrating references to blogs, websites, articles, scholarship, etc.

## STUDENT COMMENT RUBRIC

	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Quality of Comment</b>	Comment is relevant and reflects understanding of current content and previous remarks of other students and/or professor.	Comment somewhat irrelevant, betrays lack of attention to previous remarks of other students.	Comments reflect little understanding of either the content or previous remarks in discussion.
<b>Impact on discussion</b>	Comment helps move seminar conversation forward with thoughtful/insightful thoughts or ideas.	Comment somewhat advances the conversation, but does little to move it forward (repeat of a thought already presented).	Comment does not advance the conversation at all or is actively harmful to it.

TOTAL SCORE:

Adapted from John Immerwahr (2008)

## Cultivating Communities of Learning with Digital Media: Cooperative Education through Blogging and Podcasting

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*Abstract:* Digital media technology, when deployed in ways that cultivate shared learning communities in which students and teachers are empowered to participate as partners in conjoint educational practices, can transform the way we teach and learn philosophy. This essay offers a model for how to put blogging and podcasting in the service of a cooperative approach to education that empowers students to take ownership of their education and enables teachers to cultivate in themselves and their students the excellences of dialogue. The essay is organized around a compelling story of how the students in an Ancient Greek Philosophy course responded to an anonymous, belligerent commenter on the blog from outside of the class. The incident brings the pedagogy of cooperative education into sharp relief.

Recall that moment in *Republic* book one when Thrasymachus could be restrained no longer. It happened at the house of Cephalus near the Piraeus, that hotbed of democratic activity. Socrates was talking with a group of aspiring young men and he had just rejected the idea that the just is to help friends and harm enemies. When, continuing, he asked what justice and the just might be, Thrasymachus, “hunched up like a wild beast,” flung himself into the discussion.<sup>1</sup>

One Monday morning at the end of a fall semester, I was made to feel the poignant fright of which Socrates speaks when faced with the threatening Thrasymachus: “I was astounded by him, and, looking at him, I was frightened.”<sup>2</sup> Waking early, I reached for my iPhone to check the overnight activities on the course blog for my Ancient Greek Philosophy course. Students, I had come to learn, often wrote posts and made comments late into the night or very early in the morning. What I read astounded and frightened me. An anonymous comment had been published to a post written by one of my students. At first I

was thrilled, because one of the goals for the course was to open our philosophical discussions in the classroom to the wider community. We put no constraints on who could comment, nor did we insist upon signing comments with an identifiable name. All semester we had been receiving comments from people outside the class who had come to read our blog and participate in the community of learning we had created.

But this was different. The comment itself demonstrated a philosophical sophistication I did not recognize in any of the students I had come to know that semester; it is not that they were incapable of it, just that there was something in the tone and direction of the articulated thought that struck me as strange. My intuition was confirmed in the final paragraph which was belligerent, provocative, and obscene.

How ought one respond to such an unsettling voice, particularly when the stranger hides behind an anonymity that is as threatening to us as it is protective of the author? How does one cultivate habits of dialogue with students in a digital medium that opens the possibility of such a radical polysemy that it is often unclear with whom, precisely, one is engaged? These were not the original questions around which this course was organized, but they were the questions to which we were led.

Originally, the course was designed to use digital media, specifically blogging and podcasting, to empower students to take an active role in their own education.<sup>3</sup> This particular course focused on the nature of Socratic politics. We read a series of Platonic dialogues, attending in each to the manner in which Socrates practices politics by turning individual souls to the question of justice and the good. One of the main goals of the course was to cultivate the excellences of dialogue by practicing them in a digital medium that allows for a diversity of perspectives.

The way the students responded to the stranger who appeared on that Monday morning late in the semester is a testimony to the extent to which that goal was achieved. But in order to appreciate the power of the student response, it is important to understand the pedagogical principles that animated the unorthodox course design.

### *Pedagogical Principles:*

#### *Community of Learning, Community of Practice*

The central pedagogical principle around which the course was organized is that education is a *cooperative* activity best pursued in social environments in which the student and teacher together participate.<sup>4</sup> Dewey suggests that a “social environment . . . is truly educative in its effect in the degree in which an individual shares or participates in some conjoint activity.”<sup>5</sup> For this course, our conjoint activity was to

co-author a living document that expressed our ongoing engagement with the Platonic dialogues in general and the question of Socratic politics in particular. The course blog was that document.

As a publishing platform that allows for ongoing written reflection in public, the blog offered us a space to articulate, share, develop and respond to ideas throughout the semester and, as will be heard, beyond it. Yet the power of our course blog was not simply its ability to share ideas with an unlimited audience, but more fundamentally, the way it allowed for a responsive engagement with the ideas articulated on the blog itself. Under certain circumstances, a blog can become a social environment for the conjoint activity of learning. For the blog to cultivate a genuine community of education, it must be something more than an information delivery platform. This becomes possible when teachers themselves are willing to enter into the learning community opened by the blog platform. Dewey thus only speaks half the truth when he writes that “schools require for their full efficiency more opportunity for conjoint activities in which those instructed take part, so that they may acquire a social sense of their own powers and of the materials and applications used.”<sup>6</sup> Yet, it is not only those instructed who must take part in these conjoint activities, instructors are also to acquire a social sense of their own powers by entering fully into the online social environment. We will return to this in a moment when we consider the question of implementation; for precisely how to enter into community without dominating it is of critical importance to the success of a genuinely cooperative education.

The second principle around which this course was organized is that teaching and learning are most effective when ideas are not merely discussed and considered, but *practiced*. Human lives are enriched by the communities of practice in which they are embedded. Families, teams, professional organizations, universities and indeed, classrooms are communities of shared practice, be the practices explicitly articulated or implicitly embodied. Etienne Wenger emphasizes the importance of such communities of practice for education when he writes that “the learning that is most personally transformative turns out to be the learning that involves membership in these communities of practice.”<sup>7</sup> Our course blog offered us a space not only to reflect upon the ideas expressed in the Platonic dialogues, but also to practice the excellences of dialogue introduced in the texts themselves. During the course of the semester, we were able to think critically about the nature of dialogue because we were engaged in a dialogical practice that deepened our understanding of the power and limits of dialogical engagement itself.

### *From Engagement to Cooperation*

The vision of education as cooperative owes much not only to Dewey and Wenger, but also to Frederick Woodbridge, who articulates the sense of cooperation that informs this pedagogical approach:

There is cooperation in the pursuit of knowledge, an interchange of discoveries, opinions, and results, a communication which would put agreement in the place of disagreement. We are not left each to his own devices, but employ the aid of others.<sup>8</sup>

For Woodbridge, this sort of cooperation is rooted ultimately in the human ability to work together with nature in such a way that we are able to respond in meaningful ways to the world we encounter. His emphasis on agreement is no naïve optimism, but rather a recognition that as natural beings, humans exist in ways that allow us to meet the world that reaches out to us. Inter-human relations are rooted in this possibility, no learning would occur if we could not meaningfully cooperate with the things we encounter.<sup>9</sup> This philosophical naturalism, which is neither mechanistic nor reductive, but living and organic, has deep implications for the theory of education.<sup>10</sup>

To speak of the pursuit of knowledge as a truly cooperative activity is implicitly to challenge traditional pedagogies of student engagement. It is widely recognized among educators that student engagement is a key to academic success. Disengaged students erode the social dynamics in the classroom, have a negative impact on their peers and drop out at high rates. Thus, it is no surprise that the desire to move students from a disengaged attitude to one of engagement has become a major goal of our pedagogical practices.

Of course, student engagement has many meanings. Engagement might be measured by certain behaviors, as when students write effectively and with nuance; it might be felt in certain emotions, as when students express excitement about the ideas they encounter; or it might be understood by way of certain cognitive activities, as when students demonstrate an ability to analyze and synthesize in sophisticated ways.<sup>11</sup> Yet, despite its many dimensions, engagement itself seems too impoverished a pedagogical ideal. We ought to aspire to something more for our students and ourselves. Strange as it sounds, focus on engagement remains too student centered. Its primary emphasis is on changing the habits, behaviors and attitudes of students, and it often fails to consider those habits, behaviors and attitudes of faculty that close off the possibility of cooperative education.

The students in my Ancient Greek Philosophy class were ultimately able to respond effectively to the belligerent voice of the stranger at the end of the semester because they had been practicing the excellences of dialogue throughout; and I, as teacher, found it easier to trust their

abilities to respond, because I had been participating in the community of dialogue with them for months. This is compelling testimony to the power of cooperative education. The integrity and sensitivity of the student response, however, must be understood as rooted in the structure of the course design itself.

### *Relinquish Control and Empower Cooperation*

The two pedagogical principles that animated the design of this course—that education is cooperative and that it is most effective when embodied in communities of shared practice—are themselves connected to what I take to be the central purpose of my teaching: to empower students to take an active role in their own education. Rather than taking an antagonistic stance against a technological environment that can so often distract students, I have attempted to enter into the digital media in which students already live in order to enact together with them the enduring values of a liberal arts education—critical judgment, an appreciation for diversity, excellence in communication, ethical imagination and an ongoing, deliberative reflection on the meaning of the human condition.

The impulse to join students in a social space with which they are comfortable combined with the work I had long been doing to develop a model of educational blogging that would add pedagogical value to my courses led me to the design for this course. At its core is the notion that together the students and I would co-author a dynamic and living “document” around the content of the course. To accomplish this, the expectations and requirements for the course were clearly established on the syllabus and, in particular, on the blogging rubric, presented in Figure 1 below (p. 352).

In order to encourage continuous and sustained engagement with the material, all the writing for the course, save for a final research paper, took place on the co-authored course blog. *There were no specified writing assignments.* Instead, the rubric established the expectation that students would write consistently and frequently on the course content throughout the semester.

Note that the rubric does not specify a number of posts or comments a student must write per week, although it does indicate the minimum number (1–2) of online written contributions per week in the “Good” column. My refusal to identify a determinate number of posts and comments required for an “Excellent” grade is rooted in the Aristotelian notion that excellence involves the cultivation of certain habits.<sup>12</sup> Specifically, a main objective of this course in particular and of my teaching in general is to cultivate the habit, at once intellectual and practical, of ongoing, critical, reflective engagement with the



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Follow-up Postings	No or few comments on blogs of others	Comments are shallow contributions to the discussion; do not enrich discussion	Comments elaborate on existing posts and develop them further	Comments analyze the posts of others, extend the discussion in new directions, relate to previous online or classroom discussion
Content Contribution	Posts irrelevant information, tangential to discussion	Repeats some previous content, does not add substantively to the discussion	Content is factually accurate, but does not include much conceptual nuance or development	Posts draw directly upon the material to make a creative and substantive point that extends beyond the material
Clarity and Mechanics	Unclear, disorganized, unedited	Open and respectful tone, some typos, some organization	Organized, well-edited, and thoughtfully composed	Organized around a central point/argument, concise, even striking formulations, clear, easy-to-read style
Reference and Support	No or few references or support for position	Appeals to personal experience, but not to the work/experiences of others	Incorporates the work/experiences of other students, scholars and experts	Uses references to literature, readings, personal experience, experts, etc. in ways that strongly support the main position
Connections	Establishes no or few connections with other blogs, websites, articles, etc.	Infrequently establishes connections to other blogs, websites, articles, etc.	Regularly establishes connections to internet resources and other sources of contemporary culture, news and politics	Consistently draws course material into connection with issues of the day by integrating references to blogs, websites, articles, scholarship, etc.

Figure 1: Blogging Scoring Rubric

philosophical content of my courses. In order to encourage students to come to their own terms with the material, I relinquished a modicum of directive authority in designating pre-determined assignments. By so doing, however, I gained an abundance of student commitment to the shared space opened by the blog itself.

The rubric allowed me to clarify the expectation of clear, organized and even striking writing. It enabled me to fairly and rigorously assess student work, which I did four times during the semester at roughly the intervals at which I would have otherwise assigned a short paper to be submitted to, read and graded by me alone. The blog, however, empowered me to insist upon all the traditional excellences of written communication even as it opened that communication to the learning community in the class and to a wider world of readers.

### *Openness*

Because students no longer wrote for an audience of one, but rather for an unlimited audience of potential readers and, most immediately, for a group of their peers, the full weight of appearing in public and the concomitant pressure to excel was brought to bear on their writing. For some, this was difficult, so—for these few—I offered to accept their “blog posts” privately. Yet even the most trepidatious were eventually able—once I read, edited, and encouraged their written work—to contribute to the ongoing, public dialogue on the blog. Further, when I found issues in need of correction—be they grammatical, stylistic, substantive, or philosophical—I made it a practice to email students privately to alert them to the mistakes. Inevitably, they would immediately log on to the blog to make the corrections. In the past, unless I specifically asked students to revise a draft of a paper and resubmit it to me, rarely have I had students make corrections to their submitted papers and return them to me. The pressure of public exposure and the desire to appear not only competent but excellent to their peers moves students to invest more energy into their work.

Further, because the blog opens the possibility of response and because the rubric explicitly encourages follow-up comments that respond to and expand upon the written work of others, the blog cultivates the ability to respond in substantive and productive ways to a diversity of ideas. The public nature of the blog also affords students the opportunity to engage a wider community of students beyond the classroom, extending even beyond the institutional walls of the university. After learning that a colleague at Boston College was teaching Plato’s *Phaedrus* the same week in which our class was reading it, we agreed to have her students comment on our blog and to give her the opportunity to write blog posts on our blog. My students at Penn

State were in this way exposed to a more diverse set of perspectives than they would have been in a traditional course; and we, the two faculty members, were able to model modes of scholarly engagement in our public written communication with one another that exemplified the ways we expect our students to respond to one another. The blog opened a space of communicative practice in which one of the main objectives of the course—to cultivate the excellences of philosophical dialogue—could be achieved.

### *Blurring Boundaries*

The blog platform blurs boundaries in multiple ways. We have already heard how our course blog blurred the boundary between two educational institutions, Boston College and Penn State. However, the blog blurred other boundaries as well. The boundary between in-class and out-of-class time was blurred by the continuous accessibility of the blog space. Because members of the community could enter and leave the space at any time of the day or night, they were able to engage the material and one another on their own terms and in their own time. The asynchronous nature of this communication has pedagogical advantages and limitations. One of the limits is that discussion can become fragmented and unwieldy. In order to counter-balance the proliferation and fragmentation of the discussion, students were divided into groups of two or three and assigned a week to produce a “Weekly Round-up” podcast in which they highlighted the themes and ideas that emerged in the readings, on the blog and in the classroom discussion over the prior week. By the end of the semester, we had twelve short podcasts that chronicled the trajectory of the course and stood as artifacts expressing the development of our collective thinking over the course of the semester. If, however, the unremitting nature of the communication on the blog opens the possibility of fragmentation, ubiquitous access also affords members of the community an opportunity to pause and reflect on what they want to say. Participants in the online community can thus take their own time to consider how best to convey their ideas and respond to the work of others.

The boundaries of time are blurred in another way as well. Because the students took ownership of the community that emerged on the blog, the online discussion extended beyond the prescribed limits of the course itself. Once the semester ended and grades were submitted, students returned to the blog, posting about things they encountered in their current semester’s coursework and readings related to the tropes and themes that emerged during the previous semester. No longer constrained by a concern for assessment, students were able to introduce a broader range of interests into the discussion, but because the blog

space remained an academic site of interaction and the level of student writing expected remained high, the post-semester writing on the blog brought material students were presently working on into relation with the ongoing themes from the previous semester. Thus, the community that was established extended beyond the temporal limits not only of individual class sessions but also of the course as a whole.<sup>13</sup> The blog opened a ongoing community of learning that has enriched the education of all involved.

This points to another boundary that was blurred by this pedagogical approach: that between teacher and student. By encouraging the liberal use of tagging, a dynamic tag cloud emerged that served as an organic taxonomy for the main themes of the course. As a participant in the discussion, I was able to influence this organic order, but I did not control it.<sup>14</sup> Rather, the themes of the course were established and its direction driven by the online dialogue. I found, however, that I could still effectively exercise my disciplinary expertise by weaving the themes that emerged from our online discussion into our discussions in the classroom. Preparations for a given class session involved reading the blog, identifying excellent articulations of those ideas I would have wanted to emphasize if I had created a lecture independently, and embedding links to those posts and comments directly into my teaching notes. With the blog on screen in the classroom, I linked directly to student posts and comments in order to amplify the ideas I found most important. Often I would call up a strong post from a student usually reticent to talk in class and ask the student to reiterate the excellent point made online. This encouraged a broader range of in-class participation, facilitated thoughtful online communication, emphasized good writing and positively reinforced continuing engagement. A friendly competition emerged among the students to see whose posts would be highlighted in a given class, and I intentionally leveraged that competition to increase the quality of the writing in the class.

Even as I directed discussion and reinforced excellence in this manner, my own engagement with the material was being determined by the dynamic dialogue I was having with the students. For example, although the question of Socratic piety was not something I had originally intended to emphasize in the course, it emerged as an important theme for the students and provoked me to engage in further research into the scholarly literature on the topic. My students were now teaching me.

This suggests, indeed, the blurring of yet another boundary, namely, that between teaching and research. Because the course was centered around a topic directly related to my own scholarly research program, the learning I was doing in class with my students broadened and deepened my own scholarly work. This occurred on two different planes. First, as this article itself demonstrates, I was moved to reflect upon

and articulate the pedagogical implications of adopting technology in this way. Contributing to the scholarship of teaching marks a new direction of research for me. Second, however, my continuing research in ancient Greek philosophy has now been shaped by the ongoing work being done on the blog itself. My understanding of the difficulties endemic to the practice of Socratic politics has been enriched by the digital dialogue opened by the blog.

And yet, as we have heard, the blurring of boundaries has potentially problematic consequences. Because the blog platform offers faculty enormous flexibility to determine the degree of openness a given course should have, decisions about how to modulate that openness must be made in light of the benefits and limitations of openness, and always with an eye to the ultimate educational objectives of the course. Different courses, students and faculty will embrace different degrees of openness. In this course, my interest in exposing ideas to a wide public in order to cultivate habits of response endemic to civic discourse mandated that the boundary between my classroom and the wider world be as porous as possible. Yet, as we learned that Monday morning late in the semester, it is one thing to open the course to a wide public and to discuss abstractly how to respond to Otherness, it is quite another to encounter the belligerent voice of an Other in the shared space of dialogue we had worked all semester to create.

### *The Ability to Respond*

Let us return, then, to that moment, to the decisions made and the emotions felt as we found ourselves accosted by the aggressive voice of an anonymous stranger, who, like a wolf, flung himself into the discussion. When Thrasymachus acted similarly, Socrates, drawing on the common belief in antiquity that if a wolf sees you first, you are struck speechless, suggests that he was himself not rendered speechless because he had seen Thrasymachus first.<sup>15</sup> Because our stranger remained both unseen and anonymous, the challenge immediately became how to respond in a responsible and effective way with words.

Of course, I could have simply deleted the comment, recognizing that, at 6 a.m., I was likely to be the first and only member of the class to have read it. And yet, given the community that had grown over the semester, to mute the voice seemed at once unjust and unnecessary. It felt unjust because we had cultivated a community together by conjoint activity, and such a unilateral decision would have failed to respect the right the students had earned to determine how best to respond. It felt unnecessary because a community of shared practice had emerged in which we had not only discussed how to respond to the Other, but had practiced it together with one another. Further, despite the unsettled

feeling that remained with me throughout, I recalled in that moment the words of Noëlle McAfee in her book *Democracy and the Political Unconscious*, when she wrote: “Dealing with trauma that besets the public sphere calls for public work, not private decision making.”<sup>16</sup>

After responding to the comment by rebuking the profane and belligerent language used and insisting on the degree to which anonymity can erode civic discourse, I turned to my students, opening a protected space online, limited to registered students, through our university’s course management software, in which we could discuss how best to respond. Our public work required some private space. This, indeed, was one of the core lessons I learned from the experience: a certain privacy can empower deeper public engagement.

Although they were somewhat divided on the question of whether we should delete the comments and silence the voice, most of the students expressed the desire to leave the comment and to allow the community to handle it. My decision in this regard was facilitated by the fact that as they were arguing this in private, in public, they were addressing the philosophical substance of the stranger’s comments. Further, they were getting responses that, while still belligerent, nevertheless showed signs of genuine movement, signs, indeed, that the words of the students were having some effect.

The range of student responses was remarkably illuminating for me. Some, understandably, were outraged, but others were amused, responding at times with laughter and even teasing. The most surprising and philosophically interesting moment came when a student from the class began posting under the screen name of the stranger during a public discussion related to the question as to whether we should delete the stranger’s comments. Here, suddenly, the voice of the stranger appeared arguing that we should keep him, only subsequently to be revealed as a member of the class who had signed on anonymously using the same pseudonym. To this, indeed, the actual stranger responded as if he were a disgruntled member of the class. Because I had access to the IP addresses from which these comments were made, I was able to reconstruct the dynamic at work, but in the moment, it was disconcerting and troublesome. The community we had built was experiencing a radical polysemy for which I, as faculty, was quite unprepared. And yet, because we had built a trust in one another throughout the semester, my confidence in the students never wavered and they were able, finally, to diffuse the voice as the stranger’s final comment expressed frustration because the intention was not to “turn this into a test of the community.”

The test to which our community was subjected was, to some degree, the test of certain democratic abilities. As McAfee puts it,

[A] true democracy begins early and deep, in the ability of *all* members of the polity to feel themselves members of a common public space who have a hand in shaping the contours of that space. . . . Where oppressive societies alienate members from membership in a common world with others, a democratic society should be able to create pathways for citizens to talk with each other, coordinate their aspirations, and help fashion and shape the public world.<sup>17</sup>

The difficulty is how to respond to voices that are disruptive and radically opposed to the nexus of relations that connect people in a given community in ways that do not institutionalize the repetition compulsion endemic to the logic of exclusion and silencing that results when the forces of disruption are not sublimated.<sup>18</sup> In her response to McAfee's book at the Society for Phenomenology and Existentialist Philosophy annual conference in 2009, Shannon Sullivan suggested that "being emotionally present with and open to another person can allow for moments of understanding that standard politics and legislation do not."<sup>19</sup> Such openness and emotional presence, however, is at the heart of the *practice* of Socratic politics. And even if we did not attain a moment of understanding with the stranger whose anonymous voice addressed us, we began not only to think through the meaning of democratic community, but also to live our way into it with all the emotional and intellectual discomfort that entails.

The blog platform opened the possibility of this encounter and the opportunity to learn something of how to respond to those voices that do not accept the practices on which the community is based. Although it was unsettling, it was heartening as well, and never more so than when a student responded to the voice of the stranger by quoting Socrates:

"Thrasymachus, don't be hard on us. If we are making any mistake in the consideration of the arguments . . . know well that we're making an unwilling mistake. . . . So it is surely far more fitting for us to be pitied by you clever men than to be treated harshly."<sup>20</sup>

This response, as much as anything I learned in the course, taught me something of the power of cooperative education.

### *Cooperative Education*

In conclusion, then, let me delineate the contours of the sort of cooperative education I experienced together with my students that semester. Cooperative education takes seriously the social and reciprocal nature of teaching and learning. It recognizes that students, both individually and in the aggregate, have something to teach even as they have much to learn. It empowers teachers to relinquish authoritarian control, and encourages them to weave their expertise into the community of learning that emerges dynamically in the courses they teach.

Cooperative education understands that the teacher-student relationship is reciprocal, even if it is also asymmetrical. It is reciprocal insofar as students teach and teachers learn, but asymmetrical insofar as the teacher retains a definite privilege not only as one who has learned and thus has earned a certain expertise, but also as the one responsible for assessing the learning that occurs in the course. Cooperative education does not seek to elide this asymmetry, but rather, to invite teachers to carefully consider how their authority operates in the delicate ecologies of learning in which they participate. How we as teachers respond to this invitation is critical; for our authority is operative in everything we do. It can be used to close off discussion and shut down debate, or it can open students and, on our better days, ourselves, to new connections, richer and deeper insights and surprising discoveries.

Cooperative education, then, must cultivate certain excellences in those faculty and students committed to it. It will need to teach and learn openness, comfort with ambiguity, generosity and equity. It will need to affirm the value of difference, embrace diversity and seek common ground. It will need to be animated by mutual respect for the experience of students and for the wisdom of teachers. It will need to empower students to take ownership of their education and faculty to move from imposition to collaboration. That such a conception of education is both possible and powerful was demonstrated in the way my students responded to the belligerent comment that appeared late that fall semester, once they and I had cultivated some of the excellences of cooperative education.

### Notes

1. Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, 336b–d.
2. *Ibid.*, 336d3–4.
3. For a good discussion of the educational affordances associated with emerging digital technologies, see Anderson, “Theories for Learning with Emerging Technologies,” 30–32.
4. This principle is itself rooted in a broader claim about the developmental origins and nature of human language and knowledge. Vygotsky puts it well when he suggests: “Signs and words serve children first and foremost as a means of social contact with other people.” See, Vygotsky, *Mind in Society*, 28–29. Teaching and learning at its earliest stages in the developmental life of an individual is social, oriented toward making sense of the world in relation to others.
5. Dewey, *Democracy and Education*, 26.
6. *Ibid.*, 45.
7. Wenger, *Communities of Practice*, 6.
8. Woodbridge, *An Essay on Nature*, 209.
9. For a discussion of this deep, naturalistic understanding of cooperation, see Long, *Aristotle on the Nature of Truth*, 11–20.



10. Randall gives voice to the sort of naturalism gestured to here, which should in no way be confused with those forms of naturalism that seek to reduce being to the mechanistic interactions of matter. See, Randall, “Epilogue.”

11. For a discussion of the different senses of engagement, see Harris, “A Phenomenographic Investigation.”

12. Sachs, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*, II.4, 1105a29–35. Although it is tempting to view the ethical habits in separation from the intellectual habits, Aristotle has a more integrated view of how these active conditions of the soul, or *hexeis*, operate together. See, Long, *The Ethics of Ontology*, 144–48.

13. Insofar as the blog was deployed in a way that placed students at the center of the learning community, allowed for a variety of formal and informal learning activities, exposed students to a more heterogeneous spectrum of expertise, and allowed them to maintain a record of their individual and community growth, it embodied what Koper and Tattersall have identified as the specific characteristics of lifelong learning. See, Koper and Tattersall, “New Directions for Lifelong Learning,” 690–92.

14. The organic growth of the tag cloud on the blog was, it seems, an example of what Siemens has called “connectivism.” Delineating the meaning of this term, he writes: “Learning (defined as actionable knowledge) can reside outside of ourselves (within an organization or a database), is focused on connecting specialized information sets, and the connections that enable us to learn more are more important than our current state of knowing.” See, Siemens, “A Learning Theory for the Digital Age.” Without endorsing his suggestion that learning may reside in non-human appliances, nevertheless, the tag cloud was an example of connectivist learning insofar as it organized the ideas with which we as a community were concerned in ways that allowed us to reflect more deeply on the trajectory of our own learning. For more on connectivist learning, see Anderson, “Theories for Learning with Emerging Technologies,” 33–36.

15. The passage cited at the start of this essay, in which Socrates said he was astounded and frightened by Thrasymachus, continues this way: “I think that if I had not seen him before he saw me, I would have been speechless” (336d4–5). Bloom points out that this is a reference to the popular belief in antiquity that if a wolf saw a person first, the person would be rendered speechless. That Thrasymachus would be characterized as a wolf, that untamed relative of the guard dogs of which Socrates will speak in book II, 376a, suggests the extent to which his spirited intrusion is a threat to the community gathered around Socrates. For a discussion of the connection between Thrasymachus and *thumos*, see Long, “Socrates and the Politics of Music,” 334, 338.

16. McAfee, *Democracy and the Political Unconscious*, 108.

17. *Ibid.*, 17.

18. The vocabulary here is indebted to McAfee who herself draws on psychoanalysis in her attempt to conceptualize the dynamics of contemporary politics. For a discussion of repetition compulsion in Freud, see *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in Freud et al., *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 18, 7.

19. Sullivan, “Democracy as the Work of Mourning,” 15.

20. *Republic*, 336e–337a.

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