




The Magic Happens Inside Out: A Reflection on the Transformative Power of Self-Expression and Dialogical Inquiry in Inside-Out Prison Exchange Courses


Kym Maclaren

To cite this article: Kym Maclaren (2015) The Magic Happens Inside Out: A Reflection on the Transformative Power of Self-Expression and Dialogical Inquiry in Inside-Out Prison Exchange Courses, *Mind, Culture, and Activity*, 22:4, 371-385, DOI: [10.1080/10749039.2015.1075045](https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2015.1075045)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749039.2015.1075045>


 Published online: 23 Oct 2015.

 Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)

 Article views: 421

 View related articles [↗](#)

 View Crossmark data [↗](#)

 Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

The Magic Happens Inside Out: A Reflection on the Transformative Power of Self-Expression and Dialogical Inquiry in Inside-Out Prison Exchange Courses

Kym Maclaren
Ryerson University

Based upon experiences in Inside-Out Prison Exchange courses, and drawing insights from Plato, Merleau-Ponty, and Freire, I reflect upon the pedagogical power of honest expressions of personal experience, and dialogical inquiry. The expression of personal experiences, I argue, can (a) motivate a “conversion” from a sophistic and disputatious use of reason to the transformative practice of pursuing one’s own insights and interrogating tensions therein and (b) institute genuine solidarity among inquirers in place of alienation. Dialogue in this context becomes a “practice of freedom”: It cultivates in us virtues necessary for learning and transforms us into socially responsible agents of inquiry.

INTRODUCTION

I teach a university-level philosophy course that brings together university program students with either individuals who are incarcerated or individuals released from prison. This Inside-Out Prison Exchange course is an extremely moving course to teach: rewarding, challenging, and requiring of great learning on my part (for similar attestations, see Boyd, 2013).¹ Participants also typically claim that it is transformative—indeed, that it is their most transformative educational experience. In anonymous evaluations of the course, for instance, students say: “The experiences of this course will stay with me for the rest of my life”; “[This was] the best course I have taken throughout my entire four years of university. It allowed me to grow and learn with others in a way that isn’t always possible in many courses”; “Education seems so much more applicable to my life than ever before. I really understood how valuable education was after this course”; “If all classes were like this one I would stay in school forever.” . . . But what exactly is being learned? In what sense are students transformed? And by what means?

Correspondence should be sent to Kym Maclaren, Department of Philosophy, Ryerson University, 350 Victoria Street, Toronto, ON M5B 2K3, Canada. E-mail: kym.maclaren@ryerson.ca

One thing is clear: Students typically move from an “us versus them” (and even “me vs. her”) orientation to a strong sense of community and appreciation for each other. As students reveal retrospectively, many typically come to the class harboring fears and assumptions about people in the other group—despite good intentions to the contrary. The undergraduate students often assume and worry about the criminality and dangerousness of the others; and the incarcerated or released students often assume and worry about the elitism and condescension of the university students. This is all added, of course, to the inevitable anxieties inspired by a gathering of unfamiliar people—anxieties that take the form, “Who am I in relation to these others?” and “How will I be perceived?” and that typically make us feel isolated and alone. Such divisions may furthermore be intensified by the great diversity in the class—diversity across racial, socioeconomic, educational, geographical, gender, and age lines—and the stereotypes and assumptions that these forms of difference can activate.²

But magically, as the course unfolds, such social and personal barriers give way, and there is a deep sense of connection and shared care and responsibility. This, I think, constitutes one important form of educational transformation in the course, and I am interested in thinking about how this magic happens. But, in light of the fact that this is a university-level course in *philosophy*, I have been obliged also to think about whether there is truly *philosophical* learning taking place, and if we are dealing with something more than the magic enacted in any effective social club.

Part of what motivates this question is the fact that, in an Inside-Out course, pedagogy proceeds through *dialogue*, and other typical tools for teaching the disciplines of rigorous philosophical thought are absent: Students are not required to write academic philosophical papers or exams, to listen carefully to lectures that model careful philosophical thinking, or to engage in close, systematic readings of difficult texts. Nor, more generally, are they expected to articulate systematic, “bulletproof” rational defenses of some thesis. If, then, they end the course without having practiced and developed these particular disciplines, have they failed to engage in philosophical learning? If we use dialogue alone, can it induce philosophical education? What are the powers of dialogue?

This line of inquiry is complicated by the following fact: Even if dialogue can—as one might expect—develop skills of questioning, giving reasons, and being consistent, and even if paper assignments and interpretive exercises can develop disciplines of rigorous thought and rational defense, none of these guarantee genuine philosophical learning. They can instead lead to mere sophistry and disputatiousness, or to what Freire (1989) called “verbalism” (p. 75), where words are dead, empty, divorced from the realities of our lives. Rational argumentation can, moreover, become a weapon of war, a means to defeat others and establish oneself as superior, and thus a technique of maintaining and protecting oneself through distancing oneself from others.

In my view, genuine philosophical learning, on the contrary, involves self-transformation. As Plato’s Socrates asserted, it involves a revolution in one’s hold on the world: One’s lived assumptions are challenged, and there comes to be instituted a new sense of who one is, what the nature of reality is, and how we might better pursue wisdom and bring ourselves into deeper touch with reality. Indeed, self-transformation is so essential to philosophy, according to Socrates, that the development of genuine intellectual insight is inseparable from the development of virtue.

In this article, I propose that Inside-Out can, through the kind of dialogue that it facilitates, be philosophically educational *insofar as it enables such deep-reaching self-transformation*.

Moreover, this self-transformation *is inseparable from the aforementioned social transformation* that takes place in an Inside-Out course. Students may not, at the end of the course, be writing philosophical papers with bulletproof arguments. But as they themselves attest, they do have radically transformed *living* insights into their own selves, the reality they live within, and the power and responsibilities of communal inquiry.³

How Inside-Out works this magic is difficult to pinpoint, but I propose that it happens to a great extent through its incorporation of honest expressions of personal experiences, and by means of the kind of dialogue and dialogical responsibility that develop out of these. My answer moves not through empirical studies or scholarly assessments of arguments, but through a reflection upon my own and my students' experiences within the classroom and by drawing together insights from a set of thinkers who, like my students, are not typically brought into conversation with each other—Plato, Merleau-Ponty, and Freire.

A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE INSIDE-OUT PRISON EXCHANGE PROGRAM

Inside-Out courses typically bring together students from university and prison for a semester-long university course within the prison walls.⁴ Students discuss readings and learn through dialogue, collaborative inquiry, community building, circle-work, reflective forms of individual writing, and a collaboratively designed group project. Variations on this model have recently been developed in the United States and Canada⁵: Moving beyond the prison setting, these new variations on the Inside-Out course bring together university students and other community members. My own experience consists in a pilot course taught in a maximum security correctional facility and a regularly offered course for university program students and people recently released from prison.

Inside-Out aims to make the same diversity that creates social barriers into a rich fund for developing wisdom, insight, and a sense of human connection. It aims to transform walls into bridges. Evidence suggests that students do indeed develop a much greater awareness of their own biases, prejudices, and assumptions and that they dismantle the social barriers that exist between them. There is typically a growth of what Freire (1989) called “critical consciousness” (pp. 86), or the awareness that the situation we each face is not simply given but has social causes and thus has room for intervention and transformation. With this often comes a deepening sense of social responsibility, a new recognition of the power of dialogue and communal inquiry, and an experience of having been engaged in learning in deep and existentially transformative ways (Davis & Roswell, 2013; Follett & Rodger, 2013; Larson, 2013; Perry, 2013; Pollack, 2014, 2015; Werts, 2013).

Pollack (2014) proposed that one of Inside-Out's most powerful pedagogical tools is “circle-work,” wherein participants sit in a circle, express themselves honestly, and listen carefully to one another. Such circles share a kinship with Aboriginal circles (e.g., Graveline, 2003), Palmer's (2004) circles of trust, and Freire's (1989) culture circles. I intend to elaborate upon this by thinking further about why personal expression within this circle format can be *philosophically* transformative, and how it gives rise to meaningful, soul-changing dialogue. I begin by considering why sharing personal experiences can be a matter of sowing seeds of responsible inquiry, rather than simply airing different perspectives.

TELLING OUR OWN STORIES AS SOWING SEEDS

Myles Horton, founder of the Highlander Folk School, noted how easily we fail to acknowledge the sowing of seeds of learning (Horton & Friere, 1990). The Highlander Folk School aimed to educate and empower people who were disadvantaged and had among its “graduates” many of the leaders of the civil rights movement. Education and empowerment in this school came in good part through the sharing of one’s own experiences. But outsiders did not always recognize the worth of sharing stories. Horton, in conversation with Freire, recounted that, once

someone criticized Highlander workshops, saying “All you do is sit there and tell stories.” Well, if he’d seen me in the spring planting my garden, he would’ve said: “That guy doesn’t know how to garden, how to grow vegetables. I didn’t see any vegetables. All I saw was him putting a little seed in the ground. He’s a faker as a gardener because he doesn’t grow anything. I saw him and there’s nothing there.” Well he was doing the same thing about observing the workshop. It was the seeds getting ready to start, and he thought that was the whole process. To me, it’s essential that you start where people are. (Horton & Friere, 1990, p. 99)

How can listening to others’ stories and telling one’s own be a collective sowing of the seeds of education? And why might it be difficult to see this?

Since Plato’s time at least, we have been prone to a mistaken vision of education that Freire (1989) has more recently characterized as the “banking” model: We assume that wisdom and knowledge are acquired when the experts, filled with truth, deposit it into the students who are empty vessels awaiting enlightenment. In Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates engaged in his own bit of storytelling to counter precisely this vision of learning. He told the story of the cave. And he completed it with this remark:

Education is not the sort of thing certain people who claim to be professors of it claim that it is. Surely they claim they put knowledge into a soul it wasn’t present in, as though they were putting sight into blind eyes. . . . But the current discussion indicates that this power is present in the soul of each person; and the instrument by which each one learns, as if it were an eye that’s not able to turn away from the darkness toward the light in any other way than along with the whole body, needs to be turned around along with the whole soul. . . . Then there would be an art to this very thing, this turning around, having to do with the way the soul would be most easily and effectively redirected, not an art of implanting sight in it, but of how to contrive that [redirection] for someone who has sight, but doesn’t have it turned the right way or looking at what it needs to. (518b-d)⁶

Knowledge cannot be the kind of thing that is given, Socrates argued. It can be realized in a person only through her own powers of insight. The art of education, then, is helping to reorient a person—and not just her mind, but her whole person—so that her already existing power of insight can be better realized. Such a reorientation, Socrates suggested, is a matter of undergoing a *revolution* (“*periagôgê*”) or *conversion* (“*metastrophê*”) within one’s whole person. Education, then, involves not primarily acquiring further stocks of information but conversions: It involves the inauguration of new ways of perceiving the self-same world, others, and one’s relation to them.

Socrates’s story of the cave helps us understand the nature of this conversion. The revolution the prisoners-become-learners undergo involves a move from seeing the shadows on the wall as given realities, unquestionable truths, to seeing them as heavily mediated appearances of reality and, thus, as convictions in need of examination, interrogation, elucidation. What was thought to

be a “tree,” for instance, turns out to be the mere shadow of a much more substantial reality—namely, a figure held up in front of a fire. If the prisoner keeps moving, interrogating, asking if reality is now attained, this figure itself is revealed as the image of an even more substantial reality—the living tree beyond the cave.

The conversion is, in the first place, then, the realization of the need for questioning, the recognition that there is more to learn here. But the questioning that we must engage in is not mere questioning for the sake of questioning. Such disputatiousness will get us nowhere. If we are to ascend to greater truths or deepen our insight into reality, we need to stick with and interrogate *the insights we already have*. The prisoner does not turn away from the shadows toward some *different* truth; he rather comes to see more deeply into that of which he was already aware. The shadow itself comes to “mean” differently: Where once it was a “tree,” now it is the appearing (and concealing) of “tree”; where once it seemed to be the endpoint of knowledge, now it appears as an entrance into a reality that still requires clarification, examination. We question, then, for the sake of clarifying what reality was already dimly appearing to us, for the sake of “recollecting” what we already, in some sense, know.

The conversion to an attitude of recollective questioning is equally a revolution in our sense of self and the task of learning. Initially, the prisoners competed with each other to accurately name the shadows and predict what would happen next. Here, one is taken to be either right or wrong, “in the know” or not, and knowledge appears as the possession of some and not of others. Once a prisoner comes to see the shadows as the heavily mediated appearing of reality, however, he must equally experience himself as a power of insight already in touch with that reality. The task that confronts him is no longer one of gaining possession of a knowledge that is external to him, but of pursuing the insight that he already has. And the pursuit of insight will lead to deeper and deeper insights, as the reality he is in touch with reveals itself in new and more substantial ways.

It is this kind of conversion that I propose can be achieved in circle-work and the sharing of personal experiences. Through this process participants come to see that what they took to be the truth of reality is only an appearing of it, but that they also have, individually and collectively, genuine insights into the reality in question, so that it is in their own power to pursue insight and discover greater truths.

Here is a simple example. Suppose that we are discussing freedom, and we have been invited to reflect upon a situation in which we felt powerfully our own freedom. One participant speaks of what it was like no longer to be under the strict supervision of parole. Another describes the freedom felt in her realization that she no longer had to live at home and take the abuse meted out there. A third participant speaks of the anxiety she felt when she realized the responsibility of freedom, and how the future of another person could rely upon whether or not she chose to take the stand against him. Yet a fourth speaks of the huge expansion of inner freedom that he experienced when he was incarcerated and had to take on the question of who he was going to be in that environment; he thereby discovered his poetic abilities. With these four stories alone, we have conjured up the *complexity* of freedom; freedom has become more of a problem.

Participants often remark upon this initial transformation in their own grasp on the issue. Erik, Isabelle, and George offered these reflections:

I went into this class thinking freedom was the ability to physically do what I want. . . . Then you quickly realize that there is so much more to it than that. (Erik)

Freedom, to me, was definitely something I took for granted, and I didn't really appreciate it as much until I heard the stories of everyone else. . . . I definitely will never look at it in the same way ever again. (Isabelle)

I used to think freedom was being outside, saying "hey I can walk around, I don't have limitations, I can do whatever the hell I want to do" . . . then I was like, "okay, wait, hold on!" (George)

These comments—as simple and commonplace as they might seem—in fact express an essential moment in learning: the revolutionary moment, that is, in which one realizes that one has been operating with an assumption—with a settled, taken-for-granted prejudgment of what something is—that is ultimately inadequate to the realities with which one is in touch. These students have realized that freedom is *not* what they initially took it to be. But this is not just a negative realization. It comes by means of an expansion of their insight into what calls to them to be understood. For as much as they are struck by the inadequacy of their own definitions, they are also struck by the truth that resides in each of the stories shared (including their own).

Participants develop the sense that they are engaged with *appearings of freedom*—appearings in which freedom is both revealed and concealed. Such stories, thereby, both raise the *question* of freedom *and* indicate a way forward. They call on us to develop deeper insight into freedom, but by starting where we already are, with the (inevitably mediated) insights that we already have, and by seeking to clarify what, *in some sense, we already know*. They put us, in other words, on the path of learning as transformative recollection. And they are, indeed, the sowing of the seeds of inquiry. As one student remarked in an anonymous evaluation:

I never thought I could look to what I already know to learn new things. This class was set up in a way that called upon me to learn from myself/others and to teach myself/others things that I did not even realize that I knew. Before Inside-Out I assumed that teachers knew and students learned from them. I now see that there is more to it.

In sum, then, sharing stories can inaugurate precisely the conversion that Socrates suggests is essential to learning. They can enable the realization that there is more to be understood here, but also that wisdom, in an important sense, lies not beyond us but by deepening our expressive engagement with ourselves and each other.

HONEST SELF-EXPRESSION AS REVOLUTIONARY

Why lived stories, though? Could one not accomplish the same kinds of conversions simply by eliciting from students definitions of the issue at hand? For, insofar as a number of different definitions are elicited, we find ourselves in a similar position of wanting to figure out how they can all be definitions of the same thing.

Giving definitions, I propose, is importantly different from the process of expressing one's own personal experience: it typically inclines us toward a learning that is disembodied, alienating, and therefore not fundamentally transformative; and it can significantly undermine the establishment of a community of inquiry. In contrast, *honest self-expression* can be more radically transformative and can help to institute a sense of community. Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) argued that, through self-expression, we come not only to hold linguistic propositions before our

own minds, as it were, but much more radically to *see* the world in a new way, and to see it *with* others.

In offering an account of expression, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) distinguished between “first-order” and “second-order” language, or between “speaking” speech and “spoken” speech, “authentic” expression or “inauthentic” expression (pp. 182–196). Second-order spoken or inauthentic expression involves reiterating familiar, socially instituted ways of talking about the world and ourselves. First-order, speaking, authentic expression, in contrast, is a speaking that seeks to put into words, *for the first time*, something that has not been fully thought or communicated before. Poets, leading thinkers, and great artists all accomplish first-order expression: They articulate reality in new ways, bringing what was hitherto silent, invisible, to the fore. Their words make manifest what had somehow been making itself felt all along, but remained unacknowledged by us. To read them may in many cases be difficult, but if we dwell with them and spend the time to come to understand them, we find ourselves carried away into a new world that is equally just a reconfiguration of the reality we have known all along. A paradigm shift takes place. We do not merely encounter new facts out there to be memorized and made a part of us; we rather come to inhabit a new way of making sense of our shared world, and the world shows up in a new way.

Being carried away by another’s first-order speech is not, however, simply indoctrination. For it is precisely *when* we have come to inhabit this vision of reality, *because* we have come to inhabit it, that we start to feel tensions between that way of experiencing things and our more habitual forms of making sense of the world. We find ourselves *implicated simultaneously* in two not-perfectly-compatible perspectives on the world. It is that personally felt tension that provokes interrogations that help us develop our insights further, and get to know ourselves and the world more fully. By enabling these productive tensions, these first-order speakers, thus, help us transform ourselves by recollecting ourselves. This is why it is important to read great works of literature, poetry, and philosophy.

How different this is from reading a school textbook. For the school textbook operates in the realm of second-order speech. Far from seeking to put into words what has not yet been seen or thought, textbooks simply reiterate accepted, standardized views, and pass along “received wisdom” that, in this external form, is not wisdom at all. What effect does this have on us as readers? Instead of drawing us along into a new way of perceiving the world, textbooks, I propose, tend to set up a sense in us that there is some set of objective truths beyond us, known by the experts, which we need to implant into our minds. Learning, then, is felt to be the importing of external content. Rather than turning toward ourselves to interrogate insights that we already possess and tensions that we feel between those insights, we instead experience ourselves as detached from the truth. We turn not to ourselves, but to textbooks, experts, or authorities whom we hope will make the truth available in the form of definite answers.

This same external relation to truth tends, in my experience, to be encouraged by the solicitation, in class, of different definitions of the issue at hand, like freedom. Students typically approach this request for participation not in terms of the question, “What insights do I honestly have into this issue?” but rather through asking themselves, “What is one supposed to say in response? What is the right answer?” They are inclined, in other words, to orient themselves toward second-order speech, rather than first-order speech. The result, thus, tends to be a list of definitions inherited from others—a list of what “one should say.”⁷ Although a discussion can then ensue about how these definitions can all be definitions of the same thing, such a

discussion—precisely because it has been established on the ground of a detached, external form of knowing—has a built-in inclination toward becoming an intellectual game and logical disputation, rather than the pursuit of insight and wisdom. Indeed, such intellectual games can lead us astray from the realities of our world, spinning us off into meaningless logical conundrums that we buzz around, as Wittgenstein (1958) suggested, like flies in a fly-bottle (para. 309).

Something different happens when we turn away from what “they say” and work to articulate our own experiences in relation to the concept being discussed. Here, we find first-order speech occurring not just in a great text, but in the shared conversation. For, in reflecting upon our own experiences of freedom, to stick with the earlier example, or upon what these experiences seem together to reveal, we are called upon honestly to notice what we had not noticed before and to articulate an experience or a nascent groping thought for the first time for ourselves. We come to *realize* through self-expression what our experience was, or what new insight had been seeking to make itself known.

Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) summed this up by writing that “for the speaker . . . [first-order] speech does not translate a ready-made thought; rather, speech accomplishes thought” (p. 183). Prior to speaking honestly, we are not typically clear what precisely it is that we have to say; the thing to be said exists not as a fully determinate inner thought to be translated into words but as a kind of “vague fever” (Merleau-Ponty, 1993, p. 69), an ambiguous tension, or “flashes” of potential insight (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012, p. 183). It “remains for us to appropriate it, and it is through expression that thought becomes our own” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2012, p. 183). Making the thought our own is, however, coming to perceive the world in a new manner. Thus, Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) wrote of expression as “installing” “a new sense organ”: By expressing ourselves, we crystallize a new way of encountering, perceiving, or finding sense in our world. Our expression of our own lived experience “opens a new field or a new dimension to our experience” (p. 188).

This first-order expression is revelatory not only for the speaker, however. It has an impact on listeners too—an impact not unlike that of a great author’s speech, even if it is less erudite. When one witnesses someone striving honestly to convey her experience, to answer to that which she has lived or to that which she is currently realizing for herself, one can get caught up in that way of seeing, and carried along by it. As Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) argued, “Through [first order] speech . . . there is a taking up of the other person’s thought, a reflection in others, a power of thinking *according to others*, which enriches our own thoughts” (p. 184). These thoughts are not merely propositions held before our minds; they are rather ways of encountering, making sense of the world. To witness another speak honestly, then, is to get to inhabit, momentarily, that other person’s way of experiencing the world and to have highlighted in the world that which shows itself to that person.⁸ Following Merleau-Ponty (1945/2012) (and here I substitute “speaker” and “listener” as equivalents of Merleau-Ponty’s “writer” and “reader”):

The operation of expression, when successful, . . . makes the signification exist as a thing at the very heart of the [conversation], it brings it to life in an organism of words, it installs this signification in the [speaker] or the [listener] like a new sense organ, and it opens a new field or a new dimension to our experience. (p. 188)

We can come, *through* the other’s expressive words, to see the world on her terms. The experience of hearing another express herself can, then, be transformative for the listener.

In its transformative potential, witnessing another's self-expression tends to be quite different from hearing someone repeat a definition or claim that she has acquired elsewhere. The repeated definition tends, for the listener, to be inert, empty, abstract. Even if, for the speaker, it has become an effective placeholder for a whole vision of reality—which often it is not, for we often repeat familiar claims without really understanding them, as Socrates liked to demonstrate—for the listener the repeated definition can present itself as an opaque, even if familiar, set of words, and not *as a medium through which we are offered new insight into the world*. The definition can present itself, in other words, as “knowledge belonging to that other,” rather than instituting, as authentically expressive words tend to do, a shared way of seeing the world.

As a result, the mere repetition of familiar definitions or claims—that is to say, the use of second-order rather than first-order speech—can significantly shape the relations between speaker and listeners, decreasing or even foreclosing the possibilities for communal inquiry. This is brought into stark relief in an Inside-Out class, where—as in any class, but here in an intensified manner—some will have been initiated into certain ways of speaking, certain accepted formulations and definitions, and others will not. In the context of such inevitable diversity, if participants engage in second-order speech, speaking in terms of words, definitions, or claims that are familiar to them but not to others, it can institute destructive divisions and exclusions. A sense can develop, in participants, that there are the initiates and the noninitiates, those “in the know” and those not. This produces not shared inquiry but mutual alienation. It shuts down the desire to express oneself and to explore one's own nascent insights, setting up instead a situation of competitiveness and self-measuring. It turns participants away from the task of inquiry and toward questions of self-validation. Thus, far from setting up a shared context, where we have the sense of encountering one and the same reality from different perspectives and, thus, of being in communication with the world and working *with* each other, second-order speech and the reiteration of accepted definitions and received ways of speaking tends to produce a sense of separation, solipsism, and exclusion.

The argument of this section, in sum, is that honest self-expression (one's own or others') *does things*; it is a transformative *action*. On one hand, such self-expression brings about a revolution in one's own experience of the world; one realizes, through expression, a new way of making sense of the world. On the other hand, honest self-expression also shapes participants' orientation toward themselves, others, and the issue under inquiry. First-order speech transforms interpersonal situations by bringing participants into coexistence with each other, overcoming alienation and allowing them to share perspectives on the issue at hand. Second-order speech, in contrast, encourages external and alienated relations.

If this account of expression is correct, then it makes a significant difference whether a group discussion encourages self-expression or aims at pinning down claims or definitions that are “received wisdom.” Self-expression *implicates* participants in a shared world and a shared issue. It consolidates new insights into the issue at hand and brings us into coexistence as inquirers. But self-expression also sows the seeds of further transformation and learning, for, precisely because we come to feel implicated not only in our own way of seeing the issue at hand, but also in others' ways of seeing it, we feel the tensions that exist between these insights as demanding further investigation, as calling for interrogation and examination. Our honest self-expressions call on us to enter into further dialogue with each other.

DIALOGUE AS THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIRTUES AND THE PRACTICE OF FREEDOM

Freire (1989) claimed that dialogue is the essence of education as the “practice of freedom” (p. 75). Dialogue can lead to deeper insight into the issue at hand, and this, in itself, can be liberating. But learning about the object of inquiry is not all that is accomplished in dialogue, and Freire surely intended more when he spoke of the “practice of freedom.” The process of entering into dialogue, and becoming good interlocutors, is itself an important learning activity, a transformative experience. And what it develops, I propose in this section, are the very virtues essential to learning, and the self-transformation and social transformation that constitute the more radical practice of freedom.⁹

Good dialogue is an achievement. For, dialogue is not a mere exchange of opinions. Nor is it a matter of one person feeding another answers. Nor, finally, is it collective free-association. It is rather a matter of speaking *with* others about a *shared matter of inquiry*, and in such a way that that shared object is enabled, as much as possible, *to reveal itself*, to speak its own truth. Freire (1989) described it this way: “dialogue is the encounter between [persons], mediated by the world, in order to name the world” (p. 76). But it is no easy feat to be *with* others, and oriented together *toward a shared reality*, so that we are together answerable to that reality. To achieve this requires the development of responsibility. One must become answerable, responsive, to the matter under inquiry, attending to what it has to teach us and not being diverted by one’s own concerns for looking good or sounding smart. This, in turn, requires being answerable or responsive to one’s own nascent insights, turning away from second-order speech and toward what, within our own experience of the object of inquiry, calls to be said. But furthermore, this requires an attentive responsiveness to what others are saying: One needs to think along with others and to let one’s own operative assumptions be challenged by what others reveal while calling attention, for the sake of deeper shared insight—and not for the sake of self-aggrandizement—to tensions that exist within or between perspectives and that indicate something still to be thought.

Such responsibility, required for good dialogue, can equally be described in terms of virtues. Freire (1989), for instance, claimed that good dialogue requires virtues like humility, courage, trust, faith in others, and hope. We can elucidate and expand on his claims by reflecting upon our own experiences of dialogue. Good dialogue requires of us *humility*, I would argue, because even to open ourselves to dialogue requires the recognition that we need still to learn and that others can often see what we cannot. *Honesty* is necessary, too, so that we recognize not only the limitations of our own knowledge, but also when we are being moved by selfish ends, rather than by the imperatives of the conversation itself. *Temperance* is then required to stop ourselves from speaking in self-indulgent ways. *Courage* is also essential—the courage to speak honestly, to put ourselves out there in such a way that we are open to challenges and calls to revise ourselves. Such courage is supported by a capacity to *trust* others—to trust that they are similarly oriented toward developing insight and not toward using our mistakes as opportunities for self-advancement. Our willingness to engage in the process of dialogue with others is similarly premised upon our *faith* in the ability of others to lead us to deeper insight, and upon our *hope* that this dialogue will accomplish something, bring meaningful transformations into our lives. *Patience, generosity, resilience, creativity, and confidence* might similarly be defended as virtues at the heart of good dialogue.

It is the development of such virtues that Socrates had in mind when he claimed, in concluding the cave story, that learning requires redirecting not just the intellectual power of insight, but “the whole soul”; one needs to be transformed not merely at the level of ideas but at the level of one’s *deeds* or *practices*; one needs to develop virtue in order to see more deeply. Both Socrates and Freire, however, seem to cultivate such virtues in their interlocutors not through pedantry and moralism, not through giving moral directives, but rather through the *lived practice* of good dialogue.¹⁰ This is possible, as I wish now to propose, because dialogue is a *self-intensifying practice*:¹¹ Good dialogue educates us into better dialogue, implanting the very virtues that it requires, and poor dialogue devolves into worse dialogue, encouraging the vices that undermine shared inquiry.

Consider first the case of dialogue that is going poorly. Unless wise interventions are made, poor dialogue tends to encourage habits of “discussion” that foreclose learning, and that turns our inquiry into a forum for second-order language and one-upmanship. Impulses of arrogance, defensiveness, self-promotion, and self-indulgence can take over, and participants can be made to feel alienated, excluded, invalidated, and insecure. Dialogue has the potential, in other words, to undo itself and to devolve into monologues and power plays. A concern for one’s own status then replaces a concern for answering to the object of inquiry. We are no longer speaking *with* each other; nor are we oriented *toward a shared reality*; nor do we care about deepening insight. Tools of rational argumentation come to be used as weapons, and genuine dialogue ceases to exist.

The situation is quite different when the people around us speak in ways that are honest, self-expressive, and aimed at deepening shared insight, rather than establishing one’s superiority. Such expressions solicit in others similar virtues of dialogue: I am more able to be honest about the limitations of my own view, I can summon the courage to express myself further, I am increasingly oriented toward truth rather than self-validation, and I develop faith and hope in the capacity of each and all to deepen insight into reality. Good dialogue thereby produces increasingly its own conditions, cultivating the very virtues that make it possible.

What Socrates and Freire have both seen, it seems to me, and what every Inside-Out instructor must learn, is that teaching does not consist in giving insights or precepts. Rather, one works to set up the conditions of good dialogue, and then good dialogue takes over and develops itself. Or to say this in another way, through their own dialogically oriented gestures, students make themselves increasingly into the agents of their own transformation. Students’ honest self-expressions induce solidarity among participants and shared insights that can be further explored. In this context, even when conflict arises, participants are no longer simply airing their own views or defending their own positions, but are working *with* each other, building upon each other, engaging in a shared project. Individual contributions then start to really shape the substance and form of the dialogue, and participants get to feel their own efficacy, the power of their voice. This develops an increasing sense for each member of her *responsibility* for what is happening within the conversation.

Students reflect this sense of responsibility and collective agency in their anonymous evaluations: Asked what they found most valuable about this kind of course, the responded with observations like “Taking responsibility for the learning/teaching of yourself as well as your classmates”; “Inspiring us to rethink education by teaching each other and developing healthier selves”; “This class has allowed the freedom and the opportunity to take charge. It allowed us to guide our education and gave us the responsibility to be accountable for our learning.”

It is here, I think, that we find Freire's "practice of freedom." By recognizing and actively assuming their responsibility in the dialogue, participants become increasingly *creators of their own social conditions*. Where once the practice of dialogue was shaped primarily by its founding conditions and by occasional interventions of the instructor, now it comes to be actively and responsibly shaped and owned by those who are participating in it. Participants come to create directly and collaboratively the social conditions for their own self-transformation and flourishing. This is fundamentally a practice of freedom.

CONCLUSION

Inside-Out brings together people who expect to find great differences between themselves. Much of its power lies in the revelation, through dialogue, of all they have in common and of how much each person—by virtue of his or her uniqueness and difference—has to contribute to another's learning. Together, these unlikely interlocutors found a living community of inquiry, and deepen their insights into their selves and the realities at issue in their lives. The social transformation that they enact is thus, at the same time, a process of self-transformation.

Is this philosophical learning? I have argued that it can be. Despite the absence of many academic forms of discipline characteristic of a philosophy course—disciplines like those of close reading, careful textual interpretation, lecture listening, and written defenses of theses—something fundamentally philosophical can happen. Students can undergo a conversion that leads them to question their own convictions, and to do so not by seeking answers outside of themselves, but by turning inward and seeking to articulate the insights and questions inspired by thinking along with each other. This conversion, I have proposed, ultimately has its roots in honest self-expressions, the solidarity and dialogue to which these give rise, and the virtues that such dialogue cultivates.

The kind of philosophical education that is possible within an Inside-Out course should not, then, be peculiar to such a course. Certainly, the remarkable diversity of such a course sets up a potent context for recognizing one's operative assumptions, one's powers of insight, and the magic of community. But in any class, it seems to me, the encouragement of honest self-expression and solidarity in dialogue can turn the inevitable diversity of its participants into a rich fund for social- and self-transformation.¹²

FUNDING

The courses and evaluation workshop on which this article is based were made possible by the training and advising provided by the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program in the United States and the Walls to Bridges Program in Canada, with special thanks to Simone Davis; by the collaboration of the Saint Leonard's Society of Toronto and the Faculty of Arts, the Arts and Contemporary Studies Program, the Spanning the Gaps Program, and the Philosophy Department at Ryerson University; and by funding offered through the "Teaching about Diversity Fund," granted by the Learning and Teaching Office at Ryerson University.

NOTES

1. At the time of the writing of this article, the Canadian version of the Inside-Out Prison Exchange Program had just become the Walls to Bridges Program. Although Walls to Bridges was inspired by the U.S.-based Inside-Out program and maintains many of its pedagogical principles and aims, it is autonomous and carefully tailored to the Canadian situation. For this article, and for the sake of simplicity, I speak of “Inside-Out,” because all the courses to which I refer were offered before Walls to Bridges became officially its own program.
2. Ages can range from 18 to seniors. Educationally, some students will not yet have finished their high school degrees, though all have reading proficiency (and some have spent a great deal of time teaching themselves through reading and reflection), whereas others will be in their 4th year of their undergraduate degree. Geographically, some are stuck behind prison walls or have limited movement due to parole conditions, whereas others have total freedom of movement. Racially, my university’s students are relatively diverse, but also many of the incarcerated students are visible minorities, because within the prison setting and due to the operations of systemic racism, visible minorities are incredibly overrepresented. The Government of Canada’s (2013) report on ethno-cultural diversity in corrections acknowledged that “there are some groups that are disproportionately overrepresented in federal penitentiaries and growing at alarming rates. For example, 9.5% of federal inmates today are Black (an increase of 80% since 2003/04), yet Black Canadians account for less than 3% of the total Canadian population. Aboriginal people represent a staggering 23% of federal inmates yet comprise 4.3% of the total Canadian population. One in three women under federal sentence are Aboriginal.”
3. This claim is based upon official student evaluations of the course and informal student comments. It fits with the emerging research on the impact of Inside-Out (Allred, 2009; Davis & Roswell, 2013; Pollack, 2014, 2015; see also “Voices” at www.insideoutcenter.org/).
4. The concept of Inside-Out was initially proposed by Paul Perry, who was serving a life sentence and who has since helped to found the Graterford Inside-Out Think Tank and become one of several people who, from within Graterford prison, trains instructors on the Inside-Out model. Professor Lori Pompa, of Temple University, brought Perry’s idea to fruition in 1997. Since then, tens of thousands of people have participated in the program—whether as students or as instructors being trained, and they’ve done so from within the United States, Canada, and beyond. For more information, see <http://www.insideoutcenter.org> and http://legacy.wlu.ca/homepage.php?grp_id=13428.
5. In the United States, Drexel University has initiated what is called the Side-by-Side program. In Canada, Ryerson University and the University of Toronto have started offering courses that bring together university program students with individuals who have been released from prison.
6. For those unfamiliar with the scholarly citation of Plato’s work, the citations given here use “Stephanus pagination.” Numbers correspond to the page in Stephanus’s 1578 edition of Plato’s works, and letters correspond to the place on the page in which the passage occurred. Translations of Plato’s work typically include the Stephanus pagination in the margins.
7. Here, we should hear resonances of Heidegger’s notion of “*das Man*” or the “they”—or of Tolstoy’s “*comme il faut*” (roughly, “as one should” or “as is proper”)—and, thus, of inauthenticity. I am proposing that soliciting definitions, rather than exploring honest expressions of human experience, tends to lead us into an inauthentic orientation toward the task of learning. See Heidegger (1927/1962, chapter IV) and Tolstoy (2004).
8. This inhabitation of others’ perspectives is always to a lesser or greater degree, depending upon that other’s capacities for communication and upon our preparedness for hearing them.
9. Theorists of education recognize that, in addition to the development of knowledge and skills, education also requires the development of “educational virtues.” Roberts (2011), for instance, argued that a key to understanding Freire’s educational writings and practice is to understand them as working to promote the educational virtue of openness. Barnett (2004) similarly proposed that what education most importantly requires in the current era is the cultivation of an “ontological” orientation or disposition towards uncertainty, which in turn requires dispositions of “carefulness, thoughtfulness, humility, criticality, receptiveness, resilience, courage and stillness” (p. 258). Russon (2013) makes an interesting and convincing case that virtues are necessary not only for intellectual learning, but even for the development of a basic sense of agency in children.
10. Sallis (1996), Brann (2004), and González (1998) each argued, in different ways, that the education that Socrates offers his interlocutors through dialogue is to a great extent an education into virtue—in particular, the virtues that will enable philosophical insight.

11. My aim here, then, is to present dialogue not as a heady exchange of ideas, but rather as something that we *do*, as a sociocultural activity that we take part in, and that poses its own demands upon us and develops new dispositions in us. For an excellent article on how “all learning occurs by doing” (p. 13), and how that doing is ultimately a matter of a shared participation in a sociocultural activity, guided by a teacher, see Mascolo (2009).
12. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers and to the editors, Barbara Weber and Jennifer Vadeboncoeur, for their constructive suggestions and ability to see the potential in earlier drafts. I am grateful also to Claire Cassidy for her inspired suggestion of the title.

REFERENCES

- Allred, S. (2009). The Inside-Out prison exchange program: The impact of structure, content, and readings. *Journal of Correctional Education, 60*, 240–258.
- Barnett, R. (2004). Learning for an unknown future. *Higher Education Research & Development, 23*, 247–260. doi:10.1080/0729436042000235382
- Boyd, C. (2013). Opened arms, eyes, and minds. In S. Davis & B. Roswell (Eds.), *Turning teaching inside out: A pedagogy of transformation for community-based education* (pp. 79–82). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Brann, E. (2004). *The music of the Republic: Essays on Socrates' conversations and Plato's writings*. Philadelphia, PA: Paul Dry Books.
- Davis, S. W., & Roswell, B. S. (Eds.). (2013). *Turning teaching inside out: A pedagogy of transformation for community-based education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Follett, K., & Rodger, J. (2013). Trusting the process: Growing and liberating self-reflective capacities behind the prison walls. In S. Davis & B. Roswell (Eds.), *Turning teaching inside out: A pedagogy of transformation for community-based education* (pp. 131–139). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Freire, P. (1989). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (M. B. Ramos, Trans.). New York, NY: Continuum. (Original work published 1968/1970).
- González, F. J. (1998). *Dialectic and dialogue: Plato's practice of philosophical inquiry*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Government of Canada (2013). *The changing face of Canada's prisons: Correctional investigator reports on ethno-cultural diversity in corrections*. Retrieved from <http://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/comm/press/press20131126-eng.aspx>
- Graveline, F. J. (2003). *Circle Works: Transforming Eurocentric consciousness*. Halifax, Canada: Fernwood.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins. (Original work published 1927).
- Horton, M., & Friere, P. (1990). *We make the road by walking: Conversations on education and social change* (B. Bell, J. Gaventa, & J. Peters, Eds.). Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Larson, A. (2013). Liberation from university education: A lesson in humility for a helper. In S. Davis & B. Roswell (Eds.), *Turning teaching inside out: A pedagogy of transformation for community-based education* (pp. 63–69). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mascolo, M. F. (2009). Beyond student-centered and teacher-centered pedagogy: Teaching and learning as guided participation. *Pedagogy and the Human Sciences, 1*, 3–27.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1993). Cézanne's doubt. In G. A. Johnson (Ed.), *The Merleau-Ponty aesthetics reader: Philosophy and painting* (pp. 59–75). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (2012). *Phenomenology of perception* (D. Landes, Trans.). New York, NY: Routledge. (Original work published 1945)
- Palmer, P. J. (2004). *A hidden wholeness: The journey toward an undivided life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Perry, P. (2013). Death of a street-gang warrior. In S. Davis & B. Roswell (Eds.), *Turning teaching inside out: A pedagogy of transformation for community-based education* (pp. 35–45). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Plato. (1982). *The collected dialogues of Plato* (E. Hamilton & H. Cairns, Eds.). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Plato. (2007). *Republic* (J. Sachs, Trans.). Newburyport, MA: Focus.
- Pollack, S. (2014). Rattling assumptions and building bridges: Community-engaged education and action in a women's prison. In G. Balfour & E. Comack (Eds.), *Criminalizing women: Gender and (in)justice in neo-liberal times* (2nd ed., pp. 290–302). Halifax, Canada: Fernwood.

- Pollack, S. (2015). *Walls to Bridges: Report on the impact on students*. Wilfrid Laurier University.
- Roberts, P. (2011). Openness as an educational virtue. *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, 3, 9–24.
- Russon, J. (2013). The virtues of agency: A phenomenology of confidence, courage, and creativity. In K. Hermberg & P. Gyllenhammer (Eds.), *Phenomenology and virtue ethics* (pp. 165–179). New York, NY: Bloomsbury.
- Sallis, J. (1996). *Being and logos: Reading the Platonic dialogues* (3rd ed.). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Tolstoy, Leo. (2004). *The death of Ivan Ilyich* (A. Pasternack Slater, Trans.). Toronto: Modern Library Classics.
- Werts, T. (2013). Access for whom? Inside-Out's opening door. In S. Davis & B. Roswell (Eds.), *Turning teaching inside out: A pedagogy of transformation for community-based education* (pp. 157–162). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Wittgenstein, L. (1958). *Philosophical investigations* (3rd ed., G. E. Anscombe, Trans.). New York, NY: Macmillan.