Bridge building: outcomes and the humanities

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My background is that of an academic in a Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, initially in an English Department, working in particular with literary theory, and more recently Communication Studies. It was while heading up the latter that my faculty began the process of introducing a student outcomes based approach, and what I have to say today is a product of my struggles with—and, eventually, measured conversion to—this approach. There were a number of reasons for the struggle; some were very local (for example, a year long, and remarkably virulent, media campaign against "OBE", as it was then called, in the secondary sector). The reasons for that public campaign needn't detain us; but its scale and seriousness (and if you count seriousness by the number of civil servants who found themselves promoted sideways, it was serious) was an object lesson in itself: education is a social issues, not just an institutional one, and certainly not a managerial one. Other reasons for my struggle, though, were more general, and seemed often generated by the apparent gulf between the rhetoric of the model, as it was put to us, and whatever it was *we* thought we were doing. John Biggs and Catherine Tang, in *Teaching for Quality Learning*, recall a particular "eureka" moment, a specific assessment task, that helped them see the force of an outcomes approach;[i] for me, there have been a series of such (small "e"-eureka) moments and consequent modifications of practice, and I'll allude to a few of the latter that seem to work as I go. In addition to such practice issues, though, the more I taught in that environment the more it became apparent that the top-down approach initially adopted by my own university was too often counter-productive: staff went through the motions, yes, but—recalling Zizek—with little more than "ironic consent", ensuring superficial compliance, but not much more. The problem, or so I believe, was that the process of implementation did not, at least at the beginning, really register the humanities-perspective staff in the faculty were able to bring to the table. The lesson I took from this is a simple one: if "outcomes" is to talk meaningfully to the humanities, it has to be in a dialogue: in short, the humanities ought to be talking back, and part of my aim today is to suggest some of the useful ways in which we can do that—first up, by looking at the idea of "dialogue" itself.

Let me begin, with some scene setting.

"A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is a territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his

interlocutor"—or we might add, by you and me. Thus, and famously, Voloshinov and Bakhtin in 1929.[ii] Their idea that language itself (and not just its use) was fundamentally dialogic—"a bridge between myself and another"—reached an English speaking audience only in the 1970s, and at that point chimed with a number of other explorations of the relation between language, knowledge and identity. One can recall Jurgen Habermas, for example, who approaches a defence of the operability of the concept of truth by asking "what *must* we mean when we say 'this (statement) is true'?"; and answering, that the unstated premise is less about the *world* than about an imagined *conversation*: that is, we are unconsciously supposing that if the claim to truth was inserted into a dialogue, a rational, non-coerced "other" would come to agree that the statement is true, too. As he has it, "the paradigm of the knowledge of objects" is displaced by "the paradigm of mutual understanding between subjects capable of speech and action."[iii] When making claims to truth we implicitly submit to, in his phrase, "inter-subjective truth conditions", or to a dialogue in which acknowledgement of what we are saying *by the other* is as vital as what we ourselves say.

More recently, Manuel Castells has suggested that the kind of "cosmopolitan" culture Habermas is hypothesizing, the culture exemplified by a recognition of the speech of the other, can in fact be understood—now—in a somewhat more pragmatic way, as at the heart of contemporary *network* society; his idea is that—for all our differences—in network society there is a shared sense of the critical value of the communicative network itself. "The culture of the global network society is a culture of protocols of communication[,] enabling communication between cultures on the basis, not necessarily of shared values, but of sharing the value of communication."[iv] That is to say, a shared commitment to recognizing communication protocols across difference is fundamental. However, for me, this coupling of dialogue and recognition receives its most telling formulation a few years earlier, in Charles Taylor's landmark essay, "The Politics of Recognition". Taylor argues that one way to understand the fundamental shift in social thinking that we associate with the Enlightenment, broadly, if you will, the shift from medievalism to modernity, is in terms of a change in the way personal identity is conceived. In the earlier period, he suggests, identity is a matter of ascription: the social system, in outcome, at least, operates as a mechanism to ascribe identity to its constituent parts. This person is a bonded farmer, this a landowner, that a knight, and so on, and in each case personal identity is precisely that as assigned. Moreover, one's value or worth was in like manner a product of ascribed identity: the knight has more worth or "honour" simply on the grounds of his place in the structure. By the time we reach the eighteenth century,

though, that idea of extrinsic honour is giving way to the idea of intrinsic dignity: each of us has something unique, that makes us who we are. As he puts it, according to this way of thinking: "each of us has an original way of being human". On this view: "there is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called on to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone's else's life".[v]

Taylor then takes this idea, of authentic personal identity, and radically recasts it by linking it to the belief that language is constitutive of what it means to be human, and, importantly, to the idea that language is intrinsically dialogic. Thus, he asserts, since "we become full human agents through language", we are *fundamentally* dialogic, which in turn means that:

> my discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. This is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new importance to recognition. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others.[vi]

A recent example of the kind of process Taylor is getting at might be the Olympic torch relay. The torch relay, it turned out, was not at all about the Olympics, much less sport, but *all* about the politics of recognition: initially, it was about the desired recognition of the Tibetans by the Chinese ("we just want a dialogue!"), then, even more vocally, about the proper recognition Chinese students abroad demanded the West afford "their" Olympics, and indeed, their nation.

My starting observation, implicit in all of this, is that an outcomes approach, or one where we take seriously "the other" of the educational transaction, is in fact speaking the same language as Bakhtin, Taylor, Habermas and Castells, and the broader trajectory they are a part of. And, if that trajectory has articulated central concerns in the humanities, an outcomes approach can, likewise, be understood as being – if not exactly driven – at least consistent with the same kinds of concern. Further, we might note that the force of this thinking is not to argue that dialogue (or inter-subjectivity, or the flow of information) is merely a useful way of describing what could be put in other terms; rather, the argument is that dialogic relations, and the pattern of recognition carried by them, are foundational.

Now, I would like to move on by linking these thoughts about what we might call "the dialogic turn" to a decidedly more quotidian matter: assessment. Academics are both experts and enthusiasts, and for most of us the point of teaching is (of course!) the subject that engages us. Assessment is something of

an after-thought: we have to do it, but it seems unrelated to the core business of curriculum. An outcomes based approach challenges that: by asking us to look seriously at what students take away—rather than only at what we put in—it asks us to look at what they do, and central to that "doing" is the completion of assessment tasks. It is at this point the talk about dialogue is helpful. If meaning making is essentially a dialogic process, and if (as Habermas would have it) claims to truth only have traction in a dialogic framework, and if, moreover, and following Taylor, personal identity is built within an interplay of dialogic exchange, then it would seem likely that the tasks we ask students to complete that are most likely to be underwritten by a struggle with the construction of truth, and most likely be strengthened by a sense of personal engagement, are ones that are worked out in a dialogic setting. Often, though, this is precisely what assessment is not. An end of semester examination—rather like Stephen Dedalus's definition of a pier ("a disappointed bridge")[vii]—is an exercise in intransitivity, a bridge that goes nowhere.

In thinking about the implications of this, we have tried to fashion student projects that are intrinsically dialogic, that demand a speaking voice and a sense of audience (or in Habermas's more impressive formulation, inter-subjective truth conditions). Essays are, or ought to, implicitly dialogic. Projects of the sort that can have proposal, production, and review or reflection phases over a period of time are explicitly and often powerfully dialogic. Such projects need not entail "group work", although in my view where it makes sense to do so, they are better for it: "group work" mandates a structure which acknowledges and endorses collaboration, and is thereby dialogic at the outset. But there are no doubt many others ways of achieving this. One of the nicer courses we offer our Communication students is an intense, three week course in video and television production we run in Singapore, something we have done for four years now. It certainly involves group work—the students in teams create two brief films—and is by definition hands-on (and I'll return to this as an issue for much of what we do in the faculty), but we also ask students to create a press kit on their return to Perth, "selling" a story about both the course, and the experience of student exchange. Naturally, given the collaborative nature of the film making, part of the justification for this is to provide a context for the demonstration of individual performance, too; i.e. there is an element of certification in this. The immediate and practical point of the exercise, though, is for students to work on a very different kind of genre from the academic essay, a genre that they may well find, in one form or another, a regular part of their professional lives. (And by that I don't mean they will all end up in advertising or public relations—a disconcerting thought—but that they will be required to produce material that is simultaneously descriptive and promotional

or persuasive, that will combine print and visual media, and that will successfully communicate to both the hurried and committed reader.) The more theoretical point is to grapple with that very difference between essay and the kit, to make sense of the difference between linear and heterogeneous forms, between the structure of print and the visual play of an assemblage. And, organizing all this, the driver is a recognition of audience: in fact, two layers of audience—the news editor who will receive the press kit, and the wider audience that, in turn, is their target. The results are inevitably engaged and engaging: the dialogic context works as a platform for communicative success.

Even more striking to me, though, is that although the description of the task we provide is deliberately non-specific, *every one* submitted to date is organized around an elaboration of outcomes. For the students, invited to promote the course to an audience, the *obvious* focus is what they got out of it (and, I might add, they tend to weigh evenly the "practical" skills and the social one—that is, they weigh evenly the ability to use the machinery of film production, and the ability to work productively in a team). They don't need to be directed to focus on outcomes: to them, it seems the most natural approach. *In thinking about how to "tell someone" about the course, they articulate outcomes: what it has meant to them.* It is a simple enough example, but for me, a compelling one: as academics (in my faculty at least) we have struggled with what an outcomes approach might mean and why we should adopt it. For our students, when we give them a chance to explain what a course has meant to them (rather than, as we usually do, address a topic *within* the course) outcomes are, precisely, the point.

Why then the resistance to our an outcomes approach in the humanities? In my experience, there seems to have been two kinds of concerns. First, there is a fear about loss of content: the first outcomes-evangelists stressed that it is what students do that is the key, not what they do it with. Thus the oft cited example, to learn to drive, you practice driving, you don't study the car. The ability is what counts. But for many of us this seems to get it all wrong: surely the car, the object of knowledge—the stuff of history or literature or politics—is central to the enterprise. This is often expressed as a fear about "dumbing-down": in an argument that we heard first in the 1970s (then the target was the cultural semiotics of the sort pioneered by Roland Barthes in his *Mythologies*), if it is what students *do* that counts, not *what* they do it to, we might as well have them read bus tickets as Borges, comics as *King Lear*. The other cause of uneasiness was less often explicitly articulated, but it seemed to me to be pervasive: it is a fear of what—from a humanities perspective—sounds uncomfortably deterministic. Rather than a very general ambition to teach

"understanding" we are directed to be precise: to say exactly what "understanding" involves; not just to focus on outcomes, but to know in advance just what the outcome will be. There is something of a paradox in this: on the one hand, the rhetoric of an outcomes approach is about the empowerment of students, yet on the other, it would seem we are to do this by telling them, in advance, precisely what the outcome will be for them. Paradox or not, experience in any case suggests students often find in the material we teach insights we had not anticipated, and derive outcomes generated by the accidents of context (by another course being studied alongside our own, or by the happenchance of personal experience). The second fear, then, is that the specification of explicit outcomes is an exercise in limitation, that we will end up on the side of Prospero rather than Miranda, Casaubon rather than Dorothea, or, if you will, Darth Vader rather than Luke Skywalker.

These concerns are not trivial, and rather than discount, or work around, them, I think it is more useful to recast them. Let me attempt this recasting by making two rather different points.

One of the rhetorical drivers of an outcomes approach is often something like an attempt to make education future-proof: workplaces, commodities, "facts", things in general, become superseded, but abilities, or so the argument goes, are transferable, and will survive whatever shock the future has in store for us. As we have seen, the upshot of this was a conviction that outcomes had to be expressed as actions—in effect, organised by verbs—and moreover, that these actions can not be the simple *rewriting* of content in verbal form. It was just too easy, we were told, to put the verb "know" in front of the old, non-outcomes, content-based curriculum, so words like "know" and "understand" were thus ruled out, replaced by a raft of approved actions: "measure", "compare", "generate", "apply", "evaluate" and so on. This was *our* brave new world!

Verbs in, nouns out: doing is approved, but the objects of knowledge are not. Hence, the oddest outcome of all, content is the one thing that can *not* be said. But just as a language of all verbs but no nouns is unworkable, education with actions but not content is a nonsense. We need both. *Moreover, I would contend, neither is more core than the other.* Knowledge that can't be applied is pointless, but application is always the application of *something*.

I find it useful to restate this, metaphorically, perhaps, in terms of the simplest of language structures. We might say that the fundamental business of an assertion, or proposition, and thus the fundamental business at the heart of

both sentences, and the knowledge we express with them, is predication: in grammatical terms, linking the subject to the predicate, where the predicate is always verb+object. Propositions propose just this kind of connection. Predication, moreover, is an activity: it is what we *do* when we construct a proposition. To recall Mark Turner's marvellous *Reading Minds*, we regard familiar (or as he has it, well entrenched) instances of predication facts, and novel ones metaphors. "The sun is a star" is a fact, "the sun is a jewel" a metaphor,[viii] but both fact and metaphor are instances of predication, or actions performed on things. Things may exist in splendid isolation, but fact and metaphor are, always already, connective actions. Or, if a word is a bridge thrown between self and other, a sentence is a bridge thrown between subject and object, and knowledge itself a process of bridge building. Both are about action.

Stepping back a little, then, if predication is in this way fundamental to the creation of meaning and knowledge alike, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the conjunction of subject with verb+object, or the action of cognitive bridge building, ought to be at the centre of every outcome. We can't plausibly leave content behind; rather, we ought to recognise that knowledge (i.e. "knowing", not making a list) is always actively produced, and always within dialogic contexts. One of the chief virtues of outcome statements, that is to say, is that they can help us get at that conjunction of production and dialogic context; and by making that visible, provide a framework to help students work through the analytical, interpretative and constructive processes that lead to knowledge. An outcomes approach is right to stress activity, but we are wrong to imagine knowledge itself is not an activity, too: it is always a "doing things with words". The challenge, then, is to make this *"doing"* visible in the teaching and learning environment.

The second point I think worth making is a pragmatist one. You will no doubt recall the Borges story which quotes "a certain Chinese encyclopaedia" which, he tells us, divides animals into: "(a) belonging to the emperor, (b) embalmed, (c) tame, (d) sucking pigs, (e) sirens, (f) fabulous, (g) stray dogs, (h) included in the present classification, (i) frenzied, (j) innumerable, (k) drawn with a very fine camelhair brush, (l) et cetera, (m) having just broken the water pitcher, (n) that from a long way off look like flies."[ix] The postmodern position Borges' fictitous encyclopaedia anticipates suggests a distrust of the neatly unified, the kind of picture of the world where everything is of a piece, everything alike in kind. For this way of thinking, the language of postmodernism—with its talk of discontinuity, rupture, and incommensurability; or diverse stories rather than grand narratives;

heteroglossia rather than monologic systems; or rhizomic patterns rather than hierarchical structures—seems to better get at the world, and our experience of it. Now we may not all be postmodernists (although we certainly live in a postmodern media world), but I think the legacy of that body of writing—and for my purposes, especially the work of Jean-Francois Lyotard and, half a century earlier, Bakhtin—is a disavowal of false scientism and the quasi totalitarian rhetoric that it seems to inspire, the "grand narratives" of Lyotard's formulation. In Bakhtin's terms, centralizing "official", national languages always "struggle to overcome the heteroglossia of language",[x] the complex reality of everyday experience; and, within the humanities, we tend to side with heteroglossia (and of course there is a politics in this). The lesson is that of a suspicion of "grand narratives", or of any account that aims to see the world according to a single schema.

If that is a lesson that we apply to the world we study, surely it ought to apply, too, to the lessons we teach. There is no good reason to imagine that we improve outcomes by insisting that they conform to a particular formula, or to imagine that we can specify in advance what students will bring to the process. Indeed, in my view one of the drivers of the initial resistance to an outcomes approach in my own faculty has precisely been a tendency—inherited perhaps from purist rhetoric adopted by the trial-blazing apparatchiks in the school sector in my state—to insist on the most simplistic examples. We teach a teenager to drive a car with what outcome in mind? That they can drive a car.. We teach a child to tie shoelaces with what outcome in mind? So they can tie shoelaces. How do we assess this? We get them to tie their shoelaces for us. But, we might well ask, in what ways is understanding the interplay of economic, military and nationalist imperatives in the lead up to First World War different to driving a car? In what ways is reading *Middlemarch* or *Ulysses* different from tying shoelaces? The answer, surely, is in almost every way.

So much for the cautions. Let me suggest five ideas that we have found help ful in moving forward from here. First, given all this, we are not anymore worried about constructing an overly neat set of outcomes statements, or concerned that they all have the same level of specificity. At one point in the *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein remarks "if I tell someone 'Stand roughly here'—may not this explanation work perfectly?" And to the imagined complaint that this is "inexact", he responds: "let us understand what 'inexact' means"—"for it does not mean 'unusable'."[xi] That is, we need to temper enthusiasm with a tolerance for mixed vocabularies and processes. I see *no* reason not to expect *every* course, in *every* discipline, to seriously attempt to articulate outcomes, and moreover to map out an alignment between

curriculum, outcomes, and assessment. But there is no compelling reason to assume all statements of outcomes ought to look more-or-less the same, or that the only outcomes worth their salt are the highly specified ones. Outcomes need only be as precise as makes productive sense. It seems perfectly reasonable to me to include statements with words like "understand" and "know" in them… but to also (often) include more specific elaborations under the rubric "such as" or "including". That is, our practice is to point to a broad aim, and ways in which that aim might be fleshed out, but it is an open-ended list, not a closed one. Moreover, in the disciplines typical of the humanities and social sciences, in my view that list should always include reference to what is *not* in the course: students should be prompted to link the course topics to other domains of knowledge, and to their own personal contexts and experience.

In a similar vein, in terms of the critical alignment between curriculum, outcomes, and assessment (and it *is* critical), there is no reason to mandate any hierarchy here: teleology has its place, but as a matter of practice, it does not matter if we *start* with curriculum or outcomes or indeed, as many students do, with assessment. What matters is that the three are aligned, and work plausibly and productively together.

My second point, and obviously from everything I have said to date, we ought not be the least bit embarrassed about "content" or "declarative knowledge". There is nothing arcane or old-fashioned about knowledge, and indeed it is hard to see what "doing" (say) archaeology or linguistics might be if disconnected from the knowledges built up in their respective disciplines. That knowledge base changes over time, but then, so does everything.

However, we do need to remind ourselves that facts are not things: the best label for a fact is not a noun, but a sentence, an act of predication. I think Bakhtin is getting at something like this when he argues understanding is a matter of response: one can (literally) "pick up" a thing or an object, but one cannot "pick up" a fact or sentence. A sentence demands agreement or disagreement. "Every concrete act of understanding is active", he writes, it "assimilates" what is to be understood "into its own conceptual system filled with specific objects and emotional expressions, and indissolubly merged with the response, with a motivated agreement or disagreement."[xii] In short, knowing *that* (the definition of declarative knowledge) can easily be rendered to look more like a list than an action, more like data than understanding, but it is only *as action* that it is knowledge—rather than, say, repetition—and that, for me at least, is a useful starting point to rethink both how we teach and the kinds of assessment we set.

Third point: given that, the move from declarative to functional knowledge (*knowing that* to *knowing how*) is not, perhaps, a large a leap as it sometimes seems. Functional knowledge, precisely because it is specifically about application, is something of the hero of many accounts of outcomes based teaching. Thus for instance Biggs and Tang, although they have a lot that is useful indeed to say about "declarative knowledge", find examples of good outcomes practice rather more ready to hand when they consider professional courses, such as education, architecture or commerce, where the *point* is the application. The difficulty for us is that for much of what we do in my faculty, things look rather different. My first example, the video and television production unit, is centrally about application in ways that many arts units are not. That said, it is my contention that all knowledge is an action that is dialogic in form, and that we teach most successfully when we can provide environments—classrooms, assessment tasks—that better enable students to articulate the active, dialogic nature of the enterprise. When I was an undergraduate a typical English essay question went along the lines "*King Lear* is a typical tragic hero: great but flawed. Discuss." If I managed to get myself time-warped back, but this time as a teacher, I would be looking to make explicit what a gifted student might see anyway: that while at first glance this is an invitation to tick of a list of examples from the text that exemplify "great", on the one hand, and "flawed", on the other (and perhaps tally them up to determine the matter), one might instead ask if Lear is indeed "typically" tragic, perhaps something along the lines: "Given the range of texts studied in *this* course, to what extent, and in what ways, might Lear be typical of the tragic hero?" That is, my aim is not to put it into new language, and certainly not new jargon; it is to prompt the student to evaluate what text-book account of the tragic hero they might have to hand by comparing it with the account they are able to generate by reading just *this* set of texts, and then to apply that to *Lear*. We can easily spell this out as follows: The verbs here—generate, compare, evaluate, apply—certainly make plain an outcomes orientation—and sometimes I'd use a question just like this. Equally, though, it is often productive to put a sign-post up, rather than lay out a path, and we can do just that with the second question. It, then, provides a cognitive environment that prompts and challenges students to engage actively, and dialogically, with the subject of our attention: and of course, that is exactly our aim. So, in sum:

Fourth, it seems to me useful to remind ourselves that the kind of "functional knowledge" we are most often dealing with in the humanities is *interpretative* knowledge: understanding from another's point of view (whether that be another theory, or simply an other, another person). The process of

interpretation, seeing through the eyes of another, is always an action, is always an outcome of cognitive work, and always implies a dialogue between my perspective and yours. Our experience has been that it is here that an outcomes approach has the most traction for the humanities: indeed, it seems a fundamental fit. The kind of activity that defines critical knowledge is precisely throwing a bridge "from oneself to another". Although *every* essay question can be cast to prompt this kind of reflection, one of the most powerful activities we have tried is a modified version of peer assessment, in which students complete an essay (and hand it in) and then exchange copies of it with peers in groups of three. Each student reads the other two, and then writes a short critique: responding to the other two essays and suggesting how, in the light of that, they would now rewrite their own essay.

The process just described is clearly dialogic, and perhaps a reminder that "group work" is a particular instance—to recall Castells—of network culture: production within the context of a network of other texts, writers and producers. By way of an aside, I may note here that we too often attend to the very visible forms of network culture that seem most at odds with the academic enterprise: for example, Wikipedia and the business of plagiarism. A student outcomes approach also means a student context approach, and that context now is, in every direction, networked. Given this, rather than (as some have) taking a stand against the realm of networked "social utilities" (Facebook's self description), we should perhaps be trying to understand and, where possible, deploy network-supported strategies of learning and production. The network is a very powerful exemplification of a dialogic structure; and as such we might better use it than (just) police it.

Fifth, and finally, an outcomes approach should champion creativity. Outcome statements of the shoelace-tying sort cannot go in that direction, but many others can. All problem-based learning evokes creativity. The press kit I mentioned clearly works this way: a critical aim is to assemble an array of material in a way that will catch the attention of the reader/viewer, and students best achieve this when they step outside the box, and create an unexpected angle, or deploy the mix of print and visual materials in an unexpected way. More generally, any essay or project topic that prompts movement between domains by definition, almost, is about creativity. Within domains (a la Thomas Kuhn) the rules of normal science apply, students have a scaffolding to work with; between domains they have to construct it themselves.

Let me conclude by linking these thoughts to the question of "recognition". To return to the beginning, for students, thinking about the course as a whole,

rather than topics within it, the language of outcomes seems the most natural one, and an outcomes approach is, if nothing else, a prompt to make us reflect on the relation between what we do, and the way it is understood. We need to recognize that students will of course bring different contexts and experiences to the course, but each course we offer ought to be—on its own terms—coherent and highly integrated. More explicitly, it is to recognize that teaching a set of topics with the goal that students understand them needs to be teased out: from the student's perspective, what counts is *knowing* that they understand, being able to articulate *why the topics matter to the course as a whole* (and one might well add, from an employers point of view, this is what counts too: too often we have sent our students out having learnt a great deal, but unable to—quite—explain what it is they have learnt).

Recognition has another dimension here. If an outcome is something a student achieves, the measure of their success is how well they achieve it, not how well others achieve it. In the language of educators, we have to move from norm-based assessment (measuring against others) to criterion (measuring against the task). But if our aim is to provide an educational environment where students are encouraged, and given the means, to succeed then, the outcome *we* are looking for would be to have large numbers of our students do just that: succeed. As Biggs and Tan argue, that laudable ambition collides dramatically with the implicit rule of our practice, which is that it is a sign of weakness—poor standards, lack of rigour, and so on—in a course if most students do well. A student outcomes approach, by contrast, demands we enable and recognize achievement, but, as Taylor contends, there is a kind of politics in all such recognition.

Moreover, the outcome of a politics of recognition is a dialogue that, if it is genuine, has to feed back into our curriculum. I have said that I am not concerned about which "comes first", specification of outcome or curriculum: we need to attend to both. However, that is all about the planning stage. The dialogue that follows, that ought to follow, is with our students. And, if we are to genuinely participate in it, we have to listen, and respond: feedback, that is to say, is not just about how well we are doing. It is about what we should be doing, as well.

Notes.

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[i] John Biggs and Catherine Tang, *Teaching for Quality Learning at University*, Third Edition (McGraw Hill, 2007), pp.50-51.

[ii] V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929), in Pam Morris (ed) *The Bakhtin Reader* (Edward Arnold, 1994), p.58.

[iii] Jurgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures, trans Frederick Lawrence (London: Polity, 1987), p.295.

[iv] Manuel Castells (ed), *The Network Society: A Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Edward Elgar, 2004), p.39.

[v] Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition Princeton* University Press, 1994), p.28.

[vi] Taylor, p.34.

[vii] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, The Corrected Text (Bodley Head, 1986), p.21.

[viii] Mark Turner, *Reading English: The Study of English in the Age of Cognitive Science* (Princeton University Press, 1991), p.121.

[ix] Jorge Luis Borges, “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins”, *Other inquisitions 1937-1952* (University of Texas Press, 1993)

[x] M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, trans M. Holquist and C. Emerson, in Pam Morris (ed) *The Bakhtin Reader* (Edward Arnold, 1994), p.74.

[xi] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, translated G.E.M. Anscombe (Blackwell, 1974), #88.

[xii] M.M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p.76.