

Learning Without Teaching

The Practice and Benefits of the Nelson-Heckmann Method of Socratic Dialogue

Dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the MA
Education at The University of Northampton

May 2018

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own independent investigation, except where I have indicated my indebtedness to other sources.

I hereby declare that this dissertation has not been submitted or accepted in substance for any other degree, nor is it being submitted currently for any other degree.

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Date: 17 May 2018

This dissertation is 19,877 words in length, excluding quotes, references, bibliography and appendices.

ABSTRACT

The subject of this dissertation is the Nelson-Heckmann Socratic Dialogue, a pedagogical method developed by the German philosophers and educators, Leonard Nelson (1882 - 1927), and Gustav Heckmann (1898 - 1996). The purpose of the research carried out here is to understand how Nelson-Heckmann Socratic Dialogues are conducted, to establish what the benefits are of participating in such dialogues, and to find out if the people who participate in Socratic Dialogues experience any of the expected benefits.

The dissertation proceeds in the following way. Chapter one provides an introduction to Socratic Dialogue, and outlines why empirical research about Socratic Dialogue is worthwhile. Chapter two explains the philosophical underpinnings of Socratic Dialogue and outlines the process of conducting a dialogue. It then goes on to review the literature concerning Socratic Dialogue, focusing specifically on the claims made about the benefits of participating in a Socratic Dialogue. Chapter three outlines the research methodology and details the research method. Chapters four and five present and discuss the research findings, and chapter six concludes the study and presents further reflections on Socratic Dialogue.

Reviewing the literature it was found that there are seven benefits which participants are said to experience as a result of participating in Socratic Dialogues, which are that it enables participants to: i) review and revise (and reject) some of their opinions, widen their vision, and gain insight into some of their beliefs; ii) experience the advantages of constructively and cooperatively thinking together; iii) recognise the educational value of personal experience; iv) improve their critical thinking, reasoning and arguing skills; v) learn that a heterogeneous group of people are able to reach genuine and meaningful consensus about challenging subjects; vi) expand their model(s) of what learning is, and of how and under what conditions it can take place; vii) strengthen their own values, and make the world in which they live more ethical, decent and humane.

Three Socratic Dialogues were facilitated as part of the research, and focus groups were conducted with participants immediately afterwards. Analysis of the focus group data showed that, for the most part, the benefits of Socratic Dialogue as suggested by the literature are experienced by the participants who take part in the dialogues.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Society for the Furtherance of Critical Philosophy for kindly providing me with a number of important texts, in particular, an unpublished English translation of Gustav Heckmann's *Das sokratische Gespräch: Erfahrungen in philosophischen Hochschulseminaren*.

I would also like to thank the Institute of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education at the University of Northampton who funded some aspects of this project.

Finally, I would like to thank the students who participated in the Socratic Dialogues with me. Without their involvement this project could not have happened.

We need to stop identifying learning with teaching, with the transfer of some definite subject-matter, something new that we did not know before, containing new concepts and terms that we never heard before. We need to think about learning more - and more skillfully - from ourselves and with each other.

Jos Kessels, 2001, p.70

The world today is not in trouble because it lacks the trained professionals it needs or the indoctrinated and the fanatics it does not; what it needs desperately are men and women who are willing and able to engage in dialogue. Nothing else will improve our educational institutions and the character of our civilization so much as our efforts to cultivate genuine rational dialogue within all our schools as well as within our world.

Tasos Kazepides, 2012, p.925

Philosophy is not a body of doctrine but an activity ... Without philosophy thoughts are, as it were, cloudy and indistinct: its task is to make them clear and to give them sharp boundaries.

Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1921, §4.112

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction and aims

In 1922 the German philosopher, Leonard Nelson, delivered a lecture entitled *The Socratic Method* to the Pedagogical Society in Göttingen. In his lecture he outlined his new pedagogical approach, one in which he was concerned with “teaching not philosophy but philosophising, the art not of teaching about philosophers, but of making philosophers of the students” (Nelson, 1949, p.1). Nelson died in 1927, but his method was carried on and adapted by one of his students, Gustav Heckmann, and it has since become known as the Nelson-Heckmann method of Socratic Dialogue.

The broad aim of this research project is threefold: firstly, to understand how Nelson-Heckmann Socratic Dialogues work; secondly, to establish what the benefits are of participating in such dialogues; and thirdly, to find out if people who participate in Socratic Dialogues experience any of the expected benefits. In order to achieve these aims, the following research questions will be answered:

- What is a Socratic Dialogue in the Nelson-Heckmann tradition?
- What does the literature say the benefits are of participating in a Socratic Dialogue?
- To what extent do participants in a Socratic Dialogue experience any of the benefits as stated in the literature?

1.2 What evidence is there that this research is needed?

There is a general lack of empirical research into Socratic Dialogue. In his bibliographic essay, Leal (in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.175) states that in the literature on SD “there is a tendency not to stray too far from experience and practice.” The lack of empirical research led Leal (in Brune and Krohn, 2005, p.42) to say that “*nobody knows exactly what a Socratic Dialogue is ... To find out what it is and what it does to people, we need empirical research*” (ibid. emphasis in original). This lack of research was also noted by Knezic *et al.*, (2010, p.1107) who explain that “As for the Socratic Dialogue, there has been very little empirical research and relatively much experiential account ... Aside from ... favourable experiential accounts, there has not been much evidence of the effects of Socratic Dialogue. The need for empirical research has been felt for quite some time now.”

This lack of empirical research is surprising for three reasons. Firstly, because SD has a relatively long history, and will be 100 years old in 2022. Secondly, because there are three long-established European organisations which exist to promote and encourage its use and to train facilitators: the PPA (Philosophisch-Politische Akademie) founded in Germany in 1922; the GSP (Gesellschaft für Sokratisches Philosophieren) also founded in Germany; and the SFCP (Society for the Furtherance of Critical Philosophy), founded in the UK in 1940. And thirdly, because many facilitators of Socratic Dialogues are academics who, it is reasonable to assume, value research very highly and are themselves very able researchers. This lack of empirical research contrasts sharply with the approach taken by the Philosophy for Children (P4C) movement, which was founded by Matthew Lipman and which began in 1969 when he published his first philosophical novel for children. Lipman was conducting experimental studies to see whether his methods were effective as early as 1970 (Lipman, Sharp and Oscanyan, 1980, pp.217-224), only one year after publishing his philosophical novel, and four years prior to establishing the Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children (IAPC, n.d.) at Montclair State University.

While this lack of empirical research into SD may not have generated any particular problems in the past, the calls for educational practices to be evidence-based are growing (e.g., Torgerson and Torgerson, 2001; Cook, 2002; Oakley, 2006; Schanzenbach, 2012; Goldacre, 2013). Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that for SD to flourish in educational settings it will be useful to conduct empirical research in order to establish its strengths and benefits.

1.3 Literature concerning Socratic Dialogue

In order to obtain the literature used in this research project, the following different strategies were used. To begin with, an initial search of multiple databases was conducted in order to find: (a) publications written by or about Leonard Nelson and/or Gustav Heckmann; (b) individual papers and chapters of books about Socratic Dialogue and/or Socratic Method published in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes; (c) entire books, both monographs and edited volumes, about the Socratic Method and Dialogue. Because the terms ‘Socratic Dialogue’ and ‘Socratic Method’ appear frequently but often do not refer to dialogues in the Nelson-Heckmann tradition, only papers and books which mentioned Nelson and/or Heckmann in the abstract, or which included works by Nelson and/or Heckmann in the references and bibliography were chosen for inclusion in this study. This first round of searching yielded the following books and papers: Altorf, 2016; Birnbacher, 1999; Boele, 1997; Heckmann, 1988; Kessels, 1998; Knezic *et al.*, 2010; Leal, 2013; Mitchell, 2006; Nelson, 1928; 1949; 2016.

Following on from this, works in English published and/or recommended on the website of the SFCP (Society for the Furtherance of Critical Philosophy), the organisation who promote SD in the UK, were found. This second round of searching yielded: Brune and Krohn, 2005; Brune, Gronke and Krohn, 2010; Saran and Neisser, 2004; Shipley, 1998; Shipley, 2000; Shipley and Mason, 2004a; Shipley and Mason, 2004b.

A third round of searching proceeded by examining the references, bibliographies, and recommended reading sections of the literature that had been obtained in the first two rounds of searching. This third round yielded: Bolten, 2001; Henry-Hermann, 1991; Kessels, 2001; Kessels and Korthagen, 1996.

A final round of searching involved making direct contact with the SFCP. This yielded one of the most important finds, which was an unpublished English translation of Heckmann, 1981, one of the most important texts about Socratic Dialogue, but currently only published in German. As well as making this freely available to me, the SFCP also sent me copies of Brune and Krohn, 2005; Brune, Gronke and Krohn, 2010; Saran and Neisser, 2004; Shipley and Mason, 2004a.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There are three main aims of this chapter, which are to use the literature to: i) explain the origins, development and philosophical underpinnings of the Socratic Method; ii) understand the practical process of conducting a Socratic Dialogue; and iii) establish what claims have been made about the benefits of participating in a Socratic Dialogue.

2.1 The origins, development and philosophical underpinnings of the Socratic Method

A Socratic Dialogue is a complex process and needs to be understood in some detail in order to understand what it is, and why it is conducted according to a particular set of rules. Therefore, the first part of this chapter will review the literature in which the Socratic Method is discussed, with the aim of establishing a secure and sound grasp of the principles and philosophy underpinning Socratic Dialogue.

2.1.1 Nelson's establishment of the Socratic Method

The Socratic Method was first formally outlined by Leonard Nelson in a 1922 lecture entitled *The Socratic Method* (Nelson, 1949, pp.1-43) delivered to the Pedagogical Society in Göttingen. Thus 1922 is often considered to mark the beginning of the Socratic Method, but Nelson had been using the method with his students at the University of Göttingen as early as 1909, and continued using it there until his death in 1927 (Kraft, 1948, in Nelson, 1949, p.ix). Much of the method described in Nelson's 1922 lecture was evident in his 1918 paper *The Art of Philosophizing* (Nelson, 1949, pp.83-104), and one of the most important elements of the method, regressive abstraction, is also discussed in his 1904 work, *The Critical Method and the Relation of Psychology to Philosophy* (Nelson, 1949, pp.105-157). Therefore,

while the name ‘Socratic Method’ might have been new in 1922, Nelson had been developing and refining his method over a considerable number of years prior to his Göttingen lecture.

It needs to be stated from the outset that Nelson’s method, although called Socratic, does not try and mimic the method used by Socrates in Plato’s dialogues: indeed, Nelson is quite critical of Socrates, at one point describing his method of teaching as being “full of faults” (Nelson, 1949, p.12). Nelson called his method Socratic not because he wanted to resurrect exactly what Socrates did, but because,

Socrates was the first philosopher to combine with confidence in the ability of the human mind to recognise philosophical truth the conviction that this truth is not arrived at through occasional bright ideas or mechanical teaching but that only planned, unremitting, and consistent thinking leads us from darkness into its light. Therein lies Socrates’ greatness as a philosopher. His greatness as a pedagogue is based on another innovation: he made his pupils do their own thinking and introduced the interchange of ideas as a safeguard against self-deception (Nelson, 1949, p.17).

A major problem that is generally encountered when describing how Nelson’s method is put into practice is that it is agreed upon by all commentators on the subject that it is not possible to provide an adequate description of SD, nor to fully explain what participants experience when they take part in one. In his 1922 lecture, Nelson makes it clear in the very first paragraph that, like a violinist “when asked how he goes about playing the violin, [he] can of course demonstrate his art but cannot explain his technique in abstract terms” (Nelson, 1949, p.1). Both Leal and Krohn make exactly the same point about SD when they say that “It is useless to try to describe what it is or what it does to you. It has to be experienced” (Leal, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.123); and “no one can understand what Socratic Dialogue really means without participating in and experiencing the process several times” (Krohn, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.16). Nevertheless, there are generally agreed upon procedures and rules under which modern Socratic Dialogues are carried out, which

will be outlined below (in section 2.2), which give a fairly complete outline of the process if not of the experience. Additionally, the rules of the process and guidelines for facilitators and participants are provided in the appendices.

Before going on to explain how an SD is carried out, it is essential to present, in the most basic form possible, Nelson's philosophical foundations for the Socratic Method. Without a grasp of these basics it is unlikely that the process of SD will make much sense. Regarding the original formulation of Socratic Method, Nelson explained it as follows:

The Socratic Method, then, is the art of teaching not philosophy but philosophising, the art not of teaching about philosophers, but of making philosophers of the students (Nelson, 1949, p.1).

Nelson's concern was that his students were not learning philosophy, but the history of philosophy, and that they were unable to comprehend philosophical truths simply by having them explained to them. Philosophy, Nelson believed, is the sum total of "universal rational truths that become clear only through reflection" (Nelson, 1949, p.10). However, for Nelson, such truths cannot be adequately conveyed to students simply by telling them what they are. In trying to do this, what the teacher does is communicate "not philosophical truth itself but merely the fact that he or somebody else considers this or that to be a philosophical truth" (Nelson, 1949, p.11). These beliefs about the teaching of philosophy led Nelson to develop the Socratic Method as a way of allowing his students to gain direct understanding of philosophical truths by 'finding' or 'discovering' them for themselves. Only by discovering these truths for themselves could they hope to securely and fully comprehend them, and the tool he used to help his students find philosophical truths for themselves was the Socratic Dialogue and the method of regressive abstraction.

In respect of the Socratic Method, perhaps the most important aspect of Nelson's thought to understand is the regressive method of abstraction. Regressive abstraction, he says, does not produce new knowledge, rather it "utilizes reflection to

transform into clear concepts what reposed in our reason as an original possession and made itself obscurely heard in every experiential judgement” (Nelson, 1949, p.10). Nelson wrote about the regressive method as early as 1904, in his essay *The Critical Method and the Relation of Psychology to Philosophy* (Nelson, 1949, pp.105-157) where he argued that there resides within all human beings certain basic philosophical principles which guide our judgements while simultaneously remaining obscure to us. He made a similar point fourteen years later in 1918, when he said that “If there is such a thing for us as philosophical knowledge, we possess it once and for all, and the development of philosophy consists only in our becoming more and more clearly and completely conscious of what philosophical knowledge we possess” (Nelson, 1949, p.104). Heckmann described the method of regressive abstraction as moving “from judgement in concrete cases towards the general truth on which that judgement is based” (Heckmann, 1981, p.113).

Regressive abstraction, Nelson explained (1949, pp.107-8), reverses the usual process of reasoning, which begins with reasons and establishes conclusions (or consequences, as Nelson calls them) from those reasons. For example, in the usual process of reasoning (the progressive method as Nelson calls it) one might begin with the idea that all human beings are born equal. From this point one might then begin to build, and to consider what logically flows from such a belief: thus one might argue for a meritocracy and a system of equal rights, for example. However, the process of regressive abstraction is more interested in seeing the belief that all human beings are born equal as a consequence arising from other ‘obscurely heard’ principles. Thus, the regressive method consists in rooting the consequence in experience, by asking participants to describe an actual event in which they experienced their belief in human equality, and in helping the participants to discover the ‘obscurely heard’ principles which gave rise to that consequence or belief. Such principles (which Nelson calls basic principles) he argues, “generally form the ground of our judgements and evaluations only in an obscure way, without our really stating them and without our becoming clearly aware of them, [and] we must make use of an artificial regressive procedure to make them our own” (Nelson, 1949, p.107).

Essentially, what Nelson's method of regressive abstraction is aiming to uncover is synthetic a priori knowledge (which he refers to as metaphysical truth, in contrast to logical truth which is analytic a priori (Nelson, 1949, pp.84-5)), which is to say knowledge that is uncovered through reasoning in which the predicate is not contained within the subject. Therefore the process of regressive abstraction also aims at consensus, for synthetic a priori knowledge is not a matter of opinion; rather synthetic a priori truths are self-evidently true. For example, the knowledge that all bachelors are unmarried (analytic a priori) is as self-evident as the knowledge that a straight line is the shortest distance between two points (synthetic a priori). The basic principles that it is possible to uncover using the Socratic Method are thus not subject either to proof or genuine doubt, as it would be both impossible and unnecessary to provide a proof of a basic principle; the veracity of such principles being immediately obvious to anyone simply by understanding the meaning of the words being used (Nelson, 1949, p.107). Blanshard (1948, in Nelson, 1949, p.vii) explains Nelson's basic principles as follows:

For him these [basic] principles were incapable of proof in the sense of being derived from anything else; they were not tautologies; they were not empirical generalizations; they were not postulates, accepted merely because experience confirmed them. They were synthetic a priori insights.

Nelson's belief in truth made him, according to Kraft (1948, in Nelson, 1949, p.x) a "philosophical heretic" and marked him out as a man completely against the spirit of the time in which he lived. As Kraft (*ibid.*) explains, "his fundamental heresy was his conviction that there is one, and only one, philosophical truth, and that it is attainable through thinking."

This brief outline of Nelson's thought provides the philosophical underpinnings necessary to understand why he developed the Socratic Method and what his method was trying to establish. In practical terms, Nelson provides many clues as to how an SD would work, but much is left for the reader to imagine as to the precise working of a dialogue, and how, in practice, one might apply the regressive method.

Nevertheless, Nelson does clearly mark out all the key aspects of SD in his writing, such as the fact that the facilitator must not intervene in matters of content, that the participants must only say what they really believe, that thought experiments and hypothetical examples should not be introduced, that the language used to express thoughts must be as simple, non-technical and as clear as possible, that the process requires time and consistent, persistent, precision thinking, and that it must occur in groups to minimise the possibility of self-deception. However, it was Nelson's pupil, Gustav Heckmann, who provided many of the specific details about the workings of Socratic Dialogues, and who influenced how the method is used today.

2.1.2 Heckmann's development of Nelson's method

When Nelson died in 1927 his students carried on using the method, and after the Second World War one of his students, Gustav Heckmann, further developed the method (Altorf, 2016, p.4; Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.107), giving it what Birnbacher (1999, p.219) refers to as its "canonical form". Heckmann's most significant contributions to the method are twofold. Firstly, the synthetic a priori truths that Nelson sought in his dialogues become, under Heckmann, truths which are simply "proven for the time being" (Heckmann, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.112). And secondly, the meta-dialogue is introduced. In addition to this revising of the method, Heckmann made the extremely valuable contribution of publishing reports of some of his Socratic Dialogues (Heckmann, 1981) which did much to shed light on how Socratic Dialogues worked in practice. He also outlined his six pedagogical measures for the facilitation of Socratic Dialogues (in Saran and Neisser, 2004, pp.107-120), which succinctly clarify and explain what is expected of the facilitator. However, these pedagogical measures do not go significantly beyond what can be found in Nelson (1949, pp.1-40).

Heckmann's first major contribution to Socratic Method was to move the focus away from the search for synthetic a priori truths, and to acknowledge that participants in a Socratic Dialogue were "unable to identify statements that were error-free or

without need of revision” (Heckmann, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.112). Nevertheless, Heckmann does not abandon the idea of truth, and he does not believe that it is impossible to move beyond shallow, relativistic dialogues in which participants simply exchange equally valid subjective opinions without challenge. This is the kind of poor quality dialogue that Boele (1997, p.54) calls “indifferent tolerance” and that Altorf (2016, p.3) refers to as “discourse of (uncritical) acceptance”. As Boele explains, “True consensus is only possible when dissensus is valued” (1997, p.54). While it may not be possible to identify statements as being universally true, other than tautologies, Heckmann argues that it is certainly possible to identify statements which are false, and those which are “insufficiently grounded in reason” (Heckmann, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.111). Heckmann argues that the search for truth should always guide an SD, and that all participants should search for statements about which there is consensus, but that participants should also recognise that new information might come to light which could require them to revise their provisionally agreed upon statements. As he explains,

Using the concept of truth critically, even avoiding the word ‘truth’ does not mean surrendering the idea of truth, which has lent wings to western thought, to science and to critical thought. Quite the contrary, this very idea encourages those motivated by it to engage in critical understanding of themselves. In Socratic Dialogue we are motivated by this idea. It prompts us to describe the experience we have in the Socratic Dialogue with concepts that stand up to critical testing (Heckmann, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.112).

Heckmann (1981, pp.34-61) records a dialogue in which consensus was not able to be reached because of “the pompous word, Truth” (Heckmann, 1981, p.46). While Heckmann notes that he does not believe that the use of the word ‘truth’ was the only issue for the participant in question, he does note that when the phrasing was changed from ‘statement A is true’ to either ‘statement A is correct’ or ‘statement A is right’ then the one dissenting participant immediately consented to the wording of the statement. And while Heckmann (in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.111) clearly has reservations about the word ‘truth’, and suggests that “valid inter-subjective

statement” might be a more appropriate term (in a similar fashion, John Dewey suggested that the term ‘warranted assertibility’ be used instead of ‘truth’ (Dewey, cited in Phillips and Burbules, 2000, p.3)), he does acknowledge that the word ‘truth’ has many positive associations, and that it is a point towards which participants in a dialogue should orient themselves. Even if truth is a destination that participants will never reach, moving towards it will at least allow them to move further away from error. Conceptually, we might imagine that if zero is the point of absolute falsehood, and infinity is the point of absolute truth, then although the numbers one and one-hundred are equally far from infinity, one-hundred is still further away from zero than one.

Heckmann’s second major contribution to Socratic Method was the introduction of the meta-dialogue. This requires that at certain intervals during an SD, the main dialogue (often called the content dialogue) is suspended and the meta-dialogue commences. The meta-dialogue was introduced in the 1970s (Krohn, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.22) and is often attributed to Heckmann (e.g., Leal, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.177; Knezic *et al.*, 2010, p.1105). However, while Heckmann acknowledges that it arose during the dialogues that he facilitated, he denies having invented it himself, saying that “both the term and the process denoted by it evolved during our work; they are not of my invention” (Heckmann, 1981, p.8). The purpose of the meta-dialogue is to allow the participants to step back and to analyse the progress of the content dialogue and the work of the facilitator and of the participants themselves. Thus the meta-dialogue has to be facilitated by one of the participants, not by the facilitator. The meta-dialogue is used to identify and deal with any problems in the content dialogue, and it supports the content dialogue by “making the dialogue more transparent and by agreeing what changes in the behaviour of the group could improve the content dialogue” (Krohn, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.22). Heckmann explains the process thus:

Every feeling of discomfort must be voiced. We state what we feel is unsatisfactory in our common endeavour. Participants might be critical of the behaviour of individual fellow-students or of the chair. There might be

discontent with the ponderous, unproductive, or muddled character of the discourse, a discontent for which the reasons are not yet obvious. We reflect on how to put an end to such shortcomings (Heckmann, 1981, p8).

The facilitator must make time for a meta-dialogue, regardless of how well the content dialogue is proceeding; however, participants may call for a meta-dialogue at any point. Birnbacher (1999, p.222) suggests that meta-dialogue should take up approximately one-third of the discussion time.

2.2 The practice of a Socratic Dialogue

As much of the literature makes clear (e.g., Nelson, 1949; Boele, 1997; Leal, 2013), a Socratic Dialogue cannot be effectively described, it needs to be experienced. Of course, the same is true of a great many other things, music and poetry to give just two examples; but much in the same way that the form of a sonata or a sonnet can be explained, so can the form of SD. An appreciation of the process of conducting dialogues is essential to its understanding, therefore the second part of this chapter will outline the practical process of facilitating an SD.

2.2.1 How is a Socratic Dialogue conducted today?

As explained above, current practice owes as much to Heckmann as to Nelson, which is why the method is often referred to as the Nelson-Heckmann method. Regarding the practicalities of conducting a Socratic Dialogue, Leal explains that:

It is usually practiced by a small group, say 6-10 participants, and a facilitator; the facilitator is not a participant, in that he or she is not allowed to contribute to the dialogue, but only to steer it in such a way that the special features of the SD are actually realized. It is guided by one question (which does not preclude other questions being asked) ... the question that guides the dialogue can be proposed by one of the participants or by the facilitator, but the important thing is that it has to be agreed upon by all participants as well worth asking. ... [N]o

special expertise is needed or required, participants just express their own convictions, ideals, and feelings as best they can ... SDs are open-ended: a slow process is of the essence; no particular result is urged or to be expected; the important thing is for every participant to understand what is being said at all times. In an SD, people have to say what they think without quoting authorities, feigning hypothetical situations or speculating about mere possibilities. The statements produced by participants have to be based on experiences drawn from their own lives (Leal, 2013, p.198-9).

Leal's suggestion of six to ten is at the lower end regarding numbers of participants. Both Altof (2016, p.5) and Birnbacher (1999, p.223), who use the method with undergraduates, allow for a maximum of twelve participants, and Saran and Neisser (2004, p.34), who use the method in schools and school sixth-forms, allow for a maximum of fifteen. Heckmann (1981, p.7) notes that his participants "usually numbered about a dozen; sometimes rather less." The amount of time devoted to an SD varies, as does the way that the time is structured. For the most part however, the minimum time will not normally be less than seven or eight hours in total. Birnbacher's dialogues run for approximately twenty hours, over four consecutive days; each day comprising a series of one-and-a-half hour sessions with regular breaks in-between (Birnbacher, 1999, p.223). An alternative approach is used by Saran and Neisser (2004, pp.29-39), who run Socratic Dialogues in schools over a period of four to six weeks, with each week incorporating either a half-day dialogue (four hours with a half-hour break), or two 'double lessons' (approximately one-and-a-half-hours each); therefore taking between twelve and twenty-two hours in total. Heckmann's dialogues generally ran longest, both in terms of overall time and of the number of weeks over which they ran. His dialogues were structured around two, ninety-minute sessions per week on consecutive days, and in some cases the dialogues would run for ten weeks, comprising thirty hours total time (Heckmann, 1981, p.7).

2.2.2 The phases of a Socratic Dialogue

While there is broad agreement across all the books and papers on the way that the Nelson-Heckmann method works, different facilitators divide their dialogues into slightly different phases. Both Altorf (2016) and Neisser (in Saran and Neisser, 2004, pp.79-91) divide the SD into five phases (although these phases are not identical), whereas Saran and Neisser (2004, pp.29-39) divide the process into four phases. In general though, all authors are in agreement on the general process, and their approaches can be amalgamated as follows:

2.2.2.1 Phase one: Finding participants

Heckmann (1981) and Altorf (2016) both addresses the issue of finding participants, and mark it out as the first distinct phase of a Socratic Dialogue. As Altorf explains, “There is no simple way to invite participants to a dialogue which they will only understand once they have experienced it” (Altorf, 2016, p.3). Altorf’s solution is to generate interest among possible participants by emphasising the uniqueness of the process, and the way that it will allow them to experience a new kind of dialogue aimed at mutual understanding. Similarly, Heckmann encourages students by inviting them to take part in a co-operative, philosophical discussion, although he is also keen to stress the hard work and dedication required of the participants (see the appendices for Heckmann’s notice inviting students to participate in an SD).

2.2.2.2 Phase two: Setting the question and establishing the rules of the dialogue

The question that will be the focus of the dialogue needs to be decided upon. The question can be set by the facilitator, or can be proposed by the group. Often the facilitator sets the question, and advertises the dialogue accordingly; however, a group who have participated in a number of Socratic Dialogues may prefer to propose their own question. Regardless of where the question comes from, it must be something that can be answered without reference to empirical data, and without the need for expert knowledge. “The questions and statements that are suitable for a Socratic Dialogue are those for which independent critical thinking about personal

experience suffices” (Krohn, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.17). In general, the question will be a broadly philosophical one which can be answered purely through the process of critical reasoning. For example, such questions might include, ‘when should we accept authority?’ ‘what is a work of art?’ ‘why should we be good?’ ‘what is justice?’ ‘is lying ever acceptable?’ ‘when are we responsible for the actions of others?’ ‘when do we learn for ourselves?’ ‘what are the limits of tolerance?’ This phase may be very brief, and will need to be conducted (possibly online) at least a week before the full dialogue begins, as the participants will need time to think about the question and to choose an example from their own lives which relates to the question. In this pre-dialogue phase it is also important to make participants aware of the rules of the dialogue, and to outline the process and the distinction between the content dialogue and the meta-dialogue (see the appendices for the process and the rules of SD).

2.2.2.3 Phase three: Relating the examples/experiences

While the first two phases may begin prior to the first face-to-face meeting of the group, participants will need to be together from phase three onwards. In what may be their first actual meeting, the participants, all of whom are now acquainted with the rules, and all of whom have been considering the question and have chosen an example or experience from their own lives, gather together and relate their experiences to the group.

2.2.2.4 Phase four: Choosing one example/experience

Once all of the examples or experiences have been related, the group, with the help of the facilitator, will need to decide which experience to focus on. The purpose of choosing one example is, according to Altorf (2016, p.7) to “focus the conversation by providing a factual event that grounds the conversation.” The related experiences may not all be suitable for discussion though. For example, experiences which are not the participants’ own cannot be used (e.g., those of a friend or family member, or experiences read about in a biography), nor can experiences about which the participant feels embarrassment and would wish to hide some aspects of the experience, or which are too traumatic or psychologically unresolved. Heckmann explains the process as follows:

It is most fruitful to investigate one of the participants' real-life experiences, provided it can be presented openly and without embarrassment or shame. When it is not possible for the example-giver to communicate all relevant details to the group, the example cannot help the group illuminate the truth. But the facilitator should show patience if something speculative and artificially constructed is tabled first, rather than a real-life experience. In due course personal experiences will surely surface as the participants establish trust among each other (Heckmann, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.109).

Altorf (2016, p.7) provides five criteria for choosing a suitable example for discussion. The chosen experience should be: concrete (i.e., rooted in personal experience); limited (i.e., not too long, complicated and detailed); emotionally closed (i.e., not an experience in which the participant is still emotionally involved, and not an experience likely to cause the participant emotional distress or difficulty); relevant (to the question); of interest to everyone (i.e., philosophically interesting, rather than sensational, and an experience which may allow the participants to put themselves in the position of the example-giver).

2.2.2.5 Phase five: Regressive abstraction

Once a suitable example has been chosen, the process of regressive abstraction begins (Boele, 1997, p.51; Kessels, 1998, p.204). Phase five comprises the major part of an SD, and is made up of the two intertwined parts; the content dialogue (occasionally called the topical dialogue) and the meta-dialogue (Krohn, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, pp.22-23). In some papers (e.g. Kessels, 1998) a strategic dialogue is also referred to, but this is still part of the meta-dialogue. During the course of an SD a record needs to be kept, and the question that is currently the focus of the dialogue and other key statements must be kept visible on a flipchart or whiteboard. The facilitator will usually keep the official record, often referred to as the protocol (Heckmann, 1981, *passim*; Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.33), but participants are strongly encouraged to keep their own notes too. Heckmann suggests that the participants write up their own notes after the dialogue sessions, so that they are not

distracted during the dialogue. During phase five the facilitator and participants analyse the example, question the example-giver, and work cooperatively and collaboratively to find statements about which all can agree, and to try and unearth or illuminate Nelson's 'obscurely heard' basic principles.

2.2.2.6 Phase six: Generalisation, consensus and evaluation

The final phase involves summarising and evaluating the dialogue, and, where time allows, to 'proving' the results of the regressive abstraction by applying the results to all the related examples (Boele, 1997, p.51). Close to the end of the dialogue, time should be made to clearly specify the general answer to the question which prompted the dialogue (an answer for which there should be consensus) and to apply and validate the results of the regressive abstraction by seeing how well it relates to the participants' examples which were given in phase three. Points of consensus regarding sub-questions should also be noted, as should changes to the main question under discussion. For example, while participants might not have been able to agree on the main question, e.g., 'what is art?', perhaps they were able to agree on a sub-question, e.g., 'why is art important?' or, 'why do human beings produce art?'

Consideration should be given in this final section to Heckmann's point that "A dialogue is Socratic when it helps individual participants to gain general insights through reflection on concrete experience" (Heckmann, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.108). Thus the hard-won insights of the participants should be made clear at the end of the dialogue, and a final meta-dialogue reflecting on the overall experience, process and progress of the dialogue and of the participants should wrap-up the dialogue.

2.3 The benefits of Socratic Dialogue

The third and final part of this chapter is concerned with establishing what the supposed benefits are for participants taking part in an SD. The benefits outlined below have been selected primarily via a survey of academic papers and book

chapters published in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes in the last twenty years, primarily: Boele (1997); Kessels (1998); Birnbacher (1999); Bolten (2001); Kessels (2001); Mitchell, (2006); Knezic *et al.*, (2010); Leal (2013); Altorf (2016). Beginning with Boele (1997), five benefits were initially outlined, which were then expanded, refined and consolidated by taking the papers in chronological order and examining the extent to which they supported, refuted, or went beyond the benefits outlined in Boele's 1997 paper.

2.3.1 Reviewing opinions, widening vision, gaining insight

The first benefit of engaging in an SD is that it allows participants to review and revise (and occasionally reject) some of their opinions, to widen their vision, and to gain insight into some of their beliefs (Boele, 1997, pp.53-4). In an SD differences of opinion will come to the fore, but because the dialogue strives for consensus these differences cannot be put aside with facile comments such as 'we're each entitled to our own opinions' - rather, such differences need to be examined. Indeed, Altorf (2016, p.12) states that "disagreement is to be expected and welcomed ... [because it] allows for deeper understanding and a sense of reality." In some cases such examination will reveal not a genuine difference of opinion but simply a difference in articulating similar opinions. However, where there is a genuine difference of opinion then each opinion and the reasons or prejudices supporting it will need to be examined in order to reach consensus and move on. As Boele (1997, p.54) explains "Prejudices must be put at risk by examining them in a dialogue. Only in this way can they show what they are worth."

Kessels (1998, p.214) notes that SD assists participants to detect the mental models used by themselves and others. Both Kessels (1998, p.214) and Bolten (2001, p.29) refer to the way that the dialogue helps to make participants' "tacit knowledge explicit", i.e., to help them articulate what they don't know that they know. Both of these benefits offer participants important opportunities to review and revise (and possibly reject) their beliefs, opinions and ways of thinking. Kessels also expands on the idea that dialogue helps participants review and revise their opinions in his

discussion of Socratic *elenchus* (1998, pp.213-214). During a dialogue, participants may enter a state of unlearning, perplexity or confusion (*aporia*) in which the process leads them to become unsure of beliefs they previously held with certainty. Indeed, Leal (2013, p.199) explains that “participants may be surprised to find that they run out of words or that they are not so sure anymore of what they think or mean.” From a philosophical standpoint this is a valuable experience, because divesting oneself of an erroneously held belief is just as important as finding firmer foundations for one held only insecurely.

Similar points about the ability of SD to assist participants to review their opinions, widen their vision, see the world differently, and in general to gain insight in their own and others’ thinking have been made by Birnbacher (1999, p.223), Bolten (2001, p.28 and 31-32), Kessels (2001, p.52), Mitchell (2006, p.195), and Knezic *et al.*, (2010, p.1110).

2.3.2 Thinking together, communicating cooperatively and team building

The second benefit of engaging in an SD is that it allows participants to experience the process of constructively and cooperatively thinking together (Boele, 1997, pp.54-55). When conversing with others it is often the case that in our keenness to avoid conflict and confrontation, and in our striving for tolerance, we simply resort to an uncritical exchange of opinions. Alternatively, we see discussion (particularly academic discussion) as a kind of combative debate, a zero-sum game in which opponents lock horns in order to discover who has the best arguments and the greatest rhetorical abilities. SD is neither uncritical (Birnbacher, 1999, p.223) nor combative, but is a process in which participants think together, where different perspectives complement rather than compete in order to reveal complexities and nuances that could not be appreciated from one perspective alone. This constructive and cooperative process enables participants to “learn to communicate differently with each other: to listen, to be susceptible to other arguments, to take into account different points of view, to be reflective, to take time to investigate a difficult problem (instead of looking for immediate solutions)” (Boele, 1997, p.55).

When undertaken with a team (as opposed to a group of people who come together only once for a single dialogue), the process of thinking cooperatively together can also function as a team building/bonding experience (Kessels, 1998, p.214). Such a process would most likely come about because the dialogue encourages what Kessels (1998, p.214) refers to as a “convergence of concepts and attunement of terminology.” What Kessels is suggesting here is that through thinking cooperatively together, future communication within the team may become easier and more efficient because of a greater shared understanding of the concepts and terminology in use within the team.

Within the central theme of thinking together, communicating cooperatively and team building, Birnbacher (1999, p.223) refers to SD as an “antidote to domination and authoritarianism” and a “model of strictly egalitarian and rational exchange of arguments.” Similarly, Altorf (2016, p.12) explains that “Shared experience strengthens our sense of reality and thus our resistance to totalitarianism.” Also noted by Altorf (2016, p.12) is the way that participants form a community during the dialogue, one that often continues after the dialogue. Bolten (2001, p.27) reports that after attending a number of dialogues, one of his participants changed the way that he listens, making a greater effort to understand the views of others, rather than trying to get others to agree with him. And Kessels (2001, p.50) explains that if we avoid dialogue we also “miss out on the advantages of joint investigation ... [and the opportunity to] learn to see from new perspectives.” Knezic *et al.*, (2010, p.1107 and 1110) also note similar benefits on the theme of improving participants’ interpersonal communication skills.

2.3.3 Recognition of experience

The third benefit of engaging in an SD is that it allows participants to recognise the value of experience (Boele, 1997, pp.55-56). What it means to recognise the value of experience is expressed by Boele in three different ways. Firstly, to people unaware of existential phenomenology it can be something of a revelation to find that personal

experience can be rich enough to be the raw material for an insightful philosophical enquiry. Secondly, because of the structured nature of the dialogue, participants are enabled and encouraged to learn from experience in a manner recognised by the remark often attributed to John Dewey (but apparently never expressed by him in such succinct form (Lagueux, 2014)) that people learn not from experience, but from reflection upon experience. And thirdly, through relating, discussing and comparing experiences, and through the process of trying to experience events from the perspective of another person, we come to recognise in other people's experience what is comparable in our own experience: thus bonds are strengthened, and others become less alien.

2.3.4 Critical thinking, reasoning, rationality and argumentation

The fourth benefit of engaging in an SD is that it will help to improve the critical thinking, reasoning and arguing skills of participants (Boele, 1997, pp.56-57). SD requires participants to think carefully, to provide reasons for their assertions, and to sharpen their thinking through the process of reflecting with others. In addition, and because there can be no recourse to external authorities in the dialogue, participants are always required to explain things for themselves, rather than back up their opinions by referring to eminent theorists and philosophers. As Boele (1997, p.57) explains, "There is no excuse for quoting another's reasoning as a substitute for our own."

Birnbacher (1999) makes frequent references to the rationality inherent in the process of SD, and its ability to enhance the critical thinking, reasoning and argumentation skills of participants is widely agreed upon. Both Nelson (1949, pp.90-1) and Heckmann (in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.111) refer to similar benefits, as does Kessels (2001, p.50), who discusses the need to be able to "raise fundamental questions and analyse them systematically" and the need to "marshal arguments, produce sound reasoning and well supported conclusions." Such benefits are also agreed on by a wide range of other authors, including Birnbacher (1999, p.223), Saran and Herrmann (2008), Saran (in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.47-8),

Neisser (in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.82), Raupach-Strey (in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.106), Mitchell (2006, p.195), Chesters (in Brune, Gronke and Krohn, 2010, p.81), and Knezic *et al.*, (2010, p.1110).

2.3.5 Reaching consensus

Finally, the fifth benefit, initially proposed by Boele (1997, pp.57-60) is finding that a heterogeneous group of people are able to reach a genuine and meaningful consensus about the subject in question. From the outside it may appear that people behave and think in very different ways, and that consensus between people is impossible because people are all very different. However, what SD highlights are the overlooked common bonds that unite people. “A socratic dialogue is therefore not only an effort to *think collectively*, but also to *think what we have in common*” (Boele, 1997, p.60, emphasis in original). The benefits associated with working towards a shared vision are also recognised by Kessels (1998, p.214), and Bolten (2001, pp.29-30). Altorf (2016, p.4) explains that while the aim of SD is “mutual understanding and agreement”, it is also the case that reaching consensus is difficult, and establishing full consensus is rare, but often participants do “find some minor points of consensus along the way” (Altorf, 2016, p.12).

2.3.6 Meta-learning and teaching by not teaching

Kessels (1998, p.215; 2001, p.70) refers to meta-learning as the most important benefit of participating in an SD, but he also explains that it is the most difficult benefit for participants to recognise when they first take part in a dialogue. Kessels explains that SD exposes participants to a particularly unusual form of learning, because normally learning and teaching go hand-in-hand, but in an SD there is learning happening but there is no teaching taking place. In a Socratic Dialogue, “nothing is taught, no subject matter is transferred, no unknown concepts are introduced ... with the traditional concept of learning in mind, it is hard to see that something is being learned here at all” (Kessels, 1998, p.251). Similar points are made by Birnbacher (1999, p.223), who talks about SD as a method of “teaching by non-teaching” and Mitchell (2006, p.189) who refers to Heckmann’s dialogues in

particular as having “an ambivalent relationship with more traditional forms of teaching”.

This idea of teaching by not teaching (see also Holmes, 2011) refers to a learning environment in which there is no one in the role of the teacher who has subject knowledge to transfer, and there is no subject content at all, save for that which the participants bring with them in the form of personal beliefs, opinions and experience. As Kessels explains (1998, p.215), “In a sense, even what was found out by the participants they had known all along.” This has obvious parallels with the Socratic dialogue, *The Meno* (Plato, 1956, pp.127-140, sections 80 to 86), and in many ways goes right to the core of the meaning of education, because the word ‘education’ has its origins in two Greek words, ‘educare’ and ‘educere’: the former meaning to train, or to mould; the latter meaning to draw out, or to lead out (Bass and Good, 2004). Ultimately, what Kessels is suggesting here is that participation in an SD may benefit participants in that it will expand and challenge their model(s) of what learning is, and of how and under what conditions it can take place.

2.3.7 Transformation: changes in thought lead to changes in action

The final benefit of participating in an SD is that it should result in changes not only to what the participants think, but ultimately also to what they do. While Kessels (1998, p.215) put forth the claim that meta-learning was the most important of the benefits, the following passage strongly suggests that for Leal (2013) it is the transformative aspect of SD that is the most important benefit of participation:

The SD has the ultimate purpose of allowing for self-transformation, that is, to be able to better understand and to strengthen one’s own values, convictions, and ideals, and on the basis of this process to go out and change one’s own life as well as the conditions of the world in which one lives (family, school, community, work, society in general) in such a way that those conditions can become more ethical, more decent, more humane (Leal, 2013, p.199).

Leal's contention is that transformation is at the heart of Nelson's Socratic Dialogue. Nelson never intended his dialogues to be a dry and abstract process of argument analysis and logic chopping; rather, he intended them to engender changes in the way that people acted in the world based on changes in the way that they thought about the world and its human and non-human inhabitants. In this sense, SD is an overtly and deeply moral process aimed at making the world a better and fairer place to live, not through an allegiance or conformity to any externally imposed rules or authorities, but from deeply held personal convictions uncovered and understood through the examination of one's beliefs and values in a process of shared dialogue.

The transformative aspect of SD is present in many of the papers reviewed, especially those of the Dutch authors, many of whom conducted dialogues in professional organisations. Boele (1997, p.64), for example, explains that "socratic dialogue is, in my experience, an exercise in personal ethics and the art of living." And the dialogue that Kessels (1998; 2001) discusses is inherently action oriented as it concerns the case of George Henry, an employee of Macmillans (the company at which the dialogue was being conducted) and whether it was right for him to be dismissed. While the focus of the dialogue was George Henry, it was clear that there were much wider implication for the company, the way it operated and the way it thought about and dealt with its responsibilities to its employees.

One of the clearest cases of an SD leading to changes in action is given by Bolten, who offers the following example of a participant (a bank manager) "putting the things he learned into practice":

He ... chairs meetings in a different way, takes moral considerations much more explicitly into account in dealing with clients, talks differently with employees about the way they are working, and so on. To him the most important aspect of all these changes is better listening and being more open to other people and what they tell him. And he sees a direct link between this new conversational attitude and his participation in the Socratic dialogues (Bolten, 2001, p.31).

The above example from Bolten illustrates effectively what is perhaps the key purpose of Socratic Dialogue; for changes in thought to lead to positive changes in action that help us to live lives that are “more ethical, more decent, more humane” (Leal, 2013, p.199).

Chapter 3: Research Method

There are four main aims of this chapter, which are to: i) outline the methodological paradigm within which this research project will operate; ii) explain the specific method that will be used to gather the research data; iii) consider issues relating to the quality and credibility of the research, and; iv) detail the ethical issues that need to be considered when conducting participant research.

3.1 Research methodology

While it may sometimes appear that the terms research methodology and research method can be used interchangeably, such an approach is incorrect as these terms do in fact refer to very different things. As Howell explains “methodology is defined as the research strategy that outlines the way one goes about undertaking a research project, whereas methods identify means or modes of data collection” (Howell, 2013, p.ix). On a practical level what this means is that before deciding on a research method, the researcher needs to be clear about the methodological paradigm from within which the method will be chosen. This methodological choice has important implications, for not only will it define the range of research methods available, but it will also have epistemological ramifications too, as it will say something about the kinds of truth that the researcher is attempting to uncover.

The most common distinction made when discussing research methodologies is between the quantitative methodology on the one hand, and the qualitative methodology on the other (Robson and McCartan, 2016; Pring, 2015; Flick, 2014; Hennink *et al.*, 2011). Underpinning the quantitative and qualitative methodologies are two different philosophical attitudes to knowledge. This is to say that each of the different methodologies aims to uncover a different kind of truth, and has a different perspective on how such truths relate to the world. Researchers choosing to work

within a quantitative framework are more likely to be interested in finding objective knowledge through formulating and testing hypotheses. Quantitative research is said to be underpinned by a positivist epistemology, which argues in favour of the idea that there is a reality (i.e., a 'real world') that exists independently of anyone's experience of it, and that we can gain knowledge of this world because it can be discovered through careful, rigorous scientific observation (Hennink *et al.*, 2011; Robson and McCartan, 2016). This means that research done in the quantitative/positivist tradition is likely to produce highly generalisable and widely reproducible findings (Hennink *et al.*, 2011).

Qualitative research is said to be underpinned by an interpretive epistemology (Hennink *et al.*, 2011). An interpretive epistemology places less emphasis on uncovering objective facts about the world, preferring to see the world as comprising people's subjective experiences of it. Because interpretivism views reality as being socially constructed, it is also sometimes referred to as social constructionism (Robson and McCartan, 2016). Interpretivists are interested in people's experiences and the meanings they attach to them. Rather than the blunt facts regarding the experience, interpretivists want to "understand or explain behaviour and beliefs, identify processes and understand the context of people's experiences" (Hennink *et al.*, 2011, pp.17). Interpretivists are also more likely to take a perspectival view about knowledge, i.e., to believe that an experience cannot be viewed from nowhere, or from an omniscient viewpoint; therefore they are more likely to believe that what we take for agreement about reality is better thought of a multiplicity of overlapping subjective perspectives (Hennink *et al.*, 2011). As Yalom (2013, p.172) puts it, "one longs for an umpire of reality or some official sharp-imaged snapshot ... How disquieting to realize that reality is an illusion, at best a democratization of perception based on participant consensus." Unlike the highly generalisable findings of quantitative/positivist research, findings from qualitative/interpretive research studies are likely to be less easily generalisable.

In making a choice between either the quantitative/positivist approach or the qualitative/interpretive approach, then the nature of main research question (i.e., to

what extent do the experiences of participants in a Socratic Dialogue align with the benefits as stated in the literature?) necessitates adopting a qualitative/interpretive approach. This is because the research question requires us to determine what participants believe about SD; it requires us to seek to understand what they think, feel, perceive and intuit about participation in an SD, i.e., to ask what the process meant to them.

3.2 Research method

In the introduction to this project the following three research questions were formulated: i) What is a Socratic Dialogue in the Nelson-Heckmann tradition? ii) What does the literature say the benefits are of participating in a Socratic Dialogue? iii) To what extent do participants in a Socratic Dialogue experience any of the benefits as stated in the literature? The first two questions have already been discussed in the literature review, therefore the research process outlined below will be concerned with answering the third research question. A summary of the research process is presented in Table 1, below:

Stage	What	How
1	Become acquainted with the purpose and process of SD in order to: i) be able to successfully facilitate a dialogue; ii) understand the benefits of participation in the dialogues.	i) Read the available literature on the subject; ii) write the literature review; iii) participate in at least one professionally run SD.
2	Gain ethical approval for the project.	i) Define criteria for eligibility, recruitment processes, data collection techniques and participant anonymisation process; ii) write participant information statement; iii) complete ethics documentation and submit for approval.
3	Advertise the project and recruit participants.	i) Discuss the project with various members of academic staff; ii) obtain permission to advertise the project to their students.

4	Prepare for and conduct a number of dialogues with participants.	i) Define questions for the SDs; ii) read around the subject; iii) put participants into dialogue groups; iv) find convenient times to meet and book rooms, etc.
5	Gather qualitative data from participants.	i) Run audio-recorded focus groups with participants.
6	Analyse qualitative data.	i) Transcribe focus group data; ii) code and analyse transcripts; iii) compare the benefits experienced by the participants with the benefits stated in the literature.

Table 1: Research method outline

3.2.1 Stage 1: Understanding Socratic Dialogue

Prior to beginning this research project my only experience of SD was a dialogue that I had participated in during November 2003, which was run by the Society for Philosophy in Practice (SPP, 2018). Also, prior to beginning this research I was not aware of the work of either Nelson or Heckmann, but during the early stages of researching and reviewing the literature I became aware that the term Socratic Dialogue was used in various different ways, and that the dialogue that I had attended in 2003 had been run in the Nelson-Heckmann tradition. The literature review thus allowed me to gain an in-depth understanding of the purpose, process and benefits of participating in Nelson-Heckmann SDs. While this was essential for the research project, it was also necessary for me to participate in an SD with an experienced facilitator in order to understand how the process worked in practice. Therefore I attended a three-day SD in Münster, Germany, in October 2017, which was conducted in English and facilitated by Dieter Krohn. Krohn was a student of Heckmann's and learned the technique from him. He also trains facilitators as part of his work with the SFCP and the PPA.

3.2.2 Stage 2: Gaining ethical approval

Ethical approval for this project was granted by my project supervisor on the 4th of October, 2017. A discussion of the ethical factors that were taken into consideration

when planning and conducting this research project are outlined in the later stages of this chapter and detailed in the appendices.

3.2.3 Stage 3: Participant recruitment

Participants were self-selected from the undergraduate Law community, and from the postgraduate research community. In order to recruit participants, presentations were made by me in person to the first year Law students. However, this method failed to recruit enough participants, so a funding bid was made to the Institute of Learning and Teaching at the University of Northampton (ILT, n.d.) which enabled morning refreshments, lunch, and afternoon tea to be provided for the participants, and to give each participant a £30 National Book Token for taking part. The use of incentives was not felt to undermine the credibility of the project as such incentives are common practice (Litosseliti, 2003, p.38), and were felt to be in accordance with BERA's requirement that incentives be "commensurate with good sense" (BERA, 2011, p.7).

The project as outlined to the first-year Law students was a randomised controlled trial involving two full days of SD, plus a pre- and post-test designed to test their critical thinking skills. In order to increase participation rates the project was made less onerous by reducing the project to a one-day dialogue plus focus group. And in order to further increase participation rates the invitation was extended to all Law students, and to postgraduate research students. The second and third year Law students were invited to participate by one of their Law lecturers, and the postgraduate research students were contacted by the postgraduate student representative via an email in which the project was outlined and requests made for expressions of interest. Reducing the duration of the dialogues, extending the invitation to participate, and using incentives resulted in a significant boost in expressions of interest (from one to thirty-one), allowing the project to go ahead.

The thirty-one students who expressed an interest in the project were divided into three dialogue groups. The first dialogue group contained ten postgraduate research

students, the second group contained eleven first-year undergraduates, and the third group contained nine second and third year undergraduates plus one taught Master's student. The rationale for keeping students studying at similar levels in the same SD groups was because focus groups were being used to gather data, and to be most effective focus group participants should be a relatively homogeneous group (Litosseliti, 2003, pp.32; Hennick *et al.*, 2011, p.150). Where a focus group comprises participants who are fairly similar to one another there is less likelihood that unequal power relationships will affect the discussion (e.g., in a group comprising first-year undergraduates and PhD students it is likely that the undergraduates will defer to the PhD students because of their perceived academic superiority).

3.2.4 Stage 4: Preparing for and conducting the Socratic Dialogues

All the students who had expressed an interest in participating in an SD were invited via email to attend a one-day dialogue and focus group in either November or December 2017. The email also contained a copy of the participant information statement (included in the appendices). Participants were asked to think about the dialogue question and come up with a personal example to bring to the session. However, not all participants who initially expressed an interest actually attended a dialogue, so the numbers of participants were lower than expected; four at the first dialogue, four at the second dialogue, and three at the third, making a total of eleven participants overall. However, this ended up being advantageous as the smaller groups were easier to facilitate than larger groups would have been, and more progress was made in the SD than would have been possible if all the participants had turned up.

I was relatively confident in my ability to hold a philosophical discussion with the SD participants as my Bachelor's degree was in Philosophy, and I taught A level Philosophy and AS level Critical Thinking for many years. Nevertheless, prior to each of the dialogues I prepared by reading (Blackburn, 2017; Sandel 2010), making notes and thinking about the subjects for discussion, which were 'truth' for the first dialogue, and 'justice' for the second and third dialogues.

Upon arrival the participants and I introduced ourselves. We talked about the aims and purpose of the day, and I outlined the process of SD, and gave them a very short history of the method. In addition, all participants were given a copy of the standard procedures and rules of SD (Saran and Neisser, 2004, pp.171-173, included in the appendices). I explained to the participants that I was new to facilitating these dialogues, and that the rules and procedures were for me as much as for them, and they should feel free call for a meta-dialogue if they felt that we were not keeping to the rules and procedures.

The SD process was conducted according the standard procedures as outlined in the previous chapter. Each SD was held over the course of a day and was broken up into four, seventy-five minute sessions, with breaks in-between. A session plan is included in the appendices.

The questions that were the focus of our dialogues were as follows:

- Question for dialogue 1: How do I know when a statement is correct?
- Question for dialogues 2 and 3: How do I know when a decision is just?

These questions were chosen in order to be of maximum interest to potential participants. I hoped that a question about truth would interest postgraduate research students as most PhD and MPhil students need to discuss epistemological matters in their theses. And with the Law students I hoped that they would find a question about justice to be relevant to their studies. In addition to this, the question for the first dialogue was the same question used in the dialogue that I had participated in with Dieter Krohn, and I suspected that I would be better able to facilitate my first SD if it focused on a question that I was familiar with.

As is usually the case with SDs, the key points of the discussion were recorded on flipchart paper and posted up around the room. After the session the flipchart papers

were photographed and assembled into a PDF document that was emailed around to the participants so that they would have a copy for themselves.

3.2.5 Stage 5: Data gathering

The data collection method chosen for this project was the focus group discussion, a method fully compatible with the qualitative methodology (Vaughn *et al.*, 1996, pp.15-16). A focus group discussion is generally understood as being an interactive discussion, focused on a specific issue or set of issues, carried out with a predetermined group of people. As Hennick *et al.*, (2011, p.136) point out, the most important characteristics of the method are actually stated in the name of the method; focus group discussion, although perhaps the name *focused* group discussion would make the point even more clearly. Other introductions (e.g., Vaughn *et al.*, 1996; Litosseliti, 2003; Puchta and Potter, 2004; Silverman, pp.211-213; Flick, 2014, pp.242-262,) define the method similarly, and occasionally introduce or emphasise additional points. For example, Vaughn *et al.*, (1996, p.4) and Silverman (2013, p.213) both note that the discussions should feel informal, and should be conducted in a permissive atmosphere. And a similar point is made by Litosseliti who cites the focus group definition given by Krueger (cited in Litosseliti, 2003, p.1) which emphasises that the discussions must take place in a non-threatening environment. Ultimately, the goal of a focus group discussion is to “create a candid, normal conversation that addresses, in depth, the selected topic” (Vaughn *et al.*, 1996, p.4) in order to elicit “participants’ feelings, attitudes and perceptions about a selected topic” (Puchta and Potter, 2004, p.6).

The primary reason for choosing to gather data via focus group discussions was because they would allow for the collection of rich qualitative data needed to answer the research question. Specifically, the data gathered in focus groups reveals “through interaction the beliefs, attitudes, experiences and feelings of participants” (Litosseliti, 2003, p.16). While one might reasonably argue that such data can be gathered via many other qualitative methods, what is unique to the focus group as a

method is what Vaughn *et al.*, (1996, p.19) refer to as the “loosening effect” of focus groups, which they explain as follows,

In a relaxed group setting where participants sense that their opinions and experiences are valued, participants are more likely to express their opinions and perceptions openly ... Thus the focus group format facilitates more candid and reflective responses by the participants (Vaughn *et al.*, 1996, p.19).

As well as the fact that focus groups promote more candid responses, Vaughn *et al.*, (1996, p.19-20) go on to make a number of other claims about the advantages of the focus group, most significantly that the active group format stimulates greater participation, and that responses given in focus groups tend to be more honest and substantial than might otherwise be the case. Ultimately, they claim, focus group data is “often richer and fuller than the data available from an individual interview” (Vaughn *et al.*, 1996, p.19). Similar points about the richness of focus group data in comparison to individual interviews are made by Litosseliti (2003, pp.18-19) and Flick (2014, p.257). Flick (2014, p.244) also refers to the way that focus groups avoid the isolated artificiality of the individual interview, and recreate more authentically the ways in which “opinions are produced, expressed, and exchanged in everyday life.”

As suggested by Litosseliti, (2003) and Hennink *et al.*, (2011), the focus group discussions for this project were carried out in small groups in an open, friendly, non-threatening environment, and were audio recorded using two digital audio recorders (a primary recorder and a backup recorder). We remained in the same room as we had used for the SD, and began the focus group after a short break at the end of the SD. As they had done during the SD, the participants sat around a circular table where they could have eye contact with one another (Litosseliti, 2003, p.48; Hennink *et al.*, 2011, p.153). It was vital for the participants to feel free to say what they really felt about the dialogues, as opposed to what they thought I wanted to hear, thus we had a discussion at the start of the SD and again at the start of the focus group about the fact that, as far as I was concerned, the participants and I were

researching SD together. I explained that I had not made up my mind about what I thought about SD as an educational method, therefore they should feel free to be open and honest about what they thought about our session.

In order to further encourage the participants to be as candid as possible, and because I was concerned that I might bias the data by being both the SD facilitator and the focus group moderator, the focus groups were moderated by a postgraduate research student whose time was paid for from the ILT funding bid. The postgraduate research student and I met several times during the early stages of the research and he had a very good grasp of the purpose and aims of the research project and the role of the focus group moderator. He was also familiar with SD, having participated fully in the first dialogue. However, we did not discuss any of the findings from the literature review, in particular the stated benefits of SD, because I did not want him to bias the data by trying to steer the participants towards any particular responses. Whereas I might, unconsciously or otherwise, suggest to the participants that some responses were more interesting than others by being more interested in those responses that aligned to my findings in the literature review, the focus group moderator was unaware of these findings, thus was less likely to encourage any one response more than another.

Vital to the success of a focus group is deciding beforehand what prompts and probes will be used in order to stimulate the discussion and ensure that it remains focused on generating data that will allow the research question to be answered (Vaughn, at al., 1996, p.5; Litosseliti, 2003, p.5; Puchta and Potter, 2004, p.6; Hennick *et al.*, 2011, pp.141; Silverman, 2013, p.213). After some consideration and a number of revisions, the final set of prompts used in the focus groups were defined as follows:

Q1. What are your first thoughts and impressions about participating in a Socratic Dialogue?

- Did you enjoy participating in the dialogue?
- Do you think it was a good use of your time?

Q2. *For focus group 1:* Have you learned anything useful about truth and the correctness of statements from participating in today's dialogue? *For focus groups 2 & 3:* Have you learned anything useful about justice from participating in today's dialogue?

- Can you outline what you have learned?
- Do you think that you will be able to apply what you have learned to your research [focus group 1] / studies [focus groups 2 and 3]?

Q3. *For focus group 1:* Aside from the discussion about truth and the correctness of statements, do you think that there are any wider benefits to participating in Socratic Dialogues? *For focus groups 2 & 3:* Aside from the discussion about justice, do you think that there are any wider benefits to participating in Socratic Dialogues?

- Can you articulate what those benefits are?

Q4. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- I would be interested in continuing this dialogue?
- I would be interested in attending another dialogue on a different subject?

During the focus groups I stayed in the room in case anything important came up that I felt was necessary to discuss further. However, I attempted to minimise my presence in the room by keeping quiet and still, and by directing my attention to the moderator so that it was difficult for the participants to get eye contact with me. I also minimised my presence by not being particularly expressive, and by only intervening if strictly necessary. As an afterthought, participants were given the opportunity to give anonymous feedback online in case they felt that there were things that they couldn't say in the focus groups. However, no participants took up this option, therefore it was concluded that they had not felt particularly inhibited by my presence in the focus groups.

3.2.6 Stage 6: Data analysis

The method of data analysis followed very closely the seven step process described in Rubin and Rubin (2012, pp.189-211). The focus group recordings were professionally transcribed (using funds from the ILT bid), read through, carefully checked against the audio recordings and amended where necessary. While the professional transcriptions sped up the transcribing process, it was very apparent that they needed careful checking, not least because there was a 'not' missing in one sentence, which completely changed the meaning, and a 'did' which was transcribed as 'didn't'. The majority of the other amendments included marking up which particular participant said what, adding the 'ers', 'umms', 'likes', 'you knows', etc., marking the pauses and hesitations, and carefully checking whether what was transcribed as 'hmmm' (connoting doubt) was, in fact, 'mmm', (connoting agreement). In a few cases I underlined some words where the speaker had particularly emphasised them, and in two cases marked non-verbal information where what was said indicated agreement, but the way in which it was said suggested only very cautious or doubtful agreement.

Once I was happy with the transcripts they were thematically coded, after which the similarly coded passages were sorted and summarised. The similarly coded passages were then sorted according to the different focus groups, and the responses from the different groups were compared and summarised. These comparisons and summaries allowed a more complete picture to be built up regarding how the different groups felt about their participation in their SDs. My overall strategy when analysing the data was to explore the extent to which what the participants said about SD aligned with the benefits of SD as outlined in the literature review (see Chapter 2, section 2.3). Therefore, I created code list or codebook (Bernard *et al.*, 2017, pp.125-161) to code against which was based on the seven benefits listed in the literature review.

- B1. [RO] Reviewing opinions, widening vision, gaining insight
- B2. [TT] Thinking together, communicating cooperatively and team building
- B3. [RE] Recognition of experience
- B4. [CT] Critical thinking, reasoning, rationality and argumentation
- B5. [RC] Reaching consensus
- B6. [ML] Meta-learning and teaching by not teaching
- B7. [TR] Transformation: changes in thought lead to changes in action

The detailed code list (included in the appendices) also contained a short description explaining the theme of each code, with inclusion criteria specified. This allowed me to check the meaning of each code frequently during the coding process, ensuring that I remained consistent with my coding, and helping to increase the reliability of the findings (see section 3.3.2 below). This process of coding to pre-defined codes derived from the literature is referred to as the deductive (or theory-driven, or a priori) approach (Bernard *et al.*, 2017, pp.128-129). I was aware that using a deductive approach would not exhaust the data, but felt that while using both deductive and inductive coding would be preferable, using inductive coding was not required in order to answer the research question, and it risked making the project too long and complex. For these reasons I chose to prioritise deductive coding in order to keep the analysis section of the project more clearly focused on answering the research question.

3.3 Quality and credibility of research

In any research project there are three markers of quality; reliability, validity, generalisability. A research project which has findings that are neither reliable nor valid is likely to be deemed not to be a credible study. However, studies do not have to produce highly generalisable findings in order to be credible, although those with widely generalisable findings are often the considered to be the most useful or important. Nevertheless, conducting credible small-scale projects with only

minimally generalisable findings is still worthwhile, as these studies can be combined with other similar studies to create meta-analyses.

3.3.1 Validity

Validity refers to the credibility of the interpretations of the data that have been analysed (Silverman, 2013, p.285). In essence, validity is concerned with the truthfulness of the research findings that the researcher presents (Hammersley, 1990, p.57; Silverman, 2011 p.360). At some point in a research project the researcher will report what was found during the data gathering process, and will discuss what those findings mean. But the purpose of data analysis is not to find the one essential meaning that naturally inheres within the data; rather, data analysis is a creative process in which the researcher makes meaning from (or, perhaps, imposes meaning upon) the data. But this is not to say that all interpretations are equally valid. While there may not be only one correct interpretation of the data, it will support some interpretations better than others. Thus the point is not to find the one right interpretation, but to make a valid one, i.e., one which is clearly supported by the data, and which is arrived at through a rigorous process of analysis.

In order to make a valid interpretation of the data, the researcher can employ certain strategies, and according to Silverman (2011, p.383, emphasis in original) “The criterion of *falsifiability* is an excellent way to test the validity of any research finding.” What this means is that upon drawing a conclusion or making a finding, the researcher actively attempts to prove the conclusion to be false, or to discredit the finding. The researcher could, for example, ask themselves what phenomena would disprove the finding, and then actively look for that phenomena within the data. Only when a conclusion cannot be shown to be false, should it be accepted (Silverman, 2011, pp.358-359; Silverman, 2013, pp.289-290).

3.3.2 Reliability

Just as validity is concerned with the truthfulness of the research findings, reliability is related to the stability of those research findings; i.e., the “degree to which the

findings of a study are independent of accidental circumstances of their production” (Silverman, 2011, p.360). Kirk and Miller (cited in Silverman, 2011, p.360) use the analogy of testing thermometers to explain the relationship between validity and reliability, which is expanded upon in Table 2 below:

	Unreliable	Reliable
Invalid	T1: 70°C to 80°C	T3: 82°C
Valid	T2: 95°C to 105°C	T4: 100°C

Table 2: Validity and reliability

When placed in boiling water on a repeated number of occasions, four thermometers (T1 to T4) give a different set of readings. The readings from T1 are variable, but always incorrect. The readings from T3 are also incorrect, but consistently so. The readings from T2 vary, but are always close to being correct, and occasionally give a correct reading, whereas the readings from T4 are both consistent and correct, i.e. both reliable and valid.

In order for the qualitative researcher to produce findings that are reliable, two things need to occur: i) the research method needs to be documented clearly, and; ii) the researcher needs to demonstrate the consistent use of categories or codes (Silverman, 2013, p.302). Silverman’s first point is self-explanatory. His second point means that another researcher would apply the same categories or codes similarly in the same dataset, or that the same researcher would apply the same categories to similar data in another dataset. Thus the essence of reliability could be stated as follows: that the method by which *X* came to be known is clearly documented, that what counts as an instance of *X* is clearly stated, that all instances of *X* are identified as instances of *X*, and that no instances of *not-X* are identified as instances of *X*. Similarly stated, we might describe validity as follows: that *X* accurately describes the real-world phenomena to which it refers.

3.3.3 Generalisability

According to Vaughn *et al.*, (1996) and Litosseliti (2003) it is difficult to generalise the outcomes of focus group discussions to a wider population. Vaughn *et al.*, (1996, p.16) explain that “with focus group interviews the goal is not to elicit principles or tenets that can be extended to a wider population.” Similarly, Litosseliti (2003, pp.21-22) notes that when using focus groups “it is crucial to acknowledge that the results may not be generalisable or representative, but indicative: that is, illustrating particular social phenomena.” However, Rubin and Rubin (2012, pp.209-210), while advocating a cautious approach to generalisation, do not discount the possibility that findings from qualitative interviews can be generalised. And the case for generalisation is stronger where the theories formulated to explain the data have included ‘deviant cases’ (Silverman, 2011, p.391). Regarding this project, where the case for generalisation is strongest is where the findings complement what has already been stated by multiple authors in the literature. Any new ideas generated will still need further research to establish whether or not they are chance or regular occurrences in Socratic Dialogues.

3.3.4 Summary remarks on the credibility of the research findings

In order to produce findings which are credible I have done the following:

1. I have attempted to produce valid findings through an active process of falsification.
2. I have attempted to produce reliable findings by clearly outlining and explaining my research method, and by using a codebook with clearly explained codes. In doing this others may replicate the study, or may find flaws and weaknesses in the method and/or analysis that could have given rise to spurious findings.
3. I have attempted to produce generalisable findings by using methods which lead to the production of reliable and valid findings, and by including ‘deviant cases’ wherever possible.

3.4 Research ethics

As with any participant research project, there are a number of ethical considerations that must be taken into account prior to commencement, some of which are potentially very serious and/or very complex depending on the scope, scale and design of the project (Hennink *et al.*, 2011, pp.61-79; Silverman, 2013, pp.159-186; Flick, 2014, pp.48-62). Factors that would indicate that a research project is likely to have serious or complex ethical issues include any project that involves children or vulnerable adults (as they cannot give informed consent), projects involving any kind of covert or duplicitous research (again, as participants cannot provide consent), and projects in which there is the possibility that participants may be in some way harmed by taking part (including physical and psychological harm, or harm arising from the disclosure of the participants' identities).

The current standards for ethical research in education are given in the British Educational Research Association's *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* (BERA, 2011). The essence of any ethically sound research project is to ensure that participants are not coerced, bribed or duped into participating, that participants are not in any way harmed, disadvantaged or unfairly advantaged through participation (and that any non-participants are not unfairly disadvantaged), and that the results of the project are accurately, honestly and openly reported, including any biases that may result, for example, from unequal power relationships between the researcher and the participants such as might arise when a teacher conducts research with their own students. Simply put, educational research ethics is ultimately based upon an ethic of dignity and respect for persons, as famously expressed in the second formulation of Kant's categorical imperative: "Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end" (Kant, in Paton, 1948, p.91).

A useful set of ethical guidelines is provided by Hennink *et al.*, (2011, pp.77-78) who suggest that would-be researchers evaluate the ethical soundness of potential

research projects against the following six points: i) informed consent; ii) anonymity; iii) confidentiality; iv) justice; v) beneficence; vi) minimisation of harm. This project has been evaluated for ethical soundness against each of these six criteria, and the results of the evaluation are included in the appendices.

Chapter 4: Findings

The aim of this chapter is to present the findings from the three focus group discussions. The key evidence supporting the findings is provided in the appendices. The codes developed from the literature review are presented in the table below, and the full code list with a long description and inclusion criteria for each code is also provided in the appendices.

Benefit	Shortcode	Title and meaning of code
1 [B1]	<i>RO</i>	<u>Reviewing opinions, widening vision, gaining insight</u> <i>Participation in an SD enables participants to review and revise (and reject) some of their opinions, to widen their vision, and to gain insight into some of their beliefs.</i>
2 [B2]	<i>TT</i>	<u>Thinking together, communicating cooperatively and team building</u> <i>Participation in an SD enables participants to experience the advantages of constructively and cooperatively thinking together.</i>
3 [B3]	<i>RE</i>	<u>Recognition of experience</u> <i>Participation in an SD enables participants to recognise the educational value of personal experience.</i>
4 [B4]	<i>CT</i>	<u>Critical thinking, reasoning, rationality and argumentation</u> <i>Participation in an SD helps to improve critical thinking, reasoning and arguing skills.</i>
5 [B5]	<i>RC</i>	<u>Reaching consensus</u> <i>Participation in an SD helps participants to learn that a heterogeneous group of people are able to reach a genuine and meaningful consensus about challenging subjects.</i>
6 [B6]	<i>ML</i>	<u>Meta-learning and teaching by not teaching</u> <i>Participation in an SD challenges and expands participants' model(s) of what learning is, and of how and under what conditions it can take place.</i>
7 [B7]	<i>TR</i>	<u>Transformation: changes in thought lead to changes in action</u> <i>Participation in an SD allows participants to strengthen their own values, and to make the world in which they live more ethical, decent and humane.</i>

Table 3: Code list

4.1 Findings from focus group 1

The question for the first SD was ‘How do I know that a statement is correct?’ The dialogue was attended by four postgraduate research students, one of whom acted as the focus group moderator for this, and for the subsequent focus groups. Therefore, there were four participants in the first dialogue, but only three focus group respondents, referred to below as R1, R2 and R3. The fourth dialogue participant (who acted as the focus group moderator) is referred to as R4 where he discusses his experiences of participating in an SD in the third focus group.

4.1.1 General remarks about SD from the focus group respondents

None of the respondents had ever participated in an SD before, and their comments indicated that although they didn’t have an especially clear idea about what to expect, they were curious about the process and were interested to find out more, although R3 said that she had been initially concerned that the day might be a waste of time. All three respondents were generally positive about the SD experience, and talked about enjoying the day, and the catering, and they said that they found the SD to be ‘fruitful’ and a good use of their time. All the respondents said that they would not want to continue with this particular dialogue, but that they would consider attending other dialogues on other subjects, especially if they were more directly related to their areas of interest/research. R3’s desire to attend subsequent dialogues seemed most genuine, but this was perhaps because she saw SD as being quite closely related to her own research interests. R1’s comments suggested that while she had been curious to find out about SD, this curiosity had now been satisfied. She also expressed reservations about the lasting educational value of discussions based solely upon personal experience. R2 gave the impression that attendance at subsequent dialogues would be where she felt that it would directly help her research. In general there was the impression that R1, R2 and R3 all had a very strategic focus on their PhDs and were unlikely to engage in many, or any, extra-curricular events that were not going to help them achieve this goal.

Throughout the focus group all three respondents discussed the SD in ways that strongly suggested that they grasped the nature and purpose of the dialogue very well. One of the most insightful remarks about the SD process was made by R2, whose first comment was:

I didn't know how much I knew already in my mind, in my head, until I talked to everybody because I think within the – when we have a dialogue, we are more likely to understand better, even the things that we already know (R2).

This comment is remarkable because it so clearly echoes Nelson's own views about philosophical knowledge and the purpose of SD in illuminating through dialogue our 'obscurely heard' principles:

If there is such a thing for us as philosophical knowledge, we possess it once and for all, and the development of philosophy consists only in our becoming more and more clearly and completely conscious of what philosophical knowledge we possess" (Nelson, 1949, p.104).

4.1.2: Respondents' experiences of the benefits of SD

Regarding experiencing the benefits of SD, all three respondents reported experiencing some of the stated benefits outlined in the literature review, although R1 noted, quite reasonably, that it was difficult to talk about the benefits of SD after only attending one dialogue. All three respondents referred to SD's capacity to help people to be more open minded, to see things in a different way, or from different perspectives [B1: *RO*]. In particular, R1 reported an insight into the way that she understood truth, stating that prior to the dialogue she held a more objective view of truth, whereas afterwards she felt that it was something more subjective. R1 and R2 both made specific comments which referred to the benefits of thinking together in an SD [B2: *TT*], particularly the way that thinking with others generates more thoughts than are possible when thinking alone. R3 expressed some surprise at how the method allowed for a simple, personal experience to be transformed into a

philosophical dialogue, and R2 referred to the way that the dialogue was focused on making sense of personal experience [B3: *RE*]. However, later on in the focus group R1 expressed some scepticism about the value of discussions based only upon personal experience. R1 felt that whereas a bona fide research question could be answered, at least in principle, an SD was in danger of being an endless discussion to which a suitable answer would never be found. R3 was the only participant who directly referred to SD as being able to improve participants' critical thinking skills [B4: *CT*], however, all three respondents discussed the way that SD encourages consensus building [B5: *RC*], and this was expressed in terms of the process helping them in 'finding common ground', 'reaching consensus', 'tolerating others', and 'accepting others' points of view'.

All three respondents discussed the fact that the SD had exposed them to a different type of learning, and that there was some value to this way of learning [B6: *ML*]. For R1 the learning process in the dialogue was focused on developing an understanding of how others see things. For R2 the learning had taken place in the later stages of the dialogue where the example that was focused on in the SD was generalised and applied to each person's example that they had related at the start of the process. R3, on the other hand, articulated the learning benefits of SD by explaining how she could apply SD to her teaching practice in order that her students might become more open minded. Thus she implicitly recognised the differences between the type of learning that happens in an SD and the type of learning that happens when teaching is more content-focused. In terms of transformation [B7: *TR*], all the respondents suggested that SD might have some lasting transformative effects. R1 strongly suggested that the experience had made her less dogmatic, and open to a more perspectival view of truth. R2 and R3 discussed transformation not in terms of changing how they thought about truth, but in terms of using SD within their own teaching practice, but this was expressed slightly more strongly by R3 than by R2. However, R1 felt that they could not use SD extensively in their own classes as it was too time consuming a process, and, perhaps, because of the aforementioned reservations about the potential 'endlessness' of dialogues based upon personal experience.

4.2 Findings from focus group 2

The question for the second SD was ‘How do I know when a decision is just?’ The dialogue was attended by four first-year undergraduate Law students, referred to below as R5, R6, R7 and R8.

4.2.1: General remarks about SD from the focus group respondents

None of the respondents had attended an SD before, and all reported that they didn’t really know what to expect, but had enjoyed the day and found it to be a good use of their time. R6, R7 and R8 clearly expressed that they had each had very strong reservations about the day, and expected it to be boring and a waste of time. R7 said that they thought it would be boring because people would not talk openly. R6 said that he expected that he would not get much out of the day and would just sit quietly waiting for it to end. R8 stated very frankly that she had only attended in order to get the £30 book token. Her initial thought when she had received the invitation to attend an SD had been “do you seriously expect us, on the day off, on my day off, to sit and talk for eight hours? Hell no!” (R8). However, all the respondents clearly said that they had enjoyed the day and found it to be useful, and that their expectations of a long, boring day had been very quickly overturned. R7 and R8 expressed this most strongly, saying “But when we started, it was really good and really enjoyable” (R8). And R7 said “I think it was actually very, very good. I was not expecting it to be like this” (R7). R6 was a little more cautious, and in the initial discussion he described it most often as being “quite good”, suggesting that he still had some reservations about its value.

Despite R6’s reservations, he along with the other three respondents said that they would be interested in attending another dialogue on a different subject, although R6 made it clear that he wouldn’t attend an SD unless he had a prior interest in the subject being discussed. Both R5 and R7 said that they would be happy to continue the current dialogue as well as attending other dialogues on different subjects. R7

was the most vocal about wanting to continue with the current dialogue, with R5 agreeing with R7 rather than offering his own comments. R7 said that “I think we could, like, manage to do hours and hours ... I’ll stick for quite a while with this topic” (R7). R6 said that he wouldn’t want to continue with the current dialogue, because he had “done enough of this topic” (R6). R6 also felt that the dialogues were best kept apart from taught university modules, and kept as an entirely separate (i.e., extracurricular) activity. However, R8 very strongly expressed that she would like to use SD in her studies as part of university modules, and said that she felt that the dialogues could be very useful for assessment preparation, saying, “imagine doing *this* before you start writing your assignment. That would be so, so helpful” (R8). And “If this would have been a topic that we were supposed to write about, it would have been amazing” (R8), a comment which was immediately agreed on by R7. R5 gave moderate support to R8 and R7, but cited the need for careful planning in order to incorporate SD into university modules. His comments about this indicated perhaps only a cautious agreement with the idea, although earlier in the discussion he had offered up the thought that SD could help students with their studies, which suggested that his agreement with R7 and R8 on this subject was genuine.

4.2.2: Respondents’ experiences of the benefits of SD

Regarding experiencing the benefits of SD, all four respondents reported experiencing some of the stated benefits outlined in the literature review, although in general their responses were more difficult to code, requiring a greater level of interpretation than those of the previous focus group. All of the respondents made at least one comment which showed that the SD had been an opportunity to review their opinions and to see the subject in question from a variety of new perspectives [B1: RO]. This was expressed weakly and less clearly by R5 and R6, but with more strength and clarity by R7 and R8. Many of the respondents’ comments initially seemed to come close to the benefit of thinking together [B2: TT], but ultimately these comments were still more about the benefits gained from reviewing their own opinions and widening their vision (i.e., B1), therefore for focus group 2 it was not possible to find any credible evidence strongly supporting B2. In addition, none of

the respondents directly mentioned the fact that the dialogue had been based on personal experience, or said anything that showed that they had recognised the value of personal experience in the dialogue [B3: *RE*]. However, their comments concerning their initial scepticism towards the day being overturned might cautiously be taken as tacit recognition that personal experience can be the basis for a rewarding philosophical discussion.

R5 made a single, rather weak comment about SD helping to improve participants' skills of analysis [B4: *CT*], but R7 talked about critical thinking with much more clarity, saying that "having this kind of discussion ... helps my for and against arguments to develop" (R7). Only R7 and R8 commented about the ability of SD to help participants reach consensus [B5: *RC*]. R7 mentioned this four times during the focus group, and R8 mentioned it twice, but both R7's and R8's comments on this subject were very clearly expressed, suggesting that for R7 this was perhaps the benefit he had experienced most strongly. R7 in fact showed great surprise that such a diverse group of people could have a productive and well-tempered discussion about justice, saying that,

At the end of the dialogue, I've like thought well we are four different law students. We are all from different backgrounds, different diversities, ethnicities, sexual orientation, and beliefs, and we actually managed to have a, a talk about justice in a different format (R7).

R8 made a similarly positive, albeit more politicised, comment about SD helping participants to reach consensus, saying,

"isn't this maybe a way you could try to spread the word on - fundamental rights; sitting down, ah, just a group of people from different countries, different beliefs, everything, and just talking about something very simple, erm - something like this, and come to an agreement and maybe try to understand people who are not like you. Like, as a, as a purpose of, of defeating racism or, or - 'Homophobia (R7)' - Homophobia, yeah" (R8).

R8 most strongly expressed the view that SD had the potential to be a useful learning experience, and could be incorporated into university modules in a way that would help students to improve their assessed work [B6: *ML*]. She made three separate comments to this effect, although didn't explicitly comment on the way that SD differs from traditional teaching. Both R5 and R7 also expressed similar views, although not as strongly as R8. R6 disagreed with the others, feeling that SD was best kept apart from normal university teaching. R5 and R8 talked about the way that SD might help them in their future law careers, which, it could be argued, links with the idea of transformation [B7: *TR*]. They both suggested that because SD helped them to better understand others, it could help them to better understand their future clients, and R8 connected it with the idea of being able to determine a client's *mens rea* (i.e., whether a person intended to commit a crime). R7 made two seemingly contradictory statements about whether or not he could apply SD (or the principles learned in SD) in his life. He initially said that he would not be able to apply those things learned in SD in his life and studies, but later in the same statement said that he might be able to apply some of the things learned in the SD when discussing the subject with others, saying that, "when I have to discuss it again with someone and I know that maybe because of their diversity or maybe because of their background or because of their ways of doing things, I will be able to understand them" (R8).

4.3 Findings from focus group 3

The question for the third SD was 'How do I know when a decision is just?' The dialogue was attended by one second-year undergraduate Law student, one third-year undergraduate Law student, and a taught Master's Law student, referred to below as R9, R10, and R11.

4.3.1: General remarks about SD from the focus group respondents

This was the smallest of the three dialogue groups, with only three people participating, as opposed to the previous two dialogues which had four participants

each. However, during the focus group the respondents said that they felt that the small size of the group had really helped them to achieve a lot in the dialogue. While it is normal to have an SD group two, three, or sometimes even four times the size, it was felt by all respondents that six people would be the maximum for a productive dialogue. It was primarily for this reason that the respondents felt that it would not be possible to use SD in university seminar sessions due to the size of seminar groups (approximately twenty-five students). The secondary reason given for not using SD in seminar groups was a general consensus around the idea that SD participants should not be made engage in the process unwillingly, “they definitely have to want to do this. ‘Cause, if not, I think it’s going to be like pulling teeth” (R9).

None of the participants had ever taken part in an SD before, and, unlike the previous two focus groups, none of the respondents reported any initial concern that the SD might be a waste of time. R9 was the most positive about the experience, stating that it had been enjoyable and a good use of time. R10 agreed with R9, and described the experience as being ‘good’, and the conversation as being ‘comfortable’. R11 said that she ‘quite enjoyed’ the SD, but she did not sound fully convinced about this. It was clear that she had not disliked the SD as she had participated fully and enthusiastically, and said that she would probably want to come to other dialogues, but she expressed some scepticism as to the lasting value of dialogues based only on people’s personal experiences.

In terms of continuing the dialogue, both R9 and R10 initially suggested that the current dialogue had been mostly exhausted, but then backtracked a little and said that they actually thought that there was still, potentially, a lot remaining to discuss. R11’s comments on the subject suggested that she felt that the current dialogue was complete, but she said that an SD with a particularly complex example could go on for days. R9 countered with the idea that increasing complexity could have been found in the current example (or any example) simply by further dissecting it, but said that on a surface level the current dialogue was complete, to which both R10 and R11 agreed.

4.3.2: Respondents' experiences of the benefits of SD

All three of the focus group respondents reported experiencing some of the stated benefits of SD as put forward in the literature, but, as was the case with the second focus group, the responses from the third focus group were a little more difficult to code than those from the first focus group. Nevertheless, all three respondents made a comment which suggested that the SD had been an opportunity for them to review their opinions and to see the subject under discussion from a new perspective [B1: *RO*]. R10 expressed the idea that in the SD they had “heard each other's different opinions and taken it in and discussed them,” and also made another comment in which she showed surprise at the wide range of things that had come into play during the dialogue. Also linking with B1, R11 referred to SD as a way of “learning to talk to other people and discuss - what you can see in front of you” (R11). R10's comment about the diversity of subjects discussed during the dialogue came close to linking to the benefit of thinking together [B2: *TT*], but only R11's comments linked suitably strongly with this particular theme. R11 said that “we went a little - erm, quite a lot into depth with in as far as *emotions* and stuff, which *isn't* normally my remit *at all*. Er, so it was quite interesting to see how emotions can play a part in justice” (R11). This comment links strongly with B1, but also with B2 because it is clearly implied in the comment that it was the process of thinking with others that prompted her to accept the idea that emotions (which are not normally her remit) can play an important part in thinking about justice.

All three respondents made a comment expressing surprise that personal experience could be the basis for a rich, philosophical dialogue [B3: *RE*]. This was expressed weakly by R9, but quite clearly by R10 who said, “So like we just started off with, erm, talking about like personal experiences and stuff, and then look how we've ended up with more of an idea of what justice is.” Similarly, R11's comment about “learning to talk to other people and discuss - what you can see in front of you” could be taken as an indication that she has, at least to some extent, recognised the value of personal experience. Of course, this interpretation requires that we take the phrase

'what you can see in front of you' not literally (i.e., meaning what was written on the flipchart paper during the SD), but rather as meaning something figuratively in front of one, i.e., one's direct, lived experience. Only R9 made any comments that linked with the benefit of critical thinking [B4: *CT*], but this was very much in the context of having to think in detail about his experience in order to reconstruct and explain it, as he was the example-giver in the SD. He said that after the SD he was able to articulate what had happened more clearly, and to "fit the puzzle pieces together a lot easier" (R9). So although this does link in with critical thinking, inasmuch as it helped him to improve the clarity of his thinking, it was very tied to the particular experience of being the example-giver in the SD.

All three respondents made comments which, to some extent, linked with the benefit of reaching consensus [B5: *RC*]. R9's acknowledgement that the SD was "pure empathy" suggests a recognition that the SD was, or would be useful, in helping a diverse group of people achieve consensus. And R11's comments about SD helping to understand cultural differences links similarly, although not as strongly, to this benefit:

If you've got people from lots of different backgrounds and lots of examples that maybe I might understand but you mightn't understand and there's cultural differences, erm, then they'll be interesting to discuss 'cause you learn a little bit more about the people that are around you, and try and develop - an understanding of, of other differences (R11).

However, R10 noted that the group had not agreed with each other on all points during the dialogue,

'Cause like today, we've spoke about stuff and we haven't all necessarily agreed with each other, but we've heard, heard each other's different opinions and taken it in and discussed them, haven't we? - So that's a benefit (R10).

This statement suggests that for R10 reaching consensus was not something that was especially important in the SD, and that of more importance to her was the experience that people could disagree about difficult matters in a manner than was, to use her word, 'comfortable'.

All three respondents recognised that there was something different about the learning that took place in SD than is normally the case in education [B6: *ML*]. Both R9 and R10 said that they enjoyed the fact that their personal views and opinions were what counted in the dialogue, and that they didn't have to back up what they said by referring to experts, although they did have to back up what they said with their own arguments. R11's comments on this theme were more complex, and while she did make a number of statements which showed that she felt that she had learned something interesting and important during the SD, she also expressed some scepticism as to the ultimate value of that learning, saying that "we haven't really learned anything that is substantive or supported ... It is literally just a bunch of how we feel and emotions." Finally, regarding the transformative aspect of SD [B7: *TR*] R10 and R11 both made comments which strongly showed that the dialogue had transformed their understanding of justice because of an insight into the role that emotions play in justice. And R9 commented on being able to apply the insights gained during the dialogue to his future professional practice, in that it would help him understand his criminal cases better, a comment similar to those made by R5 and R8 in the second focus group.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Limitations

There are two main aims of this chapter, which are to: i) summarise and discuss the findings from the three focus groups, and; ii) consider the limitations of the findings.

5.1 Summary of the findings

The findings from the three focus group discussions presented in the previous chapter are summarised in table 4, below. Where a respondent (*R_n*) has made a comment supporting a particular benefit (*B_n*) this is indicated with a '+'. A comment challenging or opposing a benefit is indicated with a '-'. The number of comments of each type is indicated in parenthesis. Note that one comment may be coded against more than one code, therefore the total number of comments extracted from the transcripts (sixty-five) is less than the total number of codes listed (one hundred).

Summary of Focus Group Findings

	B1 [RO]	B2 [TT]	B3 [RE]	B4 [CT]	B5 [RC]	B6 [ML]	B7 [TR]	Total
R1	+ (2)	+ (2)	- (1)		+ (2) - (1)	+ (2)	+ (1)	+ (9) - (2)
R2	+ (1)	+ (3)	+ (3)		+ (1)	+ (2)	+ (1)	+ (11)
R3	+ (2)		+ (1)	+ (1)	+ (1)	+ (2)	+ (3)	+ (10)
R5	+ (3)			+ (1)		+ (1)	+ (1)	+ (6)
R6	+ (2)		+ (1)					+ (3)
R7	+ (4)		+ (1)	+ (1)	+ (5)	+ (4)	+ (1) - (1)	+ (16) - (1)
R8	+ (2)		+ (1)		+ (2)	+ (3)	+ (1)	+ (9)
R9	+ (1)		+ (3)	+ (2)	+ (1)	+ (2)	+ (1)	+ (10)
R10	+ (3)	+ (1)	+ (1)		- (1)	+ (2)	+ (1)	+ (8) - (1)
R11	+ (3)	+ (2)	+ (1) - (2)		+ (1)	+ (2) - (3)		+ (9) - (5)
Total	+ (23)	+ (8)	+ (12) - (3)	+ (5)	+ (13) - (2)	+ (20) - (3)	+ (10) - (1)	+ (91) - (9)

Table 4: Summary of focus group findings

Codes:

RO = Reviewing opinions.

TT = Thinking together.

RE = Recognition of experience.

CT = Critical thinking.

RC = Reaching consensus.

ML = Meta-learning.

TR = Transformation.

5.2 Discussion

The findings from the three focus groups give support to the idea that the perceptions of the participants regarding the benefits of SD were, in the majority of cases, broadly in line with the benefits of SD as outlined in the literature. It is clear from the findings that not all the benefits had been experienced equally, but all had been experienced to some extent by some of the participants. This is important because it gives weight and credibility to the argument that the benefits of SD as stated in the literature are generally accurate, and are likely to be experienced and recognised by those who take part in an SD.

Few, if any, of the participants experienced all of the stated benefits, but this is not surprising given that none of the SD participants had ever attended an SD before, and that their responses were based on attending just a single, one-day dialogue. As Krohn (in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.16) explains, in order to really understand SD one needs to experience the process repeatedly. This was a point which was made by one of the participants, who said that “I’m not seeing the wider benefit of it from one session. Maybe if I do different sessions, I could realise the, the applicability and the usefulness of Socratic Dialogue” (R1). Nevertheless, all of the participants were able to articulate, with varying degrees of clarity, what they had found useful, and not useful, about attending the dialogue. But perhaps what was most surprising about the findings, given that the participants and the facilitator were all new to SD, was that the participants experienced any benefits at all after such limited exposure to the method.

As neither the focus group moderator nor any of the respondents were aware of what the stated benefits of SD were, it is not likely that these findings were a result of conscious or unconscious bias. Nevertheless, there are limitations to these findings which affect their credibility (see section 5.3 below), and it is important not to overstate the meaning of the findings. Since no objective measures were used to test the benefits of SD, the claim being made here is simply that what SD participants

think, feel, believe, intuit or otherwise *perceive* the benefits of SD to be, is more or less in line with what the literature about SD has claimed the benefits of SD to be.

Overall, none of the participants expressed any dislike of the dialogues, and none of them said that they wished that they had not attended, or that they had found the dialogue to be a waste of time. In some cases this may have been politeness, but all of the participants said that they had enjoyed the day, or at least had found it to have been an interesting experience. Those focus group respondents who outwardly expressed the most enthusiasm for SD were R3 from the first dialogue, R7 and R8 from the second dialogue, and R9 from the third dialogue.

The respondents were split on the question of continuing the dialogue. R5, R7, R9 and R10 all said that they felt that there was some value in continuing with the dialogue, with the remaining six respondents feeling that the dialogue was complete. All of the respondents said that they would consider attending other dialogues, although not all of them were interested in further attendance just for the sake of it. In some cases there was certainly an element of politeness in the responses to the question about attending other dialogues, and a feeling that their curiosity as to what an SD is was now fully satisfied and that they were unlikely to want to attend more dialogues (e.g., R1). In some cases attendance at further SDs appeared to be linked either to a personal interest in the topic being discussed as opposed to an interest in experiencing the SD process again (e.g., R6), or to some perceived strategic advantage, such as the dialogue helping with their research (e.g., R2). In many cases though, expressions that they would be interested in attending more dialogues did seem to be genuinely based on an interest in the process of SD, especially in the cases of R3, R7, R8, R9.

One point that was interesting because it was entirely absent from the responses of the focus groups was any criticisms of the rules and procedures of SD. Although the respondents were not specifically asked to comment on the procedures, none of them volunteered any comments that suggested that they found the method difficult, constraining, arbitrary, unhelpful or impeding the discussion in any way. Because

these were the first dialogues that I had facilitated I kept very strictly to the rules and procedures, ensuring that the participants were familiar with them prior to attending the dialogue, and I made sure that all participants had a copy of them to refer to during the dialogue. I did have some reservations about strict adherence to the rules as Birnbacher (1999, p.222) notes a concern that “the rules in their canonical form are too rigid”, and suggests three areas in which the rules might be modified. Firstly, in respect of the rule requiring the discussion be based on personal experience, he suggests that in some cases that this is not always possible, and that in these cases it is acceptable to broaden the starting point “to include examples from hearsay or fictitious cases from literature or film” (Birnbacher, 1999, p.222). Nevertheless, he does agree that such a broadening comes with the potential price of a loss of personal buy-in to the dialogue. A similar point is made by Heckmann (in Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.109), who allows for “speculative and artificially constructed” examples to be used where necessary, on the grounds that personal experiences will come to the fore as trust develops in the dialogue group. Secondly, Birnbacher suggests a “loosening of the rule of restraint on the part of the facilitator” (Birnbacher, 1999, p.222) in order that they might be able to move the discussion on if it gets stuck. And thirdly, he suggests that facilitators not become too concerned with ensuring that the participants reach a precise consensus. He does not suggest dispensing with this rule, but does strongly suggest that it should be handled with “a certain degree of largesse” (Birnbacher, 1999, p.222).

In our dialogues none of the participants had any problems coming up with a personal experience, and all brought thoughtful examples to discuss. Nevertheless, not all of the examples appeared suitable for a productive SD, and Altorf’s five criteria for choosing suitable examples (Altorf, 2016, p.7) were useful in helping to steer the participants to select the most suitable examples for the dialogue. In addition, during the dialogue there was no need to break the rule requiring that the facilitator stay neutral. However, regarding the requirement for consensus I think that it was fair to say that, as Birnbacher suggests, this requirement was interpreted broadly rather than rigidly.

The problem of recruiting participants, as noted by Altorf (2016) and Heckmann (1981) was certainly experienced, to the extent that without the use of incentives it is almost certain that this research project would not have gone ahead. On this subject R3, R6, R7 and R8 all stated that they had major reservations about the SD, and were very concerned that it would be a waste of time. What was particularly interesting was that three of these four respondents (R3, R7 and R8) were the most enthusiastic about the process after experiencing it.

It is also important to note R11's comments about the emotional nature of the dialogue. Shipley (in Brune and Krohn, 2005, pp.140-149) is critical of the way that Socratic Dialogue fails to take adequate account of emotions during the dialogue, and of the way that emotions are kept out of the content dialogue by relegating discussion of them to the meta-dialogue. Furthermore, she notes that there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that "the dialogue may generate emotional experiences for some individuals" (Shipley, in Brune and Krohn, 2005, p.144); and this certainly was the case in our dialogues. For R11, the dialogue had been (too?) emotional, not in the sense of there being too many outward displays of emotion, but in the way that an important part of the dialogue had been centred on a discussion of the emotional lives of the people in the example-giver's experience. This clearly made R11 feel uncomfortable enough to bring up the subject of the emotions more than once during the focus group, and to say, "personal experiences, sometime, sometimes people don't want to talk about them. If you don't want to talk about them, you're going to really struggle in here" (R11).

However, what was also interesting about this focus group was that R11 asked the moderator (who had participated in the first SD and was the example-giver in that dialogue) what he thought of SD, and one of his comments about the process concerned the fact that at time he felt quite uncomfortable in the example-giver's role, which led him to question whether he really was as open a person as he thought that he was:

I'm very happy to, you know, speak about things, and I think I'm quite an open-minded person, and actually, I think some people would discover either they're *more* so than they thought or they're *less* so than they thought, *while it's taking place*. So I think it's quite a journey that you can't quite — 'cause I mean, I went through one as well. I mean a few weeks ago I, I did one, and, er, mine was the one that was picked. And I remember thinking, oh, I'm quite kind of — and mine was quite — I mean, compared to some of the others [i.e., personal examples from the other participants] that we've dealt with, the subject matter was quite light-hearted really. And erm yeah, I found myself getting quite defensive, over something which I thought was — you know, I was quite happy to talk about it, but, but eventually I felt interrogated to the point that it made *me* start to challenge those sorts of things (R4).

This was not something that R4 brought up during either the content dialogue or the meta-dialogue, but it would certainly have made for a richer dialogue had it been included. As Shipley notes, “keeping emotions out of the picture can be oppressive to participants and impoverishing to the dialogue” (Shipley, in Brune and Krohn, 2005, p.148). In her personal reflections on participating in an SD and being chosen as the example-giver, Anderson (2015, pp.175-177) discusses experiencing feelings similar to those expressed by R4.

Regarding each of the benefits, B1 [RO] was the benefit most widely experienced by the SD participants, and in fact all of the focus group respondents made at least one comment suggesting that they had experienced this benefit. In addition, there were no comments from the respondents which challenged the idea that reviewing their opinions, widening their vision and gaining insight was a benefit of participating in an SD. B6 [ML] was another very strongly experienced benefit, and the majority of respondents saw the SD as being of wider educational benefit, although one of the respondents did struggle to grasp the value of what she had learned during the SD. B5 [RC] and B3 [RE] were experienced positively by almost all of the respondents, but with two respondents finding it difficult to see the value of personal experience as something in which to ground a philosophical discussion, and two respondents

unsure as to whether a genuine consensus had been, or could be, reached. Less than half of the respondents saw the SD as something that would improve their critical thinking skills [B4: *CT*], or fully appreciated the benefits of thinking together [B2: *TT*], although none of the respondents challenged these as benefits. Finally, all but three of the respondents made comments which suggested that what they had experienced might prompt them to do something different as a result of the SD [B7: *TR*], and one of the respondents suggested that he was conflicted on this matter. Therefore it seems that participation in an SD clearly has a number of more immediately apparent benefits (B1, B3, B5, B6 and B7) that participants can clearly recognise upon even quite minimal exposure to the method. From this it may be possible to infer that the remaining benefits (B2 and B4) require additional dialogues to develop, but further research would be needed to establish this. It should be remembered that the focus group respondents were not directly asked about any of the benefits in particular; rather, they were just asked about what they thought the benefits of SD might be. Therefore the fact that some of the benefits (B2 and B4) are not discussed by many of the respondents does not indicate that they are not benefits, just that they were not immediately apparent to all of the respondents at the time of the focus group.

In terms of the negative comments, of which there were very few (six, from a total of sixty-five comments), in many ways these were mostly rooted in a struggle to understand the value of philosophising from personal experience, and a concomitant struggle to grasp the idea that there cannot be an infinite regress of justifications, and that some statements must be regarded as axiomatic (i.e., self-evidently true and requiring no further justification). In one case this struggle was expressed as the idea that “personal experiences can never be agreed upon” (R1) and that dialogues based on personal experiences are likely to be “endless” (R1). Another expression of this idea was “none of it is really supported. It is literally just a bunch of how we feel and emotions. And I think that's probably the downfall to it” (R11). It may be the case that these experiences of SD are lessened by participating in more dialogues, or perhaps by attending dialogues run by more experienced facilitators, but more research would be needed to establish this.

One particularly interesting response from the focus group respondents was made by R10, who said that,

... we just started off with, erm, talking about like personal experiences and stuff, and then look how we've ended up with more of an idea of what justice is, and, it was like quite comfortable. We were comfortable with like, talking about our personal opinions ... we've spoke about stuff and we haven't all necessarily agreed with each other, but we've heard, heard each other's different opinions and taken it in and discussed them, haven't we? (R10)

This was an important comment because it seemed to talk clearly to the current debate about safe spaces in universities (e.g., Dunt, 2015; Palfrey, 2017; Pells, 2017; Weale, 2018). The key word in R10's comment was 'comfortable': different opinions had been discussed, not everyone had agreed with everything that was said, but she had felt comfortable during the dialogue. R10's comment was similar to Anderson's reflections on SD in which she talked about the "quiet, calm, respectful setting of the Socratic Dialogue" and of feeling "trust, calm and ease" in the SD group, even though as the example-giver she had felt "exposed and somewhat vulnerable" (Anderson, 2015, p.177). In a different setting such feelings of being exposed and vulnerable could easily lead to aggression, but the supportive atmosphere of the SD, along with the sense that the group were "pursuing something worthwhile" (Anderson, 2015, p.177) encouraged Anderson to continue with the process. On the subject of safe spaces in universities, Dunt (2015) asks the question "should university be a 'safe space' for all, or a place where anything can be debated?" However, the experiences of R10 and Anderson suggest that the two may not be mutually exclusive as Dunt suggests, and that perhaps an SD can be a safe space *and* a place where anything can be discussed.

5.3 Limitations

There are a number of limitations of this research study, the most serious of which is that the analysis and coding of the focus group transcripts was done by one person working alone. As Bernard *et al.*, (2017, p.146) suggest, “Even on small projects, like those typically associated with MA and PhD theses, you should try to have more than one coder.” This limitation affects the credibility of the findings, and is an example of poor practice when it comes to undertaking qualitative research, but was necessary given the requirements that the dissertation be entirely my own work. In order to produce credible findings it is necessary to have two or more people developing the codes, analysing the qualitative data, and discussing, comparing and refining their findings. By working as part of a team to analyse the data it is more likely that the codes developed will be valid, and it also means that interrater or intercoder reliability can be used as a measure to test the credibility of the findings (Bernard *et al.*, 2017, pp.119-120 and 146).

Other limitations of this research study include the small size of the overall sample (eleven SD participants), the unusually small size of each of the dialogues (only three or four participants in each), the fact that each participant only attended a single, one-day dialogue, and the fact that the SD facilitator was new to SD, had not been trained to facilitate SDs, and had never facilitated any dialogues before. It is clear that the findings would have been more reliable if it had been possible: i) to recruit more participants to the study; ii) for the SD's to have been run with around six participants in each dialogue; iii) for the participants to have attended more than one SD, and; iv) for an experienced SD facilitator to have run the dialogues. This final point is, however, perhaps less clear cut than the others. One of the advantages of my having facilitated the focus groups is that it allowed me to get a much more fully rounded experience of SD, and thus to learn much more about it than would have otherwise been possible. Also, one might argue, that if someone very new to SD can show that the dialogue participants do experience some or many of the suggested benefits of attending an SD, then it is likely to be the case that participants working

with more experienced facilitators will experience those benefits at least as much, if not more.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

There are two main aims of this chapter, which are: i) to state the conclusions of this research project, and; ii) to reflect on Socratic Dialogue, noting areas of interest for further research.

6.1 The benefits of Socratic Dialogue

The purpose of this dissertation has been to explore and understand the Nelson-Heckmann method of Socratic Dialogue, and to this end three research questions were formulated:

- What is a Socratic Dialogue in the Nelson-Heckmann tradition?
- What does the literature say the benefits are of participating in a Socratic Dialogue?
- To what extent do participants in a Socratic Dialogue experience any of the benefits as stated in the literature?

The first two research questions were answered in the literature review, where the process of SD was explained, and where seven possible benefits of participation were outlined. These benefits were:

1. Participation in an SD enables participants to review and revise (and reject) some of their opinions, to widen their vision, and to gain insight into some of their beliefs.
2. Participation in an SD enables participants to experience the advantages of constructively and cooperatively thinking together.
3. Participation in an SD enables participants to recognise the educational value of personal experience.

4. Participation in an SD helps to improve critical thinking, reasoning and arguing skills.
5. Participation in an SD helps participants to learn that a heterogeneous group of people are able to reach a genuine and meaningful consensus about challenging subjects.
6. Participation in an SD challenges and expands participants' model(s) of what learning is, and of how and under what conditions it can take place.
7. Participation in an SD allows participants to strengthen their own values, and to make the world in which they live more ethical, decent and humane.

A participant research project was conducted to answer the third research question, the main conclusion of which was that participants *do* experience many of the benefits of SD that have been claimed for it (B1, B3, B5, B6, B7), although some of the benefits are less immediately obvious to participants (B2, B4) and may require more experienced SD facilitators or attendance at more than one SD, or both, to fully appreciate. While some of the benefits (B3, B5, B6, B7) were challenged by a few of the respondents (R1, R7, R10, R11), the number of comments in support of the benefits of SD (n=91) considerably outweighed the number of comments challenging them (n=9).

This is not to say that SD is not without its problems, but in the case of this project the problems experienced were generally practical, rather than problems with the method itself, although others more experienced with SD have argued for the method to be modified (e.g., Birnbacher, 1999; Shipley, in Brune and Krohn, 2005, pp.140-149). The problems experienced with SD during this project (which are problems likely to face anyone trying to facilitate an SD for the first time) were: i) understanding the method; ii) recruiting participants, and; iii) finding time to run the dialogues. SD is not a simple method to understand, and requires serious engagement with the key texts by Nelson, Heckmann, and others, but it is vital to understand it well in order to facilitate dialogues successfully. It is also vital to attend at least one or two Socratic Dialogues in order to understand the method. Recruiting participants is also difficult, but may perhaps be easier in universities where

students' lecturers are facilitating the dialogues, rather than an outside person who is unknown to the students, which was the case in this research project. Finally, finding time in people's busy schedules may also be difficult, although dialogues do not have to be conducted over whole days, and can be broken up into shorter sessions conducted over a few weeks, but this could be problematic in terms of ensuring that all participants attend every session.

The dialogues which were conducted as part of this project were, as the comments from participants attest, successful and enjoyable, and ultimately what this research project has been able to show is that even with first time SD participants working with an inexperienced SD facilitator, by taking the process seriously and by understanding and adhering to the rules and procedures of SD, participants are able to experience many of the benefits of participation. From this it seems reasonable to conclude that continued exposure to SD and the use of more experienced facilitators will only enhance participants' experiences of the benefits of SD.

Although one might reasonably prefer that this research project had employed a more experienced SD facilitator, one of the advantages of not doing so is that a much greater emphasis was placed on the method (i.e., the rules and procedures of SD) rather than the skill and experience of the facilitator. The fact that our dialogues were successful suggests that, to a large extent, it is the method itself that is responsible for producing the benefits, and that it should therefore be the facilitator's job to understand the method as fully as possible and to ensure that the participants stick with it. It is hoped that this conclusion will give other people the desire to learn about SD and the confidence to try it out for themselves, for as Leal (in Brune and Krohn, 2005, p. 48) explains, "SD is one of the most extraordinary inventions ever devised to share in other people's lives."

6.2 Reflections on Socratic Dialogue

Prior to beginning work on this dissertation I had no knowledge of Nelson's or of Heckmann's work, although I had attended a single, one-day Socratic Dialogue in 2003, which, as I found out during my research, had in fact been conducted according to the Nelson-Heckmann method. During my research I came to hear about other methods of dialogue, including Catherine McCall's *Community of Philosophical Inquiry* (CoPI) (McCall, 2009), and David Bohm's *Bohmian Dialogue* (Bohm, 1996). Unfortunately it has not been possible to say more about these other methods, or to compare them with the Nelson-Heckmann method, which would have been very interesting.

Regarding the implementation of SD, it is fairly obvious that any pedagogical method that takes many hours to complete, requires continual attendance by all the participants, and can only be conducted in small groups, will not become a regular feature of university teaching, no matter how worthwhile or beneficial it is. However progressive the university, and however committed to active methods of teaching and learning it is, in the short term the best that SD can hope for is to be an extra-curricular activity facilitated by a few dedicated members of staff. Ultimately, it seems unlikely that a slow process like SD could become widely adopted within UK HE teaching. But it should be noted that just as there are movements in 'slow food' (e.g., Petrini and Padovani, 2006), and 'slow cinema', (e.g., de Luca and Jorge, 2017) there are now calls for 'slow teaching' (e.g., Thom, 2018) and 'slow philosophy' (e.g., Walker, 2016) too; so perhaps there will be a greater place for SD in HE in the future.

Nelson devised the Socratic Method because of a pedagogical concern that he experienced when teaching his philosophy students; in particular, that he was teaching his students about the history of philosophy, but was not teaching them how to philosophise (Nelson, 1949, p.1). In creating his method, it is difficult to imagine that Nelson was not, in some way, responding to Marx's famous criticism that "The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change

it” (Marx, in McLellan, 1977, p.158). Like Marx, Nelson was interested in action as well as theory, and intended his method to have a practical and positive effect on the world:

The SD has the ultimate purpose of allowing for self-transformation, that is, to be able to better understand and to strengthen one’s own values, convictions, and ideals, and on the basis of this process to go out and change one’s own life as well as the conditions of the world in which one lives (family, school, community, work, society in general) in such a way that those conditions can become more ethical, more decent, more humane (Leal, 2013, p.199).

Thus, an SD is neither a morally nor a politically neutral endeavour which improves a particular set of skills in general, allowing them to be applied in whatever way students desire. In this sense it is not like the teaching of rhetoric, for example, which improves students’ abilities to present arguments persuasively, but which can be applied to arguments for any given end, irrespective of the moral worth of that end. For this reason, it might be argued that SD is closely related to those pedagogies variously referred to as the radical, critical, or engaged pedagogies (e.g., Brookfield, 2010; Friere, 2000; Giroux, 2011; hooks, 2010). Alternatively, perhaps SD is less radical and more liberal in character, and thus more allied to the democratic education movement (e.g., Brookfield and Preskill, 2005; Hecht, 2011; Noddings, 2013). Whatever the case, it would be interesting to research the extent to which SD is essentially radical or liberal in character.

One of the most surprising discoveries of this research project was finding that far more of Nelson’s work had been translated into English than was first evident. At the start of this research project, while trying to create a list of the most important literature, I consulted two lists of recommended reading (Saran and Neisser, 2004, p.8; Shipley and Mason, eds., 2004a, pp.229-231), a bibliographic essay (Leal, in Saran and Neisser, 2004, pp.175-180), and twenty-three papers and book chapters on the subject of Socratic Dialogue written in English which contained at least one reference to Nelson (Kessels and Korthagen, 1996; Boele, 1997; Kessels, 1998;

Birnbacher, 1999; Leal, in Shipley and Mason, 2004a, pp.79-95; Kletschko and Siebert, in Shipley and Mason, 2004a, pp.112-127; Toshiro Terada, in Shipley and Mason, 2004a, pp.141-147; Kopfwerk Berlin, in Shipley and Mason, 2004a, pp.148-168; Littig, in Shipley and Mason, 2004a, pp.213-220; Kessels, in Brune and Krohn, 2005, pp.63-87; Kopfwerk Berlin, in Brune and Krohn, 2005, pp.88-111; Mitchell, 2006; Knezic, et al, 2009; Gronke, in Brune, Gronke and Krohn, 2010, pp.43-56; Svare, in Brune, Gronke and Krohn, 2010, pp.63-72; Chesters, in Brune, Gronke and Krohn, 2010, pp.73-96; Raupach-Strey, in Brune, Gronke and Krohn, 2010, pp.191-204; Boers, Kessels and Mostert, in Brune, Gronke and Krohn, 2010, pp.307-320; Avenarius and Lielich-Wolf, in Brune, Gronke and Krohn, 2010, pp.321-332; Leal, 2013; Bennett, Anderson and Sice, 2015; Anderson, 2015; Altorf, 2016). While some authors who wrote in English but were able to read Nelson's work in the original German do reference his complete works (the nine volume, *Gesammelte Schriften*, published between 1970 and 1977), regarding the English translations of Nelson's work, not a single reference exists for anything other than Nelson's 1949 work, *The Socratic Method and Critical Philosophy: Selected Essays*, or to specific essays contained within that volume. However, by the end of this project I had obtained five additional volumes of English translations of Nelson's writings (Nelson, 1928; 1949; 1956; 1970; 1971; 2015). Of course there are obvious reasons that Nelson's 2015 work is not referred to, but the complete lack of reference to any of the remaining four volumes (Nelson, 1928; 1956; 1970; 1971) appears surprising. One explanation could be that these other books are entirely irrelevant to the study of the Socratic Method, but it seems unlikely that a better understanding of Nelson's wider works would not, in some small way at least, enhance understanding of his Socratic Method. Therefore there would appear to be ample scope for English-speaking practitioners of Socratic Dialogue to 'rediscover' a broader picture of Nelson's thought, and to consider how an understanding of his works other than his widely referenced *Socratic Method* lecture of 1922 could improve and develop our understanding of the Socratic Method.

Of pedagogical interest is the fact that because: i) a Socratic Dialogue is primarily a spoken activity (except for the fact that significant statements are written up on a

flipchart), and; ii) it is conducted in a non-technical/non-specialist language, it is perhaps more readily accessible by people with low levels of literacy. This could make it an effective educational intervention to use, for example, in prisons or with the Gypsy and Traveller community. A recent report indicated that over half of the prison population are functionally illiterate (Moss, 2017), and low levels of literacy are often noted in reports about Gypsies and Travellers (e.g., Ryder, 2012; Cromarty, 2017).

Other worthwhile research projects would be to experiment with the method of facilitating SD's in a way that takes seriously Shipley's claim that we need to make emotions central to SD, and that it's "time for Socratics to get excited about emotions" (Shipley, in Brune and Krohn, 2005, p.148). Finally, a very useful research project would be a longitudinal study conducted with a group of participants over, say, a three year period, in order to understand how regular participation in SD's affects the thoughts and abilities of participants. This, especially, would help to address the 'challenge' laid down by Leal when he said that, "*nobody knows exactly what a Socratic Dialogue is*" (in Brune and Krohn, 2005, p.42, emphasis in original).

6.3 Final remarks

The fact that we live together with so many millions of other sentient creatures, both human and non-human, capable of experiencing pleasure and suffering, means that we have certain moral duties or obligations to them that we ought to fulfil. However, the philosopher, Mark Rowlands, reminds us that as well as our moral duty, we also have another kind of duty to fulfil, one that is today much less talked about:

On the one hand, there is a failure to do one's moral duty ... There is, however, another kind of duty ... something that philosophers call epistemic duty. This is the duty to subject one's beliefs to the appropriate amount of critical scrutiny: to examine whether they are warranted by the available evidence and to at least attempt to ascertain whether or not there exists any countervailing evidence.

Today we have scant regard to epistemic duty: so sparingly is it honoured that most people would not even regard it as a duty (and this, itself, is a failure of epistemic duty) (Rowlands, 2008, p.98).

One of the things that Leonard Nelson gave us when he devised his 'extraordinary invention' as Leal calls it, was a method for philosophising from personal experience, and for finding via the method of regressive abstraction those 'obscurely heard' principles informing our judgements. SD is a powerful tool for helping us to examine our beliefs and our shared humanity. It helps us to talk with others about difficult subjects and to find common ground with them, and to fulfil some of our much neglected epistemic duties. In a time of fake news, post-truth, alternative facts, a resurgence of authoritarianism against a global democratic recession (Diamond, 2015), and the various reports (e.g., Casner-Lotto and Barrington, 2006; FYA, 2016; World Economic Forum, 2016) suggesting that graduates are generally deficient in thinking skills, there is an increasingly compelling argument to suggest that Socratic Dialogue is something well worth making time for in our educational institutions and wider communities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1:

Record of supervision sessions

Record of supervision sessions

Meeting 1: 2017-03-17

- The dissertation will be primarily about the methodology - the intervention itself will be of secondary interest/importance.
- Really need to strongly justify the use of RCTs. Why use an RCT instead of a comparative case study? [*JU is persuadable but will need a lot of persuading! Need to make a strong case*].
- Look at the work about case studies by Robert Yin.
- Look at the work on action research by Jean McNiff.
- Consider what size sample is needed for the RCT? How many students will be required. How feasible is this? What is the back-up plan. What happens if not enough students are recruited?

Key Actions:

1. Get Yin, 'Case study research : design and methods, 5th edition.'
 2. Get McNiff, 'Action research: principles and practice, 3rd edition.'
 3. Consider using a comparative case study as a 'retreat position' in case not enough students will take part.
 4. Find out who else is doing small-scale RCTs in education. - the 'Closing the Gap' project looks interesting in terms of this.
-

Meeting 2: 2017-05-11

Discussed refocusing the project. The dissertation will be about the intervention (SD), not about the methodology. The literature review will thus focus on SD, not on RCTs. RCT will be the focus of the methodology/methods section.

Key Actions:

1. Conduct a thorough literature search and get reading.
 2. Write the introduction and literature review for next supervision.
-

Meeting 3: 2017-07-19

Discussed chapters 1 and 2 - introduction and literature review. Main outcomes were:

- Consider the type/field/paradigm to which this study will belong. What kind of educational dissertation is this. Education is a very broad field. The dissertation is unusual in that it is very philosophical, but this is not necessarily a problem.
- Need to understand the relationship between the literature review and the discussion sections of the dissertation. The former will only fully make sense in light of the latter.
- Need to consider related research studies in more detail.

Key Actions:

1. Make a start on the methodology/methods section.
2. Review the available literature for the related research studies section of the literature review.
3. Put together ethics proposal.

Meeting 4: 2017-10-04

Discussed chapter 3 on research methodology and methods. Main outcomes were:

- Reviewed ethics process - ethics approved.
- Lack of reference - methodology/precedent. (reading after design - part of a reflective process).
- A few indented quotes: - Flag it or lose it!
- Ethics section expanded. BERA. Expanded and discursive.
- Reliability, validity, generalisability. Power relations between you are your participants.
- Boundaries - if not say why not. Expand the sampling. Address the potential for a very arty student.

Key Actions:

1. Ensure that research method is properly supported by academic literature.
2. Review use of lengthy quotes. Are they really necessary?
3. The ethics section needs to be more than just a BERA tickbox exercise. Make sure that this is a longer and properly academically supported discussion. Consider the power relationship between the researcher and participants.
4. Start recruiting participants asap.

Meeting 5: 2017-10-19

Discussed re-focusing project due to lack of participants for the RCT. Plan is now to conduct the Socratic Dialogues with fewer participants and to run focus groups afterwards.

Meeting 6: 2018-01-23

Discussed introduction, lit review and methodology/methods section.

- Introduction is fine.
- Lit review is fine.
- Some issues with the methodology/methods section:
 - “This [the methodology section] gets into very complex arguments about methodology, but the method is less clear.”
- Need a section about positioning within the academic conversation.
- Validity, reliability, generalisability.
- Role of the researcher / power relationship between researcher and participants.
- Data analysis - how will the data be analysed?

Key Actions (all to be addressed in chapter 3):

1. Reduce the methodology section by a significant amount!
 2. Add a section about positioning within the academic conversation, validity, reliability, generalisability.
 3. Discuss the role of the researcher - power relationship between researcher and participants.
 4. Make sure the methods section makes clear to readers exactly how to replicate the study.
 5. Explain how the process of data analysis will be undertaken.
- + Need to start the process of data analysis and to write the findings chapter.
-

Meeting 7: 2018-04-17

First draft of dissertation completed. Discussed Findings and Discussion chapter, and Conclusion. Also discussed revised Research Method chapter.

- Generally all okay.
- Findings and discussion all good, but need moving to two separate chapters.

- Conclusion is good, but could be made stronger/firmer. Be more positive - the findings and discussion can support more than the tentative conclusions currently drawn.
- Some suggested revisions (see below):

Key Actions

1. Add more info to table 4 in findings and discussion chapter - explain the codes immediately below the table in order to stop the reader having to flip back and forth between the tables and the code list.
2. Split chapter 4 in to chapters 4 and 4. Sections 4.1 to 4.4 to become chapter 4 'findings'. Sections 4.5 and 4.6 to become chapter 5 'discussion'.
3. SD and safe spaces - is this a new idea? If so, claim it! If not, reference it!
4. In the conclusion consider the extent to which SD can be 'partially used'. Can one do 'a bit' of SD? What is the minimum time needed to do it.
5. How well did that dialogues go? They seemed to have gone very well, so need to say this. Be more positive.
6. Proposal for future research. Consider using the method in schools (sixth forms?). What about prisons too? Due to low literacy requirements, perhaps this would work well with people with low literacy levels.
7. Personal reflection? How about changing the 'Further research' section to 'Further reflections'?

Appendix 2:

Heckmann's notice inviting students to participate in a Socratic Dialogue

Heckmann's notice inviting students to participate in a Socratic Dialogue

From: Heckmann, 1981, pp.3-4

The intention, in this seminar, is not to study a philosophical text. The participants are to cooperate in finding, by discussion and jointly reasoning it out, possible solutions to a philosophical problem. This can be done, for we all possess reasoning faculties. However, it requires unusually tenacious hard work. A seminar of this kind can only be successful if the participants are ready to make that effort.

One precondition of this is continuous and regular attendance. If you are in doubt whether you shall be able to spare the time to come to all the sessions this term, you had better not attend at all, for sporadic attendance will interfere with the work of the group. But regular participation in the discussions is not enough either to produce results; participants will be expected to elaborate in writing on the results of the discourse. Thus, the seminar requires a considerable amount of work to be done by the participants - say, five hours a week.

I am mentioning this in order to make sure, as far as possible, that preconditions for fruitful work in this seminar are met, in order to prevent disappointment, and in order to give prospective participants the information they need to decide whether or not they want to join.

Readiness to make the effort described above, and normal intelligence, are the only qualifications required. A knowledge of philosophical literature or previous training in philosophy is not necessary.

Our first session will be particularly important. In it, all this: the specific way in which the seminar is run, and what is required from the participants, will be discussed in detail. We shall also choose, in this session, the philosophical problem we wish to discuss. Participants may suggest problems to be discussed, and we shall choose the one in which the participants are most interested.

Appendix 3:

Detailed ethical statement

Detailed ethical statement

In order to consider the ethical soundness of this project in detail, it has been evaluated according to the ethical guidelines provided by Hennink *et al.*, (2011, pp.77-78). The six criteria included in the guidelines are: i) informed consent; ii) anonymity; iii) confidentiality; iv) justice; v) beneficence; vi) minimisation of harm.

2.1.1 Informed consent

From an ethical standpoint, informed consent is perhaps the most important part of the recruitment process (guidelines #10 to #13, BERA, 2011, p.5-6; Hennick *et al.*, 2011, pp.66-69; Flick, 2015, pp.54-57). In this project potential participants will be informed about the project via a project website which will outline the purpose of the project, and which will include a participant information statement and FAQs explaining what is being asked of them, and their right to withdraw. The participant information statement will explain how and why data is being collected, and how it will be used, and how and who to complain to if they are dissatisfied with any aspect of the project.

3.1.2 Anonymity

Keeping participants' responses anonymous is a more complex issue as both the Socratic Dialogues and the focus groups will involve a number of participants, therefore it could be the case that although the researcher will not disclose who said what, that participants may do so. In order to counter this problem it will be made clear that both the dialogues and subsequent focus groups will be conducted under the Chatham House Rule, which states that "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed" (Chatham House, 2018). To maintain anonymity in the transcripts respondents will be named simply as R1, R2, etc.

3.1.3 Confidentiality

Hennink *et al.*, (2011, p.71-71) make a distinction between the terms ‘confidentiality’ and ‘anonymity’, terms which they say are often mistakenly used interchangeably. While anonymity refers to the removal of personally identifiable information from the research data which has been collected, confidentiality refers to the processes of data management and archiving (as outlined in BERA’s guidelines #25 to #28 (BERA, 2011, pp.7-8)), and ensuring the non-disclosure of data, especially un-anonymised data. Because the focus groups will be audio recorded, the recordings be kept secure and available only to the researcher via password protected devices. Ultimately the data collected will not be confidential because some quotations may be used to illustrate and explain points, however, any disclosed information will be kept anonymous, thus avoiding any potential future harm to participants when the results of the research are made more widely available.

3.1.4 Justice

In the context of designing a qualitative research project, justice, for Hennink *et al.*, (2011, pp.65-66) means ensuring that the study population are not exploited or deceived, or even coerced (through bribery, for example) or pressured into participating. In the analysis stages of the project, justice means ensuring that the findings are accurately reported and not distorted or sensationalised (Hennink *et al.*, 2011, p.77). When the results of a project can be generalised to a larger population, the issue of justice is particularly important as the findings may apply not only to the people who took part in the project, but to people who never knew about the project and never had the opportunity to take part in it.

This project will be openly advertised to Law students and to the postgraduate research community, and participants to this project will be self-selecting. Unless the project seriously over-recruits, all participants who want to take part in the project will be allowed to do so. In line with BERA’s guidelines #23 and #24 (BERA, 2011, p.7) there are no indications that participants will be in any way harmed or disadvantaged through participation. Neither are there any suggestions that project

participants will be unfairly advantaged by participating. Although it has been stated that there are benefits to taking part in a Socratic Dialogue, the dialogue is not linked to any assessment activities, therefore the benefits that participants may experience are not likely to result in increased performance in any particular item of assessment following the dialogue.

3.1.5 Benefice

Benefice refers to the possible direct and indirect benefits of the research project (Hennink *et al.*, 2011, pp.64-65). Even if a research project does not directly benefit the participants or the wider study population, there should be some wider possible benefits to the research community (in terms of knowledge benefits) or to people in the future who may benefit from taking or avoiding a particular intervention. In this project it is hoped that there will be benefits to both the participants and to the wider research community. As explained in the literature review, participation in a Socratic Dialogue is considered to have a number of benefits, which have already been outlined and explained. Also, as discussed in the introduction, there have been few studies into the effectiveness of Socratic Dialogue, therefore it is expected that this project will be of interest to the wider research community and to practitioners of Socratic Dialogue.

3.1.6 Minimisation of harm

Minimisation of harm means taking all reasonable steps to ensure that participants (and anyone else who could possibly be affected by the research) are not likely to be physically or psychologically harmed either by taking part in the research project, or by publication of the results. There are no reasons to believe that participation in this project will result in any harm arising to the participants. To further minimise the chance of participants being harmed, and to make sure that the participants feel safe, the dialogues will take place at the University on a weekday, within normal office hours, in a room that is part of a well populated area of centrally-located building, and the dialogues will be timetabled so as not to clash with the students' regular lessons. The names of the participants will not be reported, and any quotations used when disseminating the findings will be kept anonymous.

Appendix 4:

Ethical approval document

Student Ethics Form to be completed and approved by dissertation supervisor before collecting empirical data.

Name of student: Robert Farmer

Name of Supervisor: James Underwood

Ethical Principle	Action	Copy attached	Explanatory note if copy not attached	Approved by dissertation supervisor (signature)	Date of approval
<i>Please demonstrate how you will:</i>	<i>Eg. permission letter, consent form, information sheet, executive summary</i>				04/10 17
Communicate the research aims and details to all participants	(1) Participant information statement. (2) Introductory project briefing for participants	Yes		J. Underwood	"
Obtain evidence of their permission	Participant information statement will be signed and dated by participants.	Yes		J. Underwood	"
Inform participants of their right to withdraw	Participant information statement.	Yes		J. Underwood	"
Protect the interests of vulnerable participants	Children and vulnerable adults are not being recruited to this project.	n/a		J. Underwood	"
Minimise disruption and bureaucratic burden on participants	Project sessions are timetabled on days normally set aside for participation in extra-curricular activities.	n/a		J. Underwood	"
Inform participants about the storage and use of data	Participant information statement.	Yes		J. Underwood	"
Share research outcomes with participants	On completion of the project participants will be contacted and research outcomes shared with them.	n/a		J. Underwood	"

Review Date (Where applicable): _____

Appendix 5:

Participant information statement

Participant Information Statement for the Research Project: Investigating and Evaluating Socratic Dialogue

You are invited to participate in the research project identified above which is being conducted by Robert Farmer at the University of Northampton.

1. Why is the research being done?

The purpose of the research is to investigate whether students enjoy and feel that there is any benefit to participating in a Socratic Dialogue.

2. Who can participate in the research?

We are seeking participation from staff and students at the University of Northampton.

3. What would you be asked to do?

If you agree to take part in this research project, you will be asked to participate in: (a) a one day Socratic Dialogue; and (b) a forty-five minute focus group. The dialogue and focus group will be on the same day, and the focus group will be audio recorded.

4. What choice do you have?

Participation in this research project is entirely your choice. You are under no obligation to participate and there are no negative consequences for not participating in this project. If you do choose to participate, you may leave the dialogue or focus group at any time without any adverse consequences. Please note that the focus groups will be audio recorded, so if you decide to participate in part or all of the focus group it will not be possible for you to withdraw your focus group contributions at a later date.

5. How much time will it take?

Participation in the project will take up one day of your time (approx. 9:30am to 4:45pm).

6. What are the risks and benefits of participating?

There are no anticipated risks associated with participating in this research project. However, there are some potential benefits of participation. During the main part of the project you will take part in a Socratic Dialogue on the subject of truth/justice. By focusing in detail on the subject of truth/justice, you may find that it leads to improvements in your academic work. In all of the many published papers on Socratic Dialogue, none have reported that any participants were in any way harmed or disadvantaged as a result of participation, and many have reported that participants benefited from taking part in the process.

7. How will your privacy be protected?

Only the research team will have access to any data which could be used to identify you. No one else will have access to this data. Only anonymised data will be made more widely available. Any data that could be used to identify you will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act. The Socratic Dialogue and focus group will be held under the terms of the Chatham House Rule, which states that "When a meeting, or part thereof, is held under the Chatham House Rule, participants are free to use the information received, but neither the identity nor the affiliation of the speaker(s), nor that of any other participant, may be revealed."

8. How will the information collected be used?

The information collected will be used as part of a postgraduate research project, in papers submitted to academic journals, conference papers, and other academic presentations. Raw data may be made available to other researchers, but only if it has been completely anonymised. Nothing that could be used to identify you will ever be revealed in any publicly available document, presentation or dataset.

9. What do you need to do to participate?

If you have read this information statement and agree to participate in the research, please sign and return one copy of the participant consent form to the researcher.

10. Further information

If you would like further information please contact Robert Farmer via robert.farmer@northampton.ac.uk

11. Complaints about this research

Should you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which the research has been conducted, it may be given directly to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to the project supervisor: James Underwood, Faculty of Education and Humanities, Park Campus Library, Boughton Green Road, Northampton, NN2 7AL.

Thank you for considering this invitation.

Robert Farmer
The University of Northampton

I have read the participant information statement and I agree to take part in the research project entitled Investigating and Evaluating Socratic Dialogue and for my data to be used in the ways specified.

Signed.....Date.....

First Name.....

Last Name.....

Student Number.....

Appendix 6:

Procedures and rules for a Socratic Dialogue

Procedures and Rules for a Socratic Dialogue

From: Saran and Neisser, 2004, pp.171-173

Procedures

The Socratic Dialogue normally uses the following procedures:

- A well-formulated general questions or a statement is set by the facilitator before the discourse commences.
- The first step is to collect examples experienced by participants which are relevant to the given topic.
- The group chooses one example, which will usually become the basis of the analysis and argumentation throughout the dialogue.
- Significant statements made by the participants are written down on a flipchart or board, so that all can have an overview of the discourse.

Rules for participants

There are eight basic rules for participants in the Socratic Dialogue:

- Each participant's contribution is based upon what s/he has experienced, not upon what s/he has read or heard.
- The thinking and questioning is honest. This means that only genuine doubts about what has been said should be expressed.
- It is the responsibility of all participants to express their thoughts as clearly and concisely as possible, so that everyone is able to build on the ideas contributed by others earlier in the dialogue.
- This means everyone listening carefully to all contributions. It also means active participation so that everyone's ideas are woven into the process of cooperative thinking.
- Participants should not concentrate exclusively on their own thoughts. They should make every effort to understand those of other participants and if necessary seek clarification.
- Anyone who has lost sight of the question or of the thread of the discussion should seek the help of others to clarify where the group stands.
- Abstract statements should be grounded in concrete experience in order to illuminate such statements. This is why a real-life example is needed and constant reference is made back to it during the dialogue.
- Inquiry into relevant questions continues as long as participants hold conflicting views or if they have not yet achieved clarity.

Rules for facilitators

- The main task of the facilitator is to assist the joint process of clarification so that any achieved consensus is genuine. Consensus is only achieved when contradictory points of view have been resolved and all arguments and counter-arguments have been fully considered; the facilitator has to ensure this happens.
- The facilitator should not steer the discussion in one particular direction nor take a position in matters of content.
- The facilitator should ensure that the rules of the dialogue are upheld, for instance watch that particular participants do not dominate or constantly interrupt the dialogue, whilst others remain silent.

Criteria for suitable examples

- The example has been derived from one's own particular experiences; hypothetical or 'generalised' examples ('quite often happens to me that...') are not suitable.
- Examples should not be very complicated; simple ones are often best. Where a sequence of events has been presented, it would be best for the group to concentrate on one event.
- The example has to be relevant for the topic of the dialogue and of interest to the other participants. Furthermore, all participants must be able to put themselves into the shoes of the person providing the example.
- The example should deal with an experience that has already come to an end. If the participant is still immersed in the experience it is not suitable. If decisions are still to be taken, there is a risk that group members might be judgemental or spin hypothetical thoughts.
- The participant giving the example has to be willing to present it fully and provide all the relevant factual information so that the other participants are able fully to understand the example and its relevance to the central question.

Appendix 7:

Socratic Dialogues - outline session plan

Socratic Dialogues - Outline Session Plan

9:30 - 9:45 Arrive

- Tea and coffee, etc.

9:45 - 11:00 Socratic Dialogue, First Session

- Welcome and introduction
- Purpose of / aim(s) for the day
- Stating the question and establishing the rules of the dialogue
- Relating the examples and choosing one example

11:00 - 11:15 Break

11:15 - 12:30 Socratic Dialogue, Second Session

- Examining the example in depth
- Regressive abstraction

12:30 - 1:00 Lunch

1:00 - 2:15 Socratic Dialogue, Third Session

- Meta-dialogue
- Regressive abstraction

2:15 - 2:30 Break

2:30 - 3:45 Socratic Dialogue, Fourth Session

- Generalisation and consensus
- Meta-dialogue

3:45 - 4:00 Break

4:00 - 4:45 Focus Group

Appendix 8:

Code list

Code List

B1: Reviewing opinions, widening vision, gaining insight. [RO]

Theme: SD enables participants to review and revise (and occasionally reject) some of their opinions, to widen their vision, and to gain insight into some of their beliefs.

Inclusion criteria: [B1 - General formulation] Respondents report, for example, being able to see unspecified things from different, wider or more varied perspectives, seeing things from others' points of view, becoming more open or broad minded. [B1 - Specific formulation] Alternatively, or in addition, respondents report having changed their view(s) about something stated and specific, seeing or thinking about a subject differently, or gaining insight into something as a result of the dialogue.

B2: Thinking together, communicating cooperatively and team building. [TT]

Theme: SD enables participants to experience the advantages of constructively and cooperatively thinking together, because it is a process in which participants think together, and where different perspectives complement rather than compete in order to reveal complexities and nuances that could not be appreciated from one perspective alone.

Inclusion criteria: Respondents make a direct, positive and specific reference to thinking or discussing with others. They report, for example, gaining insight into or learning something that wouldn't have happened if they had been thinking alone. As far as is possible, reference to thinking with others must be clear and unambiguous - e.g., 'I wouldn't have thought about this if I was just thinking on my own'.

B3. Recognition of experience. [RE]

Theme: SD enables participants to recognise the educational value of personal experience.

Inclusion criteria: Respondents report, for example, surprise that personal experience can be rich enough to be the raw material for philosophical enquiry. This may be phrased negatively, as expecting the dialogue to be boring and expressing surprise that it wasn't. Respondents may also make reference to recognising in other people's experience things that they have felt or experienced themselves, perhaps in a way that suggests that others

have become less different or alien. Alternatively, respondents may express the idea that SD increases their sense of empathy.

B4. Critical thinking, reasoning, rationality and argumentation. [CT]

Theme: Participation in an SD helps to improve the critical thinking, reasoning and arguing skills of participants, because it requires them to think carefully, to provide reasons for their assertions, and to explain things for themselves.

Inclusion criteria: Respondents may directly refer to critical thinking, or to thinking or explaining themselves (or their thoughts) more clearly, logically or systematically. They may refer to being better able to analyse or articulate their thoughts and ideas.

Alternatively, or in addition, they may refer to SD helping them with arguing, reasoning, reaching conclusions, or other technical terms normally associated with critical thinking.

B5. Reaching consensus. [RC]

Theme: During an SD participants are often surprised to find that a heterogeneous group of people are able to reach a genuine and meaningful consensus about the subject in question.

Inclusion criteria: Respondents report, for example, being able to overcome disagreements of differences of opinion through discussion. They may, perhaps, report reaching agreement after finding that certain differences were merely superficial. Respondents may use the term 'consensus' directly, or may use similar terms such as finding common ground, finding or seeing parallels, or accepting or tolerating others' points of view.

B6. Meta-learning and teaching by not teaching. [ML]

Theme: SD expands and challenges participants' model(s) of what learning is, and of how and under what conditions it can take place.

Inclusion criteria: [B6 - Strong formulation] Respondents directly acknowledge finding educational value in the SD and articulate that they understand the differences between SD and more traditional content-focused forms of teaching. [B6 - Medium formulation] Respondents simply report finding value in the SD as a learning experience, but without a clear suggestion that they have appreciated how it is different from traditional

teaching. [B6 - Weaker formulation] Respondents report having learned something during the dialogue, (using terms such as 'I learned that ...' or 'I came to understand that ...') in a way that constitutes acknowledgement that they have tacitly recognised SD as a worthwhile educational experience.

B7: Transformation: changes in thought lead to changes in action. [TR]

Theme: Participation in an SD may result in changes not only to what the participants think, but ultimately also to what they do. Transformation is at the heart of Nelson's Socratic Dialogue - he intended them to engender changes in the way that people acted in the world based on changes in the way that they thought about the world and its human and non-human inhabitants.

Inclusion criteria: Respondents directly state [B7 - Strong formulation] or make comments that clearly imply or strongly suggest [B7 - Weaker formulation] that they will do something differently as a result of participating in the SD.

Appendix 9:

Evidence from the transcripts

#	Evidence from the transcripts	Focus Group	Participant	Supports or challenges	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4
1	"So everybody is seeing things differently. So for example, before coming to the, to this session, I thought that there is a way to find whether, erm, a statement is true or not. By discussing it with people, I came to learn that no, even if I'm quite convinced with the way I see things, people have different ways, have different reasoning, have different – and, and communication is key. And understanding the difference between the way I see things and the other party, how does he or she see things ... erm, is important."	1	R01	Supports	B1 [RO]	B2 [TT]	B5 [RC]	B7 [TR]
2	"So, I learned ... I learned the bit of, erm, er, how do people think about one thing and the way they see the same topic from very different perspectives."	1	R01	Supports	B1 [RO]	B6 [ML]		
3	"We've raised many, many aspects which I wouldn't have raised if I, I do it alone."	1	R01	Supports	B2 [TT]			
4	"... personal experiences can never been agreed upon, so we will always be agreeing and disagreeing and discussing ... personal, er, personal life issues are very subjective ... and the discussion upon it that happens is quite, um, endless."	1	R01	Challenges	B3 [RE]	B5 [RC]		
5	"... there was a kind of disagreement, but we've approached it in a way that we could, er, reach a consensus by the end. So I learned that even if we disagree upon some things, there is still a way to accept and tolerate the ... the others' point of view."	1	R01	Supports	B5 [RC]	B6 [ML]		
6	"I could see something from a very different perspective that I was struggling on my own for a very long time and then I could understand it from a different perspective, from a very objective perspective because it was not just me thinking subjectively."	1	R02	Supports	B1 [RO]	B2 [TT]		
7	"... we have to think about different topics in different ways and obviously when we're working alone, we're just thinking in one way."	1	R02	Supports	B2 [TT]			
8	"I didn't know how much I knew already in my mind, in my head, until I talked to everybody because I think within the – when we have a dialogue, we are more likely to understand better, even the things that we already know."	1	R02	Supports	B2 [TT]			
9	"So I think for me it was very grounded, in, in my own experience, and then making sense of that experience over time."	1	R02	Supports	B3 [RE]			
10	"I really value personal experiences and the value of personal experiences in someone's way of learning or process of learning in general."	1	R02	Supports	B3 [RE]			
11	"So I think it's a very good way to - see parallels with other people as well, how they have been experiencing a particular thought and what they have to say and if there is a common ground we can find."	1	R02	Supports	B3 [RE]	B5 [RC]		
12	"I think it's a very interesting - way to learn"	1	R02	Supports	B6 [ML]			

#	Evidence from the transcripts	Focus Group	Participant	Supports or challenges	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4
13	"I really enjoyed the last part, when you had the findings of one example and then you're extrapolating that to other bits. That is very interesting because that would verify if the findings are reliable or not, and that is very helpful because you can see whether, contexts, in different contexts, this finding works. And then that, that makes you learn more ... So it may be that findings of one example may or may not be - applicable to others. So I think that is where the learning lies because then you can see, er, whether - we can reach a common understanding or not about a topic."	1	R02	Supports	B6 [ML]			
14	"I think even I will use this methodology in my own classes. I think it's a very effective way of making someone understand the basics of what we're talking about, so I think that will definitely add value."	1	R02	Supports	B7 [TR]			
15	"... this method encourages students to be, er, more aware, to be open minded, discuss themselves and to accept the others' point of view."	1	R03	Supports	B1 [RO]	B5 [RC]		
16	"... for me, this is really a valuable opportunity to know about this method of teaching, which encourage, er - confidence and it create a more open minded student."	1	R03	Supports	B1 [RO]	B6 [ML]		
17	"I'm impressed how the facilitator, er, changed a simple situation into such a philosophical discussion. I'm really impressed."	1	R03	Supports	B3 [RE]			
18	"This method encourages critical thinking skills, that aren't collected in my classroom [i.e., that aren't taught/valued in my country], unfortunately."	1	R03	Supports	B4 [CT]			
19	"... I'm interested in teaching - training and I find this [SD], er, exactly as a training course or workshop in teaching."	1	R03	Supports	B6 [ML]	B7 [TR]		
20	"... there is nothing about Socratic talk in my country, er, but it is really, er, fruitful for me as a teacher of English, how to invest this in my classroom."	1	R03	Supports	B7 [TR]			
21	"I'm happy to know this method of teaching, er, and I'm sure I will apply it at least to the postgraduate students in my class."	1	R03	Supports	B7 [TR]			
22	"... once we - go into employment and once we are practising as lawyers or whatever we are doing, it would also help us to understand the needs of our clients. So it has, sort of like, erm, helped us to, like, look into our employability skills as well."	2	R05	Supports	B1 [RO]	B7 [TR]		
23	"Also it helps, like, to build up your confidence, like, talk to people about your opinion."	2	R05	Supports	B1 [RO]			
24	"Erm, so I think I really found it useful and also the way we all interacted and participated in the discussion. Erm, giving, erm feedback to each other's opinions and discussing the topic was really helpful."	2	R05	Supports	B1 [RO]			
25	"Erm, apart from that, it also helps to analyse stuff."	2	R05	Supports	B4 [CT]			
26	"The wider part, um, I mean, benefit of it would be, I mean - it could, I mean - a person that, well, could help us, like, in our reviews while we're reviewing literature and stuff, as we move on to further in our studies."	2	R05	Supports	B6 [ML]			

#	Evidence from the transcripts	Focus Group	Participant	Supports or challenges	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4
27	"It's good to know the opinions of others and basically, you know - to - put your own views forward."	2	R06	Supports	B1 [RO]			
28	"You know, a single version of justice cannot be - applied on all, you know, the cultures, different cultures, different societies. So it was good to know what other people's views are on this. Ah, there was some, difference of opinions on this issue and we had a long discussion about it."	2	R06	Supports	B1 [RO]			
29	"I just thought it's going to be a, you know, a - boring, long day, er, probably not going to get much out of it, just going to sit there, quiet, all day, wait, waiting for it to end, but it was not like that. It was quite good"	2	R06	Supports	B3 [RE]			
30	"It's really helpful in like in small groups, to like discuss general matters that can actually help each other to, like, develop our knowledge and different beliefs."	2	R07	Supports	B1 [RO]	B6 [ML]		
31	"I've got my definition of justice. It helps me to get the feedback to see if, I, in something I do believe may be wrong, but as human beings, we all have our certain beliefs and really certain in ourselves."	2	R07	Supports	B1 [RO]			
32	"I will apply it maybe, in a way, when I have to discuss it again with someone and I know that maybe because of their diversity or maybe because of their background or because of their ways of doing things, I will be able to understand them - the way they apply - the justice."	2	R07	Supports	B1 [RO]	B5 [RC]	B7 [TR]	
33	"... it makes us understand other people's points of view and being able to discuss them in a group, without biting our necks off. So discussing it in a civil way, where we can share our opinions and try to find - what are, what in our opinions are similar, what can we change about them, how can we get to a point where we can get a general agreement between all of us?"	2	R07	Supports	B1 [RO]	B5 [RC]		
34	"Well, in my opinion, I think it was actually very, very good. I was not expecting it to be like this ... To be honest, I was expecting it to be boring, erm, just like, not, people not being able to talk about openly, afraid of what people would think if they said something."	2	R07	Supports	B3 [RE]			
35	"... me and [R8] never normally agree on general matters, but having this kind of discussion helps us to have, in, for and against, er, arguments, helps my for and against arguments to develop, as well as hers. It just helps our knowledge - to increase."	2	R07	Supports	B4 [CT]	B5 [RC]	B6 [ML]	
36	"At the end of the dialogue, I've like thought well we are four different law students. We are all from different backgrounds, different diversities, ethnicities, sexual orientation, and beliefs, and we actually managed to have a, a talk about justice in a different format."	2	R07	Supports	B5 [RC]			
37	"Yes, well if I have to answer the question, have I learned anything, I would say yes. I will apply to my life and studies? I would answer no."	2	R07	Supports	B6 [ML]			

#	Evidence from the transcripts	Focus Group	Participant	Supports or challenges	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4
38	"Yes, well if I have to answer the question, have I learned anything, I would say yes. I will apply to my life and studies? I would answer no."	2	R07	Challenges	B7 [TR]			
39	"... that's what we want, have in Socratic dialogues, to actually help us develop and get in, in the state of mind of helping us reach the purpose of the assessment - to get all the information as possible with the most agreement as possible."	2	R07	Supports	B5 [RC]	B6 [ML]		
40	"I think it's very relevant, considering that we're law students and, erm, we all know what mens rea is, and I think applying this way of thinking to determining someone's mens rea can be very, erm, very useful - erm, because finding someone's intentions - I, let's say that I, er, have graduated and I'm working as a lawyer and I think that what you did is totally unreasonable and unjust, like, and, and, and, unjust, but to them maybe it wasn't. Maybe this will make me, make me see that."	2	R08	Supports	B1 [RO]	B5 [RC]	B7 [TR]	
41	"... isn't this maybe a way you could try to spread the word on - fundamental rights; sitting down, ah, just a group of people from different countries, different beliefs, everything, and just talking about something very simple, erm - something like this, and come to an agreement and maybe try to understand people who are not like you. [pause] Like, as a, as a purpose of, of defeating racism or, or - (R7 "Homophobia") - Homophobia, yeah."	2	R08	Supports	B1 [RO]	B5 [RC]		
42	"Umm, I was in it, honestly, I was in it for the free book for next term ... But - when - we started, it was really good and really enjoyable."	2	R08	Supports	B3 [RE]			
43	"I wish we would do these things in our modules, umm, discuss maybe a case and really, really get to the bottom of the case and what everyone thinks about it - in such. I'd like to use it in my studies - a lot."	2	R08	Supports	B6 [ML]			
44	"Let's say - I mean, we have a group project coming up. Erm, imagine doing this - to - before you start writing your assignment. That would be so, so helpful."	2	R08	Supports	B6 [ML]			
45	"If this would have been a topic that we were supposed to write about, it would have been - amazing."	2	R08	Supports	B6 [ML]			
46	"I don't think that I'll be able to apply this directly to research, except for maybe in terms of with law, criminal law, because you do have to, um, understand what the person was feeling for their mental state. So, and this definitely is almost pure empathy that we did today. So if you can, you know, heighten your sense of empathy and put yourself into other people's shoes, I think that you'll definitely be able to - maybe not apply it in research, unless you're doing a paper on something about criminal law, but, um, I think, in practice, you, this could definitely help you - you know, understand what are the cases you're dealing with and everything."	3	R09	Supports	B1 [RO]	B3 [RE]	B5 [RC]	B7 [TR]

#	Evidence from the transcripts	Focus Group	Participant	Supports or challenges	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4
47	"Ah, first thoughts was that, er, I liked the fact that usually in a university, ah, you don't have, your opinion, means nothing because everything is about, what you've read and what you've researched, and if you want to give your own opinion, it's like, oh, am I going to get done for academic misconduct you know? So I liked the fact that this was the reverse. It's all just your opinion."	3	R09	Supports	B3 [RE]	B6 [ML]		
48	"I think, er, being able to articulate itself is a benefit, because, er, as I said - well, my example was used, so I was able to, er, at least attempt to articulate, er, certain scenarios that I would not have had to try to express before - And, er, yeah, I think er, the, the main thing that would be benefited from this, other than, er, the main point of it, which is insight itself, was the ability to, er, articulate certain situations that I never had to before."	3	R09	Supports	B4 [CT]			
49	"So, personally, 'cause I talked about something that I definitely - I hadn't thought about it in a while and I don't think I've ever spoken about it so in-depth before. So, umm, it, it was definitely good for me to see, retrospectively, all of these, er, different situations and how they played out. And, if I ever did think about it before, erm, there was a chance that I still, I still probably had some emotions connected to it. But now it's just, like, completely - just - looking back on something and, you know, it's, it's closed, it's happened and everything's concluded. And now I can just, kind of, fit the puzzle pieces together a lot easier, you know, of all these characters that I forgot were involved, and, you know, so yeah, I enjoyed it."	3	R09	Supports	B3 [RE]	B4 [CT]		
50	"I think this will, er - my law in context class that I - I think this will complement that class perfectly"	3	R09	Supports	B6 [ML]			
51	"Cause like today, we've spoke about stuff and we haven't all necessarily agreed with each other, but we've heard, heard each other's different opinions and taken it in and discussed them, haven't we? - So that's a benefit."	3	R10	Supports	B1 [RO]			
52	"Cause like today, we've spoke about stuff and we haven't all necessarily agreed with each other, but we've heard, heard each other's different opinions and taken it in and discussed them, haven't we? - So that's a benefit."	3	R10	Challenges	B5 [RC]			
53	"... we've discussed, like, diff-, loads of different things in here. Like, we've talked about religion, we've talked about animals (laughs) and stuff like that."	3	R10	Supports	B1 [RO]			
54	"I think it's good how we discussed in like a small group. So like we just started off with, erm, talking about like personal experiences and stuff, and then look how we've ended up with more of an idea of what justice is, and, it was like quite comfortable. We were comfortable with like, talking about our personal opinions."	3	R10	Supports	B3 [RE]			

#	Evidence from the transcripts	Focus Group	Participant	Supports or challenges	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4
55	"Like before I came in, I didn't, I wouldn't have really thought about there being an - erm, empathy side of it and then an intellectual side of it. So like its definitely - I've definitely learned something new and I've definitely taken away something from it. And I could probably write something about it - like if I had to, or at least it would be a starting point for me to write something about it - maybe."	3	R10	Supports	B1 [RO]	B2 [TT]	B6 [ML]	B7 [TR]
56	"I think, a lot of the, the stuff that we do at the moment is - like heavily based on, like - obviously, case law and stuff like that. Like this book, reference this and that. So it was, it was different and I think it was nice that we just didn't have to rely on that. We could just discuss what we thought and like, what - I don't know how to say it like. Does that make sense? Like it, that we're just discussing - so there's no, like no pressure to have, oh, I know this from this and this, and I got this from that."	3	R10	Supports	B6 [ML]			
57	"But do think, I think there are certainly benefits in the sense of, erm, learning to talk to other people and discuss - what you can see in front of you and actually being comfortable with talking within a group. So I think it will help on a confidence level, certainly."	3	R11	Supports	B1 [RO]	R3 [RE]		
58	"Um, some of the stuff we went a little - erm, quite a lot into depth with in as far as emotions and stuff, which isn't normally my remit at all. Er, so it was quite interesting to see how emotions can play a part in justice."	3	R11	Supports	B1 [RO]	B2 [TT]		
59	"... although it is very interesting and it's very interesting finding out the way people feel and how it makes them react and we decided justice comes with a lot of emotions as well, which I hadn't really thought of before because I'm quite a straight, straight sort of narrow-minded (laughs while saying 'narrow minded') person at the best of times. So I, I learned quite a lot from it, but I just, I don't know how - how you'd - app, apply it to anything. Because a lot of, if, if you go just by law, it's not about emotions."	3	R11	Supports	B1 [RO]	B2 [TT]	B6 [ML]	
60	"I think other benefits you could, erm, say it gets, like you say, people have to want to do it, but if they do, I think it'll get people talking a little bit more about personal experiences."	3	R11	Supports	B3 [RE]			
61	"If you've got people from lots of different backgrounds and lots of examples that maybe I might understand but you mightn't understand and there's cultural differences, erm, then they'll be interesting to discuss 'cause you learn a little bit more about the people that are around you, and try and develop - an understanding of, of other differences."	3	R11	Supports	B5 [RC]			
62	"I don't think I could apply it to research in an educational environment. I wouldn't be able to apply it to an essay, for example. Or, and if I were to do an essay on this - we discussed this a little bit earlier - I mean, the most you could probably do on it is a reflection."	3	R11	Challenges	B6 [ML]			

#	Evidence from the transcripts	Focus Group	Participant	Supports or challenges	Code 1	Code 2	Code 3	Code 4
63	"I'm very used to having to reference where I got things from and I find it very hard to take people's, things seriously though. Not opinions as such, 'cause an opinion's an opinion, but I take it, I find it quite hard to take things seriously when there is no - reference to it. it's like, me telling you, 'Oh, look outside. The sky's - mm, pink.' Well, it's not, but that's an opinion."	3	R11	Challenges	B3 [RE]	B6 [ML]		
64	"I'm just not entirely sure how I feel about it being [pause] used [pause] as - an educational experience, 'cause I just don't think - I mean, if we look at what, we learned quite a lot about the way people - could see things, but we haven't really learned anything that [pause] is [pause] substantive or supported. Does that make sense? It's, none of it is really supported. It is literally just a bunch of how we feel and emotions. And I think that's probably the downfall to it."	3	R11	Challenges	B3 [RE]	B6 [ML]		
65	"I think it'd [i.e. SD] be great as an extra - curricular sort of thing - Like, oh, there's a dialogue on this, come and join in if you fancy it. And I think that'd be really insightful and really good and it'd teach people, lots of different things."	3	R11	Supports	B6 [ML]			