“We made progress”
Progress in dialogue across difference, where the difference remains

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Abstract
What might it mean to make progress in dialogue across difference, even though the dialogue never reaches any consensus? This paper develops a number of criteria for judging what I call ‘collective epistemic progress’ in the face of seemingly irreconcilable differences. Although it might seem plausible to judge collective epistemic progress by the strength of the dialogue community, by how long the conversation is continued, or by how close we have moved towards consensus or the truth, I argue that these fail to provide serviceable epistemic criteria. However, I go on to argue that this does not imply that we must reject the possibility of any epistemic progress in dialogue across difference. The paper demonstrates how we might judge progress using the criteria of reaching mutual understanding, furthering the one distributed process of inquiry or deliberation, reaching inquiry milestones, and by finding procedural consensus.

Introduction
There is something wonderful about participating in an animated dialogue that seems to move forward of its own accord, generating new and better ideas, conceptions and insights. This is the intellectually satisfying experience that we made progress in our dialogue, which I call making ‘collective epistemic progress.’ By ‘progress’ I mean ‘change and improvement’. By ‘epistemic progress’ I mean ‘getting better ideas, judgments, theories, beliefs and understandings’.

My aim in addressing epistemic progress is to understand what it might mean to have a collective change and improvement in our ideas, and thus how we might judge collective epistemic progress. I do not use the term ‘epistemic progress’ as a modernist imperative, nor as the description of an inevitable process, or of the historical development of society or technology. I am not presenting a set of prescriptions for how dialogue should proceed, nor am I arguing that dialogue should attempt to make epistemic progress. Instead I am examining criteria for judging epistemic progress in dialogue that does not aim for consensus.

The epistemic value of dialogue seems to depend on the achievement of collective epistemic progress. Although a dialogue can have social value without making epistemic progress, to have epistemic value it must involve some sort of epistemic improvement. Yet understanding epistemic progress is problematic for dialogue, especially dialogue across difference. How can we say that we made progress, how can there be collective epistemic progress, when our differences persist?

Collective epistemic progress is a significant educational problem, given we encourage educational dialogue in various forms, with epistemic aims such as constructing knowledge, solving problems, making decisions and inquiring. This would include dialogical educational methods stemming from Freire, Habermas, Gadamer, Bakhtin, Vygotsky, Mead, Wenger and the community of practice, Lipman and the community of inquiry, and, of course, democratic education in the Deweyan tradition. In these educational dialogues we do not merely want students to have a satisfying conversation, we want them to make epistemic progress. Yet, to paraphrase Burbules (1993, x), ‘exhorting teachers to engage in various forms of dialogical educational methods, without providing them with a conception of making progress in dialogue, will have the effect of discouraging teachers rather than inspiring them.’ What is the point when they cannot see that their dialogue is making progress?

My attention in this paper is on dialogue across difference, or ‘divergent dialogue’ in Burbules’ words (1993, 110-111), with epistemic aims such as understanding, decision-making, problem-solving, constructing knowledge, deliberation, and making judgements. I use the term
‘inquiry’ in a generic fashion, as Dewey does, to describe these kinds of dialogue and all the epistemic aims they might have. In short, in this paper I am concerned with epistemic or inquiry dialogue.¹

I am also only concerned with what might be called genuine dialogue or the inquiry which occurs when neither teacher nor students know the answers they will arrive at, and thus when they have to follow the inquiry where it leads (Burgh, et al., 2006, 51, 152). A genuine inquiry is “a process of discovery and invention – bringing together different perspectives and building on these differences” rather than “a process of working inexorably and inflexibly towards a predetermined answer” (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, 139).

I am not concerned with what it means for an individual to make progress from dialogue. Although individuals participating in a dialogue are likely to make personal epistemic progress by developing new and original ideas, I am interested in what it means for us to progress together, not how I progress in the presence of others.

Thus, the problem I address in this paper is how to understand collective epistemic progress in epistemic dialogue across difference. I do not discuss the potential impediments to dialogue across difference or how we might strengthen and sustain such dialogue (see Burbules & Rice, 1991, for more), as my only concern is the problem of understanding what ‘we made progress’ might mean in the context of such dialogue.

The problem is illustrated in the following dialogue. Given the dialogue does not result in consensus, it is unclear whether there has been any kind of collective epistemic progress. How can we judge collective epistemic progress in such a dialogue?

Student 1 OK, so what is racism then?
Student 5 I reckon racism is when a racial minority is treated differently.
Student 6 Yeah, but only if we treat someone differently because of their race.
Student 4 That would mean that racism is a type of action.
Student 9 What about only auditioning Maori actors to play the role of the Maori school-teacher? We treat the races differently, but this can’t be racism.
Student 4 Maybe racism is unfairly treating races differently.
Student 2 Another possibility is that racism is about defining people by their race.
Student 3 Are you saying that it’s racism when we talk about someone being good at basketball because they’re African American?
Student 2 Yeah, I think so.
Student 3 I guess that’s a possible definition as well.
Student 8 I reckon we now need to evaluate the suggested definitions.
Students (general agreement)
Student 7 I agree that we could define racism as unfair treatment of a race, but I think it is too narrow. Lots of people think that other races are inferior, and that’s racist even if they don’t do anything about it.
Student 5 I understand what you are saying, but it’s also too narrow to take racism as defining people by their race. Saying someone is Chinese or White can’t be racism. Racism has to be an unfair action.
Student 2 No, I think racism is when we define people by their race, even if no action is taken.

¹ Because epistemic dialogue across difference is central to deliberative democracies, both the problem of collective epistemic progress, and my suggested resolutions are directly relevant to discussion of deliberative democracy, though I will not explore the connections in this paper.
Student 9   This is ridiculous. We’re not getting anywhere. We just can’t agree!

Even though they have not ‘got anywhere’ can they still be said to have made progress? How can a teacher judge whether or not their class has made progress in their dialogue? How can student participants judge whether they have made progress?

My approach to resolve this problem is in the broad tradition of Philosophy of Education where I apply philosophical argumentation and conceptualisation to the practice of dialogue in education. Yet my aim is not to give a disinterested analysis, but to illuminate and enhance educational praxis. As such, Lipman’s term ‘Educational Philosophy’, meaning “philosophy functioning educationally” (2004, 6), is a better description of my method.

I start by considering possible means of judging collective epistemic progress in dialogue, and then argue that they are inadequate in various ways. Although it might seem plausible to measure collective epistemic progress by strengthening the dialogue community, by carrying on the conversation, or by reaching consensus or ideal truth, each of these fails to provide serviceable epistemic criteria.

However, I go on to argue that this does not imply that we must reject the possibility of any epistemic progress in dialogue, as might be thought. Instead we can make collective epistemic progress in the following ways: by reaching mutual understanding; through advancing our distributed inquiry; by traversing epistemic milestones; and by reaching procedural consensus. I will return to the illustrated dialogue throughout this paper to illustrate each of these ways of judging epistemic progress. The contribution of this paper is thus to provide a basis for understanding what it might mean to say ‘we made progress’.

**Some poor criteria for measuring collective epistemic progress**

It might be thought that developing and strengthening a dialogical community is progress enough. However, while this sort of improvement is important educationally and socially, it is not the *epistemic* progress that is necessary to support the epistemic legitimacy of dialogue (Golding, 2009, 228). Even if we improve our dialogical skills, get better at dialogue, or foster communicative practices, without a conception of what it means to get better conceptions, answers, or judgements in dialogue, dialogue is still left as an epistemically pointless chat. In the illustration, participants in the dialogue are already good at taking turns and responding to each other, but this does not indicate collective epistemic progress and the production of better ideas.

Nor is the sort of progress Rorty endorses (1979) sufficient to indicate epistemic progress. If ‘we progress’ means no more than we had an ongoing conversation, or kept the conversation going, then there is no epistemic point, and the dialogue does not make *epistemic* progress. For example, in the illustration, keeping the inquiry going did not necessarily indicate better ideas were being produced.

In addition, collective epistemic progress in dialogue across difference cannot be judged by closeness to the truth. I reject such idealistic conceptions of progress because we do not have the independent access to the truth needed to measure the distance between our collective conception and the true conception. The participants in the illustrated dialogue cannot tell whether they are closer to the truth, so they cannot judge their progress in this way. But nor does this imply that we must pessimistically reject the possibility of any epistemic progress in dialogue. Instead, in the next section, I argue that collective epistemic progress can only be measured by the realistic achievements of dialogue that indicate progress such as making distinctions, giving arguments and constructing positions, which I call ‘inquiry milestones’.

The most likely candidate for a realistic achievement in dialogue that would indicate progress would be reaching some sort of consensus about our conclusions. I call this getting final epistemic consensus, which is similar to ‘that which would be accepted by all people in an ideal speech situation’ (Habermas, 1984), or ‘what the community will agree on in the long run’ (Peirce, 1912). In fact it is often argued that the only way to avoid irreconcilable and
incommensurable difference in dialogue is by getting final consensus (see Burbules & Rice, 1991, who argue that this is a common position taken in the literature on dialogue.)

However, I argue that final epistemic consensus is also a poor standard for judging collective epistemic progress in dialogue (which is not to say that incommensurability is inevitable, or consensus is impossible).

Collective epistemic progress cannot be the criterion for measuring progress in divergent dialogue across difference, because the aim of such dialogue is not consensus but pluralism and multiple possible resolutions and answers. In such dialogue, differences of culture, values, theories, ideas, epistemologies and ontologies are valued and there is no attempt to impose homogeneity over the top of this real diversity. In such dialogue, the aim is for participants to "think for themselves with others", not for them to bring their thinking into "conformity" or agreement (Lipman, 2003, 96). Any measure of collective progress in dialogue across difference must show how there can be collective progress without final epistemic consensus.

Final epistemic consensus is also a poor measure of progress even in ‘convergent dialogue’ (Burbules, 1993, 110-111) that seeks consensus. Final epistemic consensus is rarely achieved in genuine dialogue, if ever, so if this is the measure of collective progress, then we virtually never make collective progress. Final epistemic consensus sets an impossibly and unnecessarily high standard for making collective progress, and should be rejected in favour of a realistic criteria, based on the commonly achieved collective products of dialogue that indicate progress (which I discuss in the next section). Such a criteria would allow us to judge collective progress during a dialogue, when we have yet to reach any final conclusions.

Another flawed interpretation of collective epistemic progress is that the dialogue community as a whole could make progress by the collective consciously having ideas, making judgements and reaching conclusions, even though the individual members disagree. However, I reject this possibility because a community is not aware and does not have the same sort of conscious mental states or conceptions that an individual might have.

The problem with developing a conception of collective epistemic progress in dialogue is thus showing how such progress can be compatible with epistemic disagreement about final conclusions. So, even though the illustrated dialogue does not reach final consensus, is there progress nonetheless? I will discuss four linked criteria for judging collective epistemic progress. We can make collective progress in dialogue, despite disagreement between participants, by 1) reaching mutual understanding; 2) engaging in one distributed process of inquiry or deliberation; 3) reaching inquiry milestones; and 4) procedural consensus.

1) We make progress through dialogue by reaching common understanding

One way to judge collective epistemic progress despite individual disagreement is by the extent to which participants reach mutual understanding. Burbules’ (1991, 1993) identifies this as a third possible result of dialogue apart from consensus or incommensurable difference. This is also akin to Gadamer’s (1990) hermeneutical position that the aim of inquiry should be to foster mutual understanding. We make progress in dialogue as we come to appreciate the views of the other participants, making these mutually intelligible, even if we disagree with them. We make progress in dialogue by translating the different perspectives and creating “a degree of understanding across (unresolved) differences” (Burbules & Rice, 1991, 409).

As Burbules (1993, 128) indicates, there are degrees of common understanding, ranging through: 1) little understanding of difference, but respect for different positions that one does not understand. 2) understanding that there are differences, without coming to a common understanding of these differences; and 3) common understanding of the differences. Each of these indicates collective epistemic progress to some degree. In the illustrated dialogue there is collective epistemic progress as participants come to understand the different possible definitions of racism as well as their various pros and cons. This is progress even though participants do not reach agreement about which is the best definition to adopt.
The development of a shared understanding also allows for the possibility of collective progress by inter-subjectivity. We can make collective progress by developing more and more inclusive perspectives that work for a wider group of participants (even if we cannot ever reach final all-inclusive consensus).

2) We make progress through dialogue by advancing a distributed inquiry

A further way in which there might be collective epistemic progress in a dialogue, even though individual participants do not reach final epistemic consensus, is by moving forward through stages of collective inquiry. As Lipman argues, "each participant contributes to the single thinking process" (2003, 139), and there can be progress by advancing this process of shared cognition.

Epistemic dialogue involves distributed inquiry or a cognitive division of labour where each participant makes only some of the inquiry moves. Lipman illustrates how such collective inquiry is different from personal or private inquiry:

> In a prolonged session of private reflection, an individual will engage in a series of mental acts aimed at penetrating and analysing the matter at hand. Thus one will engage in wondering, questioning, inferring, defining, assuming, supposing, imagining, distinguishing, and so on. In shared cognition (also called "distributive thinking"), the same acts are engaged in, but by different members of the community. One person raises a question, another objects to an underlying assumption, still another offers a counterinstance (2003, 95).

The shared cognition involved in dialogue allows for collective progress because, first, the participants become a dialogical community, a 'we', and then they can make progress by advancing their collective inquiry.

Participants in an epistemic dialogue form a community when they come together for the purpose of collaborative inquiry. Through shared cognition the dialogue group takes on its own identity as an inquiring community which cannot be reducible to the identity of the individual participants (Splitter & Sharp, 1995, 37). Thus the community in a dialogue is formed in a similar way to how a team or band is formed by a group of people 'playing' together. They become members of a community of fellow inquirers rather than a collection of individuals (Glaser, 1998). In this way, 'we' the community emerges (Glaser, 1998, 268). This is one of the reasons why we can refer to *our* ideas, questions, inquiry, conclusions and progress, and why it makes sense for participants in the illustrated dialogue to say such things as: "We came up with several different perspectives about racism" or "We explored the difference between racism as an action and racism as a way of defining people.'

Through shared cognition, epistemic dialogue also involves a single distributed inquiry. We can judge collective epistemic progress, then, by judging progress in the single distributed inquiry, using the something like the generic stages of inquiry in Figure 1.² I do not suggest that all dialogue follows exactly these stages, but I do suggest that we can evaluate the progress in any epistemic dialogue in terms of stages like these, starting with some sort of doubt or problem, and resulting in some sort of resolution.

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² This account of the stages of dialogical inquiry is based on Dewey’s account of inquiry (1933, ch.1 sec. 2). More specifically, it is influenced by adaptations of this inquiry process from Lipman (2003, 101-103); Burgh et al., (2006, 117-119); Cam (2006, 12-28); Golding (2004, 20-21 & 2006), and Gregory (2007).
2. Suggesting
New conceptions that might resolve the problem
Hypothetical resolutions, ideas, conjectures and explanations
Understanding and elaborating suggested resolutions
Explication and interpretation
↓

3. Reasoning and Analysing
Examine the implications and interrelationships of suggested resolutions
Conceptual exploration
↓

4. Testing and Evaluating
Test the suggested resolutions
Do the suggested resolutions work to resolve the problem?
Are the resolutions defensible?
↓

5. Resolving and Concluding
Concluding & implementing
Adopt or use the best resolution

We can judge collective epistemic progress according to how far the distributed inquiry has advanced through the stages of inquiry. For example, one participant might provide a suggestion, then we make collective progress in our distributed inquiry when another participant clarifies this suggestion. Further progress is made when a different participant provides a reason for, and another provides a reason against, accepting the suggestion. Although these is not a smooth linear progression in the illustrated dialogue, by referring to the stages of inquiry, we can judge that participants have progressed through the initiating stage, then they suggested possible answers to their questions which were then elaborated. Finally they have progressed to the evaluation stage. Because the distributed inquiry progresses through these various stages, it is accurate for participants to say that we have made progress in our dialogue (and also likely that individuals make greater personal progress in a distributed inquiry than they could on their own).

Although I present the stages of inquiry in a linear sequence in Figure 1, I am not suggesting that they accurately detail all the complexities and nuances that occur in dialogue, nor am I stipulating how dialogical inquiry should proceed. Instead I suggest that the stages of inquiry are a useful, simplified heuristic for measuring collective epistemic progress. I argue that it is precisely because dialogical inquiry is non-linear, unpredictable and proceeds by what Lipman (referring to William James) calls “flights and perchings” (2003, 88), that the linear sequence of stages of inquiry is so useful. The stages can be used as a reference point to judge what has been accomplished and how far we have advanced our inquiry when our inquiry has no obvious linear development.

The stages of inquiry, if agreed to as a common framework, also provide a scaffold that makes it more likely that there will be progress in dialogical inquiry. Making collective epistemic progress through distributed inquiry requires individual participants to stick to one common line of inquiry rather than going in multiple directions pursuing their own interests and ideas. A shared framework for inquiry makes this distributed inquiry possible. By referencing the stages of inquiry, all participants know where they are in the inquiry, what has been accomplished and what sort of inquiry moves should be made next in order to make further progress. In
other words, the stages of inquiry can be used to orchestrate the moves from various participants in a dialogue into one line of inquiry that makes progress.

3) We make progress through dialogue by reaching inquiry milestones
As the result of participating in distributed inquiry, we can also make collective epistemic progress by reaching inquiry milestones. Each stage in an inquiry process results in its own products such as questions, hypotheses and reasons for and against. These are indicators of progress even when we have not reached agreement about our conclusions. I use the term ‘milestone’ in this context in the project management sense rather than in the road-marker sense. Inquiry milestones indicate a significant stage has been reached in our inquiry process towards the as-yet-unknown resolution, rather than marking the distance to a known destination. Following Lipman, they might also be called “mediating judgements” (2003, 279-281), which I re-phrase as ‘mediating epistemic conclusions’, to distinguish them from final epistemic conclusions. Figure 2 presents a list of philosophical milestones sequenced according to the stages of inquiry.3

Figure 2: Inquiry milestones

Initiating
Isolated, clarified and defined the doubt or problem
Expressed the problem as a question or questions
Organised a sequence of questions as the agenda for inquiry

Suggesting
Offered suggestion, perspective, conjecture or explanation intended to help resolve the problem
Interpreted, clarified and refined a suggestion
Broadened, expanded or built on a suggestion
Used analogies and metaphors to illuminate a suggestion
Gave examples to illustrate the suggestion
Qualified or quantified the suggestion

Reasoning and analysing
Made a meaningful distinction, connection, generalisation, classification, ordering or ranking
Discovered important relationships
Drew a reasonable implication, prediction or consequence from a suggested resolution
Uncovered assumptions and bias behind a suggested resolution
Offered an explanation to account for the suggested resolution
Defined and analysed concepts
Recognised consistency and inconsistency (interpersonally and intrapersonally)

Testing and evaluating
Formulated and applied criteria to evaluate suggested resolution
Evaluated the accuracy and plausibility of assumptions and implications of a suggested resolution

3 This list was originally formulated in a simple form in Golding (2002, 11) and is influenced by similar lists from Lipman (2003, 86), Burgh et al., (2006, 132), and Splitter and Sharp (1995, 129). Gregory (2007) has also produced a similar list of milestones.
One important benefit of using milestones as indicators of epistemic progress is that they are generally less controversial than final conclusions. There may be a great deal of disagreement about which conclusions are epistemically preferable, yet there is generally little disagreement about whether we have formulated a question; made a meaningful distinction or connection; clarified a position; uncovered assumptions and bias behind a position; given a plausible reason, example or evidence to back up or to challenge a position; or introduced doubt where there was previously indefensible certainty. Even though the students in the illustrated dialogue have not reached agreement about their conclusions, they have reached significant milestones and therefore have made epistemic progress:

- A new question was asked: “What is racism then?”
- Suggestions were offered about what racism is: “Racism is when a racial minority is treated differently.”
- Counter-examples were given to challenge this suggestion: “What about only auditioning Maori actors to play the role of the Maori school-teacher? We treat the races differently, but this can’t be racism.”
- One of the original suggestions was refined: “Racism is unfairly treating races differently.”

We can use inquiry milestones to measure collective epistemic progress in four main ways:

**Overlapping consensus about milestones:** We can measure collective epistemic progress in dialogue by the getting epistemic consensus about which milestones have been reached in the distributed inquiry (which is far easier to achieve than final epistemic consensus). We make progress by gaining agreement, or finding points of similarity or overlapping consensus, about the milestones that have been achieved in the collective inquiry. We make progress as we agree that, for instance, such and such conceptions are the live options for resolving a problem, or that a particular argument provides the most important reason against a suggestion.

**Individual milestones as a collective achievement:** We can also measure collective progress in dialogue by the milestones achieved by individual participants, such as asking a question, making a distinction, or suggesting a resolution. Every milestone reached by an individual in a dialogue is also a collective achievement, because reaching this milestone was the result of communal effort. In this respect, the distributed inquiry in an epistemic dialogue is like
mountain climbing. Although in one sense it is individual mountaineers who conquer mountains, it is equally a team conquest as those who get to the top could only do so because others stay below at base camp and provide support. To use a different metaphor, the dialogue as a whole can be said to progress whenever one of the participants achieves an inquiry milestone in the same way that Science makes progress through the achievements of individual scientists. Thus in the illustrated dialogue, participants can legitimately say “we made progress by coming up with a counter-example to the definition of racism” even if they refer to something another participant said.

Collection of milestones: Because each milestone reached by an individual in a dialogue counts as collective progress, we can also measure progress in dialogue by the growing collection of all the milestones reached by individuals. This is similar to how Science makes progress through the collected achievements of all scientists. This means that participants in the illustrated dialogue could legitimately claim that “we made progress by coming up with a range of views about racism.”

The implication is that the collective progress of a dialogue goes beyond the progress of any one participant, because no one person grasps the total collection of inquiry milestones produced. We make collective epistemic progress by creating an intellectual map made up of the milestones of each of the participants in the dialogue, such as problems, distinctions and possible positions. Each individual makes progress by developing their fragment of the map, which allows them limited intellectual navigation, but the dialogical community as a whole makes further progress because the collection of these fragments forms a bigger and more detailed map that allows for more extensive intellectual navigation.

This sort of collective progress is compatible with epistemic disagreement, just as Science makes progress despite disagreement amongst the legitimate findings of scientists. We make progress by producing an intellectual map made up of the conceptions developed by all participants, but there will be areas of the map that are not seamless, which include problematic areas where individuals disagree, and which become the stimulus for future progress.

Distributed or tacit milestones: More controversially, this view of collective progress seems to imply that the collective progress made in a dialogue can go beyond the collection of milestones reached by individual participants and includes reaching what might be called distributed or tacit milestones which no participant consciously holds. These milestones are tacitly implied by the collection of individually held conceptions, or a significant proportion of the participants in the dialogical community would agree to them, even though no participant has yet articulated them. In other words, the milestones are distributed across the dialogical community without being possessed by any individual. Using the map metaphor again, the whole map is greater than the collection of individually held fragments, because, when the fragments are put together they suggest new topographical details. So in the illustrated dialogue, participants would be justified in claiming as progress such things as, “we seem to be saying that actions are different than mere definitions.” Even though this milestone is unarticulated in the dialogue, it was tacitly implied by what was said.

4) We make progress through dialogue by reaching procedural consensus

Even if there is epistemic disagreement about the conclusions of a dialogue, we can make collective epistemic progress by reaching agreement about how to proceed in the inquiry in the face of the disagreement. This might be called consensus about epistemic procedures, or procedural consensus to distinguish it from final epistemic consensus about our conclusions.

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4 See Hager (2008, 5) and Saloman & Perkins (1998, 4), for a similar discussion of distributed knowledge, in particular know-how.
We reach procedural consensus when we agree, for example, that it is epistemically best to pursue this course, to use this as a working definition, or that we next should ask this question. In the illustrated dialogue, the participants make epistemic progress when they agree that evaluating the definitions of racism is the best course of action at this point in their dialogue.

Reaching procedural consensus is one way of making collective epistemic progress, but it is also an important pre-condition for other types of collective progress. For example, there could not be distributed inquiry without some agreement about how the collective inquiry should proceed.

Conclusion

It might be assumed that epistemic dialogue either reaches final epistemic consensus, or there is only incommensurable difference with no possibility of collective progress. This seems to force us to take an overly idealistic and potentially dominating position (that everyone should agree), or an overly pessimistic and potentially hopeless position (epistemic difference is incommensurable). Burbules and Rice (1991) offer a third option of reaching mutual understanding, but this is not yet enough to capture everything about what we mean when we say ‘we made progress’. In this paper I have extended the options further. I have described and illustrated several ways that we could make and judge collective epistemic progress without requiring final epistemic consensus. ‘We make progress’ could mean one or more of the following:

- We have come to a mutual understanding
- We are engaged in one inquiry together, and are moving forward through the stages of inquiry
- We agree on the milestones reached by participants in the community
- Through collective effort participants in the dialogical community have reached milestones
- We have accumulated a collection of milestones (some of which are tacit or distributed)
- We have reached agreement on what to do next to advance the inquiry.

Collective progress in dialogue across difference is possible in each of these ways, even when the difference remains, and thus dialogue across difference can be epistemically valuable even if we reject the possibility of complete agreement.

References


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5 Procedural consensus can also be understood in a political rather than an epistemic sense. This only requires agreement about what we will do and does not require agreement that this is, for example, the epistemically best course, definition or question to ask.


