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Philosophical Practice as Didactical Framework for Conferences A Case Study about the 8th Nordic Conference for Philosophical Practice

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Abstract

In this article a didactical framework for conferences is presented, which is based on methodological key-concepts of philosophical practice. This framework is outlined in a more manual-like style and illustrated in terms of a short case study regarding the proceedings of the 8th Nordic Conference for Philosophical Practice, which took place in April 2018 in Oslo, Norway. The case is based on the personal experience of the author, as well as on empirical data gathered in the form of a qualitative questionnaire, that was filled out at the end of the conference by the participants. The article concludes with a discussion about the potentials of philosophical practice beyond the scope of counseling and mere group dialogues.

Keywords: *pedagogical philosophical practice, conference format, experiential learning, dialogue didactics, nordic conference, adult education*

1. Introduction

The Nordic Conference for Philosophical Practice represents the most important venue for the philosophical practitioners in the Nordic countries. It takes place annually, each year in another Nordic country, with people from Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Norway attending and presenting there. In 2018 the conference went into its eighth round, taking place in Oslo/Norway. It was organized by the Norwegian Society for Philosophical Practice of which I happen to be the vice-chairman. As such, I had the honor to be entrusted with the preparation and moderation of the conference's program and in this article, I will present and explore the didactical framework that I developed for this 8th Nordic conference.

As the name already indicates, philosophical practice is practice-oriented. Therefore, it seemed natural to me that this conference could and should not be set up like conventional conferences. Traditional conference formats, consisting of keynote speeches, lectures and panel discussions would not meet the respective practice-orientedness vital to the discipline of philosophical practice. To include workshops, poster sessions and round tables might have been a step in the right direction. However, this still would seem insufficient in order to integrate and foster essential aspects of philosophical practice, i.e. performing dialogues, by which participants would contribute more actively to the proceedings of the conference, instead of consuming and listening to lectures and presentations rather passively.

In other words, I was looking for a different and new conference framework. This search was guided by the following question, which also represents the guiding question of this article:

—*How to use philosophical practice as the overall, didactical framework for a conference?*

In order to find answers to this question I will first describe the 8th Nordic conference in terms of a short case study. On the one hand, this case description will focus on the different methodological aspects and the pedagogical foundations of the conference framework that I developed. On the other hand, this case description will also include some empirical data in the form of anonymous, written feedback by the participants. In the next step, I will discuss future potentials of philosophical practice when employed as a conference framework, and finally I will draw respective conclusions. After presenting and discussing the methodological aspects and pedagogical foundations of this conference framework in the form of a case study, it will become apparent that the suggested framework does not only suit philosophical practice events. With some adjustments it can serve almost any conference, and the reader is invited to take inspiration from this framework in order to develop it further for his or her purposes. For this reason, several parts of this paper are written in a more manual-like style.

2. Case description

In this chapter I will describe the 8th Nordic Conference for Philosophical Practice, which took place in Oslo/Norway in April 2018, in the form of a case. This case description will mainly focus on three aspects: the conference framework with its didactic guidelines, the pedagogical foundations behind the framework, and the feedback received from the participants about the conference. The outcomes of this conference, in terms of answers on the conference's guiding question, "What is good philosophical practice?" are not discussed here in particular, since the main focus of this article is on the conference framework as such, as well as on its underlying didactics. Apart from the empirical data in the form of written feedback from the participants, this case description is based on my personal impressions and experiences gathered as the chairman of this conference. The conference took place from the 21st to the 22nd of April in 2018. There was a total of 47 participants, from Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Iceland and Norway. Nearly all were trained and licensed philosophical practitioners. Only a few had no such training, but an education in a related discipline like psychotherapy, pedagogy, etc. Since the main theme of the conference was "What is good philosophical practice?", this was also the guiding question for all the items on the program.

The conference aimed at two objectives in particular: One was to give participants the chance to learn from other philosophical practitioners. Key issues here have been how to facilitate dialogues according to different formats, as well as working with philosophical practice in different professional fields and settings. The other was to give participants the opportunity to contribute actively to the proceedings of the conference. Both objectives were pursued by having only dialogues and case study presentations included in the conference program. Among others, some dialogue formats that have been used at this conference were the Dialogos method (see Hansen Helskog, 2018), so-called Philo Cafés (see i.e. Weiss, 2015: 323f), variations of the Socratic method (see i.e. ibidem: 215f) like a Socratic Keyword Dialogue, a Platonic Dialogue about Dreams, the Saint Benedict's Method (see i.e. Pennington, 1998) and a Socratic World Café (see i.e. Angeltun, 2015). When it comes to the case study presentations, then there have been cases presented about philosophical counseling, philosophical practice in school and education, in clinical ethics, prisons and in the context of art. There were no conventional lectures, keynote speeches and the like. Since all items (that is, dialogues and case study presentations) were focused on the main theme of the conference, there were also certain concrete outcomes at the end of this event in terms of various definitions and ideas with regards to what good philosophical practice is (about). Though it is not uncommon

to have dialogues facilitated, as well as cases presented at conferences on philosophical practice, the overall framework developed for this event was rather new. This was also true because the entire program content was linked up and developed towards one common theme. The main theme made the conference to something like a common quest. As the subchapter on the written feedback will show, such an approach was well received by the participants, and appears to represent a quite potential and fruitful framework for future events, both inside, but also outside the field of philosophical practice.

2.1. Didactic framework

In this subchapter I will outline the 8th Nordic Conference as a case with the main focus on the didactical guidelines of the framework that I developed. Furthermore, I will explain why and how core ideas of philosophical practice are employed in this conference framework. An additional purpose of this subchapter is to highlight these didactical guidelines, so that the reader can make use of this conference framework more easily for his or her own planned events.

Reflect ways of (work) life—examine concrete (work) experiences

Anders Lindseth, a pioneer of philosophical practice, assumes that “the method of Philosophical Practice has to be a dialogical one.” (2015: 47) By using the term ‘method’ he explicitly refers to Plato’s understanding of the Greek term ‘methodos’, which means: a way to reflect and examine one’s way of life (see *ibidem*). And indeed, most of the methodological and didactical formats within the field of philosophical practice do in fact represent ways to reflect and examine people’s ways of life.

In order to stay in line with this common methodological feature, one of the guidelines of the didactical framework of the 8th Nordic Conference was to open up a space in which the conference participants could reflect and examine lived (work) life and everyday (work) experiences (i.e. certain work experiences that one makes as a philosophical practitioner). In this way, it was an aim that the proceedings of the conference should be kept close to real life (i.e. by presenting and examining case studies) so that the participants could more easily relate to the topic under investigation.

Do dialogues—form Communities of Inquiry

Basing the didactical framework of the 8th Nordic Conference on philosophical practice and assuming that “the method of philosophical practice has to be a dialogical one” (*ibidem*) consequentially meant that the different items of the conference program had to be dialogues, or at least dialogue-oriented, instead of standard lectures and presentations. However, how can we define the term dialogue? In order to give an answer in short terms, one differentiation is that a dialogue is not a debate, where the goal would be to win the debate. Nor is it a discussion, where the goal would be to find the best argument. It rather appears that a dialogue represents a common investigation of a topic, a question, a phenomenon etc.—with the emphasis on the word ‘common’. That is, in a dialogue, a group of people is examining a topic together by trying to find different perspectives on it in order to get a deeper understanding of it. Also, many of the features of a dialogue listed here, resemble what Matthew Lipman called a Community of Inquiry (see Lipman, 2003: 84). In such a community, the members do not gain knowledge simply by getting it presented, i.e. by a lecturer, speaker etc. Rather, they are generating knowledge together, often by means of experience-sharing and subsequent (self-)reflection.

The advantage of using a dialogue-oriented approach for the 8th Nordic Conference was that not only dialogue facilitators and presenters of case studies contributed to the conference's outcomes, but the participants did so too. Though by today there is a great variety of dialogue methods within the field of philosophical practice (see i.e. Weiss, 2015), many of them seemed to be suited for the purposes and the subsequent intention of this conference (i.e. Philo Cafés, Socratic dialogues and many other, newer formats) as long as they would offer the possibility to reflect on lived and experienced life. For this reason, the decision was to have only dialogues at the conference, instead of lectures or speeches. First of all because in this way the conference would stay in line with the dialogical approach of philosophical practice (see Lindseth, 2015). Secondly, because in terms of a community of inquiry the participants, with their own professional experience, could more easily get involved in the proceedings of the event. Since the outcomes of this conference were not and could not be defined in advance, due to the dialogical character of the overall didactical framework, the participants got the feeling that they actively contributed to these outcomes. They felt included and being a part of this process. As mentioned previously, it was like being on a common quest together with all the other participants.

Learn from experience—learn from peers

By having different practitioners facilitating dialogues, the participants could experience different dialogue formats and how other practitioners would facilitate them. In other words, participating in these dialogues already represented a form of experiential learning in itself, no matter what particular topic was examined. However, when using this conference framework at other conferences—i.e. at a conference about nursing—the experiential learning in the sense of learning from other practitioners about how they facilitate dialogues might not be given. This is, simply because nurses, may not have a strong interest in learning to facilitate dialogues as such. For them other practical skills might be of more relevance. Therefore, choosing dialogue formats by which one can investigate (work) experiences relevant for the respective target group of a conference (i.e. nurses), seems to be of importance. For example, by today there are many philosophical practitioners in the Nordic countries who work in quite different fields, be it in schools, universities, prisons, hospitals, museums, just to name a few. They employ quite different approaches and formats, depending on the various contexts. Thus, already when designing this conference framework it appeared that having the work experiences of these practitioners shared at a conference was something that would represent a valuable learning resource for other practitioners. In this way, conference participants could find inspiration for their own work from their peers. The question in the preparation phase was however, how to integrate this kind of experience-sharing into the dialogical and overall, didactical framework of the conference?

Since it is quite common within the field of philosophical practice to investigate experiences from lived (work) life, the respective dialogue methods lend themselves to have case studies presented in the course of the different dialogues of the conference. Instead of finding and telling experiences about a certain topic spontaneously (as it is usually the case in a Socratic dialogue, for example) the case studies, that is, the experiences, would be chosen in advance. These case studies—as some sort of in-advance-prepared experience-sharing—could then be further investigated by all participants, just as in any other philosophical dialogue. In a Socratic dialogue for example, a topic, i.e. respect, responsibility etc., is investigated by means of experiences, which are reflected by the dialogue participants. Nevertheless, experience-based dialogical investigations occur not only in Socratic

dialogues, but also in the course of Philo Cafés and other formats. However, in order to integrate case study presentations into the didactical framework of the conference, the different dialogue approaches needed minor adjustments. The main difference to regular philosophical dialogues was that the case studies were already known in advance—at least their titles and their basic content were already announced in the program of the conference. In order to guarantee a smooth progress, dialogues required sufficient preparation and coordination in advance between the dialogue facilitators and the case presenters, as will be described in the following.

Coordinate in advance—inform about the didactical framework

Dialogues in general and philosophical dialogues in particular are often characterized by their spontaneous proceedings. That is, the processes and the developments of such dialogues cannot be predicted in advance, which can also be seen as one of their strengths. With a scheduled timeframe of 1.5 hours for one dialogue at the 8th Nordic Conference, including two case presentations (15 minutes each), the time for the reflection and examination was not long. Therefore, it appeared necessary to invest enough time in the preparations, together with the dialogue facilitators and the case presenters, some weeks before the conference. Most of these preparations were done via group emails, but Skype-sessions and telephone calls were also occasionally made. Since combining certain dialogue formats with case study presentations is quite new (even for philosophical practitioners), a good part of these preparations was about discussing the didactical framework of the conference as presented here. Both dialogue facilitators and case study presenters felt the need to get a better understanding of the overall framework of this event. Particular attention was paid to how the different parts of each dialogue (i.e. introduction, case presentations, common investigation with the group etc.) could be coordinated, so that the dialogues would fit the main framework. Furthermore, an important aspect was to take care and discuss how the dialogue facilitators could practice their respective dialogue formats as freely and unconstrained as possible, while giving the case presenters the opportunity to present their cases adequately. In the beginning of the preparations several dialog facilitators feared that the case study presentations would rather be a hindrance in the course of their dialogue facilitation, while some of the case presenters felt too little room was given for their cases. As the organizer of this conference, my goal was not to “dictate” the facilitators and presenters regarding how they should set up their respective dialogues. Rather I saw it as my responsibility to coordinate their different ideas and suggestions, and take care that what they would come up with would fit the conference format. It turned out that most of my work in this respect was about clarifying the didactical framework. As soon as this was done the facilitators and case presenters had generally no problem to come up with ideas about how to set up their sessions.

Formulate a main question—let all items on the program focus on this question

In order to make ends meet with respect to the different cases being presented and investigated in the different dialogues, that were to be facilitated by means of different formats and often in parallel sessions, having a common topic for the conference formed as a main question proved to be highly valuable. At the 8th Nordic Conference for Philosophical Practice this main question was “What is good Philosophical Practice?” Each dialogue and each case then approached this question in one way or another. At the end of the conference various perspectives on it, and maybe even answers, had been developed in regard to this framework of investigation. In that way a deeper and broader understanding of the main topic was fostered—that is, a better understanding of what good philosophical practice might be (about).

Philosophize about a relevant topic—move between the concrete and the general

It is commonly assumed that the activity of philosophizing is about examining general aspects of the human condition (see i.e. Teichmann & Evans, 1999: 1). Since philosophizing was intended to be the main activity of this conference, its main topic had to deal with such a general aspect. However, not all general features of the human condition were personally or professionally relevant for the participants of this conference. When designing the overall, didactical framework, a concern was whether such a topic would be relevant enough, and whether the participants would be motivated to learn something and to be able to take something with them from the conference. In other words, the respective topic had to be chosen carefully with regards to the given target group—in this case philosophical practitioners. One goal was that the participants at the 8th Nordic Conference should be given the opportunity to learn something as philosophical practitioners—therefore the main topic “good philosophical practice”. The goal was based on the assumption that every participant of the conference had a personal and professional interest to do philosophical practice in the best possible way. The basic notion therefore was that experiencing others practicing, as well as investigating others’ experiences of practice, would turn into a source of inspiration for one’s own practice, and how to improve it.

Already at this point the typically philosophical dialectic between the concrete (experiences) and the general (main topic) comes to the fore. This dialectic “movement” between the concrete and the general represents an integral part in Socratic dialogues after Nelson (see Heckmann, 1981), and today it is assumed by many practitioners that this “movement” represents an essential aspect of the activity of philosophizing in general (see i.e. Weiss, 2015: 215). Having this “movement” integrated into the didactical framework of the conference makes the latter a philosophical framework indeed. However, in order not to limit this dialectic movement to the single dialogues, but to take the results, insights and outcomes (if there were any) from the different dialogues into the whole plenum, certain procedures were required to allow dialogues in also bigger groups (for 50 participants plus, given the number of the whole plenum). The different ways how these challenges were met are discussed in the next paragraph.

Summarize outcomes—investigate them further in plenary sessions

In order to transfer the insights, outcomes and results from the different dialogues into the whole plenum, each dialogue facilitator had to have a kind of sum-up session at a certain point in his or her dialogue. In these sum-up sessions the participants were asked to make statements, what the main topic (that is, good philosophical practice) is (about), based on the respective dialogue and the cases that were investigated in it. These statements and definitions were then written down on flip charts and collected for the plenary sessions.

The sessions in plenum turned out to be of significant importance. On the one hand because they gave participants the chance to hear and see what other participants had been doing in parallel sessions. On the other, because they gave a kind of overview of the current state of the process of the conference. In the following, two formats that have been used in plenary sessions are presented, which have been designed to summarize and highlight the insights and findings of the different dialogues. The first one is what I call “philosophical snapshot poetry” and the second what I call “poster exhibition”.

Philosophical snapshot poetry: At conferences many participants make notes. Unfortunately, these notes are often stored away and never looked at again after the conference. “Philosophical snapshot poetry” is about making use of these notes and letting them contribute to the process of the conference. In the following the different steps of this format is explained: 1. Every participant is invited to pick one sentence or keyword that he or she has written down in one of the dialogues about the topic of the conference (i.e. about “What is good philosophical practice?”). 2. The participants write down this sentence or keyword on Post-its. 3. The participants form small groups of about 6–7 people. Their task is to put together their chosen sentences or keywords, so that it forms a poem-like text. Post-its are quite useful in this respect because they can be pinned together in the form of a row, and their order can easily be rearranged. At the end of this step, each group has their own “poem” consisting of key sentences and words about the main topic of the conference. 4. One in each group is chosen to read the poem to the whole audience in a poem-like manner. This procedure can be quite funny and inspiring, especially when the participants are not so used to writing and reading poems. Another advantage of philosophical snapshot poetry is that these poems are not written by a single person, but together with others, and that all participants can contribute. Furthermore, the poem-like style of these texts facilitate that quite unexpected perspectives on the main topic can come to the fore, as was the case at this conference. Though the duration of the philosophical snapshot poetry session was not much longer than 30 minutes, it yielded quite concrete outcomes in terms of the poems. At the same time, it also produced more general views on the main topic. In this format the previously mentioned dialectic dynamic between the concrete and the general was integrated.

Poster exhibition: This format was designed for the final time slot of the conference. All the charts that were created in the summarizing phase of each dialogue (where definitions of the main topic had been written down, i.e. on “good philosophical practice”) were pinned up on walls in one room. In this way, the concrete ideas on the main topic developed in the dialogue sessions, were visible to all participants. The participants could then photograph them with their mobile phones or cameras if they wished, and take important impressions with them. Calling it “poster exhibition” had the advantage that the participants were “accessing” the conference outcomes in a similar way as they would access the art works of an exhibition. That is, they could see them from a different angle. Since there was a large number of posters, the participants could become aware of all the work and processes that had occurred at this conference—and gave them the feeling that they had been productive. And last but not least, it could make them realize that they created this exhibition all together—it was their common piece of work. Therefore, such an “exhibition” represented a suitable way to summarize and close the conference.

2.2. Pedagogical foundations

Though the overall, didactical framework as used at the 8th Nordic Conference for Philosophical Practice was mainly based on methodologies, formats, and ideas of philosophical practice, further approaches can be identified. These approaches are rather pedagogical in nature, since they foster certain forms of learning. Learning was a central concern at this conference by using this didactical framework, in the sense that participants could get the chance to learn and take something with them that was relevant both personally and professionally.

Experiential learning

The pedagogical approach of experiential learning is probably best known and also summarized by John Dewey's "learning by doing" (see Dewey, 1916: 184). This well-known phrase however is often interpreted in a way that is a reduction of what Dewey actually meant, namely, a learning through reflection on doing (see Felicia, 2011: 1003). Other renowned representatives of experiential learning are, for example, David Kolb, Jean Piaget, or Kurt Lewin (see Kolb, 1984: 21f). The idea of developing skills, attitudes, competences, or knowledge through experience is much older, however. In fact, it can be traced back to several philosophers of Ancient Greece, in particular to Aristotle, who claimed that "the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them." (NE: 2) Aristotle furthermore assumed that the development of phronesis, that is practical wisdom, is a question of experience and "experience is the fruit of years." (NE: 1142a 6-7) In a similar way Plato's and Socrates' understanding of phronesis can be read (see Gallagher, 1992: 198f).

Though not explicitly mentioned in most of the approaches of philosophical practice, experiential learning plays at least an implicit role in many of them, be it: philosophical counseling approaches, which have their starting point in everyday life predicaments (see i.e. Raabe, 2001: 130f or 137f; Lahav, 1995: 16f; Achenbach, 1995: 69; Athanasopoulos, 2015); a Philo Cafè which investigates an issue that is of relevance in our everyday life experience, like happiness (see i.e. Sandu, 2015); or a Socratic dialogue after Leonard Nelson, in which a topic like responsibility or courage is examined by means of sharing and reflecting experiences (see i.e. Angeltun, 2015).

What all these very different approaches about learning from experience have in common is to reflect on experiences (whether ones' own or those of others) in order to improve and to make it better next time, to put it into simple words. And it was this pedagogical idea, which was at the center of the 8th Nordic Conference for Philosophical Practice. The intention was to integrate it into the conference program by having certain dialogue formats facilitated so that the participants (most of them philosophical practitioners themselves) could experience how other practitioners practice such formats (and learn from them), and by having experiences about different philosophical practices reflected in order to learn from them about one's own practice. In this way this conference was based on experiential learning, even though this was not explicitly mentioned at the conference, simply because this did not appear to be necessary and appeared to be obvious.

Peer learning

In simple words, peer learning can be defined as an educational practice in which those who want to attain certain educational goals interact with those who intend to achieve the same goals (that is, peers) (see O'Donnell & King, 1999). In the case of this conference the participants were peers for each other, as it were. They all wanted to get a deeper and better understanding of what good philosophical practice is (about), by having it as their common goal of investigation. They all interacted with each other in the course of the conference (here understood as an educational practice) in order to progress towards that goal. Of course, a conference does not represent a conventional context for peer learning, since the term is often used in connection with learning that takes place among students (see *ibidem*). However, if one understands the term 'peers' in a broader sense, where peers are like-minded people, then one can also say that peer learning was a relevant pedagogical approach at this conference. Philosophical practitioners could learn from other practitioners about their experiences and ways of facilitating dialogues.

Paideia

Pedagogy has its roots in what the Ancient Greeks called *paideia* (that is, self-formation). *Paideia* was the main goal of all Ancient schools of philosophy, as Pierre Hadot pointed out in his famous work “Philosophy as a Way of Life” (Hadot, 2010: 102). In all these schools, philosophy was understood to be a formative and educational practice that focused on life as such—it was a way of life (see *ibidem*). The question now is whether this conference, as well as its overall format, was based on or oriented towards the approach of *paideia*. When taking a first look, the answer would probably be negative. This because the conference as a whole focused on different dialogue methods, as well as on case studies about philosophical practice, and not on personal development processes of individuals. However, if one goes along with Plato’s cave allegory, in which the role of the educator is not the one of a teacher, but the one of a challenger, then this conference was also concerned with *paideia*—at least indirectly (see Lahav, 2016). One can of course put into question whether philosophical practice is an edifying and educational practice at all. However, if one assumes this practice to be in line with the Ancient schools of philosophy, with self-formation as its main goal, then also this conference was oriented towards the idea of *paideia*. Specifically in the sense of learning about various dialogue formats and different contexts in which they can be practiced, in order to inspire and challenge people in their self-formation.

The previous chapters presented the overall, didactical framework of the 8th Nordic Conference for Philosophical Practice, as well as the different ideas, approaches and procedures behind it. The next chapter will take a closer look on what the participants thought of this conference, how they experienced it, and what improvements they suggested.

2.3. Participants’ feedback

At the end of the of the 8th Nordic Conference for Philosophical Practice an anonymized questionnaire was handed out to the participants in order to evaluate the conference in general, and to get feedback on its overall format in particular. Since filling out the questionnaire was voluntary, there were only three questions listed to encourage high response rates. These questions read:

- This was a bit of a different conference format: all in all, did you rather enjoy it or not, and why?
- Could you learn something at this conference about how you could improve your philosophical practice?
- What could be done better (concerning the program, the organization, etc. etc.)?

Responses were collected from 22 of the 47 participants. Unfortunately, several participants who had to leave early due to their travel schedule, did not receive the questionnaire. This provided some practical experience-based learning for the organizers, ensuring that feedback questionnaires will be made available for the participants at an earlier stage when organizing future conferences. However, all responders wrote that they enjoyed this new format, and several of them even “very much”. A total of eight explicitly stated that what they enjoyed was the aspect of practicing and philosophizing together, that is, the interaction fostered by this format. Another explicit feedback was that experiencing philosophical practitioners practicing was better than listening to them lecture on how they would practice, which would be the case in conventional conference presentations.

Out of the 22 responders, 15 stated that they had learned something new due to this didactical framework of this conference. Several of those who did not explicitly write that they had learned something new gave the feedback that they nevertheless felt confirmed in what they were doing as philosophical practitioners. Eight participants had learned new methods and five explicitly wrote that they had received many new ideas for their own practice. There were further learning aspects mentioned in the responses, but since they all were mentioned only once, it would go beyond the given length of this article to list them all here.

When it comes to what could have been done better at this conference, 12 participants wrote down suggestions in their feedback. There was only one aspect, mentioned four times, which concerned not to have more than two case studies presented in one dialogue. There were two dialogues in which three case studies were presented, and that gave not much time for the different phases of these dialogues. Two participants gave the feedback that the dialogue groups should have been smaller, as several dialogues had 16 to 22 participants (except in those which were designed for the whole plenum). There was only one participant who wrote that more theoretical input, i.e. in the form of more keynote speeches, would have been good. Another participant however wrote that the conference could have been even more experimental. One participant suggested not to have parallel sessions, so one could participate in all dialogues, while another one came up with the idea to have shorter, but more sessions. Finally, there was one participant who wished to have explicit dialogues on one-to-one counseling. The latter was investigated by means of case study presentations, but there was no actual practicing of this format at this conference. Apart from these responses concerning areas of improvement, the great majority of the responders were happy with the didactical framework of this conference format as it was.

3. Discussion

As already mentioned previously, the guiding question of this article reads: “How to use philosophical practice as the overall, didactical framework for a conference?” Now, could the different chapters, as presented so far, suggest or indicate answers to this question? In one way they for sure did, in terms of presenting the 8th Nordic Conference for Philosophical Practice as a case study. This case study highlighted how one can arrange and organize the program of a conference in a way so that it only consists of philosophical dialogues, as well as cases and work experiences, which are investigated in them. As such the conference represented a common investigation of the main topic of the conference (which was “What is good philosophical practice”). As it was shown in the feedback from the participants, the generally practice-oriented approach was appreciated by the audience. Also, a high number of participants who filled out and returned the questionnaire stated that they could learn something at this conference (with regards to the main topic). Already here, one can see a significant difference to rather conventional conferences. Community of Inquiry (see Lipman, 2003: 84), method in the way Anders Lindseth described it (see Lindseth, 2015: 47f) or experiential learning (see Kolb, 1984)—just to name a few approaches and concepts which are of relevance in philosophical practice—were not discussed or explicitly reflected upon, but rather put into practice and experienced. A question must be raised whether the didactical framework of this conference as presented here gives too little room for theoretical reflection, as one participant gave feedback on. An idea to deal with this challenge in a dialogical way, so that it still would be in line with this format, would be to have one or two keynote speeches in the beginning of a Philo Café, for

example. In other words, the didactical framework as such would remain flexible enough in order to include and embrace more theory-oriented presentations and reflections.

Another important aspect, which appears to be worthwhile a discussion, is that this didactical framework requires more preparation, and therefore more time in advance, than usual conferences. Coordinating the case presenters with the dialogue facilitators, plays a key role in order to make such a conference like this succeed. Also, “tuning in” all presenters and facilitators into the main topic of the conference appears to be essential. If this challenge is not met, the conference might turn into an event, consisting of separate dialogues not related to each other. In principle this does not necessarily pose a problem and one can of course organize the conference in such a way. However, it might be more difficult to engage the participants and provide them the opportunity to actively contribute to (overall) outcomes of the conference. In other words, the conference would be deprived of its overall “Community of Inquiry”-characteristics.

Finally, the question remains whether this didactical framework of the conference can also be of use for events where the participants are not philosophical practitioners, and where the main topic is not related to philosophical practice. For sure, one would have to make some adjustments, but in principle this should not pose a problem. Several dialogue formats within the field of philosophical practice are quite open towards the topic or issue which is about to be investigated. The case studies would still play a central role, since they would “deliver” the (work) experiences, which are (philosophically) examined, for example at a conference where the topic is “What is good nursing?” And it will be those experiences presented in the form of case studies, which will be at the centre then. Experiencing how a philosophical practitioner is facilitating a dialogue might be interesting for some nurses but it probably would not tell them so much about good nursing. Therefore, the didactical framework for a conference as presented here appears to be suitable for use in other fields of interest too, but several changes and a shift of focus will probably have to be made.

4. Concluding Remarks

The 8th Nordic Conference for Philosophical Practice was for sure a first and successful experiment, where this new conference framework was tested. Without doubt, however, it will require more of these experiments—preferably in different contexts and for different target groups (especially non-philosophical practitioners)—in order to get a deeper understanding of the potentials and the disadvantages of this didactical framework and how to meet them. In this sense this article can only give a preliminary, but promising, answer to the guiding question of this paper, namely, “How to use philosophical practice as the overall, didactical framework for a conference?”

Nevertheless, it is by means of such experiments that the scope and the broader field of application of philosophical practice can be “sounded out”. And if there is one particular insight resulting from this conference experiment, then it is that philosophical practice is by far not only limited to philosophical counseling. Though it was through a counseling approach by which philosophical practice gained a wider recognition internationally, its potentials as a *methodos*—that is, a way of reflection (see Lindseth, 2015: 47)—go far beyond that. And unfolding these potentials—or not—will shape the future developments of this discipline.

Speaking of future developments, and the transcendence of the initial focus on counseling, it is the understanding of philosophical practice as a form of learning that seems to gain momentum with experiments like the 8th Nordic Conference. Of course, what form of learning it represents in particular, like experiential learning, self-formation etc. can be put forward for discussion. Whatever the outcomes of such a discussion will be, the dialogic methodos, that is, the dialogic way of reflection (see *ibidem*) will have to play a central role. Otherwise a core aspect of philosophical practice would get lost. In this sense one can conclude that whatever form of learning philosophical practice might be assumed to be, it is always also a form of dialogical learning. And to explore dialogical learning further appears to be a worthwhile and fruitful endeavor, even if this means to put philosophical practice closer to pedagogy (and andragogy in particular), than to counseling.

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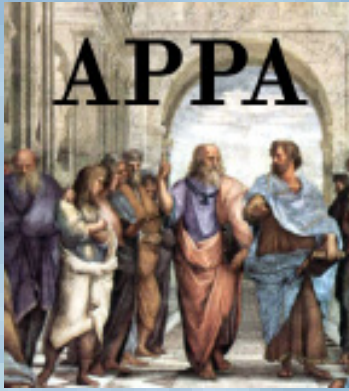
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