

WISDOM AND THE ART OF LIVING IN 8TH GRADE TEACHERS` EXPERIENCES OF PHILOSOPHIZING THE DIALOGOS WAY

LA SABIDURÍA Y EL ARTE DE VIVIR EN OCTAVO CURSO.
EXPERIENCIAS DE LOS MAESTROS DEL PROYECTO
“PHILOSOPHIZING THE DIALOGOS WAY”

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Abstract: This paper discusses teachers` self-reported experiences from participating in a Dialogos philosophizing project over five months, from the perspective of wisdom development. The project involved teachers from 13 upper secondary schools in a municipality in Scandinavia. They were given a course on philosophy and rhetoric over four workshops with five weeks in between. Moreover, they were themselves supposed to facilitate 20 philosophical dialogue sessions with their own 8th grade students during the project. The research methods used were participative observation and analysis of teachers` meta-reflection notes after the last workshop. The paper concludes with that the project did seem to enhance teachers` wisdom. According to the teachers, the students had also become much more reflected due to the project.

Key words: wisdom, Dialogos, philosophical practice, art of living, teacher education

Resumen: Este artículo analiza los informes personales de los maestros que han participado en el proyecto “Dialogos philosophizong”, durante cinco meses, desde la perspectiva del desarrollo de la sabiduría. En el proyecto, participaron profesores de trece escuelas secundarias de un municipio de Escandinavia. Se les impartió un curso sobre filosofía y retórica durante cuatro talleres con cinco semanas de intervalo. Además, se les propuso que ellos facilitasen veinte sesiones con sus estudiantes de octavo curso durante el proyecto. Los métodos de investigación utilizados fueron la observación participativa y el análisis de las notas de meta-reflexión de los docentes. El documento concluye que el proyecto mejoró la sabiduría de los profesores. Según los profesores, los estudiantes se volvieron más reflexivos debido al proyecto

Palabras clave: sabiduría, Dialogos, Filosofía Aplicada, arte de vivir, maestro

Introduction

The art of living a physically, morally and spiritually wise and good life was the core theme of classical philosophy, whether Eastern or Western. The human being was in both traditions understood holistically and as part of a greater whole, whether called nature, cosmos, atman, or the universe. On an individual level, the ancient philosophies were all oriented toward self-formation, self-edification, self-realisation, self-mastery and the like. In a Western context, Pierre Hadot, in his book “Philosophy as a way of life”¹, argues that the schools of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, the Cynics and the Epicureans were practical philosophies aimed at teaching and enhancing wisdom and human flourishing, though each tradition had a slightly different understanding of these concepts. Similarly in an Eastern context Shri Yogendra, in his

¹ HADOT, Pierre: *Philosophy as a Way of Life. Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford, 2010.

book “Facts about Yoga”², argues that no matter what school of yoga, they were all oriented toward human self-edification and thus wisdom. However, neither the classical Western nor the classical Eastern philosophical schools concerned with the art of living wisely seem to have any significant bearing in modern cultures today, other than as fragments. Does it need to be so, or can wisdom from classical philosophies, both Western and Eastern, show us a way seldomly used in our time? We believe so, and in this paper we show how philosophizing *the Dialogos way*³ through an action research project in public education might enhance the wisdom of participants. We do so by describing and discussing a project carried out over five months in the fall and winter of 2018/2019.

The policy context of this action learning- and research project is the ongoing curriculum reform in education in Norway, in which three interdisciplinary themes have entered the national curricula of primary, secondary and upper secondary education. The themes are *sustainable development, public health and life skills, and democracy and citizenship*, all based in §1 of the Norwegian Education Act (in Norwegian called *formålsparagrafen*⁴). This is the background for a direct invitation from the primary- and secondary education department in a middle-sized municipality in Norway that one of the authors of this paper, Guro Hansen Helskog received. She was asked whether she could teach the 8th grade

² YOGENDRA, Shri: *Facts about Yoga*, The Yoga Institute, Mumbai, (2009) [1971].

³ HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

⁴ MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH, Government of Norway: *Education Act, 2007*, available in <https://www.regjeringen.no/en/find-document/dep/KD/legislation/Acts-and-regulations/education-act/id213315/> (last access 4th of March 2019), §1.

teachers a course on philosophy and rhetoric so that they would be properly equipped in order to teach their students in these subjects. The topic philosophy and rhetoric would be part of a larger mainly quantitatively oriented project called *Robust*, which was initiated and lead by the University of Stavanger. The project would imply that half of the 800 students in 8th grade in the municipality would be taught a *life skills programme* one hour a week for 20 weeks, while the other half would function as control groups and be taught *philosophy and rhetorics* one hour a week for 20 weeks. The classes in the municipality would be divided randomly between the two programmes.

The municipality had been looking for a teaching approach and material that “took its point of departure in the paragraph of aims of the Norwegian Educational Act, in the overarching part of the curriculum and in competence objectives in relevant subjects for secondary school” [1]. Helskog had already written a series of books for practicing philosophy in schools called *Dialogos*, partly together with the philosopher Andreas Ribe⁵, which could be used directly in the project. *Dialogos* represents an approach to pedagogical philosophical practice that is characterized by a long-

⁵ See i.e. HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Dialogos: filosofi for ungdomstrinnet: elevbok 8. trinn*, [Dialogos: philosophy for secondary school. Students`s book 8th grade], Fag og kultur, Oslo, 2006a. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Dialogos: filosofi for ungdomstrinnet: lærerveiledning 8. trinn*, [Dialogos: philosophy for secondary school guide for teachers 8th grade], Fag og kultur, Oslo, 2006b. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen and RIBE, Andreas: *Dialogos- praktisk filosofi i skolen: elevbok*, [Dialogos: practical philosophy in school], Fagbokforlaget, Oslo, 2008. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen and RIBE, Andreas: *Dialogos-veiledning for lærere og samtaleledere*, [Dialogos: guide for teachers and dialogue leaders], Fagbokforlaget, Oslo, 2009. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

term oriented philosophical process that has the enhancement of wisdom at its core.

In her theory of wisdom, Eeva Kallio⁶, operates with three levels of thinking on the way towards wisdom: Level 1 is absolutism, to be stuck in one's own viewpoint and unable to take various viewpoints into account. Level 2 is a relativistic multi-perspective attitude: one is now able to understand multiple viewpoints, and becomes much more insecure as to the truth of one's standpoints. In the final level, integrative thinking, one understands multiplicity, but tries to integrate diversity into a united stance⁷. However, our stance is that the last level of thinking, if we are to call it wisdom, is an ideal that implies several interrelated dimensions that all have to be present in order to call a person "wise". As an ideal, it needs to be continuously developed and practiced in concrete situations, which are always unique. Thus, it is like a horizon that is always moving away from us as we seemingly move forward. Hence is never reachable once and for all. As outlined and discussed in "Philosophising the Dialogos Way towards Wisdom in Education"⁸, the six dimensions in the Dialogos map for wisdom-oriented pedagogy- are *the existential-emotional, the relational-communicative, the cultural-historical, the practical-ethical, the critical-analytical* and *the spiritual-ideal* wisdom dimensions. The map has grown out of Helskog's more than two decades of philosophical practice- and practical pedagogical experience in secondary and upper secondary schools, in family relationship education at the Norwegian psychiatric hospital Modum Bad, and

⁶ KALLIO, Eeva (ed.): *Development of Adult Cognition. Perspectives from psychology, education and human resources*. Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2018.

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

in higher education, while also drawing heavily on classical philosophical traditions as well as modern philosophical practices. The different wisdom dimensions - which all are also represented in various philosophical movements - are preliminary defined as follows:

The existential-emotional wisdom dimension implies developing self-knowledge in a broad sense, combined with insight in the universal existential human condition. Moreover, it implies understanding of and the ability to cope with one's emotional life as part of developing our fully fledged humanity. Philosophers who were concerned with this dimension were, for example, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, Arthur Schopenhauer Martin Heidegger or Viktor Frankl, just to name a view.

The relational-communicative wisdom dimension implies developing the ability to engage in profound, meaningful dialogue and heart-to-heart communication with others, with the aim of reaching mutual understanding, and thus to engage in the lives of other people in ways that make others and oneself grow. It is also about developing the ability to connect existentially with others, children and adults alike, while at the same time being able to judge when such connecting is inappropriate, and stay within limits that prevents unwanted intrusion into the life world of the other. Martin Buber, with his book "I and Thou" can be mentioned as a well-known representative of and source of inspiration for this dimension, but also Paul Watzlawick⁹.

The cultural-historical wisdom dimension implies developing the ability to see oneself as having become a "self" in interaction with people and traditions that are all culturally and historically embedded, and thus developing a more distant perspective on oneself and the context one finds oneself in. It also involves the

⁹ See i.e. WATZLAWICK, Paul, BEVALIS, Janet B. & JACKSON, Don D.: *Pragmatics of Human Communication: A Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies and Paradoxes*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, N.Y., 2014.

ability to “read” oneself and others as “text” that is con-text-ualized in history and culture that is particular to that context, but which always has universal aspects. One of the representatives of this dimension would be Michel Foucault, for example.

The critical-analytical wisdom dimension is maybe the dimension that is most systematically practiced in public education as well as in philosophical practices inspired by Oscar Brenifier, Leonard Nelson, and Matthew Lipman and his Philosophy for Children Program (P4C). It involves developing the ability to critique, analyse, conceptualize, compare, synthesize, create abstractions and make arguments. This dimension is deeply rooted in the philosophy of Kant, as well as so-called analytical philosophy with representatives like the early Wittgenstein, Gottlieb Frege or Bertrand Russel.

The next dimension – *the spiritual-ideal wisdom dimension* -- involves developing openness to the dimensions in life that not necessarily can be grasped in analytic language, and which leaves us in awe, wonder and humbleness regarding the limits of what we can know and express explicitly. It also involves the ability to use imagination and create visions and ideals concerning the conditions of living well in a broad sense, necessary for acting in ethically sound ways¹⁰. Inspiration for this dimension is as different as the idea of Bildung first developed by Meister Eckhart and expanded by Hegel and others, the idea of aesthetic education and the art of the ideal developed by Friedrich Schiller. In terms of classical philosophy, Patanjali’s classical text on yoga philosophy, and the

¹⁰ See i.e. HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019. Or: WEISS, Michael Noah: “Learning Practical Wisdom? A Guided Imagery for Philosophical Practice on Self-knowledge”, in AMIR, Lydia (ed.): *New Frontiers in Philosophical Practice*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2017a.

philosophies of Socrates, Plato and Aristoteles, can also be mentioned as inspiration here.

The sixth and last wisdom dimension in this model is *the practical-ethical*, which implies developing the ability to act with sensibility in concrete situations, ideally doing the right thing in the right way at the right time toward the right people for the right purposes¹¹. This dimension is especially rooted in the virtue ethics of Aristotle, while also Patanjali's yoga sutras are relevant. Here, all the other wisdom dimensions come together in concrete action.

Wisdom in the Dialogos model is thus understood as a polydimensional virtue. It embraces one's relations to oneself, others and the world in a broad sense, including the natural environment and other species, and for the religious person, the transcendent Other¹².

The guiding research question of this project

Concretely, philosophising the Dialogos way over time implies that some sessions will typically focus most explicitly on abstract-analytical dimensions, while others will focus most explicitly on existential-emotional dimensions, etc. A Dialogos dialogue process can also be organized by taking one's point of departure in subject matter, crystallizing a focus point that is then related to the personal

¹¹ See i.e. WEISS, Michael Noah: "Philosophical Mindfulness. An Essay about the Art of Philosophizing", in *HASER – International Journal of Philosophical Practice*, Vol. 8., 2017b. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

¹² See HELSKOG, Guro Hansen and RIBE, Andreas: *Dialogos- veiledning for lærere og samtaleledere*, [Dialogos: guide for teachers and dialogue leaders], Fagbokforlaget, Oslo, 2009. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

life of participants. From here, there is a movement between phenomenological indwelling, hermeneutical interpretation and analysis in direction of an abstract synthesis, with consensus as a regulative ideal¹³. Based in this understanding of action research on the one side, and of wisdom and wisdom development on the other side, the question we are discussing in this paper is the following: How did teachers experience their own development and the development of their students due to the project, and to what extent might we say that “wisdom and the art of living” are relevant to this development?

Operationalization of the research question

Since, as we have seen, wisdom and the art of living are complex concepts, it appears to be necessary to operationalize these concepts into a simpler and more practice-oriented term. In this respect *phronesis* - that is, practical wisdom - seems to be an appropriate term. For the ancient philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle there were two central aspects of wisdom: *Sophia* and *phronesis*. *Sophia* represents theoretical wisdom in terms of universal principles and natural laws, while *phronesis*, as practical wisdom, is about the awareness to do the right thing in the given situation with regards to living a good life overall¹⁴. Even though Aristotle assumed that *sophia* was superior to *phronesis*, he also thought that developing *phronesis* was more important since it was mandatory to live a good life (the highest good, according to him). Furthermore, to know what to do in a given situation is also of utmost relevance with regards to the art of living - the one who

¹³ Ibidem.

¹⁴ See i.e. WEISS, Michael Noah: “Philosophical Mindfulness. An Essay about the Art of Philosophizing”, in *HASER – International Journal of Philosophical Practice*, Vol. 8., 2017b.

knows what to do in the given moment, also has an overall idea of how to live life in a good way. In other words, phronesis is about mastering the art of living. Seeing wisdom from this more practical-oriented perspective, it becomes obvious that developing critical-analytical thinking is not sufficient. It takes more than that. And here we come back to the six dimensions in the Dialogos map for wisdom oriented pedagogy, which are the existential-emotional, the relational-communicative, the cultural-historical, the practical-ethical, the critical-analytical and the spiritual-ideal wisdom dimensions¹⁵. We acknowledge the complexity of these dimensions, as well as the complexity of the existing discussion on them and on wisdom in general. For example, we believe that full fledged development towards wisdom ideally requires a balanced development involving all the six dimensions in the Dialogos map for wisdom oriented pedagogy. Nevertheless, we now cut through to an operationalized definition of wisdom and the art of living that we will use in the further course of this article: We assume that development in *one* or *some* of the six dimensions do promote development of the art of living (that is, how to live life well) in general and phronesis in particular (that is, what to do in a given situation, with regards to living life well overall).

Designing the Dialogos project as a cyclic action learning and action research project

The aim of this project was to teach the teachers so that they, in turn, could teach their students, and the project was thus organized in what we can call five action learning rounds. The first round started with a seven hour workshop that would help teachers to get

¹⁵ HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

prepared for facilitating five Dialogos sessions with the students, before coming in for a new workshop. The workshop started with a reflection concerning the teachers' experiences of facilitating dialogues with their 8th-graders, before a new series of exercises and dialogues that would prepare them for additional five sessions with their students, was conducted. The procedure was repeated four times. In the last teacher-workshop the meta-reflection was facilitated as a round of sharing experiences orally, followed by a four hours continuous dialogue process based on the text "Forgiveness, Gratitude and the Art of Holding on to the Good"¹⁶. The teachers were encouraged to facilitate this work in their own classes over a period of 4-5 sessions. In this final workshop, Michael Noah Weiss, the other author of this paper, also took part as a co-facilitator.

The meta-reflections served three purposes: One purpose was that the teachers would have the opportunity to reflect upon the philosophical work they had been doing with their students in the five weeks that had passed by since the last teacher workshop. The other reason was that they through their meta-reflection notes had the opportunity to communicate directly what they had on their minds so that it could be taken into consideration in the next round of planning and implementation in the project. The third purpose was that the reflection notes would be the main empirical material in the research part of the action research project. To hand in the reflection notes was voluntary and based on written consent. The project was reported to and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD).

The pedagogical developmental work was thus designed as a cyclical action learning- and research project. There was a movement from idea, planning, flexible implementation of the plan and reflection over the implementation. Because the teachers as

¹⁶ Ibidem.

well as their students were inexperienced with philosophizing, Helskog found that the best way to train the teachers would be to give them practical experience with exercises which they afterwards could try out with their students again. Hence, she started out with exercises on distinguishing philosophical questions from empirical questions and psychological questions, before moving into exercises with argumentation and reasoning, and reflection upon personal experience.

Starting point situation

Because the project was initiated “top-down” by the municipality, and not “bottom-up” by the teachers and schools, some of the teachers openly expressed that they had not chosen to be part of this project when entering the seminar room on the first day of the project. The teachers had been picked to take part in the Dialogos project because they were all contact teachers in 8th grade. Thus, they were teaching different subjects in the municipality secondary schools. Maths, natural science, Norwegian, English, social studies and “KRLE” (Christianity, Religion, Life views and Ethics) were represented in the repertoire of subjects of the group of teachers.

Therefore, Helskog was surprised when reading the meta-reflection notes after the first full day workshop. All the teachers stated that they had found the first workshop good, both for their own sake and for the sake of their students. This is the most negative comment regarding the outcome:

“Since this is a course that is imposed on us, I came with a rather negative view. The day proved to be interesting. Have learned to pose questions, go into depth, but feel that I have too little experience in such a big topic to be able to create a good dialogue in the classroom”.

These are two more typical comments:

Teacher 1: It has been a good day because I now have a much bigger quiver of exercises that I can use in my own teaching, than I had when I came. I have an increased understanding for philosophy while at the same time looking forward to get started.

Teacher 2: It has been a good day because we have had several engaging and thought-provoking dialogues, many interesting perspectives, many creative and practical lesson examples that can be used both in this project and in other relevant subjects.

Content of the following workshops

The content of the second workshop included reflection upon some basic emotions, reflection upon the characteristics of a dialogue as compared to a debate, and some elements of virtue ethics. The third workshop had a freer form, involving rhetoric (“speech competition”), reflection upon truth, use of criteria and perspectives, as well as contemplation of ethical dilemmas. The final workshop started with a short meditative centering exercise led by Michael Noah Weiss. Further, it took its point of departure in a longer text from Dialogos, showing ways to work philosophically *with* and *from* the text.

How did teachers experience their own development and the development of their students due to the action learning and – research project?

Even if meta-reflection notes were gathered in the beginning of each workshop, for the purpose of this paper we will limit ourselves to look at the experiences of the teachers after 3/4 of the project, which concretely means the meta-reflection notes the teachers wrote at the end of the last workshop. One of our

assumptions is that in order to facilitate philosophical dialogues in a good way, the teachers first needs to have worked on him- or herself. We thus asked:

When you now look back at the workshops and your own process of learning- and self-formation process so far, what is it that still sticks with you, generally?

We wanted to see whether and to which degree the teachers reflected over this premise; that philosophical and dialogical approaches as well as pedagogical philosophical practice require an adult to put oneself, with all one's ideas and views, at stake when engaging in genuine dialogues together with the students.

Two teachers answered that they acquired a broader vocabulary concerning feelings, thoughts and other aspects of human life. Others said that they have learned much about how to talk about difficult topics in the classroom, and that they began to reflect themselves and used topics and examples about how they themselves thought and acted. One answered that he/she discovered that it is hard to philosophize, that it was something unfamiliar and a bit awkward. Others related what we have done in the project to other school subjects: "I feel that I have learned a lot, and that we had – overall – useful interesting sessions. It feels more comfortable now to have philosophical conversations, also in other school subjects."

Some teachers said that they appreciated to go deeper into the topics (in depth learning), and to do so together with colleagues from other schools. One pointed out that he/she "learned a lot about how we as teachers can prepare in order strengthen a philosophical community in the classes we have". Another set him-/herself a goal for the teaching, which the students receive during their 3 years at high school: "Furthermore, I think that one of my/our goals is to make the reflections of the students, which they have over the years

at high school, visible. And the dialogues support that straightforwardly. Moreover, I see the usefulness directly in the sessions with the students. They have aha-moments often.”

Some put emphasis on the linguistic-rhetorical dimension as the most important aspect when philosophizing with the students. Here are two examples: “To be more precise, to go deeper into a term/concept”, and “the value of going deeper into words, problems and situations.” Others emphasize the role of being a so-called “contact teacher” or the relations to the students: “This is my first year as a teacher and in many ways these sessions have made me get to know my students better. Much of this is very relevant regarding the “KRLE”-lessons (A/N: lessons on Christianity, religion, life stance and ethics) and I have used something of this in that context too and integrated it.” One said, “I have now a broader and strengthened set of tools for my work as contact teacher”, and another replied that he/she had become “more comfortable with stepping out of the comfort zone together with the students.”

The second question was formulated as follows:

What will you put forward as the *one* most important concrete experience you as a teacher have made during these weeks?

The purpose of formulating this question in this way was to challenge the teachers to pick out one *concrete* experience. Most of them, however, answered in general terms. As we will see, several indicate that the philosophical dialogues gave them knowledge and skills, which they can take with them into the lessons of their respective subjects.

Only two teachers described concrete experiences. Here is one of them: “We talked about the ability to put words on / express feelings in the class after the smiley-exercise (have drawn it). The students began to discuss differences between gender and the ability to express feelings (“boys don’t cry”) and so on. The

conversation we had based on that, had it that several students came to me afterwards in order to talk about the thoughts they had. Particularly one student (a boy) made a big impression on me when he said “I am not so good in talking about things, but it is a bit as it is with a bun dough that ferments and gets bigger and bigger.” Here is the other one: “The lesson which ended up on the topic of death anxiety and active euthanasia. Specifically challenging and heavy, but important, exciting and informative. In addition, the discussion about the horse vs. the frog was exiting since otherwise passive students engaged quite a lot.”

Among the general descriptions there are some which focus on the students, while others have the focus on the dialogue facilitator. Here are examples of those which are student-oriented and where the teacher is surprised about the students’ contributions: “I am impressed and surprised about how reflected and interested the students are” and “(...) the students are interested and I am surprised about their reflection skills – something which is eventually absent in the subjects as such.”

Furthermore: “The students have asked for these lessons and they have been pretty open concerning sharing their thoughts about the problems posed in these lessons”, and more concrete: “The students are much more efficient in reflecting when they are forced to take a stance and to defend it. They also like that, and this is something I will take with me for my further teaching.” One points out “that the students should sit in a circle / see each other when they have a plenary session” as his/her most important experience. Several expressed being surprised “that some students, who have not been “on track” so much (in other subjects), have contributed positively in these lessons”, and that the most important concrete experiences, which they had, are about incidents where “quiet, shy students have cast off their shield and dared to argue for view points in the group.”

From the meta-reflection notes focusing on the dialogue facilitator, one said that “it is challenging to keep a conversation going”, but another one points out “the importance of posing questions in order to keep a discussion alive. This concerns both philosophy as well as other subjects.” One says that the most important experience was the insight “that I don’t have to prepare ‘like hell’ for such a session, but to be open for the discussion to take its own development.” Another teacher points out “the insight/understanding that seeing things from many perspectives increases in-depth learning,” while another one points out the meetings (with the teacher colleagues) as an important experience in the project: “It is difficult to choose one thing, but it was good to be part of a philosophizing community together with colleagues, as a starting point for the lessons we ourselves had to run in the classes.”

The third question was formulated as follows:

What do you think is the most important learning outcome for your students so far in the project?

Here to a certain degree the teachers answered similarly, but the answers can nevertheless be divided into three categories, where the first is also the one with the most responses:

1. Increased self-insight and insight into others
2. Improved skills (“becoming better at”)
3. Better learning environment

Ad 1. With regards to increased self-insight and insight into others, the following answers are typical: The students have “a better vocabulary when it comes to feelings and thoughts. They have also become aware of the complexity of emotional life and how everything is interconnected”, and “I think it was good that they

heard others' arguments and that this has made them change perspectives now and then." In addition, they thought that it's good to spend time with centering meditations. One writes that he or she "hopes that they see the importance of thinking autonomously, to become aware of one's attitudes, etc.", and another one "that classmates might have other opinions than what one first thought." Another experienced that "some students (...) benefit greatly from this because it offers tools for reflecting on one's own and others' reaction patterns."

Ad 2. When it comes to improved skills, one writes that the students have become "good in listening to each other and in building on each others' statements. They have become better in discussing." Another says that the students still have "many things unresolved, but I appreciate the ability to wonder quite much. To wonder together!" Another one emphasizes that the students have understood that "they think similarly as well as differently about important questions."

Ad 3. When it comes to learning environment one replied that he or she "thinks that they learn more about themselves as well as others, and that this is good with regards to the learning environment too," while another one writes about "improved learning environment and that all dare to participate in conversations in the classroom." A third asserts that the students "have become better acquainted with each other and more open towards sharing personal experiences."

Some teachers have obviously not carried out meta-reflections with the students, and can therefore only have vague assumptions about what the students can take with them, while others point out the unpredictability of dialogues: It is just not possible to tell what sticks with the students. One for example writes that he or she "hopes that they have become better to reflect on something," and another says "hopefully [they still have] reflections and tools to cope with situations in life in a meaningful way." "In spite of that", writes another teacher "all students had thoughts and experiences

which they will, sooner or later, benefit from. They are immature, but they move into the right direction.”

To what extent might we say that “wisdom and the art of living” is relevant to this development?

In the teachers’ responses to the question “What do you think is the most important learning outcome for your students so far in the project?”, three categories have been identified. The first of them, «increased self insight and insight in others», already gives a clue about the developmental process that the teachers and students underwent in this project. They had raised their emotional (self-) awareness, not only in terms of realizing the emotional complexity around the examined topics but also by developing the respective communicational skills in order to put their observed feelings into words. The development of this ability can be called “emotional intelligence”¹⁷. With regards to “the art of living well” (“livsmestring” in Norwegian), this ability appears to be of significant relevance because “people with well-developed emotional skills are also more likely to be content and effective in their lives, mastering the habits of mind that foster their own productivity”¹⁸. Moreover, with respect to emotional self-awareness, also the Socratic “Know thyself” can be brought into account, as a prerequisite for the development of *phronesis* (that is practical wisdom or prudence). According to Aristotle “Anyone can become angry – that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way – this is not easy.”¹⁹ It is *phronesis* that makes

¹⁷ GOLEMAN, Daniel: *Emotional Intelligence*, Bantam Books, Inc., New York, NY, 1995.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 36.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. ix.

the difference here, that is, the awareness to do the right thing in the given situation with regards to living a good life overall²⁰. In other words, what was fostered with the students (and teachers) due to the Dialogos project was emotional intelligence and phronesis. And both of these abilities appear to be of significance with regards to democracy, citizenship and of course the art of living well (livsmestring). Hence in the model of Helskog²¹, *the existential-emotional wisdom dimension* implying developing self-knowledge in a broad sense, combined with insight in the universal existential human condition, seemed to have been enhanced somewhat due to the Dialogos project, both in the teachers and their students. This also implies understanding of and the ability to cope with one's emotional life as part of developing our fully fledged humanity. Other important virtues and skills that were fostered, according to the feedback from the teachers, was learning to listen to and understand each other. This is also reflected in the improved classroom community, which represents the third category of answers on the question. All of these virtues and skills can be called social skills, and it appears to be the dialogical setting as such that supported their development. A dialogue can be understood as a communicative and social setting in the sense of what Matthew Lipman called *community of inquiry*²². As such a dialogue is not a debate or a discussion where the participants compete against each other. On the contrary, a dialogue is an investigative setting, in which the participants examine a question,

²⁰ WEISS, Michael Noah: "Philosophical Mindfulness. An Essay about the Art of Philosophizing", in *HASER – International Journal of Philosophical Practice*, Vol. 8., 2017b, p. 103f. Also: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

²¹ Ibidem.

²² LIPMAN, Matthew: *Thinking in Education*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, 84.

a topic, a phenomenon together – with the emphasize on “together”. There are no wrong perspectives or opinions in a dialogue, because different and even contradicting point of views only contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, what students learn in a dialogical setting is a role model, so to speak, about how to deal with diversity and different opinions in a constructive manner. When it comes to topics like democracy and citizenship this role model, due to its community-building focus, seems to be of significant relevance. Compared to the dimensions of the Dialogos model, it seems that *the relational-communicative wisdom dimension*, which implies developing the ability to engage in profound, meaningful dialogue and heart-to-heart communication with others, with the aim of reaching mutual understanding, was enhanced. It seems that teachers and students had increasingly begun to engage in the lives of each other in ways that fostered growth. This dimension is also about developing the ability to connect existentially with others, children and adults alike, while at the same time being able to judge when such connecting is inappropriate, and stay within limits that prevents unwanted intrusion into the life world of the other. This was touched upon in the project as well, but it is not possible to interpret whether this ability to judge was enhanced.

Several teachers stated that also those students who normally would be rather quiet or unfocused contributed actively in the philosophical dialogues. One can only guess why this was the case, but the setting of a dialogue differs without doubt from those of a debate, a discussion or a conventional lecture. And when the teachers wondered about how capable their students were in terms of reflectiveness then it has to be asked for the potentials of a philosophical dialogue as a “teaching” strategy in general. Such a dialogue invites the students to become active inquirers on the one

hand²³. On the other, it often encompasses personal, concrete experiences about the topic under investigation²⁴. These experiences are told in a story-like form and then examined by the group without judging the person who told it²⁵. This would be different in a debate or a discussion, and even in a conventional lecture were being right or wrong plays a key role. In addition, the story-like experience-sharing makes it easier for the students to get a deeper understanding of the issue at stake. In addition to their competitive character, a discussion or a debate often deals with ideas in a rather abstract way. The same can be the case in a conventional lecture given by the teacher. Research however shows that conveying information by means of telling stories and sharing experiences represents a much more effective way of learning²⁶. As mentioned previously, most of the teachers had no experience in facilitating philosophical dialogues but they first learned it in this Dialogos project. Some stated that it is not easy to start such a dialogic learning and keep it going in the classroom. At the same time however, several teachers also gave the feedback that the preparation of a Dialogos session would not consume as much time as the preparation of a conventional lecture, while the philosophical dialogues as such still offer the opportunity for “in-depth” learning. In times where teachers have to take on evermore tasks, especially administrative ones, the advantage of reducing preparation time – which is for sure as important as the time of actual teaching²⁷ –

²³ See *ibidem*.

²⁴ See i.e. HECKMANN, Gustav: *Das sokratische Gespräch: Erfahrungen in philosophischen Hochschulseminaren*, Schroedel, Hannover, 1981.

²⁵ WEISS, Michael Noah: “With Life as Curriculum: On the Relevance of the Socratic Method in Norwegian Folk High Schools”, in *Journal of the American Philosophical Practitioners Association*, Vol. 12, Nr. 3, 2017c.

²⁶ See i.e. BOWER, Gordon H. & CLARK, Michael C.: “Narrative stories as mediators for serial learning”, in *Psychonomic Science*, Vol. 14, 1969.

²⁷ See BURDEN, Paul & BYRD, David: *Methods for Effective Teaching*, Pearson, New York, NY, 2018.

while still maintaining high educational standards, should not be underestimated. Furthermore, though in the beginning of the project some teachers experienced it as challenge to run a dialogue, many of them could see the benefits of the training they received. Besides the reduction of preparation time, the skill of posing good questions, for example, was seen as an additional value that contributed to the teaching in other subjects too, as some teachers have remarked. Though it is not new that posing good questions is highly relevant in a teacher's practice²⁸, this project shows *how* teachers can improve this skill. Hence, it is possible to say that teachers worked to enhance *the practical-ethical* wisdom dimension, which implies developing the ability to act with sensibility in concrete situations, ideally doing the right thing in the right way at the right time toward the right people for the right purposes, in this context: exercising good dialogical and pedagogical-philosophical practice. Here, all the other wisdom dimensions come together in concrete action²⁹.

One question focused on the teachers' own development both professionally as well as personally. Here, quite diverse answers were sent back to us. On the one end of the spectrum, some teachers again expressed their difficulty with facilitating dialogues. In this respect one must not forget that the majority of the teachers participating in this course had no philosophical or dialogical training from before. This proves that there is a difference between more traditional teaching methods, and the philosophical and dialogical methods promoted through the Dialogos approach. In this respect one has to ask whether and how the skills and attitudes of those teachers who expressed insecurity would have changed, if they would have received further dialogue training and practice.

²⁸ See *ibidem*, p. 133f.

²⁹ HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

However, many of the teachers also stated that they learned a lot due to this Dialogos project, both personally as well as professionally. While some saw the learning outcomes in terms of an extended vocabulary to put existential, emotional and ethical issues into words, others even felt that they have gained the competence to use a dialogical approach in other subjects than philosophy.

Another educational aspect that was appreciated by the teachers was that they could get a deeper understanding of the topics they investigated in the dialogues during their training. This is where *the critical-analytical wisdom dimension* comes in, and this maybe the dimension that is most systematically practiced in public education. It involves developing the ability to critique, analyse, conceptualize, compare, synthesize, create abstractions and make arguments, skills that are also held high in mainstream academic education. However, in the striving to fulfill predefined aims and learning outcomes, it might be reason to suspect that also this wisdom dimension remains underdeveloped, while a more top-down, deductive “copy-didactics” dominates. However, if one wants to facilitate a movement from what Kallio³⁰ calls *an absolutistic level* (being stuck in one’s own viewpoint and unable to take various viewpoints into account) towards a *relativistic multi-perspective level* (being able to understand multiple viewpoints and becoming more insecure as to the truth of one’s standpoints), the critical-analytical dimension is crucial.

All in all, this points not only towards philosophical dialogue practice as a form of “in-depth” learning as well as peer learning³¹, but it more or less confirms what other philosophical practitioners

³⁰ KALLIO, Eeva (ed.): *Development of Adult Cognition. Perspectives from psychology, education and human resources*. Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2018.

³¹ See O’DONNELL, Angela M. & KING, Alison (eds.): *Cognitive perspectives on peer learning*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah, NJ, 1999.

have contested to be among the learning effects of such dialogues, namely: to gain deeper understanding – not only of the topic but also of others and oneself³². An important aspect in this respect was also mentioned by one of the teachers, when he or she stated that the participating students had so-called “aha” moments more often. Some pedagogues also call such moments “golden moments” and according to them they significantly contribute to a person’s self-formation³³. Might such AHA-moments be interpreted as reaching the final level of *integrative thinking*, where one understands multiplicity, but all of a sudden is able to integrate diversity into a united stance, and see connections one has not seen before?

Some of the responses also related to the more rhetorical dimensions of this project. In general terms, several teachers stated that the project helped them to better connect with their students and they also had the impression that they learned respective communication tools, which were important for them as teachers. At this point however, it has to be said that in the feedback from the teachers one could get the impression that their focus and expectation in this project was to learn new skills. This does not come as a surprise. On the one hand because it appears to be a common assumption that in a professional training one learns skills, knowledge and competences in order to improve one’s professional practice. On the other because the teachers did not participate entirely voluntarily – they were signed up for this course. And under such circumstances it should not come as a surprise that several of the teachers were obviously not too enthusiastic about the project in the beginning. Not to mention that their willingness to open up personally was rather low. Under these circumstances it was surprising how much they nevertheless did in

³² STAUDE, Detlef & RUSCHMANN, Eckart (eds.): *Understanding the Other and Oneself*, Cambridge Scholar Publishing, Cambridge, 2018.

³³ OHREM, Sigurd & WEISS, Michael Noah: *Myndig medborgerskap. Dialog og danning i folkehøgskolen*, Folkehøgskoleforbundet, Oslo, 2019, p. 8.

the end. They seemed to have come to understand that in real dialogical encounters engaging personally is the main key. This, and the ability to philosophise heart to heart, is also a key to personal *Bildung* and the enhancement of wisdom in the Dialogos approach³⁴. And even though the focus of many teachers was still on the use of value in terms of learning tools instead of on developing personally, several of them mentioned a progress in their self-formation. However, it would have been interesting whether the situation as well as the outcome would have been different in this respect, if the teachers would have not only participated voluntarily but with a genuine interest in the subject. Moreover, it would have been interesting to see what would have happened if they were given more time for practice as well as for workshop participation. Learning to philosophise dialogically is one thing. Learning to facilitate philosophical dialogues another. Now, how about the last two wisdom dimensions in the Dialogos wisdom model - *the cultural-historical wisdom dimension* and *the spiritual-ideal wisdom dimension*? As we remember, the first implies developing the ability to see oneself as having become a “self” in interaction with people and traditions that are all culturally and historically embedded. Following this, a more distant perspective on oneself and the context one finds oneself in, is developed, involving also the ability to “read” oneself and others as “text” that is *contextualized* in history and culture that is particular to that context, but which always has universal aspects. The next dimension – *the spiritual-ideal wisdom dimension* – involves developing openness to the dimensions in life that not necessarily can be grasped in analytic language, and which leaves us in awe, wonder and humbleness regarding the limits of what we can know and express explicitly. It also involves the ability to use

³⁴ HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophizing the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, Abingdon-on-Thames, 2019.

imagination and create visions and ideals concerning the conditions of living well in a broad sense, necessary for acting in ethically sound ways³⁵. It is difficult to claim that any of these dimensions were visible in the meta-reflection notes of the teachers. Does this mean that the dimensions are not relevant to this project at all? We will argue that, no, it is relevant in the sense that the next time we will facilitate a similar project, we will make more efforts to include these dimensions more explicitly, because they are important. Moreover, based in observations, we could sense a change in the attitudes of all the teachers from the first workshop to our last – a change that it is not so easy for teachers themselves to conceptualize and verbalise, as it concerns the deeper structures of their being. At the point of writing the final meta-reflections, they were still immersed in the experience of philosophising, meaning they did not yet have a distance to themselves and their experience. Hence, the reflections of the teachers should be interpreted as preliminary. Based in earlier experiences, their views are likely to change and become more grounded as time goes by, and they get more distance to what they have experienced. Thus, if they were asked to reflect upon the question “What has philosophising (the Dialogos way) done to you?” later down the road, they would probably have been able to see more, and maybe also include explicit reflections upon the latter two dimensions. The process of philosophising seldomly stops when a session or a course is over. Judging by the feedback from these teachers and from others, it continues both as inner dialogues and as dialogues with people around them. And if the outlook and teaching methods of individual teachers are developed, this will have implications also for the smaller and greater context within which they perform their

³⁵ See *ibidem*. And also: WEISS, Michael Noah: “Learning Practical Wisdom? A Guided Imagery for Philosophical Practice on Self-knowledge”, in AMIR, Lydia (ed.): *New Frontiers in Philosophical Practice*, Cambridge Scholars, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2017a.

practices. The question is whether or not it has made a lasting impact. This, we cannot know.

Final comment

In this paper we have given an account of an action learning- and research project with teachers from 12 upper secondary schools in Norway, organized and carried out by Guro Hansen Helskog over a period of five months in the fall/winter 2018/2019, with Michael Noah Weiss participating as a co-facilitator in the last session. Teachers were given a course on philosophy and rhetoric over four workshops with five weeks in between, and were themselves supposed to facilitate 20 sessions with their own students during the project.

The first part of our guiding research question was *How did teachers experience their own development and the development of their students due to the action learning- and research project?* Here, it seems justifiable to conclude that the teachers had acquired a broader vocabulary concerning feelings, thoughts and existential aspects of human life, increased their courage when it comes to discussing such topics with their students, as well as increased their ability to facilitate dialogues with students across subjects. Moreover, it had strengthened their confidence in their role as contact teachers. Their experience of the learning outcome of their students was that they had increased their self-insight and insight into others, improved their listening, dialoguing, wondering and argumentation skills, and made their learning environment better.

This said, our conclusion in the context of this paper is that reflecting upon existential, emotional and ethical experiences, exploring issues in dialogue with others with different viewpoints and experiences than oneself, training the ability to see a topic from different perspectives, argue different stances, and striving to

integrate different viewpoints into a unified stance, does represent a step towards greater wisdom. It also provides life skills, and thus life competences needed when striving to exercise phronesis understood as the art of living well. Thus, wisdom, in the sense of phronesis understood as the awareness to do the right thing in the given situation with regards to living a good life overall is a phenomenon highly relevant to the development of teachers and students, both with regards to teachers who facilitate philosophical dialogues, and with regards to students who participate in such dialogues.

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