

# ON THE URGENT NEED FOR PHILOSOPHICAL PRACTICES IN MAINSTREAM EDUCATION TODAY

## SOBRE LA URGENCIA DE LA FILOSOFÍA APLICADA EN LA EDUCACIÓN ACTUAL

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**Abstract:** This essay is written based in a concern of ours that the dominant forms of teaching and learning in education today seem to be more in line with what Aristotle called *techné* and *poiesis* than with *phronesis* and *praxis*. The reason for that appears to be the aim-, skills- and competence-oriented approach in education as well as the quest for scientific “evidence based” practice. Using a reflective practice research approach, the authors take their point of departure in two concrete cases drawn from their lives as associate professors and researchers in teacher education. Some core themes are extracted from the cases and reflected upon critically and philosophically. Among those themes are, i.e., “reflecting freely and personally” vs. “adjusting to given frameworks and meeting required standards”. Other themes are “answering correctly and reaching predefined goals with the least effort” as opposed to “exploring possible answers”, “learning for its own sake” and “searching wisdom” on the other.

**Key words:** Philosophical practice, pedagogy, Bildung, wisdom, reflective practice research, Dialogos

**Resumen:** Este artículo se funda en nuestra preocupación de que las formas dominantes de enseñanza y aprendizaje en la educación actuales parecen estar más en línea con lo que Aristóteles llamó *techné* y *poiesis* que con *phronesis* y *praxis*. La causa de esto parece ser una educación orientada a objetivos, habilidades y competencias, así como la búsqueda de prácticas científicas “basadas en evidencia”. Utilizando un enfoque de investigación de práctica reflexiva, los autores comienzan su estudio tomando como punto de partida dos casos concretos extraídos de sus vidas como Profesores asociados e investigadores de la formación del profesorado en la universidad. Los temas centrales de los resultados se extraen de los casos y se reflexionan de forma crítica y filosófica. Entre esos temas se encontrarán, la dicotomía entre “reflexionar libre y personalmente” y “adaptarse a marcos dados y cumplir con los estándares requeridos”, la contraposición entre “responder correctamente y alcanzar metas predefinidas con el menor esfuerzo” y “explorar posibles respuestas”, “aprender por sí mismo” y “buscar sabiduría”, entre otros.

**Palabras clave:** Filosofía Aplicada, Pedagogía, *Bildung*, sabiduría, investigación de práctica reflexioanda, Dialogos

## The not so beautiful risk of education<sup>1</sup> today

This essay is written due to pressing concerns of ours regarding our teaching and research in teacher education in Norway. The concern is that the dominant forms of teaching and learning in education today seem to be more in line with what Aristotle called *techne and poiesis* than with *phronesis and praxis*, due to the prevalent aims-, skills- and competence orientation as well as the quest for scientific “evidence-based” practice. This orientation has become increasingly dominant in mainstream education at all levels since

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<sup>1</sup> This subtitle can be read in reference to Gert Biesta’s book *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, which here however receives a different connotation; see BIESTA, Gert: *The Beautiful Risk of Education*, Routledge, London & New York, 2014.

the early 1990s<sup>2</sup>. However, as we will discuss later in this essay, it has roots that at least 250 years back, contributing to the creation of a multidimensional crisis that humanity faces today, caused by what some scholars called *risk society*<sup>3</sup>. The crisis includes environmental, democratic as well as psychological and physical health aspects, which need to be addressed on both structural, collective and individual levels.

In the field of education all these three levels are met and faced, i.e. in the teacher-student relationship which receives a central mediating role in this respect. When a teacher steps into a classroom or university seminar room, or even when s/he corrects assignments, tests and exam papers, s/he enters into a moral field in which s/he is responsible for the lives and futures of others – both on an individual level, from human being to human being, on a collective level, with the class forming a community, as well as on a structural level, with the individual students in all classes from all schools forming the next generation. How the teacher acts towards others in this three-leveled field has a crucial effect on whether and to which extent the students can unleash their full human potentials, including the ability to live well and contribute to

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<sup>2</sup> HANSEN, Guro: *1990-årenes danningsdiskurs – eller humanismens vilkår i vår tid*. [The Bildungs-discourse of the 1990s – or the conditions for humanistic pedagogy in our age], in NORGES FORSKNINGSRÅD, *KULTs skriftserie*, nr. 55, 1996. And: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: “Den humanistiske dannelsen og 1990-tallets utdanningsreformer”, in *Norsk Pedagogisk tidsskrift*, 1-2, 2003, p. 20-36. And: DANNESESUTVALGET: *Kunnskap og dannelse foran et nytt århundre* [Knowledge and Bildung in the face of a new century], Universitetet i Oslo, Oslo, 2009. And: BIESTA, Gert: “How Does a Competent Teacher Become a Good Teacher? On Judgement, Wisdom and Virtuosity in Teaching and Teacher Education”, in HEILBRONN, Ruth & FOREMAN-PECK, Lorraine (eds.): *Philosophical Perspectives on Teacher Education*, John Wiley & Sons, West Sussex, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> See i.e. BECK, Ulrich: *Risk Society – Towards a New Modernity*, Sage Publications, London, 1992.

solving the mentioned crisis, or not – as individuals, as communities and as a generation. The Danish philosopher Knud Løgstrup has formulated this beautifully in his now almost worn out words from *Den etiske fordring*:

The individual never has anything to do with another human being without holding some of the person's life in his hand. It can be very little, a transient mood, an obviousness that one makes wither, or which one deepens or raises. But it can also be an awful lot, so it simply stands to the individual whether the other person's life succeeds or not.”<sup>4</sup>

(Our modified translation from Danish)

### *The original idea of pedagogy*

Relationships between those who have skills and insight considered worthwhile, and those who do not yet have such skills and insight, i.e. between teachers and students, craftsmen and apprentices or parents and children, have existed as long as humans have inhabited the globe. Hence, it is in some respect possible to argue that pedagogical practices are as old as humankind. Even if pedagogy as an academic discipline is rather new, dating less than 150 years back, it is worthwhile following its roots further back in history, to its philosophical and theological origins in ancient thought, in order to better understand what we actually mean with *pedagogy* and *pedagogical*.

Like philosophy, the study of pedagogy, and the practice involved in being a pedagogue, has its etymological roots in Greek language.

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<sup>4</sup> LØGSTRUP, Knud Eilert. *Den etiske fordring*. Oslo: J.W. Cappelens Forlag a.s. 1997 [1956, 25] 15-16. Original quote “[...] Den enkelte har aldrig med et andet menneske at gøre uden at han holder noget af dets liv i sin hånd. Det kan være meget lidt, en forbigående stemning, en oplagthed, man får til at visne, eller som man vækker, en lede man uddyber eller hæver. Men det kan også være forfærdende meget, så det simpelthen står til den enkelte, om den andens liv lykkes eller ej”

Pedagogy comes from “paideia”, implying the shaping of one’s character through a union of civilization, tradition, literature and philosophy, and a training both of the physical and mental faculties. The ideal was to develop towards an enlightened mature personality<sup>5</sup>.

Pedagogy also has roots in the German term *Bildung*, which we here choose to translate as “edification” – a complex and widely discussed concept in European history<sup>6</sup>. The concept is originally German and flourished in the period 1770-1830. It links back to 16th century Pietistic theology, in which the Christian should seek to cultivate himself in line with the image of God<sup>7</sup>, to medieval and baroque Christian mysticism<sup>8</sup>, and further to the ancient Greek concept *paideia* and *phronesis*<sup>9</sup>.

*Bildung* was first conceptualized by Meister Eckhard (1260-1328) in his theology as man’s self-realization and sanctification as a

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<sup>5</sup> JAEGER, Werner: *Paideia. The Ideals of Greek Culture. Volume I: Archaic Greece: The Mind of Athens*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1967.

<sup>6</sup> See i.e.: LØVLIE, Lars, MORTENSEN, Klaus P. and NORDENBO, Sven Erik (eds.): *Educating humanity: Bildung in postmodernity*, Blackwell, Malden, Mass, 2003. Originally published as LØVLIE, Lars, NORDENBO, Svein Erik and MORTENSEN, Klaus P. (eds): “Educating Humanity: Bildung in postmodernity”, in *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Special Issue 36/3, 2002. Or: SLAGSTAD, Rune, KORSGAARD, Ove and LØVLIE, Lars (eds.): *Dannelsens forvandlinger. [Transformations of Bildung]*, Pax, 2003, Oslo. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: “Den humanistiske dannelsen og 1990-tallets utdanningsreformer”, in *Norsk Pedagogisk tidsskrift*, 1-2, 2003, p. 20-36. Or: RISE, Svein (ed.): *Danningsperspektiver: teologiske og filosofiske syn på dannelse i antikken og i moderne tid*, [Perspectives on Bildung: theological and philosophical views on Bildung in antiquity and in modern times], Tapir, Trondheim, 2010.

<sup>7</sup> SCHMIDT, James: “The Fool’s Truth: Diderot, Goethe, and Hegel” in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57.4., 1996.

<sup>8</sup> GADAMER, Hans Georg: *Sannhet og metode [Truth and method]*, Pax forlag, Oslo, 2010 [1960].

<sup>9</sup> HADOT, Pierre: *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Blackwell, Malden MA, 1995.

being created in the image (*Bild*) of God. *Bildung* implied an increase of what in German is called *Erkenntnis des Unaussprechbaren*, that is, insight into the unspeakable. In his speeches on teaching, Eckhard argued that people should not think so much about what they should *do*. Rather, they should consider what they *are*, i.e. their being as humans, and not so much their doing as teachers. This, again, was connected to holiness: One should not establish holiness through mere doing, but rather through being<sup>10</sup>.

Those who debated enlightenment within politics and pedagogy gave the concept a more secular connotation. They discussed how to achieve an enlightened society based on the ideas of humanism, with Herder as the first who formulated the expression *Bildung zur Humanität* – edification towards humaness – a foundational pedagogical idea amongst the German neo humanists at the beginning of the 19th century<sup>11</sup>. These ideas inspired Norwegian educational thinker Frederik Moltke Bugge in the 1830's. He argued that science and education alike should be free from everything but the duty that lay in its purpose, namely *to awaken, nurture and sharpen the thoughtfulness of the young*. He insisted that we cannot discover reality unless we have eyes (language) to help us see. Our ability to see – our gaze – must be sharpened. Only then could it be possible to relate to reality, reflect upon it and criticize (investigate and explore) it. For this purpose, the studies of humanities (i.e. philosophy or literature) were best suited, according to Bugge<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> BERTHOLD-HEGELHAUPT, Tilman: “Bildung als Erkenntnis des Unaussprechbaren. Über Sprache und Wahrheit bei Meister Eckhart”, *Zeitschrift für wissenschaftliche Pädagogik*, 66 (4.1990), 1990, p. 478-497.

<sup>11</sup> MYHRE, Reidar: *Grunnlinjer i pedagogikkens historie*, Gyldendahl norsk forlag, Oslo, 1988.

<sup>12</sup> EVENSHAUG, Trude: “Skolemann versus Stortingsmann. Et blick på 1830-årenes dannelsingsdiskurs”, [Schoolman versus Parliament-man. A look at the

*Education – more than acquiring knowledge, skills and competences*

A practical pedagogical situation always consists of numerous ethical, existential and philosophical questions and dilemmas that requires that the teacher not only has knowledge of the subject and relevant skills. It also requires self-knowledge, empathic understanding of the other(s), understanding of the wider situation one finds oneself in, as well as understanding of the existential and relational forces playing out in the situation. Not least, it requires imagination and tact or *phronesis* (that is prudence or practical wisdom), because every pedagogical situation is pregnant with seeds for future developments, good or bad ones. To link back to Bugge: It requires the intuitive (spiritual and existential as opposed to critical-analytical and rational) ability to *(fore)see*. At its best, good teaching will nurture *the tree of life* in students<sup>13</sup>, understood as existential, ethical, spiritual and philosophical *mindfulness*<sup>14</sup>. This appears to be best enhanced and fostered through various forms of philosophical and dialogical practices<sup>15</sup>. However, as the

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*Bildungs*discourse of the 1830` s.], Norges forskningsråd, *KULTs skriftserie*, nr. 90, 1997.

<sup>13</sup> HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: Philosophising the Dialogos Way as Nurturing the Tree of Life in us. in *HASER – International Journal of Philosophical Practice*. Vol. 12, 2021.

<sup>14</sup> WEISS, Michael Noah: “Philosophical Mindfulness. An Essay about the Art of Philosophizing”, in *HASER – International Journal of Philosophical Practice*. Vol. 8, 2017.

<sup>15</sup> See also: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Dialogos. Filosofi for ungdomstrinnet*, Fag og kultur, Oslo, 2006. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: “The Gandhi Project: Dialogos philosophical dialogues and the ethics and politics of intercultural and interfaith friendship”, in *Educational Action Research*, Level 2, 2014, p. 1-20, available in <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2014.980287> (last access 13th of March 2019). Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: “*Bildung* towards wisdom through dialogue in teacher education”, in *Arts and humanities in higher education*,

two cases we will reflect upon in this essay indicate, the educational culture today seems to be dominated by forms of instrumental means-aims didactics that are counterproductive to philosophical practices which might nurture such mindfulness.

### *Research approach and further structure of the essay*

Our rather personal essay is both a piece of philosophical and dialogical practice<sup>16</sup>, and a piece of reflective practice research<sup>17</sup>. The latter was developed as a research approach by Anders Lindseth, who is also known as a pioneer of philosophical practice in Scandinavia. Similar to what is known as the Socratic method by Nelson and Heckmann<sup>18</sup>, this form of research starts with concrete cases which are then reflected towards more abstract and general

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Level 1, special issue on dialogue edited by ALTHORF, Marije, 2016, available in <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1474022216670609> (last access 13th of March 2019). Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: "Searching for wisdom the Dialogos way", in AMIR, Lydia (ed.): *Practicing Philosophy: Expanding Boundaries, New Frontiers*, Cambridge Scholar, London, 2017. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: "Envisioning the Dialogos way towards wisdom", in STAUDE, Detlef & RUSCHMANN, Eckart (eds.): *Understanding the Other and Oneself*, Cambridge Scholar Publishing, Cambridge, 2018. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophising the Dialogos Way towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, London, 2019. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: "Om Askeladdens metode – eller essayet som erkjennelsesvei og klokskapsdannende skrivepraksis", in ASKELAND, Norunn and BRINCK JØRGENDEN, Iben (eds.): *Kreativ akademisk skrivning*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 2019b.

<sup>16</sup> HANSEN, Finn Thorbjørn: *At stå i det åbne. Dannelse gennem filosofisk undren og nærvær*, Hans Reitzels forlag, København, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> LINDSETH, Anders: "Dannelsens plass i profesjonsutdanninger", [The place of Bildung in professions education], in DANNELSESUTVALGET: *Kunnskap og dannelse foran et nytt århundre*, Universitetet i Oslo, Oslo, 2009, p. 21-27.

<sup>18</sup> See i.e. HECKMAN, Gustav: "Six Pedagogical Measures and Socratic Facilitation." Reprinted in *Enquiring Minds – Socratic Dialogue in Education*, Trentham Books, Chester, (1981) 2004.

levels of awareness. The purpose of reflective practice research is to get a deeper understanding of one's own practice (i.e. one's teaching practice) and by that to improve oneself as a practitioner (i.e. as a teacher). This means that our point of departure are concrete cases from our practice as university lecturers and researchers in teacher education. The cases have left us with a rather unpleasant feeling that something is not right – a feeling which Lindseth calls *experience of discrepancy*<sup>19</sup>. Our aim in this essay is to investigate what this feeling or intuition might be about, in order to formulate it in more general, theoretical and philosophical terms. Our essay is thus at least roughly structured according to Lindseth's suggested structure for reflective practice research projects<sup>20</sup>: We begin by narrating two concrete cases drawn from our lives as associate professors and researchers in teacher education at the University of Southeastern Norway. This represents the first phase of the research procedure called *concrete reflection*. In the next phase of our research, called *critical reflection*, we extract some core themes that have become important to us in our joint reflection upon the cases. Central questions in this phase will be: Why caused these cases such puzzlement with us? How can we understand them? What is at stake in them? Why do we feel that something is wrong not only in these cases, but in the larger educational culture that we are living, working and educating students in? Then, in the last phase, called *theoretical reflection*, we reflect upon the themes in more general

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<sup>19</sup> See i.e. LINDSETH, Anders: "Dosenten i et FoU-perspektiv. Refleksiv praksisforskning som en vei mot dosentkompetanse", in BACHKE, Carl Christian & HERMANSEN, Mads (eds.): *Å satse på dosenter. Et utviklingsarbeid*, Cappelen Damm Akademisk, Oslo, 2020, p. 83.

<sup>20</sup> LINDSETH, Anders: "Dosenten i et FoU-perspektiv. Refleksiv praksisforskning som en vei mot dosentkompetanse", in BACHKE, Carl Christian & HERMANSEN, Mads (eds.): *Å satse på dosenter. Et utviklingsarbeid*, Cappelen Damm Akademisk, Oslo, 2020, p. 75–101.

terms, drawing on philosophical perspectives and research literature that we have found relevant in our attempts to “open up” and shed light on the themes we have extracted from the cases.

## **Original reflection**

In this phase we begin with a concrete reflection upon two concrete cases that are understood as particular examples and expressions of cultural –historical and, more or less, universal patterns and structures that will be explicated later in the essay. The first case is from Weiss` teaching practice where he taught pedagogy to younger undergraduate teacher students during the last year<sup>21</sup>. As undergraduates, these students have finished upper secondary school not so long ago. The second case comes from Helskog`s reflective practice research involving a dialogue with a student who was in the transition between high school and university.

### *Case 1*

Over the last two semesters of teaching pedagogy to undergraduate students, Weiss has observed that a genuine interest in the lectured content and subject matter was almost absent with many students in his classes. Already in the first weeks of the semesters, it turned out that they were first and foremost interested in information concerning the final exam, in order to direct their effort directly towards this target: “How will you test this theory in the exam? What is the correct answer? How do we reference this and that publication correctly?” These were typical questions that were frequently asked in the classes. The students showed a similar

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<sup>21</sup> Helskog has written about similar experiences from teaching students in post graduate teacher education in Helskog 2019b.

attitude towards the other tasks and assignments, which they had to fulfill during the semester. For example, one of the assignments was a small research project. First, they had to gather empirical data and then they had to write a paper about it. Their major concern when carrying out this project was to apply the research methods correctly and then fitting the gathered material into the structure of an academic paper, which in this case was the so-called IMRaD structure (Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion). When supervising the students in their projects, it often turned out that they had written great texts containing their own genuine thoughts and reflections on the topic of investigation. Finally, however they did not dare to include these texts in their articles because they were afraid that this would not fit into the expected structure and format. Weiss became aware of that when trying to invite the students for a discussion and in-depth reflection on their work. The students simply tried to avoid this discussion because they were not used to this kind of self-reflection. Some felt insecure, while several were not interested in reflecting upon their work nor themselves as researchers. Many simply assumed such a reflection to be unnecessary in order to produce a paper that would meet the required standards.

In the middle of the semester then, when students were still working on their research projects and still asking questions about the final exam, the corona virus broke out in Europe. Due to the imposed lockdown in Norway, all lecturing and supervising, had to be done online. And here another interesting aspect of the phenomenon came to the fore. Only few students attended the online sessions. To a certain extent this could be explained away. Some had their children at home since the kindergardens and schools were closed. Others had to see how they could maintain their income and were therefore working more shifts in their part-time jobs than normal. Nevertheless, fifteen percent of them would attend online lectures. This was also the case in a Dialogos

workshop on dialogical and philosophical practice that we, the authors, held together with this group of students. Here, we also experienced that some students disappeared from the session and went offline when they were asked to reflect and philosophize together in small groups, while they came back when we were lecturing for the whole class. At the same time Weiss and the rest of the teaching staff received many emails from the students in this period, which – how else could it be – were filled with questions about the requirements for the final exam. How might we understand that students – with a few great exceptions – did not prioritize the learning process, and seemed to be uninterested in the content, but kept asking about aims and assessment? How can this kind of student behavior be explained?

### *Case 2*

Having been a teacher at all levels of education from secondary to higher education, and having developed the Dialogos approach to pedagogical philosophical practice as an alternative to “main stream” didactics, Helskog has always been concerned about what is going on in schools. The second experience is thus from a research dialogue she had with a student at a school in Norway as part of a reflective practice study. During the dialogue, the student had shown her a text she had written when she was a 10<sup>th</sup> grade student, as well as the assessment criteria and her teacher’s actual assessment. The text was an analysis of the short story “Karen” by Alexander Kielland<sup>22</sup>. The story had made an almost life changing impression on the then sixteen year old girl. Her eyes were sparkling when summarizing the content of the short story. She expressed deep fascination of how the author had composed the

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<sup>22</sup> KIELLAND, Alexander: “Karen”, in *To novelleter fra Danmark*, Gyldendal, Oslo, 1882.

story, and by how he had created symbols and parallel stories. She told Helskog how she had read the story over and over again, and how the deeper dimensions of the text rose from between the written lines, so to speak. How was it possible that a then 33-year-old man born in the mid-1800s, could use words and create a story that touched her and made such an impression on her, a 16-year-old girl born 152 years later? Thus, despite the list of criteria and recipe-like instructions given by the teacher, with one of them being that the analysis should be strictly objective and neutral, she had decided to take a risk. She included the two first verses from a poem by the equally famous Norwegian author Johan Sebastian Welhaven in a final remark, to express how much the story had spoken to her. The verses go as follows<sup>23</sup>:

<b>Digtets Aand (Welhaven 1844)</b>	<b>The Spirit of the Poem (Welhaven 1844)</b>
Hvad ei med Ord kan nævnes I det rigeste Sprog, Det Uudsigelige, Skal Digtet røbe dog.	What cannot be expressed in the richest Language The Inexpressible Shall the poem still reveal
Af Sprogets strenge Bygning, Af Tankeformers Baand Stiger en frigjort Tanke, Og den er Digtets Aand	From the rigourousity of language From thoughtforms` bond Rises a freed thought, and This is the Spirit of the poem

<sup>23</sup> The poem is not easily re-written from 1844-Norwegian to English as it has a form and contains rimes and rhythm that simply cannot be translated directly, but Helskog has anyway given it a poor try.

However, the teacher did not approve of her choice, as students were not supposed to include any subjective elements. Thus, her creative attempt in the final remark section pulled down the overall impression of the text, the teacher argued, who had assessed the analysis by using a scheme ranging from high, via medium to low achievement of objectives, based in the criteria. The student's performance was assessed in the lower range of the high achievement section, which is of course good, but the only critical remark of the teacher concerned the student's creative and essayistic attempt to close up the text.

### **Critical reflection upon the cases**

The reason we have chosen these two cases is the so-called *experience of discrepancy*<sup>24</sup> between what we believe good teaching and learning should be, and what these cases express. Well aware that we here take a normative stance, and that two small cases are not sufficient to generalize directly to an entire culture. However, the two cases are just two examples among many experiences each of us have of the same phenomenon. These experiences have left us with the feeling that something is not right, and that this feeling is urgently important. We thus use the cases as empirical “windows” to argue that we are in urgent need of philosophical practices in mainstream education today.

If we compare the two cases, there are some obvious differences. However, we see these differences as two sides of the same problem, pointing to our concern from different angles.

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<sup>24</sup> See i.e. LINDSETH, Anders: “Dosenten i et FoU-perspektiv. Refleksiv praksisforskning som en vei mot dosentkompetanse”, in BACHKE, Carl Christian & HERMANSEN, Mads (eds.): *Å satse på dosenter. Et utviklingsarbeid*, Cappelen Damm Akademisk, Oslo, 2020, p. 83.

*Reflecting freely and personally vs. adjusting to given frameworks*

In case 1, Weiss is the teacher trying to make students reflect freely and personally upon their experiences, while the students are looking for ways to fit into a given framework. In case 2, it is the other way around. The teacher is expecting students to adjust to the given framework of “objectivity”, while the student in this case is taking the risk of including some free and personal reflections on how she experienced reading the story and what the story had done to her. Hence, the theme *reflecting freely and personally vs. adjusting to given frameworks* is one of the themes that has become important to us.

*Being forced to stick to predefined criteria and to cut off creativity*

In case 2, we meet a young student who experiences deep personal transformation and *Bildung* or edification while working with the short story “Karen” – an experience that developed unexpectedly and spontaneously, and that she felt a need to go further into. However, the teacher wanted her to stick to the predefined criteria, cutting off the creative initiative and also motivation of the student, thus making her scared of including personal reflections in her texts also later. Her way of engaging with the short story was not right according to the expectations of the teacher. The student was supposed to be strictly critical-analytical and “objective” in her paper, while her experience of working with the text, which had existential, emotional and spiritual as well as ethical dimensions, were not only uninteresting for the teacher, but outside the task. In our reflection upon the case, we have wondered whether the teacher had really understood what the student had done, which was rather advanced.

*Wanting predefined criteria and avoiding self-reflection*

If this second case is an example of the educational culture that the teacher students in case 1 have grown up in, then at least one reason for their obsession with the final exam, their fear of failure and thus their hesitation to participate in discussions, becomes rather obvious. They are simply used to predefined aims, criteria and frameworks, and thus clear expectations from the teachers. When they are asked to reflect upon themselves, or to engage in the practice of (philosophical) dialogue with others, they become insecure. Such activities do not have clear aims and learning outcomes, but require the students to think for themselves. However, the student in case 2 was not allowed to think freely for herself, as it also appears to have been the case in the educational past of the students in case 1, who were looking for clear expectations and set structures.

Moreover, it seems that the students had not been given sufficient room to wonder about the content of good literature, nor of the mystery of words coming to life in human beings several generations after their author died, which fascinated the student in case 2, but which students in case 1 seemed to never have experienced. Rational and measurable aims and formal structures seem to have been more important in their education than existential, ethical and spiritual content. Hence, the art of teaching in these cases appears to have been reduced to *techné*, as Aristotle called it. That means to the instrumental instructions of predefined techniques and skills – in these cases the skills involved in the analysis and writing of non-subjective, non-creative, texts.

*Answer correctly and reach the goals with the least effort*

Some would say that the student behavior in case 1 is perfectly normal student behavior. They just want to pass their exams, for

obvious reasons. In our understanding, this explanation would be far too simple. When investigating and reflecting upon the first case in terms of a learning practice, certain aspects come to the fore, like trying to *meet the required standards*, to *answer correctly* and also to *reach the goals with the least effort* (in this case, passing the final exams and fulfilling the tasks and assignments during the semester). Even here, some would still say that these aspects are a natural part of taking an education. However, with this point, underlying assumptions about how we see and understand education in general are beginning to surface. Hence, other themes that emerge from this case are the relationships *between personal and analytical*, and *between subjective and objective*, and *between creativity and rationality*.

Curiosity, to learn for its own sake, to take a critical stance towards what one is taught and told, and a genuine interest in and an authentic wondering about the subject matter are notably absent in the first case, and it is not encouraged in the second. Nevertheless, if we leave out these aspects from our understanding of education, and even worse, if a teacher is not fostering and challenging them with his or her students, education as such is reduced to nothing but a mechanical exercise, so to speak. Personal involvement and engagement have vanished. That this is a problem was already brought up by Rousseau in his novel *Emile*<sup>25</sup>. In this novel he offers a critique of existing culture, while exploring an educational model where the student Emile is supervised by his tutor without losing his natural inner drive.

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<sup>25</sup> ROUSSEAU, Jean-Jacques: *Emile- or on Education*, Penguin Books Ltd., London 2007 [1756].

## Theoretical and philosophical reflection

What seems to have been at stake in the previously presented educational experiences of the students in the two cases, is, among other things, the denial of authenticity, of not being understood and not being allowed to engage personally with the content taught, let alone express themselves existentially.

### *The denial of authenticity*

On the one side, with the teacher in case 2, we find the not-reflected use of authority, the lack of ability to tune in to the perspective of the student, and the lack of will to understand what the student had tried to do. On the other side, with the students in case 1, it is the culture of education that they had been brought up in, and which had been forming their ways of thinking and learning, as well as their models of teaching.

### *Techné vs. phronesis*

Plato is known for having criticized the type of education offered by the Sophists<sup>26</sup>. The Sophists were masters of speech. They were teaching away techniques of persuasion and rhetoric, and they were known for talking people into something that they themselves were not even convinced of, but they did it nonetheless because they were paid for it. The difference between the ideal of education of Plato and the one of the Sophists was pointed out by Shaun Gallagher in the following way:

Rhetoric, as practiced by Sophists such as Gorgias, is a collection of purely formal techniques used to impress those who listen. As a formal technique it

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<sup>26</sup> See GALLAGHER, Shaun: *Hermeneutics and Education*, Suny Press, Albany, NY, 1992.

does not manifest moral involvement and concern for student, subject matter, or truth. If we define art (a term that in English once signified “learning”) as a practice that manifests such moral concern, then for Plato education has more to do with art than with formal, unconcerned *techné*<sup>27</sup>

It appears to be this difference between acquiring formal techniques on the one side and involvement and concern for student, subject matter and “truth”, on the other, which shows the challenges and difficulties of the two cases. In this regard, Gert Biesta’s article in 2015 “How does a competent teacher become a good teacher?”<sup>28</sup> can be mentioned. In short terms, Biesta assumes that acquiring various competences and skills during one’s studies, does not make a teacher student a good teacher. Even if these competences and skills are mastered outstandingly. Here it has to be mentioned that Biesta’s understanding of competence-oriented teaching and education is quite similar to what Gallagher described as the acquisition of formal techniques. Both authors refer to two of the three forms of knowledge as explicated by Aristotle, which again can already be found with Plato: *techné* and *phronesis* (the third one would be *epistēmē*). Both *techné* and *phronesis* represent forms of practical knowledge. However, while *techné* can be understood as the skills required in order to produce something, *phronesis* is the awareness necessary in order to do the right thing in the given moment with regards to living a good life overall<sup>29</sup>. In other words, while the former can be understood as know-how knowledge, the latter is often translated with the term prudence or

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<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, p. 198f.

<sup>28</sup> BIESTA, Gert: “How Does a Competent Teacher Become a Good Teacher? On Judgement, Wisdom and Virtuosity in Teaching and Teacher Education”, in HEILBRONN, Ruth & FOREMAN-PECK, Lorraine (eds.): *Philosophical Perspectives on Teacher Education*, John Wiley & Sons, West Sussex, 2015.

<sup>29</sup> See i.e. WEISS, Michael Noah: “Philosophical Mindfulness. An Essay about the Art of Philosophizing”, in *HASER – International Journal of Philosophical Practice*. Vol. 8, 2017.

practical *wisdom* and has a moral connotation. Since both *technè* and *phronesis* are forms of practical knowledge, they relate to actions and activities and it is here where the key to the answer on Biesta's question ("How does a competent teacher become a good teacher?") can be found.

*"The Eichmannisation of education"*<sup>30</sup>

Techné is related to a form of activity which is called *poiesis*, while *phronesis* relates to a type of activity called *praxis*. The difference between these two types of activity is the goal that is pursued with the respective activity. *Poiesis* is any form of activity that has the goal beyond itself. For example, building a house is a typical *poietic* activity, since the building process is not the final goal of the activity. Rather, it is to live in that house. *Praxis* on the other hand is any form of activity which has the goal within itself. Listening to music, going for a walk in the woods are examples of *praxis*. Both, listening to music and going for a walk, are done for their own sake, because one simply enjoys them. There is no further goal or purpose which would lie beyond these activities. Now, the same could be said about teacher practice: It is a form of *praxis*, and one is practicing as a teaching because one simply enjoys that. For some, this understanding of being a teacher might sound a little bit weird or even pathetic. Isn't the goal of education in general to make one's students acquire competences, skills and knowledge through teaching? In other words, isn't teaching clearly a *poietic* activity? If it would be, then it would be about nothing more than applying effective techniques in order to make one's students acquire other techniques sufficiently. Maths, for example, would then be about applying certain techniques as teacher in order

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<sup>30</sup> HANSEN, Finn Thorbjørn: *At stå i det åbne. Dannelse gennem filosofisk undren og nærvær*, Hans Reitzels forlag, København, 2008.

to make ones' students acquire techniques of calculation and so on, and that is it. One does not need any personal involvement or moral concern for the student, for the subject matter nor for the truth" for that kind of activity to work out. And it is exactly this approach to learning and teaching that is meant with "The Eichmannisation of education"<sup>31</sup> – a term coined by Finn Thorbjørn Hansen. The term means to blindly and unreflectedly follow school orders, educational principles and teaching rules. The point here is that even if everything is done right, that is, done in alignment with the respective orders, rules and principles, it would still never be good.

### *Doing good*

It is here where Aristotle's explicated idea of praxis, derived from Plato, comes in. Plato thought that all human beings have the same highest goal in life and that is living a good life. Though we all have different ideas of what the good life is, we all try to pursue it. Living in a good way, however, was not meant in terms of egoistic self-realization. Rather, it was meant in terms of *doing good*. And here the double meaning of doing good comes to the fore. On the one hand, it relates to expressions like "I am doing well," "I am doing better now" etc. and on the other it also refers to expressions like "doing good to others," "making things better," "improving a situation". Interestingly, all these forms of doing do not so much relate to activities of production ("I am doing this and that"), rather they refer to *ways of being* and *becoming* in the sense of developing. Here it also becomes clearer why the term that Aristotle used to signify the good life, namely *eudaimonia*, is often translated with *human flourishing* and not simply with *happiness*. Furthermore, in one way or another, all these previously mentioned expressions have an ethical connotation. They address a

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<sup>31</sup> HANSEN, Finn Thorbjørn: *At stå i det åbne. Dannelse gennem filosofisk undren og nærvær*, Hans Reitzels forlag, København, 2008.

fundamental personal and moral involvement in whatever we are doing and they can be summarized by the question “How are we all doing in the situation that we find ourselves in?” Here again, this question addresses two sides of the same coin: It relates to *how* we are *feeling* about the situation, but also, *what* we are *doing*. If we are going for a walk or listening to music, because it does good to us, then this can be called *praxis* as we have seen. If we see teaching as an activity that we perform because it does good to us and our students, then this can also be called *praxis*. For it is an activity that has the goal in itself: It does good to everyone involved. However, as teachers we certainly will find ourselves performing certain teaching practices, where not everyone involved feels good about it. Then we want to *improve* that practice, we want to *make it better* - we want to *become* better. We are doing so by reflecting about the respective teaching practice, we find potential improvements and then ... we practice, we reflect over our practice, then we practice again, and so on. Until we have reached a level of practice, where everyone involved feels good about it. Here the teacher can be compared with a piano player. The piano player enjoys playing, but it is through reflection that he or she can realize room for improvement. So, he or she continues to practice, in order to become better. The art of improvisation – an art necessary for a good piano player – surely comes only through regular practice, for example. The same can be said about teaching, where improvisation is of significant relevance too. One can only learn to teach well by practicing good teaching, and not by merely acquiring competences. In other words, it is a form of practical knowledge (or even wisdom) that is fostered by practice and which can be called *phronesis*: The awareness of doing the right thing in the given situation with regards to living a good life overall<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> WEISS, Michael Noah: “Philosophical Mindfulness. An Essay about the Art of Philosophizing”, in *HASER – International Journal of Philosophical Practice*. Vol. 8, 2017.

Adapted for the context of teaching, phronesis might be defined as the awareness of doing the right thing in the given teaching situation with regards to having the students and oneself enjoying the teaching – only then a room for curiosity, critical thinking, a drive to explore etc. can be unleashed.

*The search for wisdom – the original goal of education*

According to Pierre Hadot in his book *Philosophy as a way of life. Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*<sup>33</sup> all the ancient schools of philosophy agreed that philosophy and the activity of philosophizing involves the individual's love of and search for wisdom. Even though their understanding of how to develop towards wisdom differed, they all agreed that wisdom first and foremost implies a state of perfect “peace of mind” or “soul”, accompanied by a comprehensive view of the nature of the whole and of humanity's place within it. Furthermore, they agreed that attaining to such *Sophia*, or wisdom, represents the highest Good for human beings. However, according to their common assumption, most people live unwise lives most of the time, characterized by unnecessary forms of suffering and disorder. The cause of this suffering and disorder is being unaware of the powers of unregulated passions, that is, of unregulated desires and exaggerated fears. Hence, people are held back from truly living, these schools agreed, according to the interpretation of Hadot<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, in order to truly live, people need to develop their wisdom, a stance that has a parallel in the Indian Yoga philosophy. Here it is argued that a person's capacity to deal effectively with his or her emotions, listen to the guidance that these emotions give, harness their energy, and channel their powers into healthy

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<sup>33</sup> HADOT, Pierre: *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Blackwell, Malden MA, 1995.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*.

motivation, communication, and behavior, is a hallmark of a healthy individual. Failures in one or more of these areas will lead to various forms of breakdown in the wellbeing and psychological functioning and health of the person<sup>35</sup>.

Both the teachings in the Academy of Plato and in the Lyceum of Aristotle, were oriented towards wisdom development as a remedy against suffering and disorder both in personal and political life<sup>36</sup>. Developing the insight and skills involved in wise living was thus a core interest of the pedagogies of all the ancient schools of philosophy, and in fact, until the eighteenth century, moral theory and practice were largely Aristotelian in character, if we are to accept MacIntyre's analysis in *After Virtue*<sup>37</sup>. The idea was that there are certain qualities of mind and character (virtues) which should guide people in their daily lives. Practical wisdom was one of them. Moreover, in the Christian tradition, there was a corresponding list of vices or “deadly sins”<sup>38</sup> signaling failure in life. Moreover, it was generally agreed that human beings had a purpose (telos) which involved the cultivation of the virtues in order to become both a good person and a good citizen, the one being necessarily connected with the other.

### *Never again Auschwitz*

Today, wisdom as a virtue worthwhile pursuing, is rarely studied by scholars of pedagogy, nor used as an ideal for pedagogical practice.

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<sup>35</sup> YOGENDRA, Shri: *Why Yoga?*, The Yoga Institute, Mumbai, 2007 [1976].

<sup>36</sup> HADOT, Pierre: *Philosophy as a way of life: spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, Blackwell, Malden MA, 1995.

<sup>37</sup> See MACINTYRE, Alistair: “After Virtue”, in *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie*, 46 (1):, 1981, p. 169-171.

<sup>38</sup> See also BRUNSTAD, Paul Otto: *Klokt lederskap: mellom dyder og døds synde*, [Prudent leadership: between virtues and deadly sins], Gyldendal, Oslo, 2009.

Neither is wisdom at the center of academic philosophy nowadays. However, in the face of the global situation today, with increasing tensions between states and within states, and with rising rightwing policies and nationalist agendas, Adorno's concern as expressed in his article "Education after Auschwitz" from 1967 seem disturbingly relevant<sup>39</sup>. After the Second World War one could have expected a revitalization of the *Bildung* tradition, he claims. This did not happen. Adorno could not understand why this had been given so little attention, claiming it shows that the monstrosity had not penetrated people's minds deeply enough. This, Adorno argues, is itself is a symptom of the continuing potential for the recurrence of what happened in Auschwitz, as far as peoples' consciousness and unconscious is concerned. Despite the beautiful traditions and thoughts that Germany and Europe had been built upon, the «Endlösung» was made possible due to modern infrastructure and means of transportation, concentration camps organized as giant factories with industrial mass killings and medical experiments. Adorno's strong claim is that

Every debate about the ideals of education is trivial and inconsequential compared to this single ideal: never again Auschwitz. It was the barbarism all education strives against. One speaks of the threat of a relapse into barbarism. But it is not a threat—Auschwitz was this relapse, and barbarism continues as long as the fundamental conditions that favored that relapse continue largely unchanged.<sup>40</sup>

Yet the barbarism was carried out by well-educated and trained doctors and nurses, engineers and lawyers, many of them probably performing their jobs to the best of their abilities. Education, as it had developed from the Enlightenment period on, had not

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<sup>39</sup> ADORNO, Theodor W.: *Education after Auschwitz*, 1967, available in <http://josswinn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/AdornoEducation.pdf> (last access 14th of May 2019)

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*.

prevented them from taking part in the barbarity. Rather, it had contributed to making it possible. And if we are to accept Hannah Arendt's interpretation<sup>41</sup>, even Adolf Eichmann was a normal, rather boring bureaucrat performing his perceived duties well, with the motive to advance his career. He was neither sadistic nor perverted. Rather, he was “terrifyingly normal”, thoughtlessly performing his evil deeds without evil intentions. His disengagement from the reality of his evil acts – his thoughtlessness – was, according to Arendt, the main problem of his wrong-doing. Eichmann never realized what he was doing because he was unable “to think from the standpoint of somebody else”:

The longer one listened to him, the more obvious it became that his inability to speak was closely connected with an inability to *think*, namely, to think from the standpoint of somebody else. No communication was possible with him, not because he lied but because he was surrounded by the most reliable of all safeguards against the words and the presence of others, and hence against reality as such<sup>42</sup>.

A pedagogical argument that can be extracted from Arendt's analysis is thus that a main purpose of education is to secure that students develop the ability to think from the standpoint of somebody else, and to engage in communication that opens up and reveals reality as it is.

### *Bildung vs. Halbbildung*

During the last decades we have seen a return of the themes of *Bildung* in the cultural reflection and debate concerning education

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<sup>41</sup> ARENDT, Hannah: *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, Penguin Books Ltd., London, 2011 [1963].

<sup>42</sup> *Ibidem* p.49

and politics, especially in the Nordic countries<sup>43</sup>. In his classical 1969-essay «Ein utdana mann og eit dana menneske»<sup>44</sup> the Norwegian philosopher Jon Helleenes claimed that current forms of education makes *Bildung* or self-formation, or what we in this paper refer to as edification, increasingly impossible. While education implies becoming qualified for certain functions in society, *edification* is a never-ending process involving the development of understanding and wisdom, requiring forms of reflection that go beyond and in between specific academic subjects. It includes our perceiving of subjectivities and our horizons of understanding, from which we see, understand and act. A “seeing” practice is an edified practice, and an education that loses contact with the everyday world, with practice and politics, becomes an education without edification. However, Helleenes states, scientific, technical and instrumental reason has invaded areas of life where it does not belong. It leaves human beings “half-edified” because it separates concrete life and abstract thinking, practice and theory. Competence oriented approaches to teaching both at lower and higher levels of education is in danger of leading to such “half-edification”, or “half-education” (*Halbbildung*) as Adorno called it<sup>45</sup>. For instance, and as previously mentioned, in dialogue with Hannah Arendt’s text on Eichmann, the Danish

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<sup>43</sup> SLAGSTAD, Rune, KORSGAARD, Ove and LØVLIE, Lars (eds.): *Dannelsens forvandlinger*. [Transformations of *Bildung*], Pax, 2003, Oslo, p. 377.

<sup>44</sup> The difference between «utdanning» and «danning», or between being «utdannet» and being «dannet» is not easy to conceptualize in English. Self-formation. See HELLESNES, Jon: "Ein utdana mann og eit dana menneske: framlegg til eit utvida daningsomgrep." [An educated man and a man of *Bildung*: draft for an extended conception of *Bildung*], in DALE, Erling Lars (ed.): *Pedagogisk filosofi*, Gyldendal, Oslo, 1992 [1969], p. 79-103.

<sup>45</sup> ADORNO; Theodor. *Theorie der Halbbildung* (1959). In: *Gesammelte Schriften*, Band 8: *Soziologische Schriften I* Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/M. 1972, S. 93–121.

professor in philosophical practice, Finn Thorbjørn Hansen<sup>46</sup>, talks about what he calls an “Eichmannization of Education”, brought forward by the dominant ideology of competence. In this ideology, there is a one-sided focus on the epistemological and rational dimension in supervision and teaching. The concept of competence that is now dominating in education, is, according to Hansen, almost totalitarian and oriented towards the knowledge seeking dimension of education. It does not have a sufficient understanding and view for the phenomena in life that cannot be rationalized, secularized or mastered by human reflexivity and pragmatic will and action, he argues. The skilled and knowing gaze can be “the dead gaze”, as opposed to “the lively and wondering gaze”, and the language of competence an “external language” that keeps us distant to ourselves. The pedagogical argument of Hansen is thus, amongst others, that schools and higher education institutions should also provide the space needed for students to develop their existential enlightenment, or their enlightenment of being<sup>47</sup>, in addition to learning how to think from the standpoint of the others. With Meister Eckard: Students and teachers need to develop insight in the unspeakable.

As one of the pioneering “pedagogues” of the Enlightenment, Jean Jaques Rousseau claimed to be the inventor of childhood, with his novel *Emile*<sup>48</sup>. In the novel, Rousseau discusses pedagogy through a fictional narrative in which a teacher is educating and supervising young *Emile*. Rousseau’s aim seems to be to suggest a pathway in five stages – a *methodos* – for how to give a human being the physical-bodily, existential, mental and moral capacity and foundation needed in order to live a good and happy life in

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<sup>46</sup> HANSEN, Finn Thorbjørn: *At stå i det åbne. Dannelse gennem filosofisk undren og nærvær*, Hans Reitzels forlag, København, 2008.

<sup>47</sup> Translated from Danish “tilværelsesoplysning”

<sup>48</sup> ROUSSEAU, Jean-Jacques: *Emile- or on Education*, Penguin Books Ltd., London 2007 [1756].

harmony with oneself, other human beings and with nature and society. In order to succeed, the educator must be critical towards forces and societal conventions and traditions, and instead cultivate the “pure”, “natural” and “innocent” in each child and student. Rousseau’s pedagogical thinking is however paradoxical, as expressed in the famous formulation that man is born free and everywhere he is in chains.

*The disintegration of pedagogical practice*

Rousseau’s pedagogical novel, along with others of his writings, inspired many to engage in pedagogical philosophizing in the years to come. Kant was one of them. Amongst Kant’s works on pedagogy are his lectures held at the University of Königsberg in the 1770s and 1780s, published in 1803 under the title *Über Pädagogik*<sup>49</sup>, in which negative pedagogy or what Løvlie calls “The freedom of paradox”<sup>50</sup> is central. Kant’s practical advice for teaching is expressed as pedagogical paradoxes such as “discipline the child, but don’t make his mind slavish; impose rules on him but remember to allow for his free judgment; praise him but don’t foster his vanity; constrain him but let him savour his freedom”. Inspired by, yet also critical to both Rousseau and Kant, Friedrich Schiller’s “Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man” from 1795 was a direct attempt to influence educational policies of its time, written as a series of letters to the Prince of Schleswig-Holstein-Augustenburg, who were reforming education. In letter III, Schiller writes<sup>51</sup>:

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<sup>49</sup> Helskog has read this Norwegian translation: KANT, Immanuel. *Om pedagogikk*. Oslo: Aschehoug. 2016 [1803].

<sup>50</sup> LØVLIE, Lars: “The freedom of paradox”, in Waks, Leonard J. (ed.): *Leaders in philosophy of education: intellectual self-portraits*, Sense Publishers, Dordrecht, 2014, p. 175-195.

<sup>51</sup> I have studied the text most thoroughly in Norwegian translation, but have

The course of events has given a direction to the genius of the time that threatens to remove it continually further from the ideal of art. For art has to leave reality, it has to raise itself bodily above necessity and neediness; for art is the daughter of freedom, and it requires its prescriptions and rules to be furnished by the necessity of spirits and not by that of matter. But in our day it is necessity, neediness, that prevails, and bends a degraded humanity under its iron yoke. Utility is the great idol of the time, to which all powers do homage and all subjects are subservient. In this great balance of utility, the spiritual service of art has no weight, and, deprived of all encouragement, it vanishes from the noisy Vanity Fair of our time. The very spirit of philosophical inquiry itself robs the imagination of one promise after another, and the frontiers of art are narrowed, in proportion as the limits of science are enlarged.<sup>52</sup>

To be blamed for this condition are according to Schiller's analysis, amongst other, an over-emphasis on reason (implying a critique also of Kant) and its ignoring of sentiment. The words of Schiller in the previous quote is strikingly relevant also in our own time, dominated as it is by matter and market, by necessity, utility and rationality. In the last two decades this problem has become increasingly pressing, as technical and instrumental reason from the 1990's on took hold of the way we manage educational systems, influencing also the content and methods of teaching and assessment, and the understanding of learning<sup>53</sup>. This has led to a

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used the British public library pdf-version for this citation: <http://public-library.uk/ebooks/55/76.pdf>

<sup>52</sup> SCHILLER, Friedrich von: *Om menneskets estetiske oppdragelse i en rekke brev*. Solum, Oslo, 1991 [1795].

Schiller, Friedrich von: "Letters upon the aesthetic education of man", 1795, available in <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/schiller-education.asp> (last access 12<sup>th</sup> November 2014).

<sup>53</sup> HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: "Den humanistiske dannelsen og 1990-tallets utdanningsreformer", in *Norsk Pedagogisk tidsskrift*, 1-2, 2003, p. 20-36. Or: BIESTA, Gert: "How Does a Competent Teacher Become a Good Teacher? On Judgement, Wisdom and Virtuosity in Teaching and Teacher Education", in

disintegration, fragmentation and specialization in academic, educational and thus moral life. For instance, in *After Virtue* MacIntyre<sup>54</sup> argues that both the language and practice of morality have disintegrated. Moreover, as a unifying concept of thinking and doing in relation to human conduct, the concept morality has become almost meaningless. Also, the language and practice of pedagogy has disintegrated and both are suffering from fragmentation and specialization. This process seems to have caused confusion amongst practicing pedagogues, especially since there is an expectation that pedagogical practice and teaching should rely on scientific evidence<sup>55</sup>. But what kind of evidence, when research results are not only overwhelming, but also contradictory? And if moral conduct is essential to pedagogical practice, how can pedagogical practice be “evidence-based” without becoming technical, and instrumental?

Many seem to have lost sight of the moral core of pedagogical practice, a core that can only be reflected upon and contemplated through forms of open and non-conclusive philosophical practices, as opposed to pedagogies taken the form of techné and poiesis. Moreover, many seem to have lost insight in the fundamental questions that were guiding not only the ancient Greeks, Meister Eckhardt and the humanist pedagogical thinkers of the enlightenment, but also thinkers of other traditions in the world, such as the Indian Yoga tradition and the Buddhist tradition. These were questions such as: How does a human being become human?

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HEILBRONN, Ruth & FOREMAN-PECK, Lorraine (eds.): *Philosophical Perspectives on Teacher Education*, John Wiley & Sons, West Sussex, 2015.

<sup>54</sup> MACINTYRE, Alistair: “After Virtue”, in *Tijdschrift Voor Filosofie*, 46 (1):, 1981, p. 169-171.

<sup>55</sup> See BIESTA, Gert: “How Does a Competent Teacher Become a Good Teacher? On Judgement, Wisdom and Virtuosity in Teaching and Teacher Education”, in HEILBRONN, Ruth & FOREMAN-PECK, Lorraine (eds.): *Philosophical Perspectives on Teacher Education*, John Wiley & Sons, West Sussex, 2015.

What is a good life? What is right action? What is the relationship between emotions and reason? Between existence and rationality? Between mind and body? How can human beings overcome suffering and disorder in life? What is wisdom, and how can human beings become wise? These are questions important to philosophical practice, as discussed for instance by Weiss<sup>56</sup> and Helskog<sup>57</sup>. The latter, for instance, has developed the Dialogos approach – a multidimensional approach to philosophical practice in mainstream education that has the search of wisdom at its core. Her book *Philosophising the Dialogos Way towards Wisdom in Education – between critical thinking and spiritual contemplation* can be read as an attempt to give philosophical practitioners, teachers and teacher educators theoretical perspectives as well as text samples and exercises that can be used for practicing philosophy across all levels in education<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> WEISS, Michael Noah (ed.): *The Socratic Handbook. Dialogue Methods for Philosophical Practice*, LIT publishing, Vienna, 2015.

<sup>57</sup> HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophising the Dialogos Way towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, London, 2019a.

<sup>58</sup> See HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Dialogos. Filosofi for ungdomstrinnet*, Fag og kultur, Oslo, 2006. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: “The Gandhi Project: Dialogos philosophical dialogues and the ethics and politics of intercultural and interfaith friendship”, in *Educational Action Research*, Level 2, 2014, p. 1-20, available in <https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2014.980287> (last access 13th of March 2019). Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: “*Bildung* towards wisdom through dialogue in teacher education”, in *Arts and humanities in higher education*, Level 1, special issue on dialogue edited by ALTHORF, Marije, 2016, available in <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1474022216670609> (last access 13th of March 2019). Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: “Searching for wisdom the Dialogos way”, in AMIR, Lydia (ed.): *Practicing Philosophy: Expanding Boundaries, New Frontiers*, Cambridge Scholar, London, 2017. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: “Envisioning the Dialogos way towards wisdom”, in STAUDE, Detlef & RUSCHMANN, Eckart (eds.): *Understanding the Other and Oneself*, Cambridge Scholar Publishing, Cambridge, 2018. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: *Philosophising the Dialogos Way towards Wisdom in Education. Between*

*Pedagogical practice as an open-ended practice*

Philosophical questions such as the ones mentioned above are still relevant to the lives of human beings in all ages across the world today. They can best be treated through dialogical and philosophical practices because they cannot be answered once and for all. Every human being and every generation needs to answer them for themselves. Not striving to answer them, however, might lead to the type of non-reflectivity and loyalty that lead to the barbarism of Auschwitz, to refer back to Adorno<sup>59</sup>. Only open-ended practices can give human beings the flexibility of mind and the ability to take the perspectives of others needed, for instance in life skills, democratic citizenship skills and sustainable living skills – three of the core themes running through the newly reformed Norwegian curriculum for primary, secondary and upper secondary schools. Most important: Such practices are good in themselves, serving one's inner life and *being* while preparing for morally good action.

**Summary and final remarks**

We began this essay by stating our concern that there is an urgent need for philosophical practices in education today. Taking our

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*Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation*, Routledge, London, 2019a. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: “Om Askeladdens metode – eller essayet som erkjennelsesvei og klokskapsdannende skrivepraksis”, in ASKELAND, Norunn and BRINCK JØRGENDEN, Iben (eds.): *Kreativ akademisk skriving*, Universitetsforlaget, Oslo, 2019b. Or: HELSKOG, Guro Hansen: “Fragmentering og disharmoni – eller helse og livsmestring?”, in *Prismet* 1, 2019c, p. 53-61.

<sup>59</sup> ADORNO, Theodor W.: *Education after Auschwitz*, 1967, available in <http://josswinn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/AdornoEducation.pdf> (last access 14th of May 2019).

departure in two cases, the first from Weiss` work with younger teacher students, the second from Helskog`s reflective practice research in the field of education, some core themes were extracted and reflected upon both critically and theoretically. A case in reflective practice research, however, is never clear cut, because it is taken from real life situations that are constantly evolving. We thus close this essay by taking each case one step further.

At the end of the semester in case 1, Weiss had a talk with two students of the described class. He asked them why they were so concerned about meeting the required standards, to answer correctly, to reach the goals with the least effort and so forth. In short, their answer was because this is how they learned to learn during their years at school. When Weiss replied that this is interesting, because their class would be among the first generation who grew up with the so-called competence aims (an educational framework coming into force in the 1990s). For a moment they were baffled, and they left the session with wondrous minds.

As to case 2, three years after the incident described, and at this point in her final year of high school, the student told Helskog she had a similar experience when working on an analysis of the short story “Hills like white elephants” by Ernest Hemingway<sup>60</sup>. This time the text was included in an assignment in her English class. The student had read the story over and over again, not understanding anything to begin with, then experiencing that “the spirit” of the story gradually was released and rose from between the few lines of the story. She had been completely mind blown and left in awe and wonderment about the almost mysterious workings of words on a piece of paper, written by one human being and brought to life in another, the two living almost 100 years apart.

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<sup>60</sup> HEMINGWAY, Ernest. Hills like White Elephants. 1927. Retrieved 30.05.2020 from Hills Like White Elephants.rtf (weber.edu)

The student had asked her Norwegian teacher at the time to read the story, asking how such a text would have been assessed if it was written by a student. The teachers' response was that she did not think most teachers would understand what the student would have done. The teacher speculated that nowadays, Norwegian teachers mostly commented on text structure, and not on content, meaning that a teacher probably would not read the content thoroughly enough to uncover the deeper meaning of the story, even if it had the qualities of Hemingway's. Like the students in case 1, the teacher in case 2 had been rather baffled.

We as philosophers call this state *aporia*. The development in the two cases indicate that something new might emerge. This is also where *the freedom of paradox*<sup>61</sup> shows itself. In both cases a door to a possible different kind of understanding had opened up, giving us at least *some* hope that teaching and learning in the future will include philosophical and dialogical practices that can baffle and redirect, serving *the good life* for teachers and students alike.

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<sup>61</sup> LØVLIE, Lars: "The freedom of paradox", in Waks, Leonard J. (ed.): *Leaders in philosophy of education: intellectual self-portraits*, Sense Publishers, Dordrecht, 2014, p. 175-195.

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