

# **Before Starting: Outlining Philosophical Dialogue as Research**

**Michael Noah Weiss**

## **1. Introduction**

In 2014, on a warm summer evening, I was sitting on the balcony of an Airbnb flat in Athens together with Sigurd Ohrem, one of the contributors to the present anthology. Over a glass of Greek wine, he tried to explain the uniqueness and benefits of a folk high school – a school with no exams and no grades. I listened and heard what he said, but I did not understand. I was puzzled and wondering why anyone would spend a whole year at such a school without receiving any formal reward, e. g. in terms of ECTS points or at least in the form of a certificate describing their acquired qualifications.

Maybe I did not understand at that time, but the fact is that between 2010/2011 and 2020/2021 as many as 80,369 students attended one of the over 80 folk high schools in Norway (NOU: 2022: 16). On average, that makes 7,500 students per year. And not only that, as the recent EPSI Rating Norge – a survey of student satisfaction – shows, folk high schools rate significantly higher than the higher education sector in this respect (EPSI, 2022: 6). An outcome

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that leads some to the conclusion that higher education institutions should learn from folk high schools (Mikkelsen, 2022, 14.12.).

When it comes to the learning content, if one can call it that, folk high schools offer a great variety of subjects ranging from extreme sport, snowboarding, and surfing to theatre play, e-sport, painting, music, photography as well as more classical subjects like psychology and philosophy, just to name a few. Field trips and journeys abroad are done on a regular basis and all schools offer dormitories where the students live together. Of the over 80 schools – 85 in 2022 (NOU, 2022: 16) – a bit more than half of them have a humanistic value base, while the rest have a Christian value orientation. Furthermore, these schools are not an invention of the recent past. They were founded by the Danish priest and pedagogue Nikolaj Frederik Severin Grundtvig, with the first school opening in Denmark in 1844. Still today, one finds folk high schools in all Scandinavian and Nordic countries. There are certain differences between the schools of these countries, which I will not go into here since the present publication mainly deals with Norwegian folk high schools. The latter have two general goals, which are also enshrined in the Norwegian Folk High School Act (The Folk High School Act: 2003): *Bildung* and public enlightenment. At this point, I will not explicate these two concepts further; more detailed accounts of them can be found in some of my other publications (Weiss, 2017a; 2021b; 2023).

Pedagogically speaking, these schools have always stood and still stand outside the conventional school system, as their history shows (Mikkelsen, 2014). And this is also what makes them so interesting: for not being part of the educational mainstream leaves room for creative forms of teaching and educational development work. The variety of concepts and approaches present in folk high school

pedagogy is, for example, outlined in the anthologies *Med livet som pensum* (Ohrem & Haddal, 2011; in Engl.: With life as curriculum) and in *The Nordic Folk High School Teacher* (Lövgren, Hallqvist, Rahbek & Lysgaard, 2023). From Socrates' dialogic approach to John Dewey's experiential learning to Wenger's communities of practice to social pedagogy and existential philosophy in general – just to name a few – the list of theoretical models and perspectives that are relevant to folk high school pedagogy is long and extensive. And so is the diversity of pedagogical practices.

After the previously mentioned conversation in Athens, I had the chance to work on different projects at different folk high schools and experience this diversity first-hand. Several of these experiences are further investigated in some of my research publications (see e. g. Weiss, 2017a, 2021b, 2023; Weiss & Ohrem, 2016; Ohrem & Weiss, 2019). When it comes to research at Norwegian Folk High Schools in general, it has to be stated that this field is still quite 'unplowed', as also a recent NOU report points out (NOU, 2022: 16). Though there are certainly a few scholars, like Johan Lövgren from the University of South-Eastern Norway, whose research focus is on folk high school pedagogy (see e. g. Lövgren, 2017a, 2017b, 2018, 2020, 2022; Lövgren, Hallqvist, Rahbek & Lysgaard, 2023), the research activities in Norway are on a much smaller scale compared to other Scandinavian countries.

With that in mind, the idea for this book was born, although I carried it around for several years before actually starting to work on it. The idea was to bring forth the folk high school pedagogues' and teachers' voices and to investigate their ideas of good folk high school pedagogy together with them, based on their experiences. Something that has not been done so far. What took me so long to

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realize this project was the impression that I first needed a proper methodology for such an enterprise. And the issue of the proper research method brings us to the guiding question of this introductory chapter.

### **1.1. The guiding question**

The question that guides this introduction reads as follows:

- *Why choose philosophical dialogue as a research approach to examine pedagogical practices at folk high schools?*

The short answer to this question is: I am a philosopher and as such, it seems natural to me to do dialogues and philosophical investigations. The longer answer, however, requires an examination of the epistemological questions that arise when understanding philosophical dialogue as research.

Those readers who are not interested in such theoretical and apparently “dry” investigations and reflections can simply skip this chapter. Reading it is not indispensable in order to understand the dialogues in this book. However, if one wants to know *why* the chapters of this anthology are written in dialogue format, the following pages might be enlightening.

## **2. Outlinging dialogue-based research**

### **2.1. Philosophical dialogues as an academic genre**

Grundtvig, the founding father of the Nordic folk high schools, suggested dialogue as the main pedagogical method for this type of school (see e. g. Korsgaard, 2017: 283). He advocated *the living word*, as he called it, as the best way for learning. While the written word would

merely contribute to the memorization of facts, in his opinion, dialogue would help the students get a deeper understanding of the topic at stake (see e. g. Ohrem, 2011). Furthermore, a dialogical approach to learning appeared to be more democratic, with the teacher and the students meeting at eyelevel and sharing and investigating thoughts, ideas and experiences together. In other words, to Grundtvig, dialogue was more ‘down to earth’ and closer to real life than any other teaching method. Even today, dialogue still plays a central role in the pedagogical approach of folk high school (see Haddal & Ohrem, 2011; Ohrem & Weiss, 2019).

With dialogue playing such a prominent role in the pedagogical history of folk high schools, it might seem natural to also employ it as a research approach to examine more closely the educational practices of this type of school. However, can philosophical dialogue be understood as a research method at all?

In fact, “book versions of conversations are not uncommon in philosophy” (Hattie & Larsen, 2020: 1). One finds a number of quite well-known scholars of the discipline of philosophy who employed dialogue as their main form of investigation and writing style in some of their publications. Plato is probably the earliest example, with his *Socratic Dialogues* (Plato, 2009), which had and still have a profound impact on Western science. A more recent example is the founding father of modern hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer, whose later works often took the form of philosophical conversations (see e. g. Gadamer, 2001, 2003). Another famous example is Paolo Freire and Myles Horton’s *We Make the Road by Walking*, a book that, apart from its introduction, solely consists of the philosophical dialogues on education that they had at the famous Highlander Education and Research Center (Horton & Freire, 1990). Also in the field of ethics, as an-

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other main branch of philosophy, we find Herlinde Pauer-Studer's *Constructions of Practical Reason*, in which she presents conversations with key figures in the field like Martha Nussbaum or Christine Korsgaard (Pauer-Studer, 2003). Herbert Pitschmann and Fritz Wallner developed and published their approach to the philosophy of science – so-called Constructive Realism – in dialogue form (Pitschmann & Wallner, 1995). Even in the last few years, several academic monographs and anthologies came out that belong to this genre (see e. g. Burton, 2021a & 2021b; Rosa & Endres: 2016). Arguably the most famous of them stems from the field of philosophy of education: *The Purpose of Education* by the often-hailed and often-criticized John Hattie in conversation with Steen Nepper Larsen (Hattie & Larsen, 2020). The list could continue, but it already appears clear that philosophical investigations carried out and published in dialogue form are not something entirely new. On the contrary, as an academic genre, it has a long tradition as well as specific, unique features that distinguish it from others. One of these features is the relation between the dialogue partners. As I shall show in the following, this relation has a direct impact on the research process as such.

### **2.2. On the nature of dialogue-based research**

In one of his articles, professor of dialogic practice Finn Thorbjørn Hansen examines several explicitly dialogue-based research approaches, like Kreiner and Mouritsen's *analytical interviewing* (2006), Brinkmann's *epistemic interview* (2007), Dinkins' *Socratic-hermeneutic interviewing* (2005) and his own approach, called the *Socratic research interview* (Hansen, 2015a). Leaving the differences between these approaches aside, there is one aspect they have in common that, according to Hansen, distin-

guishes them from conventional research interview techniques: In conventional qualitative interviews, knowledge production is carried out after the interviews and behind ‘closed doors’ at the researcher’s desk by analyzing the data of the interviews; however, in these four approaches, the desk is transferred into the field, so to speak, with the interviewer and the interviewee sitting at it together as co-researchers (see *ibid.*, 2015a: 179 & 188f). In this case, knowledge is not created *after* the interview by the researcher but *in* the interview together with all participants involved. Here, we arrive at a common definition of dialogue derived from Matthew Lipman’s *Community of Inquiry* concept (see Lipman, 2003: 20f), where dialogue means to investigate a topic, a question, and a phenomenon *together*. In other words, the dialogue participants are *inter-viewing*, that is, looking into something together from different perspectives. Against this background, Gadamer should be mentioned again, “for whom the ‘interview’ has become a significant category of philosophical output”, as Malpas puts it (2018). Hence the question, why has it become a significant category for him?

If we assume the development of new knowledge as a key feature of research (see e. g. Lindseth, 2017a: 16f, 2017b), then dialogue in the sense of *inter-viewing* also has to yield some sort of new knowledge. Otherwise, the previously mentioned publications consisting of philosophical conversations would make no sense in an academic context. According to Gadamer, the form of knowledge addressed here is essential to the humanities (Gadamer, 1997: 107), and this kind of knowledge was probably the reason why Gadamer chose to conduct and publish his later philosophical inquiries in the format of dialogues (see Malpas, 2018: 2.1., 3.2. & 3.3.). So, which form of knowledge are we talking about?

### **3. Practical knowledge and its role in the humanities**

#### **3.1. Three fundamental forms of knowledge**

In his article, “How does a competent teacher become a good teacher?” Gerd Biesta presents two spheres of life as introduced by Aristotle: *bios theoretikos* and *bios praktikos* (Biesta, 2015: 14). As we shall see, understanding the difference between these two spheres proves vital in order to understand modern science, research and academia in general.

As the name already indicates, *bios theoretikos* deals with theoretical aspects of life, like mathematical laws and eternal principles of nature. The form of knowledge that corresponds with this sphere is theoretical knowledge, which Aristotle called *epistemé* (the etymological root of the term epistemology). The activity to develop *epistemé* is *theoria* (thinking), the Greek term for contemplation. One is easily tempted to assume that science and higher education as we know it today can be attributed to the *bios theoretikos*. In reference to Popper, Kuhn and others, Biesta however refutes this assumption (ibid.) and ascribes, e. g. teacher education, to the sphere of *bios praktikos* (ibid.). The reason for that is elaborated in the following.

Hardly surprisingly, *bios praktikos* is the sphere of practical knowledge. However, according to Aristotle, practical knowledge can be divided into two different forms of knowledge: *techné* (in simple terms, *know-how*) and *phronesis* (*practical wisdom* or *prudence*). *Techné* is the type of knowledge required in order to build a boat, for example. Without knowing *how* to build a boat, a boat cannot be built. The activity that corresponds with *techné* is so-called *poiesis* (making). With the activity of *poiesis*, we find an answer to why Aristotle divided practical knowl-



edge into two: *Poiesis* comprises any activity that has its goal beyond itself (see e. g. Staude: 2015: 43). To give an example: If you build a boat, the goal of this activity is not the building process. Rather, the goal is to make something that lets you travel over water safely. Similarly, when building a house, the goal is not the activity of building in itself but to live in that house after it is finished. Seen from that perspective, one might erroneously assume that know-how knowledge was the reason Biesta attributed teacher education to the sphere of *bios praktikos*. For a teacher certainly needs know-how and practical skills when teaching youngsters. This is not the case, however. The reason is to be found in so-called *phronesis*.

Phronesis is often translated with the terms “prudence” or “practical wisdom,” and it can be described as “the ability to do the right thing in a given situation – i. e. the concrete teaching situation – with regards to human flourishing, that is, the good life overall.” (Weiss, 2021b: 248; see also Gadamer, 2004: 314) With this definition, the moral character of phronesis comes to the fore. It is moral knowledge, as Gadamer asserted (ibid.: 312), and to his teacher, the philosopher Heidegger, phronesis was “nothing other than conscience set into motion ...” (Heidegger, 1997: 39). By relating phronesis to the term “conscience”, another central aspect is addressed. Instead of a set of general ethical principles, phronesis represents a form of situational knowledge that rather resembles what one would call *awareness* or, as McEvelly suggested, *mindfulness* (2002: 609) more than factual knowledge or mere know-how.

In reference to the old Greek philosophers, like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, several scholars, such as Gadamer (e. g. 2004: 315 or 318) or Gallagher (1992: 198), have pointed out a fundamental and somewhat disturbing feature of phronesis: It can only be learned but not taught. There are no universal principles or general theories connected to

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phronesis that can be taught or imparted, as is the case with the laws of physics, for example. No wonder that to Aristotle, phronesis was not a question of factual knowledge but of experience, and “experience is the fruit of years” (Aristotle, 1980: NE 1142a 6–7). Hence, developing phronesis rather resembles a form of experiential learning (see e. g. Dewey, 1916: 184), one could say. Thus, if it is not teachable, it appears to be legitimate to ask whether such a form of knowledge can be incorporated into any curriculum of higher education programs at all.

Surprisingly, Gadamer answers this question not only positively, but he even assumes phronesis as *the* form of knowledge the human sciences should seek after:

When Aristotle, in the sixth book of the Nicomachean Ethics, distinguishes the manner of ‘practical’ knowledge ... from theoretical and technical knowledge, he expresses, in my opinion, one of the greatest truths, by which the Greeks throw light upon ‘scientific’ mystification of the modern society of specialization. In addition, the scientific character of practical philosophy is, as far as I can see, the only methodological model for self-understanding of human sciences if they are to be liberated from spurious narrowing imposed by the model of the natural sciences. (Gadamer, 1997: 107)

It is important to note that when Gadamer speaks of practical knowledge here, we must not confuse it with technical know-how and skills (*techné*). “Practical knowledge, phronesis, is another kind of knowledge,” as Gadamer put it (2004: 18).

This question brings us to the kind of activity that is connected to phronesis, namely *praxis* (doing). The main difference between *poiesis* (making) and *praxis* (doing) is that the latter has the goal within itself; that is, instead of building a house with the purpose of living in it, the activity of *praxis* is doing it for its own sake. For example, in or-

der to learn to play guitar, we have to play guitar; that is, we have to *practice*. Aristotle distinguished between bad praxis (*dyspraxia*) and good praxis (*eupraxia*); the latter is sometimes also translated with *excellent praxis* (see e. g. Aristotle, 1980: NE 6.5: 1140b4–7).

Good praxis can be understood as a *doing* that promotes human flourishing and well-being; in short, it can be defined as ‘doing well’, as Anscombe suggests (1981: 70). With its orientation towards good praxis (*eupraxia*), that is, with human flourishing (*eudaimonia*) as its end, it becomes obvious that the activity of praxis implies a strong ethical dimension. It is not simply about the mastery of skills, which would make it a matter of *techné*; instead, praxis is a question of *virtue*.

### **3.2. Phronesis and its relevance in teacher education**

By relating praxis to virtue, we find the reason why Biesta assigns teacher education to *bios praktikos* (Biesta, 2015: 19f) – an aspect which is not irrelevant for a book like the present one that deals with folk high school pedagogy. For in light of Aristotle’s understanding of praxis, the term *teaching practice* gets a new connotation. Suddenly, it is not only about managing and applying proper teaching techniques anymore; but teaching becomes a *doing* that intends to promote human flourishing and well-being with the students. Therefore, when Biesta asks in his same-named article, “How does a competent teacher become a good teacher?” (2015), his answer, in short, is: by developing *virtuosity*.

In Gallagher’s *Hermeneutics and Education* (1992), we find a hint as to how virtuosity can be developed and how it relates to phronesis:

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Socrates suggests that one must look to oneself in order to become virtuous. In effect, the knowledge that one can learn but not be taught is self-knowledge. If virtue is knowledge, it is in some sense self-knowledge. There is no teacher who can tell me who I am in a way that is superior to my own possibility of finding out for myself. (ibid.: 198)

Gallagher adds that self-knowledge “is intimately linked with *phronesis* and thinking for oneself” (ibid.), something which was already been explicated and pointed out by Gadamer (see e. g. 2004: 314). Hence, we can arrive at the conclusion that *phronesis* and *virtuosity* (which for Socrates were the same (Gallagher, 1992: 198.)) are essentially about the ability to see oneself – as a whole human being – in relation to the given situation one is standing in and become aware of what one can do (*praxis*) in order to foster human flourishing (*eudaimonia*).

This personal involvement illustrates why *phronesis* cannot be reduced to mere factual knowledge or know-how and, furthermore, how *virtuosity* is interrelated with self-knowledge. Furthermore, it also becomes clear why McEvilley spoke of mindfulness when explicating the term *phronesis* (2002: 609): one cannot be mindful if one does not personally relate to the situation one is confronted with. Hence, the *virtuosity* of the teacher, as discussed by Biesta (2015: 20f), implies not primarily the handling of knowledge, skills and competences but the self-awareness of the teacher with regards to how he or she can realize *eupraxia* (good *praxis*) with the students. The dialogues of the present book represent philosophical investigations in order to achieve exactly that – examining in what ways different folk high school teachers understand and realize *eupraxia*.

### 3.3. Phronesis and what became of it in today's academia

Interestingly, the three forms of knowledge as introduced by Aristotle, namely *epistemé*, *techné* and *phronesis* are – at least partly – represented in all curricula of any European higher education program after the so-called Bologna process. The learning outcomes of any curriculum are divided into *knowledge* (*epistemé*), *skills* (*techné*) and *competences*; however, the latter does not really fit the term *phronesis*, as outlined previously. This is also the central critique of Biesta in his article, “How does a competent teacher become a good teacher” (2015). As an example, in the Norwegian “Core Curriculum on values and principles for primary and secondary education” (Udir, 2017), competence is defined as “the ability to acquire and apply knowledge and skills to master challenges and solve tasks in familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations. Competence includes understanding and the ability to reflect and think critically.” (ibid.: 2.2.) Clearly, this definition of competence falls short of the central aspects of *phronesis*, such as the ethical orientation towards well-being, self-knowledge, personal involvement, and so on. There is one gleam of hope, though, that the essence of *phronesis* is not entirely lost in relevant higher education policy papers that refer to the three forms of knowledge introduced by Aristotle.

In its revised version of 2017, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (see European Commission, 2018), to which all the national qualifications frameworks of the European countries as well as the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area (ibid.: 16) are linked, we find – next to *knowledge* and *skills* – *responsibility and autonomy* as the third qualification category, instead of *competence*. Indeed, *responsibility* appears

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to be a term that has more to do with phronesis than competence does. At this point, though, I do not intend to go further into the discussion about the EQF. Rather, in the following, I will take a closer look at how responsibility can eventually be related to phronesis.

### **3.4. Phronesis as responsibility**

When Heidegger defines phronesis as “conscience set into motion” (Heidegger, 1997: 39), then phronesis can be interpreted as a *responsible response in action*. In other words: If we understand responsibility as some sort of response-ability, that is, an ability by which we can respond to a given situation in a morally reflected, mindful way, then this resembles phronesis in terms of “the ability to do the right thing in a given situation – i. e. the concrete teaching situation – with regards to human flourishing, that is, the good life overall.” (Weiss, 2021b: 248) Interpreting responsibility in this way, it is not only the ethical character of phronesis that is reflected. Also, virtuosity, as the ability or awareness to respond to a situation with regards to human flourishing, as suggested by Biesta (2015: 19f) appears to be addressed, namely, in terms of being able to improvise in such a situation, like a jazz musician, in order to turn one’s *doing* into *eupraxia* (good practice). Furthermore, acting responsibly appears impossible, if I do not relate myself – as a whole human being – to that given situation. With that, self-knowledge as an essential dimension of phronesis (see Gallagher, 1992: 198) is taken into account. In short, when understanding responsibility in this way, several key aspects of phronesis seem to be retained. The question now is, how can we understand the role of phronesis in terms of responsibility as the third form of knowledge – or rather ability – in academia?

To safeguard the ‘soul’ of phronesis, we have to understand knowledge more in terms of insight, even in a quite literal sense: To gain insight, literally, means to *see into something*. Metaphorically, it is as if the curtain suddenly rises, and we see the whole scenery on the stage. Raising the curtain, clearly speaking, is like raising awareness. And raising awareness is vital in order to develop responsibility, that is, the ability to respond to a situation in such a way that the response is a deliberate response towards the good life (eudaimonia). Here, the role of meaning in relation to responsibility comes into account, as Viktor Frankl points out:

Man is not he who poses the question, What is the meaning of life? but he who is asked this question, for it is life itself that poses it to him. And man has to answer to life by answering for life; he has to respond by being responsible; in other words, the response is necessarily a response-in-action. While we respond to life ‘in action’ we are also responding in the ‘here and now.’ What is always involved in our response is the concreteness of a person and the concreteness of the situation in which he is involved. Thus our responsibility is always responsibility *ad personam* and *ad situationem*. (Frankl, 2000: 29)

Frankl addresses two essential aspects of responsibility: Firstly, what we perceive as responsibility is always a question of what we experience as meaningful in a given situation. Secondly, responsibility always depends *on* the person *in* the concrete situation. In other words, responsibility cannot be generalized (and therefore – just like phronesis – cannot be taught). This brings us to the question, how can response-ability – next to knowledge and skills – be developed or made visible through research? Which research methodology appears to be suited for this purpose?

## **4. Research that allows for phronetic knowledge development**

### **4.1. Monological vs. dialogical methods**

The term *methodos* was introduced by Plato, and it consists of two words (Lindseth, 2015b: 47): *meta* (over) and *hodos* (way). Plato used this term in order to point out that even though we cannot re-walk our ways in life (what we have done, we have done, and what happened, happened), we can at least reflect and think about our concrete actions and experiences (ibid.). By walking this ‘meta hodos’, that is, by reflecting on our ways in life, we can learn and develop ourselves. In his *Socratic Dialogues*, Plato showed how this *methodos* is practiced, namely in the form of dialogues. In most of the dialogues described by him, ethical and existential issues like love, virtue, etc. were examined. Often, the point of departure of these conversations were concrete experiences shared by Socrates’s interlocutors and, not rarely, these interlocutors left the conversation in *aporia*, that is, in confusion. Instead of reaching a conclusion about what, e. g. courage, would mean, they apparently went with less knowledge from the dialogues than what they came with. One might get the impression that rather than producing new knowledge, existing knowledge was deconstructed and destroyed in the *Socratic Dialogues* of Plato. And in terms of factual knowledge, this clearly seems to be the case – what Socrates’ interlocutors thought they would know turned out to be based on mere beliefs rather than facts. However, this does not mean that the dialogue partners did not learn something from the conversation. Their leaving in *aporia* and wonderment can, in fact, be taken as a sign that they became aware of something that made an impression on them. It did something



to them; it moved them in their way of seeing life (*insight*). And this can be called *methodos*.

Today, we have a different understanding of the term *method*. Lindseth speaks of two kinds of methods: monological and dialogical methods (*ibid.*). Monological methods are standardized procedures of production where the outcome is not only predictable but intended. Such methods resemble what previously has been described as technical knowledge. In contrast, there are also dialogical methods. Their outcomes cannot be predicted, and one does not know where one stands at the end of a dialogue (which can also be a dialogue with oneself).

With respect to what has been pointed out so far concerning responsibility, it appears that the way to do research on responsibility has to be dialogical. Through dialogue, as a way of reflecting on life experiences or professional experiences, one can develop and become aware of one's own response-ability. This also is expressed in the fact that responding to each other is vital for those participating in a dialogue. In a dialogue, as Lindseth puts it,

The Other invades my world as vulnerability and silent appeal, as something invoking my responsibility even before I begin to understand. Understanding the Other is in particular subjected to the appeal for responsibility. (Lindseth, 2020a: 355)

Furthermore, with Frankl, we can say that responsibility rather *shows itself* in concrete experiences and situations rather than being present in theories or know-how. It is through the meaning that reveals itself in a given situation that responsibility can manifest itself through our actions (see Frankl's "response-in-action" (2000: 29)). And in this context, dialogue – in the true sense of the word – appears to be a proper research method since the Greek *logos* is another word for meaning, as Frankl pointed out, while *dia*

means ‘through’. Hence, in a dialogue taking its point of departure in concrete experiences, *meaning* (*logos*) – and, with that, our response-ability – can shine *through* (*dia*).

## **4.2. Phronetic research and philosophizing**

What we have seen so far is that phronesis (or, in our case, response-ability) differs fundamentally from epistémé and techné. Hence, it requires a distinct research *approach* based on a dialogical method, as suggested by Lindseth (2015b: 47). In this context, Halvor Bjørnsrud should be recognized, who, in reference to Flyvbjerg (1991) and Hermansen (2001), outlined an epistemological framework called *phronetic research* (Bjørnsrud, 2005: 138). In his explications, he points out the following: The knowledge form of epistémé represents a *know-why* in terms of universal principles and theory (see Flyvbjerg, 1991: 72), and techné represents know-how in terms of principles of production (see *ibid.*). Both forms of knowledge have to be extricated and liberated from the context of concreteness (Bjørnsrud, 2005: 138). This is what the Ancient Greek term *analysis* actually meant: *to untie* – untying and separating complex, different elements or substances. In order to present a theory or principle and its universal, general nature, it has to be untied from human everyday life and from concrete practices (*ibid.*). Analysis, in this sense, however, does not work with the knowledge form of *phronesis*. The reason is, as mentioned previously, that this form of knowledge is only learnable but not teachable – since there are no general phronetic principles that could be taught or imparted (see e. g. Gallagher, 1992: 198; Gadamer, e. g. 2004: 315 or 318). Phronesis is practical knowledge, or better, practical wisdom; as such, it is the wisdom of practice. If this wisdom or knowledge is segregated from the practice in which it is involved, it loses its essence and

meaning – an essential aspect that already came to the fore with Frankl when he states that “Responsibility is always responsibility *ad personam* and *ad situationem*.” (Frankl, 2000: 29). Therefore, as Bjørnsrud asserts, the context is inherent in phronesis, and *phronetic research* requires context-relatedness (Bjørnsrud, 2005: 138). Furthermore, Bjørnsrud concludes that since *phronetic research* is not about “unearthing” universal principles, it should focus on the *interplay between the general and the concrete by means of reflection* (ibid.)

For several scholars and philosophers throughout history, the interplay that Bjørnsrud outlines represents the essence of *philosophizing*, which could also be called a movement between the individual and the universal (see e. g. Weiss, 2015a: 215f). For Pierre Hadot, this interplay – whether done in dialogues with others or with oneself – represents a key-exercise towards wisdom, as he points out in his famous and critically acclaimed book *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (see e. g. Hadot 2010: 211f). Though, as he points out in this book, so-called *maieutics* (Socratic midwifery), as presented in the Socratic dialogues of Plato, represent one of the oldest examples of this interplay, many other philosophers and philosophical schools adhered to it (ibid.). Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* is just one of many famous examples (2009). In the 1920s, the scholar Leonard Nelson, inspired by the Socratic dialogues of Plato, developed a dialogue format that had this interplay between the concrete and the general at its center so that his students could learn to *philosophize* instead of merely *learning about the history of philosophy* (Nelson, [1922] 2004). Nelson’s approach was further developed by his student Gustav Heckmann ([1981] 2004) and still represents a key method in the discipline of so-called philosophical practice (see e. g. Weiss, 2015a). The list of scholars who incorporated this interplay as outlined by Bjørnsrud, which

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according to him is vital for the knowledge form of phronesis, could be extensively expanded. Instead, however, I propose to cut through to the following point: This interplay, which represents an examination of general aspects of the human condition, is essential for the activity of philosophizing, as several scholars assert (see e. g. Teichmann & Evans, 1999: 1; Lahav, 2016: 20; Helskog, 2019; Weiss, 2017b). As such, this interplay cannot only take place *in* a dialogue. Rather, the interplay *is* a dialogue between the concrete and the abstract put in motion by the dialogue participants. It is this that makes a dialogue philosophical.

As Bjørnsrud notes, due to this interplay between the concrete and the general – one could also say between theory and practice – phronetic research requires context-relatedness (Bjørnsrud, 2005: 138). Now, what established research tradition takes context-relatedness, that is, concrete practice and action, centrally into account? Following Bjørnsrud, we find one possible answer in the tradition of so-called *action research*. Action research has a long tradition in what could be called the field of classroom research (Eikeland, 2011), with roots in the works of Dewey (1910), Collier (1945), Lewin (1946) and Corey (1953). However, as we will see in the following, since action research today serves as an umbrella term for various research methodologies, we need to take a closer look at which of them can “host” the requirements of phronetic research.

### **4.3. Three general forms of action research**

Bjørnsrud presents three fundamental, general forms of Action Research as outlined by Carr & Kemmis (1986: 202f): *Technical*, *Emancipatory* and *Practical Action Research* (Bjørnsrud, 2005: 38f).

In *Technical Action Research*, the participants are subordinate to the researcher who decides the direction of the project and develops the respective research questions (see Carr & Kemmis, 1986: 202). The practitioners only apply what they receive from the researcher in the form of new strategies and approaches.

In *Emancipatory Action Research*, the practitioners direct the course of the investigation in order to solve specific problems. While “for Carr and Kemmis, only emancipatory action research is true action research” (Zuber-Skerritt, 1999: 11), Bjørnsrud (2005: 40f) understands this form of action research as action learning rather than actual research since the development of theory is a marginal issue in this approach.

In *Practical Action Research*, then, the relation between the researcher and the practitioners is based on dialogue in terms of mutual cooperation (Bjørnsrud, 2005: 38). The researcher’s role is Socratic in nature and intended to foster prudence (phronesis) with the participants (ibid.). Hence, the researcher becomes a sort of facilitator, encouraging the practitioners to reflect on their own practice (Stenhouse, 1975). In this form of Action Research, development happens basically through self-reflection. The overall intention is that participants develop understanding on the one hand and the (further) development of theory on the other.

In the way these three general forms of action research are outlined by scholars, it seems clear which of them meets the requirements of phronetic research. However, Practical Action Research seems to have even more on offer when justifying philosophical dialogues as a research method, as we will see in the following.

#### **4.4. Dialogical Action Research**

As mentioned earlier, Lindseth distinguishes between two basic forms of method: the *monological* and the *dialogical* (see Lindseth, 2015b: 47f). In the broad field of action research, one can find an example for the latter in what Alrø and Hansen called *Dialogical Action Research*, an approach that could be subordinated to *Practical Action Research* for several reasons. As in Practical Action Research, so too in dialogical action research, the researcher is understood as facilitator, like a Socratic midwife (Alrø & Hansen, 2017: 9). Furthermore, as its name indicates, dialogue plays a central role in this approach in terms of the conversations and forms of interaction that happen in this version of action research (ibid.: 8). Alrø and Hansen use a conception of dialogue that strongly resembles Lipman's *Community of Inquiry* concept (see Lipman, 2003: 20f). They outline dialogue not simply as a specific conversational format but as an inquiring and wondering way in which the participants relate to each other, to themselves and to the field in which they are working and reflecting upon (Alrø & Hansen, 2017: 9). The starting point for such dialogues is the practitioners' experiences of something meaningful, something good, of "golden moments" that made an impression on them and with which they, together with the action researcher, want to come into dialogue in order to get a better understanding of these experiences (ibid.: 11; Hansen 2014; 2016). Here, a unique feature of Dialogical Action Research comes into its own, which does not always seem to be in place with Practical Action Research in general: In reference to Reason and Bradbury, who assert that "action research is about working towards practical outcomes, and also about creating new forms of understanding" (Reason & Bradbury, 2001: 2), Alrø and Hansen emphasize that action research does not

always have to have the former, that is, practical outcomes, as its primary goal. Rather, the action research process can also be oriented towards the development of ethical and existential *Bildung* as well as towards a new understanding of life and what it means to be human (Alrø & Hansen, 2017: 11). With Pahuus (2015), they state that this kind of action research is not initiated by a concrete, tangible problem the practitioners need to have solved but rather sparked by an often vague, intangible longing, which the participants do not always find words for from the beginning; it is set in motion by an experience that made an *impression* on them, which they now seek to find *expression* for (Alrø & Hansen, 2017: 11). It is this experience the practitioners and the researcher want to come into dialogue with; it is this concrete experience they want to bring into dialogue with more general perspectives on what it means to be human (ibid.: 14). In that way, we can understand why Alrø and Hansen assert that Dialogical Action Research seeks a *humanization of human life* (ibid.). And here, we are back at Phronetic Research with its interplay between concrete experiences and general aspects of the human condition (see Bjørnsrud, 2005: 38).

Before we go on to the next section, let me first summarize what we have examined so far. In previous sections, we have seen that dialogue-based research differs from conventional forms of research in that dialogue-based research is not done after interviews and conversations are carried out (Hansen, 2015a: 179f). Rather, the actual research happens in the research, together with the dialogue partners. The form of knowledge that is yielded in such an approach is phronetic, as I pointed out earlier. Phronesis, in more modern terms, can also be understood in the sense of responsibility or response-ability. By taking a closer epistemological look at phronetic research (see e. g. Bjørnsrud, 2005: 38), we have learned that this form of

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research does not so much require an *analysis* in the actual sense of the word as it needs an *interplay* between the concrete and the general. For only by means of this interplay can the context-relatedness on which phronesis relies be safeguarded. I then went on to more established research approaches that could allow for phronetic knowledge development and presented three fundamental forms of action research. As it turned out, one of them, namely Practical Action Research, shows several dialogical features, including the mentioned interplay. With Dialogical Action Research, which I suggested as a subcategory of Practical Action Research, an important aspect of action research emerged that often appears to be undervalued and marginalized, namely that action research is not merely about finding proper solutions to concrete problems. Rather, as Alrø and Hansen stress, action research can also take its point of departure from a rather vague longing for understanding and wonderment about what one is actually doing in one's professional practice (Alrø & Hansen, 2017: 11). And that requires not only a dialogue between the participants of such a project but also a dialogue between concrete experiences and general aspects and perspectives on the human condition. How such a dialogical method can be outlined we be seen in the following section on so-called Reflective Practice Research, which represents the underlying *methodos* for the dialogues presented in this anthology.

### **4.5. Reflective Practice Research**

Understanding his own research approach as a dialogic method (2015b: 47f), Anders Lindseth, a pioneer of philosophical practice (see e.g. Lindseth, 2015a), coined the term Reflective Practice Research (Lindseth, 2017b). Though he never labeled his approach as action research, it



certainly bears similarities to Dialogical Action Research. Not only that Lindseth and Hansen both are philosophical practitioners and that both base their research on a dialogical methodos (that is, a dialogical way of reflection and investigation); also, both approaches take their point of departure in a practitioner's wonderment about experiences from his or her own practice (Lindseth, 2017b: 243f; Hansen, 2015b). Furthermore, taking practitioners' longing for deeper understanding seriously, both approaches intend to foster the development of practical knowledge in terms of phronesis (see e. g. Lindseth, 2017a, 2017b; Hansen, 2015b).

Since I understand Reflective Practice Research as a form of Dialogical Action Research, the main reason why I have chosen the former as the underlying approach or methodos of the research dialogues presented in this anthology is easily explained. The overall goal of Reflective Practice Research is to support a practitioner in improving his or her professional practice by developing practical knowledge (phronesis) through reflection on that practice (Lindseth, 2017b: 244). Hence, good practice (eupraxia) is a major perspective of this approach and an aspect of high relevance with regards to the question, "What is good folk high school pedagogy?" After the preliminary deliberations in this chapter, it seems to be established that not only is good folk high school pedagogy a question of good practice (that is, a practice that fosters human flourishing (eudaimonia) with the folk high school students), but also that good practice is intrinsically connected to phronesis in the sense of responsibility (or response-ability). In fact, when one takes a closer look at different Reflective Research projects, for example, from the broad field of pedagogy (see Weiss & Helskog, 2023), then one realizes that the practitioner's (e. g. a teacher's or university lecturer's) responsibility towards the respective (pedagogical) practice

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is addressed and responded to by the practitioner throughout the whole research process. Whether the research is about conducting a workshop (Kolmannskog, 2023), the impact of a new technology on one's teaching and (pedagogical) worldview (Bloom, 2023) or on one's attitude as a teacher in general (Bergh, 2023; Løvgren, 2023; Eidsvig, 2023), this responsibility is at times made more explicit (see e. g. Helskog & Weiss, 2023; Angeltun, 2023), while on other occasions it comes into prominence in more implicit ways, simply through the interplay between the concrete and the universal, which represents an integral part of the Reflective Practice Research process (see e. g. Lindseth, 2020b: 97f). For example, when a pedagogue expresses a suspicion that something was or felt not right in a specific teaching or learning situation, then it is his or her responsibility that is "activated" and "calling" here; it is his or her "conscience set into motion", to use Heidegger's definition of *phronesis* (1997: 39). The pedagogue's responsibility is "telling" him or her that the given response in this situation did not *correspond* with his or her responsibility. And this "call" of the practitioner's response-ability is "guiding" all the steps of reflection in the Reflective Practice Research process, so to speak. What these different steps of reflection are about is outlined in the following paragraphs:

1. **Concrete reflection:** An investigation based on this research approach consists of three steps (Lindseth, 2020b: 97f), where the first is called *concrete reflection*. In this step, an experience from one's (professional) practice, e. g. as a teacher, nurse, etc., is described. The experience can be one that made the practitioner wonder or even perplexed because something did not go well or something unexpected happened (Lindseth calls this experience of discrepancy; see e. g. 2017b: 247). How-

ever, one can also reflect on an experience where something happened that made an impression on the practitioner, e. g. that something went really well in terms of good practice (*eupraxia*). In this step, by the act of narrating and writing it down, a once-experienced phenomenon is re-lived, so to speak. As such, it represents a form of re-reflection, according to Ricœur (2007: 265), because one has to find the right words that properly *ex-press* what one was once *im-pressed* by, as Lindseth points out (Lindseth, 2017b: 247).

2. **Critical reflection:** After the previous, more phenomenological step (the experience as a phenomenon that is *re-lived* and *re-told*), follows a more hermeneutical one, which is called *critical reflection*. The guiding question here reads: *What is at stake in the narrated experience?* (see e. g. *ibid.*: 80, 85, 93, 97) By examining this question, more general themes inherent in the narration can come into focus, themes that are relevant for other practitioners as well and are therefore more universal in nature. If one assumes that the activity of philosophizing is centrally about examining general aspects of the human condition (see e. g. Lahav, 2016: 20), then it is not least due to this step of critical reflection that Reflective Practice Research represents a research approach of philosophical investigation as well as of phronetic research (Bjørnsrud, 2005: 38).
3. **Theoretical reflection:** In the last step, called *theoretical reflection*, the identified universal themes derived from the experience are brought into dialogue with relevant theoretical concepts, approaches and ideas (Lindseth, 2020b: 97f). Here, one can see whether the reflected experience offers some sort of new knowledge, insight or understanding that was previously not embraced or detected by the existing theory of a discipline or profession, or whether the given response in action in

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the narrated experience can be informed by theoretical perspectives.

As one can see by means of these three steps, the reflection and research process of Reflective Practice Research represents an interplay between concrete experiences and general themes, theories, concepts, etc. that Bjørnsrud asserted to signify so-called phronetic research (2005: 138). In Lindseth's approach, the concrete experience, that is, the context-relatedness, is not "analyzed away" at any point in the process. Rather, it forms the base of all three steps of reflection.

For those who are interested, more in-depth descriptions of Reflective Practice Research, especially of its phenomenological and hermeneutical implications, can be found in various publications (see e. g. Lindseth, 2017b; 2020b; Helskog, 2021; Weiss, 2021a; Helskog & Weiss, 2023). An anthology, which shall be explicitly mentioned here, was edited by Halås, Kymre and Steinsvik and called "Humanistiske forskningstilnærminger til profesjonspraksis" (in English: "Humanistic research approaches to professional practice", my translation) (2017). This book contains not only two of Lindseth's fundamental texts on Reflective Practice Research (2017a & b), but it also shows how different research methods like the interview or observation can be used in order to reflect on professional practices in the manner of the humanities. With its orientation towards humanistic research, this anthology was without doubt one of the sources of inspiration and why Guro Hansen Helskog and the editor of the present anthology started a book series on Reflective Practice Research in 2020 at LIT publishing (in which the present anthology is also published as a collaboration with the book series "Folk High School Research"). The purpose of the Reflective Practice Research series is to philosophically ex-

amine pedagogical practices from different academic disciplines in order to foster the development of experience-based, practical knowledge in terms of phronesis (see e. g. Weiss & Helskog, 2023). Investigating phronesis also represents a red thread in Helskog's and my works prior to this book series, whether written together or individually, with several of them employing a Reflective Practice Research approach (Helskog, 2013, 2014 & 2016; Helskog & Weiss, 2021; Weiss & Helskog, 2020; Weiss, 2017b, 2018, 2021a & b).

With respect to the present anthology, it must be said that even though Lindseth understood his approach as a dialogical method, it was initially not outlined as a research dialogue format. It was not until the present project that Reflective Practice Research was developed further into a form of philosophical investigation, which is carried out by means of dialogue. The reasons for choosing such a design are explicated in the next section.

#### **4.6. Philosophical investigations in terms of Reflective Practice Research dialogues and how they were practiced in the present project**

As we have seen on several occasions earlier, a philosophical investigation is characterized by the movement between the concrete and the general, that is, the examination of general aspects of the human condition (e. g. responsibility, care, love, etc.) by means of concrete life experiences (see e. g. Hadot 2010: 211f; Lahav, 2016: 20; Helskog, 2019; Weiss, 2017b). Such an approach is already found in the Socratic Dialogues of Plato.

In order to take this movement or interplay between the concrete and the general into account, each dialogue in the present anthology is based on the three-step investigation

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of Reflective Practice Research. After a short prologue and introduction, the participating folk high school pedagogue shares a concrete practice experience (*concrete reflection*). In the second step, this experience is examined by means of the question, “What is at stake in this experience?”, in order to identify more general and universal themes inherent in the narration (*critical reflection*). In the third and last step, these themes are brought into dialogue with relevant theoretical perspectives (*theoretical reflection*). Each dialogue concludes with a short epilogue giving a summary of the conversation with a focus on good folk high school pedagogy. After the actual dialogue, which was recorded on Zoom, the dialogue partners transcribed, further edited, and developed the text until both were satisfied with the result. In other words, even after the actual dialogue was finished the research continued as some sort of meta-reflection process.

In this respect, dialogue-based research, as outlined by Finn Thorbjørn Hansen, can be discussed. As he points out, though there are certain differences between them, the research approaches based on dialogue have one central aspect in common: Research does not happen *after*, but *in* and *through* the dialogue and together *with* the people involved (Hansen, 2015: 179 & 188f). Consequentially, the researcher and the dialogue partner, e. g. a practitioner, become not only co-researchers, but the dialogue *as such* represents the research (ibid.). It is this aspect that seems to strongly relate to phronetic research as described by Bjørnsrud, where the context-relatedness essential for this form of research can only be safeguarded through the interplay between the concrete and the general (Bjørnsrud, 2005: 138). Hence, understanding the dialogues of the present anthology as phronetic research makes it clear that there cannot be and should not be an analysis *after* or based *on* the dialogues that would result in phronesis, which in

our case is the *responsibility* of the folk high school pedagogues. Rather, it is primarily through the interplay between the general ideas and the concrete experiences that are brought into and forward in the dialogues that responsibility comes to the fore in a context-related manner. Therefore, the dialogues as such *are* the research. Were I to have chosen a different research approach than dialogue-based phronetic research, chances are high that I would have ended up with an understanding of responsibility and – strongly connected to that – of good practice (eupraxia) of folk high school pedagogy untied (that is, *analyzed*) from any context-relatedness and, hence, from precious pedagogical value. For what are pedagogical theories, models and concepts worth if they are not interrelated with the context of pedagogical practice? When Peter Singer states that “Ethics is not ‘Good in Theory but not in Practice’” (Singer, 2011: 2), the same could be said about pedagogy: It cannot be good in theory but not in practice. And in order to figure out whether it is good in practice, the context of this practice has to be an integral part of the whole research. One could also put it into the words of Reason and Bradbury, who, in clear reference to Immanuel Kant, state that “action without reflection and understanding is blind, just as theory without action is meaningless.” (Reason & Bradbury, 2001: 2)

That dialogue was chosen as the central writing format for the present publication on a decision that can be explained further when taking a look at the explications on meaning in terms of responsibility, as outlined by Frankl: When Frankl asserts that “Man is not he who poses the question, What is the meaning of life? but he who is asked this question” (Frankl, 2000: 29) and that “he has to respond by being responsible,” (ibid.) Frankl basically says that responsibility depends on meaning and that “meaning is connected to context.” (Dahlberg, 2011: 22) Con-

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text here means nothing else than the lifeworld of a person, that is “the concreteness of the situation in which he is involved.” (Frankl, 2000: 29) When Merleau-Ponty concludes that “because we are in the world, we are condemned to meaning” (see Merleau-Ponty, 2005: xxii), we could add with Frankl, ‘and therefore condemned to responsibility.’ Hence, if we want to investigate and reveal the response-ability of teachers in terms of their “response-in-action” (Frankl, 2000: 29) concerning good folk high school pedagogy, we have to illuminate their professional lifeworld. In other words, if the dialogues were carried out and then only their essences would be included in a research publication, an essential element would get lost along the way: the context, the described concrete situation in which the respective teacher is practicing, doing and responding to his or her pedagogical mandate. And this would mean that the actual meaning of a teaching practice, of an educational “response-in-action” (ibid.), is ‘thrown overboard’, so to speak. Hence, the dialogues of this anthology were transcribed and then further developed and edited by the dialogue partners, with the intention that responsibility in terms of phronesis and its various situational *meanings* (*logos*, see e. g. Frankl, 2000: 68) can ‘shine through (*dia*) – and here we are back at the necessity of a dialogue – based research approach (*dia-logos*) (for further explication on the term *dialogos*, also see Helskog, 2019 and Frankl, 2000: 59).

In this process of trying to let the contextual meanings of responsibility ‘shine’ through (*dia-logos*), my role as researcher is indeed that of a Socratic facilitator. My dialogue partners and I are on an “equal level”; we form a Community of Inquiry (Lipman, 2003: 20f). We are investigating, wondering and reflecting on the shared practice experience together in order to get a deeper understanding of it, especially with regards to the guiding question, “What is good



folk high school pedagogy?” In order to do so, we also bring our experience and our ideas and thoughts around it into dialogue with theoretical perspectives. Consequentially, it is these aspects that bring the Reflective Practice Research dialogues of this anthology in line with Practical and Dialogical Action Research (see Bjørnsrud, 2005: 38f; Alrø & Hansen, 2017).

At this point, however, it might be legitimate to ponder whether these dialogues also yield answers to the overall question, “What is good folk high school pedagogy?” The answer is negative if one expects a final, all-encompassing, abstract answer. The reason is not to be found in the chosen research approach but in the fact that we are dealing here with a normative question. As such, it is intrinsically *context-related*, and contexts can vary and change. And insofar as there are answers to the overall question of this anthology, they exist in terms of *examples*. The seven dialogues presented here *exemplify* what good praxis (*eu-praxis*) of folk high school pedagogy can look like; they *describe* how folk high school teachers can show responsibility, that is, how they can respond to their pedagogical mandate; they *illustrate* what is meaningful for the teachers in their respective pedagogical situations and how they respond to that meaning. Using examples instead of general definitions when it comes to phronesis (and hence good practice) is not new, as Biesta points out; we can already find such an approach with Aristotle, who “does not provide abstract definitions of what practical wisdom [*phronesis*] looks like, but tries to make this clear through examples.” (Biesta, 2015: 19). Of course, had the dialogues been conducted with other pedagogues, then other examples would have emerged. As examples, they are never all-encompassing, but they are concrete. And if *phronesis*, in terms of response-ability, cannot be taught but only learned, and if phronetic research requires context-

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relatedness (Bjørnsrud, 2005: 138), then the seven dialogues – as exemplary, context-related knowledge – might help the reader see possible ways of how to practice good folk high school pedagogy. And in that way, he or she might get an *understanding* (*phroneo* in Latin, by the way) of what good folk high school is about. And with that, we also arrive at a first answer on the guiding question of this chapter, which reads, “*Why choose philosophical dialogue as a research approach to examine pedagogical practices at folk high schools?*”

### **4.7. The litmus test**

For those still unsure whether the Reflective Practice Research dialogues as employed in this project can be understood as *research*, let me suggest a brief litmus test: Kalleberg suggests four elements (here written in italics) that constitute any kind of scientific research (1992, 1995). Thus, let us see whether the research dialogues in this anthology meet the necessary requirements:

1. ***One cannot do research without a research question. A question or questions define the direction of the project.***

With regards to the present project, the guiding question reads, “What is good folk high school pedagogy?” This question gives direction to the subsequent dialogues.

2. ***Empirical data is gathered.***

In the case of this anthology, the empirical data is represented in terms of the concrete experiences and cases of the pedagogues that are shared and then philosophically investigated.

3. ***Terms, including models and typologies, are used.***

An example of a key term or concept used in the following dialogues is *Bildung*, which is quite central to folk

high school pedagogy, but other pedagogical key terms like *learning, knowledge, etc.* are also brought up.

4. ***The research process is characterized in terms of an argumentative movement between question(s) and answers.***

A dialogue essentially consists of questions and answers and the movement between them, as are the dialogues of the present project.

In reference to Kalleberg, Bjørnsrud (2005: 43) adds a fifth criterion: ***The production of formal texts like reports, articles and similar publications.*** In this way, new theories can come forward, which then can be discussed in reference to other theories. The present anthology as such also meets this criterion – not only is it a formal text and a publication, but in the dialogues references to other theories are explicitly made, especially in the third step of each investigation called *theoretical reflection*.

Hence, as seen in light of Kalleberg's four elements (and Bjørnsrud's fifth), the philosophical dialogues carried out and presented in this anthology can legitimately be called *research*.

## **5. Presentation of the dialogues and the research ethics**

The research ethics underlying this project are, on the one hand, the ethics of dialogue with values like open-mindedness, mutual esteem, fairness, honesty, humbleness, respect, tolerance etc. at its core (see Weiss, 2015b). In addition, the project was accredited by *NSD – Norwegian Center for Research Data*. NSD approved the design and the processing of the research dialogues, on which the chapters of this anthology are based on. Furthermore,

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the identity of any eventual third parties was – as required by NSD – kept anonymous. Moreover, to formulate it in the words of the guidelines given by The Norwegian Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities (NESH), consent from these anonymous third parties was neither possible nor necessary, for there was “no direct interaction between the researchers and those involved” (NESH, 2022: § 18) in the experiences shared by the practitioners since these experiences often date back years. In this respect, it has to be emphasized that due to the employed Reflective Practice Research design, it was the respective practitioner (that is, the participating pedagogues) and his or her practices that were in the focus and under investigation in the dialogues.

The different dialogues of this anthology can be briefly summarized in the following way:

In the dialogue “When Education is at Risk” with Filipina Millenberg, a teaching experience is shared and reflected upon, which seems to represent a concrete example of Biesta’s idea of “the beautiful risk of education” (Biesta, 2013). How a folk high school teacher can deal with this risk is further investigated in the course of this conversation.

What “The Crux of Being a Folk High School Teacher” might be about is examined closer in the dialogue with Kjetil Hareide Hallre. As it turns out, stepping out of one’s conventional role as a teacher and just being a human being might appear like a paradox, but it seems to be an essential dimension of folk high school pedagogy nonetheless.

The dialogue “No Fish Pudding” with Steinar Bryn examines a peace-building project that was carried out at the Nansen Academy. In the course of the conversation, a dialogical room is outlined that has four ‘walls.’ It is then investigated more closely how these four ‘walls’ provide for a good dialogue and for good folk high school pedagogy.

The dialogue “The Human Landscape” with Benedicte Hambro focuses on how folk high school students’ personalities can be challenged and fostered and how this relates to becoming an active citizen. Related to that, the question of how one can learn to live together with others even though one might have different opinions is examined more closely.

In the dialogue “Golden Moments”, Sigurd Ohrem shares an experience that at first does not appear to be pedagogical in nature. However, as the dialogue unfolds, a pedagogical attitude is examined that resembles the Taoist *Wu Wei*, that is, doing by not doing, and how this attitude might play a vital role in the students’ Bildung-process.

In the dialogue “So that Life Becomes Bigger” with Johan Lövgren, a course about learning to deal with difficult feelings like grief and sorrow is presented and reflected upon. How this course relates to a good folk high school is further investigated in this conversation.

“Pedagogy for the Rich” is not only the title of the dialogue with Brita Phuthi, but it is also the name of an educational program that was put into practice at several folk high schools. Its main intention is to make the students aware of their own attitudes towards life and the world and how one can contribute to societal change.

## 6. Concluding remarks

In this introductory chapter, I discussed and examined the question, “*Why choose philosophical dialogue as a research approach to examine pedagogical practices at folk high schools?*” Doing dialogues and then calling them research is certainly not a conventional methodology. As I tried to point out, however, in the case of the present project, it appeared to be a valid option for the follow-

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ing reasons: Good folk high school pedagogy is a question of *eupraxia* (good practice) and good practice a question of *phronesis*. *Phronesis* – which I operationalized for this project as *responsibility* – requires a specific form of research, in contrast to conventional methodologies intended to develop the knowledge forms of *epistémé* or *techné*. So-called *phronetic research* (see e. g. Flyvbjerg, 1991; Bjørnsrud, 2005: 138) was identified as a suitable form of research required for this project. At its heart lies the interplay between general ideas and theories on the one hand and concrete examples and experiences on the other (see *ibid.*). For only through this interplay, this movement – which many assume to represent the activity of philosophizing (see e. g. Teichmann & Evans, 1999: 1; Lahav, 2016: 20; Helskog, 2019; Weiss, 2017b) – the context-relatedness, which is inherent in the knowledge form of *phronesis*, can be safeguarded. Since this interplay between the concrete and the general is represented in both Reflective Practice Research (see e. g. Lindseth, 2020b: 97) and philosophical dialogues in general (see Weiss, 2015a), it appeared legitimate to combine both into what I called Reflective Practice Research dialogues. Even though this specific form of research dialogue is quite new, dialogue is already incorporated centrally in several other practice-oriented research approaches, like in Practical or Dialogical Action Research (see Carr & Kemmis, 1986: 202f; Bjørnsrud, 2005: 38; Alrø & Hansen, 2017). Philosophical dialogue *as* research methodology was explicitly outlined by Finn Thorbjørn Hansen (2015a). In fact, one can find several academic publications in the humanities and the social sciences written in dialogue form, some by well-known authors (see e. g. Gadamer, 2001; Horton & Freire, 1990; Hattie & Larsen, 2020; Pauer-Studer, 2003; Pitschmann & Wallner, 1995; Burton, 2021a & 2021b; Rosa & Endres: 2016). Against this background, it appears

legitimate to investigate Nordic folk high school pedagogy by means of a dialogical approach, not least since the dialogical spirit of Grundtvig, the founding father of these schools, still seems to live on in the daily pedagogical practices of these schools.

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