

# The Human Landscape

Benedicte Hambro & Michael Noah Weiss

## 1. Prologue

In the fall of 2019, Benedicte Hambro and Michael Noah Weiss met at a folk high school teachers' seminar on sustainable development in Oslo, where Michael was particularly struck by her storytelling-based approach to learning and teaching. Benedicte spent most of her working life at a folk high school and in various positions. In 1988, she began her career at Seljord Folkehøyskole in international and social studies as well as in theatre play. Then she founded a major in stand-up comedy at Ringerike Folkehøyskole. This major was not only the first of its kind but several now famous comedians in Norway attended it.

Over the years, she also continually contributed to improve the theoretical concepts that inform the pedagogical work of the folk high schools, like *Bildung*, and how to make them visible in the subjects of a school. For that, she held introductory courses for new teachers, and, for a year, she also worked at the main office in Oslo. At the time of the following dialogue she was employed at Arbeiderbevegelsens Folkehøyskole (TN: the labor movement folk high school), focusing on *Bildung* and how to educate students to engage in the social activities of the folk high school. According to Benedicte, engaging in such activities is essential for the *Bildung*-process of the students.

Why she thinks like that, how personality development can be fostered with folk high school students in general and how this development relates to becoming an active citizen is investigated in the following dialogue. In this respect, a fascinating story about the search for meaning in life is shared and how one can learn to live together with others, even though one might have different opinions and attitudes towards certain life issues.

## 2. Dialogue

**Michael N. W.:** Benedicte, you are known for having in-depth knowledge and experience with the concept of *Bildung* at a folk high school. A concept that I think is highly relevant with regards to the question, “What is good folk high school pedagogy?” Hence, I would like to invite you to share an experience of yours that you think represents an example of good folk high school pedagogy.

### 2.1. Concrete reflection

*The Tree of Life* **Benedicte H.:** When you asked me to take part in this research project, the first thing that came to my mind was Grundtvig’s historical-poetical aspect of education. To me, it is essential that the students realize that they are part of something much bigger than themselves; that they, with the cultural backgrounds they have, are, so to speak, a result of people who lived before them; and that the students have the possibility to change their lives, if they are active participants in their own lives.

When it comes to this aspect of folk high school, I use storytelling as a pedagogical approach. The first story that the students hear when they come to the school is from Grundtvig’s huge collection called “Nordens mytologi”

(1808) (TN: *Mythology of the North*). It is a story from the old Nordic mythology, and it goes like this:

In the old days, when the people believed in completely different Gods than we do today, they believed that all life came from the big Tree of Life, in Norse called *Yggdrasil*. They also believed that at the roots of *Yggdrasil*, the three Goddesses of Faith sat named *Urðr* (fate), *Verðandi* (present), and *Skuld* (debt or future). They lit the light of life for each child being born. In the beginning, the little child cannot take care of this light; rather, it depends on all the people around it. When the child comes of age and says, “I want to take care of my own life. Now I am a grown-up,” the three Goddesses of Faith give the grown-up child three gifts, namely hope, vision and the belief in a good world. Then the young person gets the light in order to take care of it by him- or herself. Sooner or later, the young person realizes that you need more than these three gifts in order to live a full life. And when the child realizes this, the three Goddesses come with three new gifts. Those three gifts are disappointment, defeat and misfortune, because you need that as well for living a full life. Regardless of how the person lives his or her life, the light of life will slowly burn down, and the person will grow old. When the person has grown old, he or she gets the three last gifts of the Goddesses and that is wisdom, knowledge and the ability to tell stories.

When I tell this story – which is more poetical than when I do it in English, I have to admit – then I have also lit a candle for each student that started in that year, and I put the candles on the stage of the main lecture hall where we would have this session. I then tell the students that I lit a candle for each one of them for this school year and that this story is not only an example of how the old Nordic Gods thought that life should be lived but also a story about a year at folk high school. I tell them, “You all come here,

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and you are full of dreams, visions and hope for the future, and you think that this will be the best year of your life so far. However, you will come to realize that life takes its toll. You will face disappointments and downturns and life won't always be easy. However, this is part of living. It is part of becoming a person. And when the school year is over, we hope that you have gained wisdom and knowledge, and that you have lots of stories to tell." And then I would say, "Unfortunately, I have to blow out these lights because they won't burn for a whole year, but if you want, you can come up to the stage after this opening event and take the candle with you to your room, where you can have it as a little memory of your first school day."

Later in that school year, I would have a session with all the students called *The human landscape*, which is somehow connected to the opening event. In *The human landscape*, we explore what it means to be a person. The students are challenged with thoughts, ideas, role play, discussions and several other exercises. In one of these exercises, I ask them to bring something from their room, which is of importance for them; an item that means something to them personally. It could be anything, but the nice part here – and that touches my teacher's heart – is that many students bring along the candle from the first school day. Because, as they say, to them, this candle said something essential about life; something that was understandable, that was easy to grasp for them. And that, to me, is what all our teaching at folk high schools should be about. That is, to teach the students to see life and to learn from their experiences, and not to be crushed by them but to see that they are part of something bigger. I think it is just fascinating that the old Nordic Gods understand disappointment, defeat and misfortune as gifts that you should cherish because they form you as a person. So many of our students have not learned to see it that way before they come to the folk

high school. They are not capable of surviving the disappointment that life gives them, so to speak.

**Michael N. W.:** May I pose some follow-up questions? When you do this session about *The human landscape* and the students bring their candles, what do they say as to why they brought them? How do they explain why they have chosen their candle?

**Benedicte H.:** They got the candle on their first school day, so they remember it and they remember the story around it, which was of importance to them. And also, for many, it was the first time that a grown-up told them a story. They experienced the story-telling situation as so special that they wanted to bring that candle to this session.

**Michael N. W.:** My next question is about the way you are working with the students. You said that the session about *The human landscape* is about becoming a person. For me, when you described it, it almost sounded like an initiation ritual. The students bring their candles to this session because the candles kind of symbolize this initiation. What is the next step then, after they brought their candles?

**Benedicte H.:** When I ask them to bring something important from their room, then because this is part of a bigger game called the *Bone Game*, which is an Indian problem-solving ritual. The Indians did this ritual when two rival groups had a dispute over something like some piece of land or buffalo herds. And instead of going to war against each other, they performed this ritual, which can be compared to a win-and-lose game. So, if you lose the game, you have to do something for the winning party. By doing this ritual, greater damage could be avoided because if both parties had gone to war, it would have meant death and destruction for both. Therefore, if the losing party managed to come up with a gift that they could live with, it would

*The Bone  
Game*

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still have cost them something, but the dispute could also be settled. In that way, war could be avoided.

In the session *The human landscape*, the *Bone Game* is played in the following way: The students are divided into two groups; they sit in a circle, and each group has to decide which symbol they want to have for their group. Therefore, each student has to bring something of personal value and present it to the group. Then the group would have a vote over which symbol should be chosen in order to represent the group. Each one in the group has a say in this decision, and the symbol also serves as a talking stick. That is, only the one holding the symbol is allowed to speak. This is part of teaching how to come to an agreement without arguing and instead listening to each other; presenting to each other and listening to the ideas that are presented. As an example, one student could bring her teddy bear and say, "This teddy bear was given to me by my grandfather who was a very important person in my life." Then everyone in the circle would hold the teddy bear and give reasons why this teddy bear could be a symbol for the group or why it could not. For example, one group member would say, "I feel that this teddy bear is very important to you, but for me, it is not of so high value. Therefore, I don't think it represents the group in a proper way." However, when one of them presents his or her candle, then many accept this as a proper symbol. Not because I suggested that to them, but because all can relate to the meaning of this candle. They would say, "We all know the story behind the candle, so let's choose it as our symbol." After choosing their symbol, they go on to the next step of this exercise, which is to find out what could be the gift that they want to give to the other party if the other group wins. By doing that, they figure out what is essential to their group that they are willing to give to the other group. Here, one would, for example, suggest, "Let's give them some money," while another one would object

and counter, “Isn’t that too easy? What if we give them a good meal instead?” So, by using the chosen symbol as a talking stick, each one in the group can come with suggestions and objections until they agree on a gift. The other group has, of course, done the same. Then, two representatives – one from each group – will discuss whether they will accept the gift from the other group or not, in case their group wins. Let’s say that one group offers to buy goodies for the other, and this other group says, “No, we want something that is dear to you and that costs you something. Buying goodies is too easy.” Then the representative of the rejected group has to go back to his or her group and tell them, “The other group did not accept our gift. They want us to work harder.” So, this group has to decide on a new gift. After both groups have accepted the suggested gift from the other group, they play the *Bone Game*, which is a very simple game. It is basically about tossing sticks and depending on how the sticks fall, you get a certain amount of points. The group with the most points wins. The losing party will then present their gift, for example, making a meal, and invite the others in and say sincerely, “We lost the game; this is our gift. And let’s get on with our lives.” This is also what the Indians did because though they did not want war, they wanted something in return. For example, the losing party would say to the other, “You can get a part of our fishing river,” and the other party could say, “Yes, we accept that,” or they could say “Hm, that part is too short”, and so on. The point in the end is that by means of that *Bone Game*, they could find a non-violent solution to the dispute.

**Michael N. W.:** If I understand you right then, the idea of the Indians was that the losing party gives something away that is of value for both sides. What do you think is it that

the students learn by means of this exercise? Or, what is it that you intend that they learn?

*Conflict  
management*

**Benedicte H.:** My intention is that they learn how to solve a problem without arguing but by talking and listening and by doing something good for an opposing party. And also, to work together on a consensus, which is something that they are normally not used to. They are so used to arguing and that the stronger party or the party with the loudest voice wins. But here in this exercise, everyone has to talk. Every voice is important. Many students say that this is extremely frustrating because it is so new to them, because they are not used to it, and because it takes time. And in fact, it can take hours and even several evenings before they come to an agreement – but they have to come to an agreement.

## 2.2. Critical reflection

*Learning to  
listen*

**Michael N. W.:** When I see all that you have described so far and ask, “What is it that is at stake in this pedagogical approach or set-up?”, then it seems to be *learning to listen*. But not only that, because when I am listening to you, like now, then I am learning a lot about storytelling, about Nordic mythology and so on. However, the kind of *learning to listen* I mean here is not only about that. There is more to it. It has to do with giving and taking: In the *Bone Game* you just described, I am listening to you as my opponent – and what you say, I am taking in, so to speak. At the same time, I am also forced to give something to you; I have to present something to you in order to negotiate. We can only negotiate if we both listen and speak; when we take and when we give. What do you think about that?

**Benedicte H.:** I think you are right. Some students, in fact, say that this is the first time that their voice has been



listened to because they all sit in the same circle and their voice has the same weight as the others when making a decision. For example, if one says “I don’t agree with this symbol” then this symbol will not represent this group. So, they learn to raise their voice. And for many students, that is a novelty. And interestingly, those students who are used to raising their voice, they are suddenly forced to listen, too, since their voice does not count any more than any other voice in the circle. That is also a novelty for many.

**Michael N. W.:** When you say that this is a novelty, then I am starting to wonder because all these students went to school before they came to folk high school. And a major, overarching theme of schooling is to become an active citizen, that is, a responsible member of society. When you now mention that most of the students could not raise their voice prior to their time at folk high school and that they did not feel heard, my question simply is: What is going on here? Is your impression that the students you have in this course are quite blank, so to speak, when it comes to *Bildung*? I know that this sounds provocative, but what do you think about that and also with regards to democracy and active citizenship, which are central mandates of education in general?

*Active  
citizenship*

**Benedicte H.:** To put it bluntly, I would say that the conventional school system has failed one hundred percent. Many of my students say that they feel that they don’t have any say in their own life, in changing their life and making decisions for themselves. To me, to be honest, many of my students are totally incapable of living a grown-up life. And if we, through games, through role-play and storytelling, can raise their voices and strengthen their belief to be able to make a difference, then this is what is important, that is, to support them to be active participants in their own life.

*Being  
incapable of  
living a  
grown-up life*

I grew up with Astrid Lindgren's TV series, "*Vi på Saltkråkan*" (TN: "We on Salt-Crow Island"). One of the main characters in this series is the girl Tjorven. At one point, she was dressed up in a white dress because there was this big celebration on the island. Not even half an hour after the celebration began, the dress was not white anymore. Her mother asked her, "Tjorven, how could this happen?", and Tjorven answered, "The dress just became like that," as if she had no involvement in the matter. It just happened. Tjorven's attitude is very similar to the attitude of our students. "It just happened," they would say about whatever. And here I would counter, "No, it did not just happen. It happened because you made a decision, unaware perhaps, but you made a decision. For example, you made the decision not to show up in class. You made the decision not to finish your homework. You made the decision not to show up for kitchen duty. It did not just happen." Becoming aware of that is also something that is new to them.

**Michael N. W.:** When you describe all this, then it is the term *response-ability* that comes to my mind. With that I mean the ability to respond to a situation in a responsible way. The story of Astrid Lindgren that you just told is about this attitude in terms of "I am not responsible for the dress being dirty. It just happened." However, that being said, giving a response also means making yourself heard. And according to your description, the students themselves said that it was the first time that their voice was being heard. How can you relate all that to *Bildung*, that is, responsibility and being heard? *Bildung* often is defined in a different way than by these terms. Klafki, for example, points out that there are two traditions of how to define *Bildung* (see e. g. Klafki, 2007: 15f; 2001: 39). One of them clearly asserts that in order to have *Bildung*, you have to have read

certain books; you have to be familiar with the traditions of your culture; you have to know what the scriptures say, so to speak. Therefore, my question, how do you define *Bildung* in light of the pedagogical exercise you previously described?

**Benedicte H.:** I agree to a certain extent with the one tradition that is pointed out by Klafki. You have to have read certain books in order to have some sort of general and fundamental knowledge. With that knowledge, I also mean that you have to know how to eat with a knife and a fork. That is also part of *Bildung*. However, to me, *Bildung* in the folk high school context means to be a responsible person in charge of your own life. You have to be aware of that things don't just happen; but you have to make active decisions in your life in order to become a person in the actual sense of the word.

**Michael N. W.:** When you take a look at your students' development, then what is your impression – do they become more responsible during the school year, and if so, why? There are probably different reasons, which differ from individual to individual, but what is your general impression?

**Benedicte H.:** When we ask the students at the end of this school year, "What have you learned this year?" very few say anything about the subject they have chosen, like theatre play, design, music and so on. Rather, they say that they have learned that they are members of society and that whatever they choose to do, it will have an impact on that society. For example, "If I don't show up, it does not only affect me, but it also affects everybody around me." At the end of the school year, they see themselves as members of a society where they make a difference. One student once said, "I have become more self-aware and more self-assured, and I know that I can play an important part in *Bildung*"

society after this school year.” For me, that is *Bildung*. If only one student in each school year can go out with that attitude towards life, we can make a difference in our society. And you know, there are many students who feel that way. They have the impression that this is their most important year of their lives because suddenly they can see themselves as individuals who can make a difference.

**Michael N. W.:** We are already in the second phase of the dialogue where we investigate what it is that is at stake in the story you told. In that respect, we brought up several themes, like being heard and being able to raise your voice; responsibility was also mentioned. However, my impression is that there is still much more at stake here. When you compare what the students learn in such a school year with what they learned in their school life prior to folk high school, then it is in fact no less than the lives of the students that are at stake. To me, it is not simply *Bildung* being at stake here, in terms of the question, “Do the students receive *Bildung* at folk high school?” Rather, it is the students being at stake in terms of the question, “Will they succeed as human beings, or will they fail – will they live a failed life or not?” I know this sounds quite harsh, but this is the impression that I get when I listen to your story and your thoughts. What do you think about that?

*Poverty of words*

**Benedicte H.:** First of all, I should not be the one to judge whether they live a successful life or not. Nevertheless, I think if we give them some tools they can use in order to deal with life after the folk high school year, when they go out into society, then we are helping them to become successful as a person. I am not talking about choosing the right job or so. Rather, what I mean is that they can live a life that is workable for them. I wish we could teach the students also the *Bildung* you mentioned, which is more about general knowledge in terms of fundamental works

of literature and so on. Because it breaks my heart every year when I see how little the students know. I think there is some kind of general knowledge about literature, politics, philosophy that is just essential to know. There, they would find vocabulary in order to express themselves. There is such a poverty in that respect. For example, I have stopped playing Trivial Pursuit with my students because I find it so disappointing to see how little they know compared to what I knew when I was their age. Of course, this is an old woman talking now, but I really wish they had better general knowledge. And my main goal of being a teacher at a folk high school is not to have them gain more knowledge but to become active participants in their own lives.

In this respect, I also have to mention one more thing, and that is the so-called cancel culture (see e. g. Valesco, 2020). This culture, if you want to call it like that, also affects our students. They are afraid to raise their voice because they think that there are so many right and wrong answers. For example, it is very hard to get our students involved in discussions because they think for every question raised in such a discussion, there is a right and a wrong answer. I try to teach them to believe in their own answer and not be afraid of being judged by others. That is important, but it is much harder to learn today due to this cancel culture, where only some students define what is right and wrong.

**Michael N. W.:** What you just said about intellectual poverty in terms of the students not being familiar with essential general knowledge, with skills and also with a deeper understanding of what life should be about; how you can contribute; how you can raise your voice and be active in order to make a change, then to me this intellectual poverty appears to be quite decisive for several social phenomena we experience today. For example, that the

*Constructive  
alignment vs.  
Bildung*

students don't participate in discussions anymore, as you just said. Interestingly, I have the same experience with my students. It is very hard to get them involved in dialogue, and it is very challenging to make them formulate their own thoughts. Just last week, I talked to a teacher from another folk high school who experienced exactly the same with the students from recent years. This teacher and I have not seen each other for some years, and I asked, "How is the class this year?" The teacher replied, "They are very nice, but they are also very shy, and they don't engage in discussions." Then I said, "You know, my experience is that the students who are coming now to higher education are the first generations who grew up – since their first class in school – with the teaching principle of so-called *constructive alignment* (see e. g. Biggs & Tang, 2011)." That is, they get a pre-defined set of learning outcomes, and the only purpose of schooling is to reach these outcomes as quickly and effectively as possible. In other words, they are given a task, they reach the task, and then they are called good students. The teacher I was talking to answered, "It is interesting that you mention that because it was exactly what one of the students said when I asked them quite frankly why they would not dare to get into discussion. He said, 'We always had these learning outcomes, and we were expected to fulfill the tasks, and that was it. It was not expected from us to come up with our own thoughts.'" So, there you have this schooling system guided by this constructive alignment approach, on the one hand. On the other hand, you have this idea of *Bildung*, and what the folk high schools are doing is oriented towards *Bildung*.

With that in mind, I suggest that we go over now to the last part of the dialogue, which is about bringing in some theoretical perspectives on what we have investigated so far. In order to start with this part, I think we can both

agree that what you do as a folk high school teacher and pedagogue is quite different from what the conventional school system is doing. My first question now is, how do you justify that – how do you back up your approach in terms of theories, concepts etc.?

### **2.3. Theoretical reflection**

**Benedicte H.:** I was hoping you would not ask me that question simply because I cannot back it up. I think I just back it up with my own experience and with the ability to gain the knowledge that I need from stories, literature, philosophy etc. I think you need some sort of substance in terms of personality, and if you don't have that substance, you cannot absorb what is given to you. To me, the important thing is to give the students the feeling of belonging, of being part of something that is bigger than yourself. This somehow relates to what Gadamer called *historical consciousness* (1975), that is, the historical *horizon* in which we see and understand ourselves (see Malpas, 2018). Opening up and widening this horizon, so to speak, is among my key intentions as a folk high school pedagogue. For some students have quite a limited horizon when they come to us. I can give you two examples.

*Having  
substance*

From time to time, we sing Leonard Cohen's song "Hallelujah" with the students. I would ask them, "Do you know what the song is about?", and they don't. So I tell them the story from the Old Testament of King David and Bathsheba, who took a bath on the roof, and David saw her, because this is what this song is based on. I think, it is important to know such things; to know about their background because then you can understand their deeper meaning. And the Bible has influenced people since thousands and thousands of years. The point is not whether you

are religious or not, but rather that this book is part of our cultural backbone.

Another example is the song “Die Gedanken sind frei,” which is a German folksong from the time of the Enlightenment. The song can be related to people’s enlightenment, a key issue in folk high school ever since Grundtvig (see Ohrem & Haddal, 2011) and enshrined in The Folk High School Act as one of the schools’ main goals (The Folk High School Act, 2003: § 1). When we sing it, I tell the students that this song has been sung in freedom fights and that it has roots back to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. This background gives the song a much greater impact compared to a song just heard on the radio – it is widening the students’ *horizon*, their *historical consciousness*, to put it in the terms of Gadamer (1975). Trying to give them this kind of background information gives them an idea that they belong to a much greater history than the one they see right around them. And sometimes, they don’t even see the one right around them; they just see themselves and their little navel, to put it metaphorically. In other words, my intention is to open up the world for them.

*Concepts need  
life experience*

**Michael N. W.:** I think I understand what you mean. And I really liked your answer that you gave to my question when you said that you don’t have any back-up for your teaching in terms of theories, concepts and so on. Rather, you back it up with experience because in order to understand concepts and theories, you have to have substance, which, by the way, reminds me of Immanuel Kant’s dictum that “Thoughts without intuitions are empty, intuitions without concepts are blind.” (Kant, 1998: A51=B75) In general language, this dictum is sometimes recited as *concepts without percepts are empty, percepts without concepts are blind*. If we replace the term *percepts* with *life experience*, then what you say means that if you don’t have a cer-



tain degree of life experience, theories, concepts and factual knowledge are worth nothing. You would know about them, but you don't understand them, that is, you cannot relate them to yourself. The two songs you mentioned exemplify that quite well. This in fact brings us to the important difference between knowledge and understanding, a difference that was pointed out and investigated thoroughly by Ludwig Wittgenstein, for example, in his post-hum published book, *On Certainty* (1969). My impression of your work as you described it now is that you want to make the students understand. You do not only want them to know. And this is what you described as *having substance*.

**Benedicte H.:** Yes, that is true. In this respect, I remember a big argument I once had with a headmaster of a folk high school. I gave a lecture at his school, which was about what folk high school should be. And as always, I used a story in order to explain that. The story goes like this: Once upon a time, there was a young man in a village who decided that he wanted to become the wisest man of all men. So, he started to study. And he read, and he read, and he read. Slowly, the rumor about him and what he intended to become spread to the village. It did not take long until it dawned on the people of the village that if he really became that wise, then they could say, "Ohh, we come from the same village as the wisest man of the world." So, they could enjoy themselves in the awareness that they were somehow acquainted with him. Therefore, the villagers brought him food, they brought him firewood, and they helped him in all possible ways. Some even brought books to him, so he continued to read and read and read. One day, however, he jumped up from his desk so that the chair fell with a big bang on the ground, and the young man ran to the center of the village where he shouted, "I won't open a book again until someone can tell me what

*Meaning of life*

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the meaning of life is!” This made the whole village come running to him, and each one of them gave an account of what they thought the meaning of life was. As it turned out, there were, of course, as many meanings of life as people living in the village. And none of the answers he got was good enough for this young man. Therefore, someone said that there was an old rabbi in the neighboring village, and maybe he could tell what the meaning of life is. So, the young man walked to the other village, and with him, all the other fellow villagers. When they arrived there, he asked for an audience with the rabbi. The request was accepted, and the young man was brought to the rabbi. The young man told his story and finished with the question, “What is the meaning of life?” The old rabbi stood up from his chair, went to the young man, and slapped him in the face. Bewildered, the young man asked, “Why do you hit me? I only asked you a question!” The old rabbi replied, “Oh, you young fool! Don’t you know that this is one of the best questions in the world? And you want to fob it off with one answer? Don’t you know that it is the answer that divides us and the question that unites us?”

In the lecture where I told this story, I told the audience that this is our main objective at folk high school – to share all those existential questions with the students and not to give them answers. The best would, of course, be if we could find the answers together, which goes into the direction of inquiry-based learning, as for example Mathew Lipman has outlined (Lipman, 2003: 20f). However, the answers are not really important actually. It is the questions the students ask about life, about the meaning of life, about who they are and who they want to become and why they should care. Those are the main issues and objectives of folk high school. We should be the type of school that asks all the questions and give none of the answers. The headmaster of this school was very upset with me because

according to him, it was the school's main objective to give the students answers. To me, this is not the answer to the question of what good folk high school pedagogy is. To me, the answer is to investigate the questions with the students together and see if there is anything that we agree on. As a human being, you have to ask questions in order to grow and not simply accept the answers. If you do the latter, you stop developing.

**Michael N. W.:** What you just said reminds me of Viktor Frankl. He became famous with his book, *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl, 1992). In this book he also points out what you just said, namely, that there is no general answer on this quest for meaning. Rather, the answers differ from human being to human being. What I am wondering about in this respect is whether you think that the students at folk high school not only get the chance to raise their voice and be heard for the first time but that they also, for the first time, get the chance to ponder the question, "What is meaningful to me?" In short, do you think that this search for meaning is of pedagogical relevance, that is, of relevance for the students' growth?

**Benedicte H.:** Oh, definitely. Sometimes I initiate a walk&talk where the students are given the question, "What is truth?" in order to discuss it in groups of two. It is very interesting when they come back and share what they have talked about. Of course, there is no general answer to this big question, but we break it down into simpler questions like, "Is it always right to tell the truth?" and ask for examples from the students' lives. In this way, we related this huge question to them personally, and then they come up with important ethical and existential issues. My job in this exercise – even if I agree with what they say – is to come up with further follow-up questions and kind of disagree with them, so that they feel challenged.

**Michael N. W.:** Benedicte, I think we have come pretty far now and in our talk there were many interesting perspectives that shed light on what good folk high school pedagogy can be about. Since there is no need for arriving at a common conclusion in such a dialogue, I suggest that we finish the conversation here. Thank you very much for this inspiring dialogue.

### **3. Epilogue**

In the course of this dialogue, a game was presented – the *Bone Game* – which shall students support to develop conflict management skills. An important part of this game is learning to listen. The reason why this game is introduced and played at Benedicte’s folk high school is because the ability to resolve conflicts is assumed to be central for active citizenship. Fostering such abilities helps the students to develop response-ability in terms of learning to be in charge of their own lives and making their own self-responsible decisions.

In the further conversation, developing responsibility also turned out to be an important dimension of *Bildung*. In this respect, it was asserted that concepts, like *Bildung*, need life experience. For concepts without experience are empty, and experience without concepts is blind (see Kant, 1998: A51=B75). For Benedicte, it is therefore essential to challenge folk high school students to reflect on their life experience in an existential manner. Her way of doing this is by means of storytelling, since stories are not only easy to understand but also relate to one’s own life. But they are also concrete, so that everyone can imagine them. Furthermore, they engage the students not only cognitively but also emotionally, which makes it easier to remember these stories.

Summarizing this dialogue, it can be stated that telling stories – as Benedicte did in this dialogue with the story on the search for meaning – and philosophizing over them and relating them to one’s own life can be seen as an inspiring form of good folk high school pedagogy.

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