

# Pedagogy for the Rich

**Brita Phuthi & Michael Noah Weiss**

## **1. Prologue**

The dialogue partner of the last dialogue in this anthology is Brita Phuthi, who has in-depth experience with the field of international cooperation, global citizenship education and education for sustainable development. It was when she attended Sogndal Folk High School that her interest in the subject was evoked. Hence, after this school year, she applied for a program called Communication for Change by the Norwegian Church Aid and YMCA, in cooperation with NOREC<sup>1</sup> and Oslo Metropolitan University (OsloMet), with boarding at Rønningen Folk High School in Oslo. A stay abroad was part of the program, and for 3 months, she was in Eritrea with the Norwegian Church Aid's partner in order to learn about solidarity and aid work. In addition, she studied Global Understanding at OsloMet. After her studies, Brita had a position at Åsane Folk High School where she taught the subject "solidarity work". Since 2011, she has worked at the Norwegian Folk High School Council as an international advisor before beginning her PhD studies at OsloMet in October 2022.

Meeting Brita at a workshop on sustainable development for folk high school teachers in Oslo, Michael invited her to the following dialogue that took place in January 2022. In the beginning of this conversation, a learning pro-

gram called *Pedagogy for the rich* is presented. This program was developed around 2005, directed at the folk high schools, and was followed up by the International Committee for folk high schools (IU). The program is inspired by Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), focusing on how we can liberate ourselves from systems and ways of living that oppress us and others (see Mokhtari & Sødal, 2005). The program has been carried out by teachers at several schools as well as by the international advisors at the Folk High School Council, who on average, visited around 25 schools per annum for several years.

## 2. Dialogue

**Michael Noah Weiss:** Brita, you are quite familiar with different fields and with different aspects of folk high school. And I assume your diverse experience as a vital resource for our dialogue now, in which we investigate the question, “What is good folk high school pedagogy?” In order to go into that question, I would like to invite you to pick a story and to share an experience from your work at the folk high schools that you think represents a good example of folk high school pedagogy.

### 2.1. Concrete reflection

**Brita Phuthi:** I have chosen an experience that is based on multiple learning experiences. It is about a program, which I have facilitated several times at different folk high schools. This program is called *Pedagogy for the rich*, and I have facilitated it at schools with a hundred students as well as in small classes of just ten students. When I think of the program now and how I want to present it, I have a class with about 15 students in mind – a class that focuses

on solidarity work. This might be relevant for the reader when imagining the different activities. As a first step, I would like to describe the program.

When starting, I introduce myself and the participants. After a brief round of introductions, we start with a first exercise – the world map: We write the name of the world's continents on posters, one on each, and put them on the floor. Then, I ask the students to think of a place in the world that has meaning to them, for example, a place where something special happened (in a positive sense) or a place that made an impression on them. This place could be in Norway or anywhere else in the world. The students get some time to think, but usually quickly choose a place. Of course, participating and sharing is voluntary in this exercise, and I also mention that if it is a very personal story that is connected to the chosen place, the students may only say a few words about it without telling the whole story. As it most often turns out, some have very typical stories, like having a nice holiday trip to the chosen country. Others would pick a place in Norway because, for example, their mom lives there and they feel at home there. For most folk high school students, it is the first time in their life that they live away from home when they stay at a folk high school. Others would choose a place in the world where they experienced something quite special, something that really made an impression on them, like a cultural experience or something that challenged their world view. I would also share a story to show the students that I am “with them.” This exercise functions as an icebreaker, and since the program's focus is on the world, it is also a good way to tune into that topic and see how places can connect us.

The program is practice-oriented, and we would continue with an exercise on prejudices. Here, the students get a list of people with different identities, like a mother with a baby, a businessman, a youngster, an asylum seeker

and so on. Then the students should imagine that they sit on a train from Moscow to Rome, which takes a couple of days. The question they get is, with whom would they like to share their train compartment with and why – and why not with the others on the list? During the exercise, the students realize some of the prejudices they have. It is different how the students respond to this exercise, since some have a more solitary-oriented attitude, like choosing a blind woman from Iceland. Such students would say, “This woman should stay with me because she needs help, and I am willing to help her.” Then you have a girl with a mini skirt on the list, and some male students would choose her for obvious reasons. Others would show resistance to having the woman with the baby in their compartment; their explanation is that the baby could cry all night, making it impossible to get some sleep. It is interesting to listen to the students’ arguments on which they base their decisions. Some decisions would have been made for practical reasons, like with the mother and the baby. Others point towards more stereotypical pre-assumptions, for example, when students would be scared to share the compartment with an asylum seeker because they perceive such a situation as potentially dangerous. What is quite giving with this exercise is the act of visualizing and imagining the different situations with the different people and reflecting on your choices. The aim of this exercise is not only to become aware of your prejudices but also to investigate where they actually come from.

The next exercise is a newspaper game, where the class is divided into groups of five. I give a big newspaper, like a double-page, to each group and put it on the floor. The rule is that the students must be touching the newspaper without touching the floor, at least for a small second, and everyone in the group must do this simultaneously. The first round is easy because they stand on one foot on the

newspaper and hold each other in order to keep the balance. In the next step, I fold the newspaper to half the size, and the students try to do the same again, and so it continues. The newspaper gets smaller and smaller, and the students are not allowed to use any other equipment. Pretty soon, they would carry each other on their backs and try out other creative options. Finally, the newspaper is folded into the size of a postcard. In order to manage the task, the group really has to think outside the box. Because there is a solution: While the group members hold the newspaper with their hands, they jump up together. This exercise is a good energizer, also because the students don't think it is a part of the learning program, rather that they are simply doing a game. However, after the exercise, I connect it to the topic. I point out that the world's population is growing, but the world is not getting any bigger: the natural resources are not increasing; rather, they are being exhausted. I would point out that creativity is an important competence to seek ways in which the world can be more sustainable and equal. Then I would give some examples: In Norway, we are known for our oil resources, but we also have plenty of seaweed, which was used much more in previous times. You can make flour out of seaweed, which can be used as animal feed, for example. Where I come from, there was a factory making seaweed flour, which closed a long time ago, as seaweed was used for farming and agriculture. Today, we know seaweed from sushi, but it is not used as much and as versatile as it could. You can even make building material from it. One folk high school in Lofoten, which I visited, used seaweed as an ingredient in soup. Telling about these examples in this exercise should give the students ideas of how we can do things differently.

Another exercise I do in this program is musical chairs, but with a twist. You probably know this game where you put some chairs in the middle of the room, then you put

music on, and when you stop the music, the participants of the game must quickly sit down on one of the chairs – however, there is always one chair too little. The exercise I will describe now is a bit different. I tell the students that we are now playing the musical chairs game, but we will have two teams. I would form two groups with, let's say, 7 people in each group, and each group gets 6 chairs. After the first round, one in each group would not get a chair. However, instead of them leaving the game, the person from group A will be told to go to group B, and then I take a chair from group B and bring it to group A. So, I am changing the rules of the game, and I say that the goal is that each participant is included and that everyone gets a space to sit, even if that means that some people are sharing a chair. Because they just played the newspaper game, they are still tuned into how to cooperate. The game goes on like this for several rounds, where a person from group A goes to group B and a chair from group B is moved to group A. In the end, you have many people in group B with few chairs, while in group A, you have few people but many chairs. I don't tell the group that gets the chairs what to do with them, that is, how to arrange them and so on. They have to figure that out on their own.

After the game, the first question I ask is, "How was the game?" Here, the group with the many people would say something like, "Oh, it was real fun! We laughed a lot," and so on. The other group with many chairs and few people would not be that thrilled; they would often just say, "Well, we had enough space." What I try to observe in this group is whether they are sitting closely together and if they are using their chairs in a creative way. For example, they could build a sofa, or they could just leave the chairs randomly where I put them during the game. After hearing about their experience of the game, I ask, "Do you know what I am trying to show with this game?" And here, some

would have understood that it is a metaphor for the distribution of resources in the world. There are many different aspects that this game brings with regards to the overall theme of pedagogics for the rich. For example, if you are short of resources, you have to rely on your community, but – as in the context of this game – how long can three people sit on the same chair? For some minutes, it works, but for two hours or a whole day? They might have had a good time during the game, but being poor is not easy, even if the community supports each other.

The group with the many chairs and few people shows that it is in fact not much fun to sit on all the resources; the game gets boring for them pretty quickly. Some in this group would even look over to the other group with the many people, getting jealous and saying, “Look, they have so much fun, and we don’t.” This brings us to the question of what we need to have a good life. Material resources are important to meet our physical needs, but our mental health and social lives are also central to a good life. Another important question concerning the group with the many chairs and the few people is whether this group utilizes their resources. Do they make and build anything out of these chairs, for example? Or are the chairs just standing there? And how do these material resources affect us and our daily life? Do they create distance between us, or do they bring us together?

Another question is whether the rich take from the poor – because the group with the many chairs gets more and more chairs while the other group has fewer and fewer chairs. Here, we would talk about development issues, such as how for each dollar that a rich country gives to a developing country through aid, rich countries take about two dollars back through tax havens or debt payments, and so on. Another question I ask is whether there are more and more poor people on the planet, because this is what happens in

this game. At the time when I was facilitating the game, the number of people living in extreme poverty was decreasing, which showed (at that time) that there were positive developments as well.

The final exercise I would like to share is called “Take a stand”. I would put posters on the floor where one would say “agree”, another one “disagree” and the third and last one “don’t know”. Then I would pose some statements, and the students must physically move to the poster with the answer that they think fits best. I encourage them to discuss a bit before they choose. However, quite often the students just follow their gut feelings and quickly go to a poster. The first statement is, “I hardly ever buy things I don’t really need”, which brings us to issues of consumerism. The second one is, “My way of living contributes to the world being a better place.” After positioning themselves, we would discuss the topic further by the students sharing their standpoints and some follow-up questions by me. But first, I would remind them that they can change their opinion and go to another poster that appears to fit better while we discuss. With regards to the statement about consumerism, it is interesting to talk about happiness with the students and pose questions like, “Is consumerism making us happy?” or “How long are you happy due to something that you just bought?” or “Which comments do you get when you wear something new?” When we arrive at the second statement about one’s way of living, it often turns out that the students are very critical towards their way of living. The danger here is that they become a bit down, and that their impression is that we have screwed up the world in every respect. Therefore, when they share their issues and views, I try to point out positive developments too, including systemic changes, for example, at the palm oil campaign in 2012, which was very successful. We also talk about small changes each can make, like re-



ducing meat consumption and contributing to an inclusive school environment. More importantly, I try to leave the individual focus and give examples of what we can do on the school level as well as on a political level in order to make change happen. As much as I hope to bring in some perspectives through my questions, an important part of the exercise is for the students to listen to each other's views and practice expressing their opinions.

The program goes on like that, depending on whether we have a half day or a full day, with more exercises and reflections. I don't use that much theory when doing this program; rather, I try to give many examples in order to make it easier for the students to understand the issues that I want to bring attention to.

## **2.2. Critical reflection**

**Michael N. W.:** I think I have a good idea and picture of the program you described now. What I was wondering a bit about while you were describing the different exercises was the following: Normally, when we hear about solidarity work and global solidarity, then we are presented with a lot of knowledge. You said that you did not use that much theory in this program; rather, what you wanted was to break down these big topics into personal experiences. For me, seen from a pedagogical point of view, there is something in all the exercises that you described that you could call *emotional* or *personal involvement*. Like in the first exercise, where they pick a country that has a certain meaning for the students. If something has meaning for you, it also has a value for you. In the case of the first exercise, it would be an experience-based value that comes to the fore – because the students have experience with the country they have chosen, for whatever reason, whether it is because their mom is living there or you had the best holi-

*Emotional and  
personal  
involvement*

days ever in that country, and so on. So, it is an experience-based value that is in the focus here. Something similar happens in the game with the chairs. As you yourself mentioned, this exercise is about provoking personal emotions and feelings, like being jealous of someone else because that person got hold of a chair. Or those who have more than enough chairs without realizing what they could actually do with these chairs. Instead, they just sit around, bored. In this respect, we could ask, are we making something out of our concrete living situation?

When we now go over to the next step in the dialogue called *critical reflection*, then it is the question, “What is at stake here?” that is central. What is at stake in the program that you described now, especially in terms of pedagogy? I don’t know what you think, but for me, it would be this emotional and personal involvement that I just mentioned in order to succeed with this *pedagogy for the rich*, as you called it. What do you think about that?

*Unlearning the  
“We are the  
best in the  
world” attitude*

**Brita P.:** Well, I have to reflect while I speak now. I think global understanding is one thing, but that you care about other people in the world – this kind of interest is quite hard to call up if you are not already involved. To get a concrete, emotional experience might help in that respect. The program *Pedagogy for the rich* is about our attitudes as well as politics in the North and what impact these attitudes and politics have outside but also inside our borders. There are many aid organizations and projects that focus on what we can do somewhere else in the world. However, the *Pedagogy for the rich* is about what we can change here, in our society, and in our politics in order to create a sustainable future globally. In order to evoke involvement and to investigate these questions together, it can be good to start with the individual level, for example, by doing a project at your school, signing a petition or buying fair trade prod-

ucts. One of the questions that I pose during the exercise “Take a stand” is, “Is it better to give aid or to buy Fair-trade products?” Here, you would always have someone in the group saying, “Oh, I like this aid project,” and another one stating, “Yes, but I think fair trade is better.” Here, I try to point out that many well-intentioned projects are like putting a band-aid on a wound, but the real question is, “Why is there this wound in the first place?”, metaphorically speaking. In other words, I try to challenge them on an even deeper level, looking at the systems that are making these wounds. The students, just like me at their age, through the Norwegian culture, schooling, media etc. are used to the idea that if you want to help people in the global south, you give money. Many have this understanding when they come to the folk high school. Therefore, my aim is to start a process of unlearning and awareness. To start that process, I would have a very short presentation at the beginning of the program where I come with a bit more critical perspective on how we learn about the global South in Norway and how we view ourselves in Norway.

This reminds me of our prime minister when he held his New Year’s speech a few weeks ago. I think he had many good points, but when he talked about the Norwegian youth, he said something like, “We have the best youth in the world!” However, his next sentence was, “But they need some help” (the focus being on mental health issues). This idea that we are the best country in the whole wide world and that we know best, I think this is an attitude that we subconsciously have in Norway. On the one hand, an integral part of our culture is what in Norwegian is called The Law of Jante, saying, for example, “Don’t think that you are better than anybody else.” On a national, collective level, however, we have this “We are the best” attitude. I found evidence for that in the schoolbook of my son, who is in the second grade (Phuthi, 2021). In this book, there

was a page about water where Norway was compared with Africa, a whole continent, and all the stereotypes about Africa, as well as Norway, were reinforced<sup>2</sup>. I complained to the teacher about this book, who followed up, but for me, this is one of the signs for this “We are the best” attitude. With the *Pedagogy for the rich* program, I want to challenge this attitude because I think it is important to rethink how we view ourselves, how we view the world and how such attitudes can also be negative for us. Because in a way, such a collective attitude is connected to institutional racism. In that sense, the program is also intended to be a changemaker.

**Michael N. W.:** When you put it like that, then for me, the program is about awareness-raising, on the one hand. On the other, I was wondering – when you mentioned unlearning certain attitudes or behavioral patterns – whether you sometimes get the impression that you are dealing with a quite ideological issue here.

**Brita P.:** Definitely!

*How to deal  
with ideology?*

**Michael N. W.:** How do you respond to this ideological aspect, which is obviously an inherent part of this program, and, in a certain sense, it has to be? In that respect, I can also mention that I just took a look on the world map that is hanging behind you on the wall. What is funny with those maps is that each continent and country gets a different color. Hence, in a way, we are already dividing when making such maps: the idea that the world can be divided into different countries, and then all of a sudden – as you just mentioned – it happens that someone sees his or her country as the best country in the world or at least better than other countries. And this is the point where certain ideologies come in. So, I ask again, how are you dealing with this ideological aspect in terms of an ethical attitude towards it?

**Brita P.:** I have to say that in most of my experiences from this program, I did not go too deep into the different topics that we dealt with so that it would become a challenge. The focus is to raise some questions that invite the students to think for themselves. They would then have reflections like, “Is it really so?”

*Posing questions that are thought-provoking*

I would use Peter’s World Map, where you can see the globe unfolded. In Peter’s World Map, you see the correct size of each country, however, the shape is not right. Here, Europe looks very small, and Africa is much larger than in the maps that are commonly used. When studying maps, you may also reflect on which countries have been put into the center of the map. Another map I use in the program is one that has the Norwegian flag on the country of Norway, and the size of Norway is much bigger than the other countries. Due to its size and being the only country with a flag on it – Norway dominates the whole image. Norway is a small country in the global context, but we tend to think of ourselves as very important. On the other hand, Norway is a country with a small population, but our carbon footprint is very large.

Another example of learning about Norway and the world is from the Montessori schools, which, when learning about geography, start with the universe and the planets. Then they would slowly zoom in more and more until they “arrive” in Norway – after you already learned about the solar system, the continents and so on. In the Norwegian public school, they would start with Norway and then gradually zoom out. I believe that how you learn about the geography of the world impacts on how you view the world and us who live in it.

Back to your question, I cannot say that I went deep enough into discussions regarding ideologies, so that tensions arose. As mentioned, I rather try to pose questions that are thought-provoking. One possible reason why I

didn't experience great tensions might be that in a class focusing on solidarity work, you tend to get students who have a certain political orientation, so to speak. On the other hand, I try to provoke the students a bit because I think it is "healthy" to be challenged. I don't know whether I answered your question, though.

**Michael N. W.:** In fact, you did. My follow-up question now is whether challenging the students is part of good pedagogy.

*Echo chambers* **Brita P.:** I think so. If you agree too much with what has been said, I don't know whether it moves you. I see it with myself. I think I have too many in my network who think alike. I am not happy about that because in a democracy, it is through diversity that you understand other people and other views better. If we agree too much, I don't think it is healthy, just like these typical political debates are not healthy either, where you just present your opinion and stick with it, no matter what. That does not lead to any change of thinking either.

Benedicte Hambro is a folk high school teacher and an expert on storytelling. In one of the stories that she tells, there is this person who wants to know the answer to the question, "What is the meaning of life?" (see Hambro's chapter in this anthology & Hambro, 2021) This person goes around the whole town and seeks counsel from those who are known for their smartness. Finally, the person ends up with the wisest of them all. This wise old man gets really upset and asks the person, "You have the best question in the world, and you are willing to exchange that for one answer! Don't you know it is the answers that divides us, and the questions that unites us?" For me, asking questions rather than providing answers is such an important part of the program.

**Michael N. W.:** When you describe it in that way – that is, by means of this story – then there seem to be some fundamental and existential aspects coming to the fore. Previously, we investigated *emotional involvement* as an essential aspect of this program, and also *challenging the students*. Furthermore, you mentioned that *being moved* is another important aspect. When I put that all together, then for me, all this is basically about *daring to discover* – daring to discover the world, but also daring to discover the world in a new way. What do I mean with daring to discover the world in a new way? In order to explain that I would like to take the world map behind you on the wall as the starting point again: When looking at this map as an adult or even as a youngster, there does not seem to be so much new because we are so used to that sight. We are so used to dividing the world into continents and countries. And you are challenging this view that we are so used to. And here, the question is: Do the students dare to take a new look? What I am wondering about, in this respect, is whether this is part of human nature.

**Brita P.:** I was discussing this in relation to the question, “What is the meaning of life?” One of my brothers was listening to a podcast where they investigated the meaning of life. One of the conclusions was *improvement* – improvement as an essential part of human nature and, therefore, a possible answer to the meaning of life. When I discussed this with my brother, I said that this is perhaps a western perspective – that we always have to improve. For me, that seemed quite capitalistic, while he replied that it can also mean fixing your house or that you master something new. And, of course, when you take a look at human development without improvement, we would not be where we are today. On the other hand, we would not have the climate crisis that we have today either. In our discussion, I also

*Improvement –  
the meaning of  
life?*

pointed out that the meaning of life can mean to be loved or to experience love. With regards to your point about daring to discover and whether this is part of human nature, I don't think I have a general answer to that. Personally, I think, yes it is, but it also depends on what we understand by this discovering.

One thing that we experience when I teach this program is *community*. We experience a community in the learning situation, where we share experiences and values, choose standpoints and share views. That is, you don't only go into your own emotional experience; but you also investigate and share your own thoughts and values. Typical statements for that are, "No, I don't buy new things because I don't think it's right" or "I don't need to look fancy because I am proud of who I am". Sharing something like that in a community with others moves you in a way because you also take in what the others share.

**Michael N. W.:** In what you just said, there are two forms of learning that come to the fore here. On the one hand, you mentioned improvement as the meaning of life, or at least as the meaning in several concrete situations. Whether it is in our work or in our private life, very often these situations are indeed about improvement – improving our personal living situation, improving a procedure at work, a product etc. All this, as I see it, could give us the impression that life is about nothing more than improvement. And here, I mean improvement also in terms of development. On the other hand, however, you said that you are trying to provoke your students so that they begin to dare to discover. And for me, to discover is a different form of learning than to improve.

Let me give you some concrete examples for that. *To improve* is something that I try to do when I work on an academic paper or a lecture, for example. That is, I try to make them better. *To discover*, however, is something that I do



in a completely different context, and that is when I take a walk in nature, for example. In fact, I live quite close to nature, and sometimes it happens that I discover a new path. In such moments, I always ask myself whether I should try out this new path because I have never walked it before, and in one hour, I have to pick up my kids from school. So, will I be back in time, or will the path lead me astray? Sometimes I choose to walk along the new path, and what happens while I walk on this unknown territory, to call it like that, is that I have a completely different experience of time compared to a walk on a path I already know. Furthermore, I would also discover and see new places, and there is always a certain uncertainty concerning what I would see and where I would end up. The reason why I mention all this is because improving an article and walking on a new path are two very different forms of experience. Without doubt, in both of them I would learn something, but what I experience as learning when improving an article is something completely different compared to what I learn when walking a newly discovered path in the forest.

My question to you now is: Do you think that learning at folk high school is more about discovering than about improving?

**Brita P.:** When I look at this question from a more general perspective, I think that we have more potential in folk high schools to reflect deeper and more often compared to a conventional school. Of course, at a folk high school, one can also get trapped in an everyday hassle with all the things that one must do for the school to operate as it should. Furthermore, it also depends on the respective teacher. Some focus more on the reflective part of their learning program, while others are more occupied with *doing*. Some years back, I was co-teaching on a folk high school study trip to Kenya and Tanzania. One of the things I observed was that

*Reflection and  
experience*

after an experience – that is, after discovering and visiting a new place – they did not reflect on that experience. Rather, they just went on to the next experience. What I suggested then was to have an evening gathering, where each student could share what made an impression that day, what each of them could take with them from the experience, and so on. For me it was important to see how they analyzed the situation from their own perspective. Also, it was important to make the students aware why they thought about an experience in that way, why they saw it in this way, and so on. It is in situations like this that you have the opportunity and the time to go into reflection.

Critical reflection represents an important aspect in my own pedagogical agenda, so to speak. For example, in this one year at a folk high school, I don't want students to reproduce this image of the global south that so many of us have. That is my nightmare. I want them to get a new and different view of the world. We are talking about the ability to be open. At the same time, I also want to show them certain tools regarding how to act. You cannot just sit and reflect; but to act is also important. In terms of study trips to the global south, I like to challenge the students to not focus on what money can fix but try to get in contact with the local youth who are interested in the same things as you are – and learn from each other. There are some schools that focus entirely on making connections between the folk high school youths and local youths through common interests during the study trip. I believe this type of cooperation, which may last a week or two, can contribute to better understanding as well as unlearning.

Since we talked about the meaning of life earlier, I would like to refer to Frederik Christensen, who wrote “To be a folk high school teacher”, which I read recently (in Danish: “*At være folkehøjskolelærer*” (1978: 54f)). Here, he discusses different approaches to the world. One approach

is: first you change the world, and then you will love it. Or you can first learn to love the world; then you can see whether there is anything you want to change, which was Grundtvig's life philosophy (ibid.: 59). These are two very different perspectives about the world and on life, and it brings us back to the topic of improvement. Many of the global issues that we have today are about improvement – because the world is not a good-enough place yet, to put it simply. It is unsustainable, unjust and so on. However, maybe by loving it first, you are better equipped to create something good. If you don't love it first, you can be very critical towards what you meet.

### **2.3. Theoretical reflection**

**Michael N. W.:** Let us go over now to the next step of the dialogue, the so-called theoretical reflection. In this step, we can shed a bit more theoretical light on what we have been talking about so far, like life as improvement or life as discovering. In this respect, there are two pedagogues that come to my mind: first, John Dewey with his famous approach of experiential learning (see e. g. Dewey, 1938); and second, Jerome Bruner with his approach of discovery learning (see Bruner, 1961). While I can see Dewey as a representative of an understanding of learning in terms of improvement, I can obviously see Bruner as a representative of an approach to learning in terms of discovering. You just brought up this approach to life in the sense of *first, you have to love it, and then you can see whether you want to change it*. For me, this also means that you first have to discover something that you are curious about. This curiosity implies that you feel a kind of attraction towards something, and you go after this feeling of attraction, and by that, you discover what you are curious about more and more. The other approach towards life that you men-

*Experiential  
vs. discovery  
learning*

tioned, however, could be summarized by saying, “Here is the world. And the world is not a good place; we have to make it better,” so to speak. What do you think about these two approaches with regards to the program you presented earlier? Is it your impression that the students who are participating are embracing the world in terms of, “Yes, it’s great to live and to be here! And of course, we have to become aware of certain aspects that we can change.”? Or are these students generally saying, “The world is not a good place, and we have to do something about it”? What I want to point out is that with these questions, in the second approach to learning, the starting point is assumed not to be perfect, whereas in the first approach, it is assumed that there is something interesting, attractive. Do you see what I mean?

*Transformative learning*

**Brita P.:** Well, I think so, but I am still thinking. I like to think of myself as someone who is employing *transformative learning* (see e. g. Elias, 1997; Brookfield, 2000). In simple terms, I want to challenge the knowledge and insights about the world that these students gained through their 19 years of life (on average, they are 19 years old). In my experience, many have stereotypical images of certain global issues. Like when you ask, what do you know about Africa, they would answer “Well, Africa is about poverty and safari”, and so on. Unless the students have already traveled to a country in a way where one really gets to know the culture, the country and the people, the majority of the students have their center of life, and therefore also their main focus, in Norway. Their life is in Norway, and everything outside the country is more peripheral.

Many folk high schools have a rather homogenous group of students and do not necessarily represent society at large. Democratic *Bildung* is an important learning target at the folk high schools, but in a democracy, we need to under-

stand different people's perspectives, and I think that the folk high schools have a potential to expand the perspectives that are represented among both students and staff. I mention this because it makes it harder to discuss different, unfamiliar views if you are not exposed to such views through conversations and discussions. Someone might jokingly pose the question, "Well, do they actually have internet in Africa?" And even though it is meant as a joke, there is an underlying idea of how people live in Africa, like in straw huts in the bush. This is also exactly what was implicitly communicated in the teaching book from my son that I was mentioning – the hidden curriculum. Therefore, I think it is important to challenge established worldviews.

Choosing a transformative approach to learning, in one way or another, in order to discover something new, as you said, is crucial. It is crucial in order to break up outdated patterns of ideas and worldviews. One music video I show to the students during the *Pedagogy for the rich* program is "Radi-Aid" (SAIH Norway, 2012, 06.11.), a campaign by SAIH. The video is about Africans collecting radiators for the Norwegian people, since it is so cold there and the people must be really freezing. It is a lot of fun to watch this video because it has these vintage images of people in Norway in the snow and people in Africa putting radiators on a truck and then waving the truck good-bye. When I show this video to the students, some ask, "Yes, but why do they collect radiators for us?" Some don't even understand that this video is meant ironically. We would then have a discussion around that. What if this is the only video that Africans saw about people in Norway and took it for real? Then they would probably ask themselves, "How can the people live their lives under such harsh conditions? We have to help them, 'cause this really looks bad!" The reason why SAIH made this music video was because most students in Norway have only seen these kinds of aid cam-

paigns for Africa. The video is intended to make us aware of our view of Africa. And, of course, if you only see these kinds of aid campaign videos, then you think that this is the only reality in Africa. My concern is that folk high schools could eventually contribute to reproducing such views and images simply by solely focusing on aid. That is the reason why I think this program, *Pedagogy for the rich*, is so important, because it can challenge and change the idea of improvement, and where it needs to happen and by whom.

*Seeing other countries through a 'value-lens'*

**Michael N. W.:** What you just said in terms of transformative learning, also with regards to the program *pedagogy for the rich*, seems to be about becoming aware of the values inherent in your worldview. And worldview literally appears to be the proper term here, because sitting here in Norway and looking down to Africa already implies a certain cultural hierarchy in terms of 'looking down', a top-down model, as it were. Transformative learning, in this case then, makes us not only aware of other countries but of the view by which we see other countries. And maybe that this is the actual problem that we have in rich countries: that we often look at other countries through what I would call a "value-lens," which makes us think that the people from Africa, for example, are much poorer than we are. However, through such a "value-lens," we also go blind, and we do not see the things these other countries have that we don't have. Though I put it more metaphorically, but taking off this "value-lens," is that what you mean by transformative learning?

*Ubuntu philosophy*

**Brita P.:** Yes, I think so. I mean, the ultimate goal is that the world is a good place for everyone. However, I don't think that this is going to happen as long as we look at each other in such a top-down way. Rather, I think that we should live more according to what is called Ubuntu philosophy (see e. g. Gade, 2012), which means "I am be-

cause we are”, and is sometimes translated as “humanity.” One of the basic ideas behind this philosophy, as I understand it, is that I have my talents and you have yours, and together we can create something that is bigger than us, so to speak. We are connected through communities. To make this kind of connection between people possible is a potential that the folk high schools have. Living in a community where you contribute with what you have and who you are is something that the folk high school students can experience. They might have their ups and downs while living and learning at the school, but through that experience, they also learn how much they have in common. To discover that you have so much in common with other people is also vital for the global perspective I am talking about. It does not matter if you are a Muslim, a Christian or an atheist; but we have many things in common that we care about.

**Michael N. W.:** I think this is a good closing remark: that folk high schools have great potential when it comes to getting young people out of their bubbles. Thank you very much for the conversation!

### **3. Epilogue**

In the previous dialogue, a program called “Pedagogy for the rich” was presented and reflected upon. Instead of just lecturing facts and figures, the program takes its point of departure in practical exercises, making complex global challenges experienceable on a personal level. In the common reflection that follows each exercise, the students cannot solely express their theoretical thoughts on issues like global fairness, poverty, racism etc., but they can speak from their emotional, experience-based perspective, induced by the respective exercise.

## *Pedagogy for the Rich*

In more general terms, the previous dialogue dealt with the responsibility that one has as an individual and as a community towards the world. The movement between concrete exercises and general worldviews that this program triggers reveals that this responsibility often starts in small things, in concrete attitudes, mindsets and actions, and that it eventually leads to a better understanding of the systems and structures that we find ourselves living within.

In the course of the dialogue, *becoming aware* was pointed out as a first step towards what could be called global citizenship. This form of awareness-raising also implies unlearning certain fundamental attitudes, like the “We are the best in the world” attitude that one often finds in Western culture. As brought forth in the dialogue, the program “Pedagogy for the rich” is based on the pedagogical approach of *transformative learning*, which deals with the growth and maturation of the whole human being on the one hand. On the other, it addresses one of our fundamental human potentials, namely, to change and evolve – to transform – something that often starts by enacting our ability to *think differently*.

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