

The Aftermath: So, what now is Good Folk High School Pedagogy?

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1. A short recap

When reading the previous seven dialogues, it quickly becomes apparent that they are diverse and rich in content. What good folk high school pedagogy can be was illustrated by quite unique and different examples – but what do they have in common? What is the essence of good folk high school pedagogy? Questions like these tempt us to analyze these dialogues in a conventional way, for example, by means of a thematic analysis (see e. g. Guest, MacQueen & Namey, 2012). Carrying out such an analysis, however, would not be in line with *phronetic research* as outlined in the introduction chapter of this anthology.

As it was pointed out in this introduction, good folk high school pedagogy is a question of good practice – *eu-praxia* in Greek – and good practice is a question of phronesis. Phronesis, furthermore, represents one of the three forms of knowledge as suggested by Aristotle (see Biesta, 2015: 14). In contrast to the other two knowledge forms – *epistémé* (theoretical knowledge) and *techné* (know-how knowledge) – phronesis (practical knowledge) is not teachable but only learnable, since it rather is a question of the

right attitude towards a given situation than a question of knowledge that simply is applied. For this reason, Aristotle “does not provide abstract definitions of what practical wisdom [phronesis] looks like but tries to make this clear through examples” in his works (ibid.: 19). For example, one can show what phronesis implies instead of telling what it is.

When outlining a research approach that takes this central aspect of phronesis into account, Bjørnsrud (2005: 138) – in reference to Flyvbjerg’s *phronetic research* (1991) – addresses the necessary context-relatedness of practical knowledge. That is, this form of knowledge can only be understood and investigated if the context in which it occurs is safeguarded and not *analyzed* (which etymologically means *to be untied*).

In the present anthology, it was argued that phronesis does not simply represent a form of practical knowledge but – more concretely – some sort of *response-ability*. To investigate how this form of response-ability comes to expression in pedagogical situations at a folk high school, each dialogue was conducted according to the three steps of reflection of so-called Reflective Practice Research (Lindseth, 2020). This research approach can be associated with phronetic research since it takes the mentioned context-relatedness into account by including concrete experiences as a central part of the investigation.

It is particularly this context-relatedness that brings up the pressing question: Why do I present a concluding essay at the end of this anthology? For isn’t this just another form of analysis? And, understood as analysis, isn’t this essay jeopardizing the whole endeavor in terms of a phronetic research project?

The answer is negative if one sees this essay as some sort of continuation of the previous philosophical investigations. For, as far as I understand it, the ideal outcome

of philosophical investigations is not any conclusion that one arrives at. Rather, an ideal outcome would be if the respective investigation triggers further reflection with the reader. Hence, the idea behind this concluding essay is to foster after-thoughts with the reader about good folk high school pedagogy and how it can be practiced by giving expression to my own as the author of this essay. It is as if one goes into an inner dialogue with oneself about what has been said in the dialogues presented here. It appears to be in this way of inner dialoguing – that is, by reflecting on the experiences of others and how they responded to the respective situations – that we can learn and further develop our own *response-ability*.

2. Allow the text to speak to us

A first step to start with this inner dialogue might be what Lindseth and Norberg have called “naive reading” in their phenomenological hermeneutical method for researching lived experience (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004: 149):

The text is read several times in order to grasp its meaning as a whole. To do this it is necessary for us to be open enough to allow the text to speak to us. We become touched and moved by it. (ibid.)

When reading the dialogues, what was it that moved me (or you, the reader)? What touched me (or you, the reader) in these narratives and their subsequent examinations?

There is one particular feature that somehow makes me wonder when reading these seven dialogues: When asked to share an experience about good folk high school pedagogy, all pedagogues, in one way or another, have chosen an example that first and foremost dealt with human

growth and flourishing of the students. Specific teaching content, like the Tree of Life, which Benedicte Hambro describes, lectures on democracy and European history as mentioned by Steinar Bryn, or facts and figures about international inequalities as brought forward by Brita Phuthi, was rather a means to a higher end than a means in itself. Furthermore, several of the experiences shared and examined in this anthology do not refer to any teaching content at all. Rather, what these pedagogues understand by good folk high school pedagogy comes to expression in terms of their response to a concrete situation, which is often of more interpersonal and relational character than related to any school subject at all. As corny as it might sound, but some sort of *learning for life* was central in all the described situations.

Interestingly, most of these situations occurred spontaneously. Though a few of the pedagogues mentioned that they had some kind of teaching plan, they could not foresee or provide for the situation that they were then facing. Explicit examples in this respect are the situations described in the dialogues with Filippa Millenberg, Sigurd Ohrem, Kjetil Hareide Hallre and Steinar Bryn. The situations and their responses to them, which finally led to an edifying outcome, to put it like that, were centrally based on spontaneity and intuition. However, in order to avoid misunderstandings, it is important to note – as Steinar Bryn did in the dialogue with him – that intuition in this context “is more than an educated guess because when you work with this process-oriented pedagogical approach all the time, you start to sense when you will have a breakthrough.”

With this quote, two further features find expression that seem to be characteristic of good folk high school pedagogy as described in the previous dialogues. The first one is the process-oriented character of this form of pedagogy in terms of the personal development processes of the

students – previously also called *human flourishing*. The other is the *sensibility* or *awareness* of the folk high school teacher to sense when the given situation has the potential to lead to what Sigurd Ohrem called a *golden moment* – and that this *sensibility* comes with experience.

3. The hidden curriculum

That all seven dialogues deal – in one way or another – with human flourishing might not come as a surprise. With *Bildung* and public enlightenment as the main goals enshrined in the Folk High School Act (2003), these folk high school teachers are almost expected to have such a focus. However, what indeed is surprising when reading the dialogues is that human flourishing is fostered and facilitated not so much by means of an explicit course plan (as would be normal in a conventional school) but rather through unforeseeable situations, reactions and interactions with the students and an intuitive but nevertheless reflected response to them. In this respect, Steinar Bryn also mentioned the term *hidden curriculum*. In the dialogue with him, he did not explicate this term in depth but noted that folk high school teachers “hardly talk about it at all. It is more something that the students observe.” In other words, the hidden curriculum represents some sort of existential and ethical value base represented in the attitudinal values, which the teachers do not lecture about but rather *live* and *practice*. In one of his research publications called “Learning together,” Johan Lövgren calls these values *embodied values* (2020: 19). In the respective dialogue, Sigurd Ohrem also spoke of a pedagogy of *showing, not telling*, in this regard.

To make such a pedagogy of *showing, not telling* work demands a high degree of authenticity and “uprightness”

from the pedagogue. In simple terms, it is the contrary of the phrase “preaching water while drinking wine.” Furthermore, in terms of *attitudinal* and *embodied values*, one can wonder whether good folk high school pedagogy is a “teaching subject-independent enterprise”? That is, could this form of pedagogy be practiced as an *eupraxia* (that is, good practice), even if all the school subjects are replaced by others or even completely taken away? For me, the answer tends towards a yes. For this form of pedagogy rather seems to depend on how a teacher responds with his or her attitude to the concrete situation with the students than on specific teachings.

Nevertheless, though much of this pedagogy is obviously tacit and, hence, not much mentioned, it does not mean that it is absent. On the contrary, it is embodied. If we assume that good folk high school pedagogy is a form of embodied pedagogy, then this actually confirms why it can be attributed to practical knowledge in terms of *phronesis* rather than theoretical knowledge in terms of *epistemé*. As embodied pedagogy, it is something that can be shown, e. g. in terms of the responses of the teacher to the given situation. But, and this is the crux of it, it cannot be taught in terms of models and methods. Especially this feature bears a resemblance to *phronesis*, as it was outlined in the introduction chapter.

As a consequence, it would not make much sense to try to further define what good folk high school pedagogy *is*. Based on what has been said so far, this would be counterproductive. Instead, it seems to be wise to just see the experiences shared in the dialogues as examples – to open oneself to them and use them as a springboard in order to move into dialogue with oneself. Questions investigated in such a dialogue with oneself could be, e. g.: *How would I have responded to the situations that were described in these dialogues? Have I been in similar situations, and*

how did I react there? What can I learn through these examples if I mirror myself in them – what can I learn about myself as a pedagogue, my pedagogical practices, and my professional as well as personal attitude? Which insights do I want to take further and incorporate and have embodied in my attitude as a practitioner? Which values underlie these insights?

If one takes these questions seriously after having read these seven dialogues, one might realize why there is and cannot be a final, general answer to the question of good folk high school pedagogy. For the question of good folk high school pedagogy is a question of *eupraxia* – of good practice. As such, it cannot be answered *in* theoretical terms but only *with* practical examples. And as examples, that is, as *possible answers in practice*, they can only unfold their full potential if someone – like you, the reader – relates them to one's own pedagogical practice. Only by means of such self-reflection can the knowledge these examples embody begin to reveal itself. With that, it becomes clear why Gallagher stated that "Self-knowledge, [...] is intimately linked with phronesis and thinking for oneself." (1992: 198f)

In other words, the true value of this publication can only evolve when the reader takes a look at it, like taking a look into a mirror. It is through the self-reflection that emerges in this mirror, to put it metaphorically, that pedagogical practice can be informed, reflected on and further developed. In this sense, I hope that this book can serve as a source of inspiration for those who keep up the good work at folk high school, namely: its staff – may it be pedagogues, kitchen workers, administrators, housecleaners, sanitors, etc.

4. References:

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