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Reflective Practice Research in International Collaboration

Developing Teacher Education in Togetherness

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LIT

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Chapter 1: Developing education through international collaboration

Guro Hansen Helskog[1], Ingrid Reite Christensen[2] and Åsmund Aamaas[3]

At the heart of this anthology lies a commitment to developing teacher education in togetherness, an ethos of relational, reflective, and ethically grounded international collaboration. The golden thread running through our chapters is the movement beyond instrumental, policy-driven internationalization efforts toward deeply human, dialogical, and wonder-based collaboration.

The cultural-historical context of our work is the general internationalization policies in higher education. Academia has a long history of being international, for instance, in the form of international conferences and research collaboration. However, it is a relatively recent development that internationalization of higher education has become an aim of its own, rather than a consequence of ongoing academic activity (Flobakk-Sitter and Hybertsen, 2021). The internationalization efforts that this anthology is born out of are a result of the rather new policy priorities regarding internationalization of higher education. The policy context can be traced at least two decades and be seen as part of European efforts to adapt to what has long been understood as an increasingly globalized world.

Policy context

Globalization is often understood as the politics and practice of promoting interconnectedness and interdependence among people and countries across the world, manifesting, amongst others, in increased cultural exchange and the spread of technology (see, i.e., Held and McGrew, 2002). An aspect of globalization has been internationalization in education, which originally referred to cross-border interactions and connections, especially in the field of higher education, involving activities such as faculty and stu-

dent exchange, joint research projects, and international collaboration in curriculum development (Finardi & Rojo, 2015).

While Norwegian internationalization policy for a long time primarily focused on collaboration and interaction within the European context (Trondal et al., 2001), the so-called "Quality Reform", following the endorsement of the Bologna Declaration of a common European space of higher education, was fully implemented from January 2004. The Quality Reform implied a greater national standardization of internationalization, as earlier internationalization efforts had been characterized by a relative absence of central regulation (Tjomsland, 2004). Both the Bologna Declaration and the Quality Reform were political means to expose Norwegian students, teachers, and researchers to higher education in Europe. In 2009, the Norwegian government presented a report to the parliament stating that education for everyone is important and that "internationalization of education is something that concerns all pupils and students, training and teaching staff, and academic, administrative and technical personnel" (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2008–2009:4). The purposes of the internationalization efforts were to increase people's ability to meet the challenges and opportunities that arise from globalization and international interaction in working life and in society. This included bettering language skills and understanding of and insight into other cultures and broadening the geographical perspective, for example, in the direction of "new economies" (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2008–2009). Following up on these priorities, the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research was given as one of its tasks to strengthening international collaboration. Government programmes supporting partnerships with prioritized non-European countries (Panorama strategy) and other third countries (HK-dir NORPART) were included in the internationalization policy (Mld. St. 7. (2020–2021, pp. 25–30).

In this globalization scenario, the internationalization of higher education is increasingly seen as a key feature of "global universities" (Haley et al. 2022, p. 1). Students and researchers are now expected to have a broad understanding of different cultures, languages, and worldviews. Internationalization in education can thus take the form of exposure to different cultures and ways of thinking, which can broaden people's perspectives and foster intercultural and interreligious understanding. It can also enhance learning outcomes for students through the exchange of teaching approaches from different contexts. Moreover, it can lead to enhanced research and innovation, as international collaboration might result in the de-

velopment of new insights and discoveries that can benefit the respective societies.

Collaboration efforts in an increasingly polarized world

Parallel to globalization tendencies and internationalization efforts in the last decades, we have seen an increasing polarization at different levels of the global community, ranging from the global to the local and inter-personal. Polarization can here be understood as the phenomenon of increasing divides between groups of individuals who do not share the same beliefs, values, or worldviews. Part of this scenario are increasingly anti-democratic, authoritarian, national-protective, and national-expansive forces that are taking hold of the world. For instance, in this concrete anthology, some of the authors are directly affected by the wars between Russia and Ukraine (Beskorsa 2025, Lukianchenko 2025) and in Palestine (Christensen, Wistrøm, and Adwan 2025). The collaboration started before the wars and has continued despite them. Needless to say, it is probable that continuing the projects on democracy education when there is a war against democracy going on has been close to impossible. Yet, as manifested in these essays, the collaboration and relations that were established in times of relative peace have continued to nurture the private and professional lives of involved teacher educators. With regard to this, many of the essays illustrate alternatives to polarization, showing how compassionate relationships across cultural and religious worldviews might increase the focus on our shared humanity and our shared human condition.

Establishing close, personal relationships between project members is listed by Duesund and Aasland (2023) as a key factor determining success in international collaboration. Other important factors mentioned by them that are of importance to the work with and content of this anthology, as well, respectively:

1. the willingness and ability of project partners to include others in the work, pass the baton to a new generation of coordinators, and share their experience, insight, and knowledge developed through international projects with others, as the authors do with this anthology;
2. the "bottom-up" initiatives, efforts, and dedication of individuals, with solid anchoring in the respective institutions on both sides of the partnership, as several of our essays are indicators of;

3. the ability to understand the meaning and role of cultural differences, as some of the authors explore and reflect explicitly upon;
4. the ability to engage longitudinally in the work, as international collaboration is more like a marathon than a sprint. The work with this anthology has in itself been a collaborative marathon.

Reflective practice research in international collaboration

The factors listed above may offer open and unknown spaces for concrete, critical, and theoretical reflection on the role of internationalization in education. We acknowledge that cross-border relationships and connections do not only appear as matters of technical exchanges of knowledge and skills, but also propel transformation and questions concerning ethical, existential, relational, and even spiritual meaning. Such themes are not easily researched through traditional empirical research methods oriented towards objectivity, as Hansen (2025) argues in Chapter 2. Here, phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches are better suited. Such research approaches link to premodern academic traditions. As Lindseth (2023) argues, before modernity, both philosophy and research were oriented towards understanding the *meaning* of being in relation to phenomena of life. However, from the beginning of modernity onwards, science has mainly been directed toward the outer, factual, and objective world. While this change has led to impressive technological development, our ability to find meaning and *orientation* in life seems to have decreased. "We might say that we know more and understand less", he argues (2023, p. vii). Thus, as a reaction to science that gives us knowledge more than understanding, philosophical hermeneutics came about in the middle of the 19th century, and phenomenology started as a movement at the beginning of the 20th century. Like philosophical hermeneutics, phenomenology emphasized the necessity of understanding life on the basis of our acquaintance with lifeworld phenomena, our *preunderstanding*.

When we sit down in solitude or in a small group of peers to write a reflective practice research essay, we begin the process by narrating a personal experience, inviting first ourselves and then later maybe our peers, then finally our readers into our story. Through the narration, we start the shift from a natural attitude of taking meaning for granted to a phenomenological attitude where we pause our judgements. In Lindseth's (2023) words: "The natural attitude is an attitude in which we judge, we know already, we

conclude, we state the facts and take for granted what is meant. To shift to a phenomenological attitude, we must refrain from making judgements about the factual and accomplish epoché or bracketing. The natural way of doing this is to narrate from lived experience. When narrating, we naturally refrain from judging and concluding. (. . .) In the telling, both the teller and the listener participate in the narrated meaning. Then they may consider: What are the important themes here?" (Lindseth, 2023, p. ix–x)

This is what all the contributors to this anthology have been invited to do. In different constellations due to the geographical distance between many of us, we have met several times on campus and/or digitally and/or at Guro Hansen Helskog's farm to discuss possible ways to understand our narratives, read and comment on drafts in smaller groups, and rewrite based on editor comments. As such, the research process has not been a collective journey for all of us.

As suggested in Lindseth (2020), all the authors of this essay begin with a lived experience in the form of original and concrete reflection. We do so by narrating one or more experiences from international collaboration that have been important to us in one way or another, and that we, for some reason, cannot forget because they made such an impression on us. Maybe the experiences puzzled us, made us wonder or question ourselves and our previous practices or ways of being in the world. It can also be an experience of discrepancy, i.e., that something is not quite right in a situation or that things did not go as expected, or that we are left in surprise over something. In this concrete and original reflection part, the experiences are narrated more or less "straight from the heart", with a hint of the mystery of the experience. It could be one incident, a series of incidents, or an educational process that the author has experienced or facilitated. By refraining from already knowing what our experiences mean until we have taken a closer look at them through the process of reflecting upon them and writing the essays, maybe together with co-authors, we have exercised what Husserl called *epoché* (pause, restraint), leaving the natural attitude and entering a phenomenological attitude. This might seem easy, but this is far from the case, and for some, it has caused quite a bit of confusion and frustration. Turning one's gaze inwards towards one's own experience, writing a story from a first-person perspective, and seeking to understand this text of ours, instead of looking outwards at facts in the world, is difficult. As such, what Hansen (2025 in this anthology) calls the *voice of personal being* is present in all the essays. Moreover, the personal relationships between the authors and their international partners are, in one way or another, at the centre of

the authors' reflections. Hence, the *voice of ethical calling* is also present in many of the essays.

The experiences are then discussed, and one or a few themes are guided by a question such as "What is at stake in this narrative?" or "What is the deeper meaning of this experience?" is drawn out (see also Lindseth and Norberg, 2021). This is the critical reflection part of the essays. In this phase the authors stay close to the narrated experience in order to see what emerges from it. Here, it might become obvious that our personal experiences are not purely "subjective", and our practices are not simply "my practice". On the contrary, we might discover how our experiences and practices are intertwined in cultural-historical webs or see how our experience contains dilemmas that are embedded in political and institutional structures or how collective historical guilt is lurking under our personal and academic relationships. As such, our personal experiences contain general themes that can be drawn out and studied further through phenomenological and hermeneutic interpretation and reflection. Hence, there is a move from concrete experience towards more general themes and phenomena that can resonate with the experience of others and be of interest and importance to human beings in other contexts.

When reflecting further upon these themes, it is time to draw in perspectives from philosophical, theoretical, and spiritual literature in order to understand the phenomenon more deeply and broadly. Thus, in the last part of the essays, the themes are reflected upon in more general terms, drawing on spiritual and philosophical as well as theoretical perspectives and research literature. This is the theoretical reflection part of the essays. Epistemologically speaking, the aim in these sections can be to reveal aspects of the multifaceted, dynamic, and kaleidoscopic understanding that emerges through the reflective process (see Helskog and Weiss, 2023) or also to dive deeper into the mystery of the phenomenon, in line with Chapter 2, The Dao of Reflective Practice Research. In this essay, the author provides a theoretical overview and grounding for the chosen research approach in our book. Hansen asks what kind of research is needed when wanting to approach existential, ethical, and spiritual experiences in practical professions such as nursing and teaching. These experiences are often very delicate and ineffable and accompanied by deep wonder. The chapter questions how far epistemological approaches can reach to grasp such experiences. It is argued that by following the thinking of Gadamer, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, it is possible to talk about an "apophatic epistemology" that, to a certain degree, can make room for the ineffable. Being in deep

wonder seems to be key when approaching the ineffable in reflective practice research. Yet, the author also shows how an apophatic epistemology may have its limits.

The choice of reflective practice research as orientation has allowed for very different ways of structuring the texts. We see this as a strength of the anthology, as the openness has allowed the different voices of the authors to be heard in their own unique ways. Our experiences are different. So are our ways of reflecting upon them.

Three internationalization projects

The three internationalization projects represented in this book were funded by Norwegian government institutions and involved collaboration with countries outside the EU. In the following two sections, we will give an overview of the internationalization projects and the respective reflective practice research essays written based on experiences from these projects (chapters 3–10). The projects are, respectively, a) *Developing Democracy Education in Ukraine, Norway, and Palestine*; b) *Quality in Teacher Education – Joining Forces through Internationalisation (JOIN)*; and c) *Teacher Education for Sustainable Futures in India and Norway (TeachIN).*

Collaboration between Ukraine, Norway and Palestine

The overall objective of the project, *Developing Democracy Education in Ukraine, Norway, and Palestine,* was to improve democracy teaching in teacher education in the respective countries. The main activities took place in Ukraine in the period 2018–2019, before the Covid-19 pandemic in the period of March 2020 to fall 2021, and the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The objectives have been achieved through student and staff mobility, international comparisons of democracy, research-based curriculum development, and training in teaching. The main partners have been the University of South-Eastern Norway and National Pedagogical Dragomanov University, with sub-partner Sloviansk State Pedagogical Institute in Ukraine, with assistance from PRIME in Palestine. The project has been led by USN and Øyvind Wistrøm, with Ingrid Christensen as a co-coordinator, while Author Sami Adwan has contributed from Palestine and PRIME.

Communication across cultural, historical, academic, and personal customs and expectations is a general issue in all forms of international collab-

oration. This theme is addressed explicitly by Ingrid Reite Christensen in Chapter 3, *Success or Failure? Establishing communication between partners in a democracy education project.* Christensen tells the story of two sessions at a seminar in Kyiv, where one followed the conventional rules of academic presentation, while the second did just the opposite. While the author experienced losing the audience's attention, the next speaker surprised the audience and the author by breaking all the usual communication advice for an academic presentation: shouting, laughing, and even crawling on the floor. Despite the frustrating experience of not communicating, the actual insight seems to be joyful and energetic. Gaining insights into communication and connection comes with a sense of relief over leaving established standards. The insights appear as professional teaching competence, while professionalism does not lie in its structural qualities or the perfection of academic knowledge. Instead, "wonder" touches upon something deep about being a teacher and an academic, whereas the secrets of communication are available in the clashes between cultures, which can be open, creative, and curious spaces free of the shame of failure.

One of the activities in the *Developing Democracy Education in Ukraine, Norway, and Palestine* project was the introduction of philosophical dialogue into teacher education provided in two 3-day Dialogos workshops in 2018–2019, facilitated by Guro Hansen Helskog, based on her book *Philosophising the Dialogos Way towards Wisdom in Education. Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation* (Helskog 2019). Two of the contributions, respectively Chapter 4 written by Olena Beskorsa and Chapter 5 written by Olga Lukianchenko, take their point of departure in the profound transformation and release of creativity experienced in the philosophical dialogue workshops, which the authors have later taken into their own contexts and further reflected upon in their essays. In Chapter 4, "*Philosophising together – a way towards safe space"*, Beskorsa describes several incidents and turning points that can be described as moments of insight from professional mastery to mystery. At first, it seems like philosophical dialogue was established as "professional knowledge" and then as a "voice of ethical calling/mystery". More than the successes or failures, the question about the author's professional and personal process comes into focus. However, developing a safe space does not emerge in the form of a calm, meditative insight. Rather, her journey towards increased wisdom offers her struggle, not the least in conflicts with students and colleagues about teaching methods, negotiated and tested against other ways of teaching. The connections and the relations seem to play a critical role.

Her journey is not about detaching from the world and turning inwards. Instead, boundary-crossing takes place on several levels in the midst of, and as a result of, messiness, fear, and forceful changes of professional identity, as well as handling war and risks for her and her family. Her moments of wonder are not without pain, as pain seems to prevail over her deeper insights. Philosophising and wisdom appear in her moments of connections at the international seminars on philosophical dialogue with her students and colleagues. Her insights are not only based on her own meetings but also on how others meet with her, both the conflicted and the healing meetings. She reaches out to the students throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, and her international contacts reach out to her.

Further, in Chapter 5, *"Philosophising – a fruit of international Collaboration",* author Olha Lukianchenko takes her point of departure in the experience of philosophising according to the Dialogos approach, discussing the role and significance of internationalization in education for improving the means and methods of training future teachers. It suggests that tolerance is a necessary quality of a modern teacher and shows how philosophical dialogues can promote it.

Also, the authors of Chapter 6, "*Becoming rocked: a Palestinian and Norwegian partnership"*, Ingrid Reite Christensen, Øyvind Wistrøm, and Sami Adwan, describe a strong relationship and partnership as a key factor in international Collaboration in the context of a joint 20-year collaboration between higher education institutions in Palestine and Norway, and between themselves as colleagues. The chapter takes a starting point in Wistrøm's experience during a dialogue meeting between Palestinian and Israeli families in Bethlehem in 1999, telling their stories of the war in 1948 and how they live their lives. The authors recall a specific "moment of truth" through the eyes of Adwan, a Palestinian teacher who describes a tough life under occupation and contrasts it with the life of many Israelis. This statement represented a moment of "being rocked". The authors then elaborate on this statement, becoming an "imperative realization of facts". In this moment, the Norwegian partner gets a glimpse of the fatal situation of Palestinians – its deep injustice and hopelessness. Through this experience, the authors do not express that one can fully understand what it is to be a Palestinian. Yet, the authors elaborate on the moment of being moved and of connecting to people, to land, and to history. The realization is not any beautiful moment of wonder and harmony but rather the opposite: a painful mark of suffering. Wistrøm describes his wisdom as moving beyond the voice of theoretical knowing or the voice of skills.

The painful insights at the seminar in Bethlehem make up a driving force for collaboration with Adwan and Palestinian partners. We propose that learning partnerships involve intricate processes of seeking comprehensive insights, resisting simplistic solutions in favour of embracing complexity, and demonstrating openness to acknowledging and addressing suffering.

Collaboration between Norway and India

Savitribai Phule Pune University in India (SPPU) and the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN) have three joint and externally funded projects in the field of teacher education: Quality in Teacher Education – Joining Forces through Internationalisation (JOIN), Teacher Education for Sustainable Futures in India and Norway (TeachIN), and INterGlocal: Connecting Global and Local Realities through Indo-Norwegian Internationalization in Teacher Education. All three projects are funded by the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-Dir). JOIN (2017–2024) was funded through the NOTED programme. NOTED was established in 2017 in response to the Norwegian government's strategy, "Promotion of the status and quality of teachers – joint effort for a modern school of knowledge", and the introduction of master's degree programmes in teacher education for primary and lower secondary schools (HK-Dir). TeachIN (2022–2025) and INterGlocal (2025–2028) are funded through the HK-Dir UTFORSK programme. UTFORSK funds educational partnerships in higher education and was initiated in response to the Norwegian Panorama strategy, which identified nine non-European countries as prioritized partner countries, including India.

SPPU and USN have collaborated since 2005 (see Duesund and Aasland, 2023), and this long-standing partnership has encouraged project members to explore shared challenges and possibilities in teacher education through collaborative, dialogical, and comparative approaches. When applying for funding, project partners from SPPU and USN argued that the projects were important for the quality and relevance of their teacher education programmes. Teacher Education 2025, the National Strategy for Quality and Cooperation in Teacher Education (Government of Norway, 2018) in Norway, and the National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020) in India pointed towards a stronger focus on 1) interdisciplinary cooperation, 2) relevance and quality of research, and 3) relevance of the study programmes for the profession. The TeachIN application highlighted that JOIN showed that international and interdisci-

plinary collaboration enhanced and enriched their teacher education programmes through student and staff mobility, including virtual mobility and joint development and research activities. An activity also included in these projects was the introduction of philosophical dialogue in teacher education, provided through two 3-day Dialogos workshops in May and October 2022, respectively, facilitated by Guro Hansen Helskog, based on her book Philosophising the Dialogos Way towards Wisdom in Education. *Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual Contemplation* (Helskog 2019).

Five chapters in this anthology are directly linked to JOIN, TeachIN and INterGlocal. Chapters 7 and 8 address different ways of and reasons for getting involved in and committing to this international collaboration. In Chapter 7, *"International Collaboration and Workplace Friendships",* authors Åsmund Aamaas and Vaibhav Jadhav take their point of departure in a shared experience at the marketplace in Pune, India, in 2014. They reflect upon how this experience marked the beginning of a workplace friendship, greatly influencing the authors' joint journey and the future collaboration between the two universities.

In Chapter 8, *"Ways of Understanding Coincidences"*, the first author, Guro Hansen Helskog, takes her point of departure in her concrete experiences from trying to help a minor refugee with access to an education and a decent life. In rather coincidental and mysterious ways, educational opportunities opened up for the Kid, and opportunities for longstanding international collaboration opened up for Helskog. Together with colleagues Michael Noah Weiss and Christian Stokke, she has reflected critically and theoretically upon the experiences. Seven chains or patterns of experiences are drawn out in the critical reflection section and reflected theoretically upon from the perspectives of synchronicity, intuition, and divine guidance, without drawing any bold conclusions as to which should be held as the right way of understanding what happened.

In Chapter 9, *"Exploring our Cultural-Historical Embeddedness",* authors Guro Hansen Helskog and Vaibhav Jadhav take their departure in three small episodes where the European one of us experienced that she did not fully understand what was happening. The experiences included an inauguration ceremony, different forms of teaching, and someone bending down to touch her feet. In an effort to better understand, she invited her Indian colleague to reflect upon the episodes together with her, using a reflective practice research approach. Through the collaborative reflections that followed, the authors mutually received glimpses into what seemed to be fragments of each other's cultural-historical traditions, namely, the ancient

roots of the Indian cultural tradition and the Socratic dialogue tradition, amongst others.

As mentioned, parts of the projects in Ukraine and India were Dialogos philosophical dialogue workshops intended to make participating teacher educators capable of trying out similar exercises with their students. In Chapter 10, *"On compassionate teacher-student relationships"*, authors Guro Hansen Helskog, Dipali Mehakarkar, and Chaitali Ghosh Sinha take their point of departure in one of the comparative philosophical dialogues in the workshops in India. Through the methods of comparative philosophical dialogue and written theoretical reflections, the experiences of Indian co-authors Dipali Mehakarkar and Chaitali Ghosh Sinha are first narrated and then explored critically. In the process, the phenomena, respectively, of *seeing* behind the immediate behavior and actions of children by tuning in to their emotional and existential state of being and then taking proper *action*, doing what is right in the situation, are synthesized. In the theoretical reflection section, the concepts of "empathic communication", "the tolerance window", "regulation", and "phronesis" are applied to the phenomena. As a final afterthought, the authors argue that the lives of these children lie in the hands of their teachers. Their *seeing* and acting upon what they saw were life-changing for the children.

With their different perspectives, JOIN and TeachIN-project members were determined to contribute to building a culture of internationalization at the core of the USN and SPPU teacher training programmes. The University of Oulu and the University of Iceland were also affiliated with the JOIN project. USN, Oulu, and Iceland were already working together in the Spica network. Spica is a Nordic[4] network for teacher education institutions supported by the Nordplus programme, focusing on global issues in local contexts (spicanetwork.com). In this way, USN connected different partners in one project. The aim was to ensure that teacher students had access to various international learning arenas during their studies.

In Chapter 11, the authors Audrey Paradis, Jarno Slendebroek, Leandra Ve Saskia Romey, Marianne Reuse, Md Abu Nayeem, Laurel Seppälä, Alina Marchenko, and Elizabeth Harlow discuss how students from Oulu shifted their understanding of inclusive education (IE) during and after participating in an intensive programme organized by the network at SPPU, India. The chapter discusses how IE has become important for education systems around the world, but what IE entails seems to differ depending on local definitions. The authors explore their changing perceptions of IE in a context new to them and analyse narratives that emerged from the mo-

bility programme, focusing on the experiences that were most impactful to the mobility's participants. The analysis suggests that national policies concerning IE can have varied effects on local educational institutions, often relying on the skills and motivation of local actors when it comes to the implementation in their contextual realities.

In addition to focusing on mobility and lowering the threshold for students and staff to explore new contexts and perspectives, internationalization at home is an integrated approach in JOIN, TeachIN, INterGlocal. Intensive courses are examples of that. One main goal is to make internationalization accessible to all students, including those unable to go abroad. A key aspect of this strategy is integrating short- and long-term incoming students into mainstream teacher education programmes. Chapter 11 is an example of this, addressing an intensive course developed by the project partners. The joint JOIN course later became an open course in the teacher education portfolio in Pune, within the frames of the TeachIN project and the Finland-financed Teacher Education for Sustainable Futures (TESF) project.

The TeachIN project was initiated four years after JOIN to expand the existing partnership between SPPU and USN, with a clear focus on ways to implement Agenda 2030 in education, with a particular focus on target 4.7 – Education for sustainable development and global citizenship. As we have seen, Åsmund Aamaas and Vaibhav Jadhav went to the marketplace together back in 2014. At that time, they were both junior team members that later became project coordinators. They explored the market together and discussed real-life and educational challenges and possibilities. Discussing global citizenship and sharing professional and personal knowledge and experiences in the marketplace was inspirational and made sense to them. This is not the only example of place-based experiences of importance to the project.

General internationalization efforts

As we have seen, a majority of the chapters in this book are examples of how participants in the internationalization projects strive to connect the different parts of these projects. Research activities are thus directly linked to the field of practice within the internationalization projects. The final three chapters of the book, however, take their point of departure in general internationalization activities that are not connected to these projects, but

which involve more regular international academic collaboration. For instance, in Chapter 12, *"A Horse Called Hitler: Reflections on the German Guilt"*, author Kerstin Bornholdt takes her point of departure in an experience from the social part of an international conference where the author, as a German, was given the role of a horse resembling Hitler, entering the conference room with one of the other participants on her back, enacting the role of Mussolini. She reflects upon the incident from the perspective of "inherited collective guilt" and "historical/collective responsibility". The essay then discusses critically the concept of cosmopolitical identities and the challenges of deconstructing and de-essentialising narratives of national historical identities.

Further, in Chapter 13 *"From Geopolitics to Rare Earths in Teacher Education",* author Erlend Bendik Myhre takes his point of departure in the feeling of frustration as a teacher educator in social studies focusing on geopolitics and geo-economics. Narrating the story of how he invited an international expert with practical experience in dealing with rare earth elements (REE), the author problematises how the ambitions regarding the green shift and global warming collide with the geopolitical national security perspective as well as the capitalist growth perspective. The three are different logics with different purposes that do not work well together.

Finally, in Chapter 14, "*Existential Encounters – epistemological diversity"*, author Kristin Gregers Eriksen takes her departure in a self-altering experience as an international visiting researcher witnessing a First Nations Sundance ceremony in Vancouver, Canada, in 2019. The author discusses her experience in dialogue with indigenous, decolonial, and pluriversality approaches to knowledge. Three main insights derived from her analysis of the experience: epistemic blindness, border thinking, and the significance of acknowledging the ontological level when approaching the challenges of modern/colonial unsustainability. Through the theoretical-philosophical reflection, the author explores the potentials of internationalization in education as an avenue towards the co-creation of new paradigms that may open not-yet-imaginable possibilities for sustainable futures.

Summing up

Altogether, the 14 chapters of this anthology cover a wide range of themes and questions emerging from concrete and determined internationalization efforts. There is a golden thread running through the anthology, namely

the cultivation of wisdom through shared vulnerability and reflective dialogue across borders. The collective insight that can be drawn out of our shared work is that international collaboration in teacher education becomes truly transformative only when it is practiced as reflective, relational, and wonder-based inquiry into what it means to be human – together.

Through a reflective practice research approach, authors have explored key challenges of internationalization projects between the University of South-Eastern Norway and, respectively, universities in Ukraine, Palestine, and India in particular, and in international collaboration in general. The research approach has allowed for a variety of experiences to be contemplated and of theoretical perspectives to be applied, in line with a so-called "kaleidoscopic epistemology" (Helskog and Weiss 2023), as well as Hansen's (2025 in this anthology) model of the four voices of reflective practice research. A few of the essays also come in touch with the "Dao" of reflective practice research – i.e., with that which cannot be understood in rational language. Across the Ukraine–Norway–Palestine and India–Norway partnerships, the anthology models reflective practice research as both method and mindset that begins in lived experience and dialogue. Through this approach, international collaboration becomes not just a means of exchanging knowledge but a transformative practice of co-being, and a collective search for meaning, democracy, and hope amid global fragmentation and conflict. The anthology reframes research as an ethical encounter rather than as data collection. Starting from lived experience, practitioners narrate, interpret, and theorize their own and others' experiences in a hermeneutic–phenomenological way. Reflection becomes a site where personal, institutional, and geopolitical layers of meaning intertwine. Through acknowledging our interdependent humanity and our shared vulnerability, we can challenge socio-political forces threatening to dehumanize us and polarize our world.

Notes

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