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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 4: Philosophising – a Way Towards Safe Space

Olena Beskorsa[1]

Abstract

For conducting the Reflective Practice Research, the departure point is the concrete reflection that highlights the first international collaboration, based on philosophical practice, and further experience of implementing the philosophical dialogue as a method of teaching at the pedagogical university in Ukraine. The practical reflection also represents the effect of international collaboration on the author's personal life during the war-related crisis. The part of critical reflection allows deepening into the analysis of experience and defining the core theme – the role of philosophical dialogue in creating a safe space during the time in Ukraine. The theoretical reflection investigates the definitions of 'safe space'. The ethic of care is considered a mechanism that fosters the sense of safety, responsibility, and respect for others' feelings and encourages acting to protect others. The reflective practice proves that both safety and care can manifest in the process of dialogical interaction that does not necessarily exclude the controversial topics and provides room for exploring a person's beliefs, needs, and boundaries.

Keywords:

philosophical dialogue, international experience, reflective cycle, safe space, times of uncertainty, caring relationships, ethic of care.

Introduction

Internationalisation of education has a variety of meanings, being dependent on the levels of its implementation – political, sectoral, or institutional. Analysing the concepts of internationalisation, I figured out one area of internationalisation that is revealed in this research. According to Teich-

ler (2004), internationalisation in higher education should imply border-crossing communication and discourse. Learning and research within the international settings gain a creative manner (one's own conceptual framework is tackled by disclosing new theories, methodologies, and approaches that are different from the home culture and incite one to reflect on the practices, broaden the horizon, and develop more complex perspectives).

This chapter explores one dimension of internationalisation that emerged through my research: the role of philosophical dialogue in teacher education. My collaboration with researchers from Norway and Palestine significantly influenced my professional trajectory, particularly in implementing philosophical dialogue as a teaching approach in pre-service teacher training. Through reflective practice research, I examine philosophising both as a pedagogical approach in teacher education courses and as a transformative practice that shaped my personal and professional development.

The significance of this research lies in its emphasis on the transformative power of international collaboration. Philosophical dialogue is used as a method to foster meaningful intercultural exchange and to create a safe space in education – particularly in times of crisis – offering valuable insights into how education can be reimagined to promote deeper reflection, understanding, and growth.

Concrete reflection

For conducting reflective practice research on philosophising in my teaching practice, I start with describing the first encounter with philosophical dialogue. In 2018, the teaching staff of Donbas State Pedagogical University participated in the international project "Enhancing Democracy Culture in Norway, Ukraine, and Palestine". The aim of the project was to support a broad and dynamic understanding of democracy development in school. Donbas State Pedagogical University is located in the east of Ukraine, next to the Russian border, where the Joint Forces Operation has been taking place since 2014.

The participation in this project was crucial for me and other teacher trainers, as partnership with colleagues from Norway and Palestine at that time added to our hopefulness and provided valuable insights on how to improve the teaching methods for communicating an idea of the diversity of the society, equal dignity, and equality and how to improve the social

cohesion within the classroom in the region where military conflict was palpable.

During the workshop week in 2018, I had an opportunity to work with Guro Hansen Helskog, who is a trainer in implementing the dialogue approach in teaching and learning activities at teaching training universities. We worked as a team where representatives from different regions of Ukraine were included. We started with the usual circle of introduction by using a method where we had to choose one card that the trainer offered to define at what point in life each of us was. The card I chose showed a spiral stairway. To be honest, I don't remember clearly how I interpreted it. I think it was something about professional development, as it was a group of colleagues from higher education institutions, and we mainly discussed the professional issues. It was my first trial of philosophical practice, and it was not very smooth since I got the understanding of the true essence of philosophical dialogue a bit later. However, my reflection after the workshops included the ideas that philosophical dialogue is open to the content and can be incorporated in the teaching of a wide range of courses, philosophising is a lifestyle to teach to students, and it gives content and tools for building difficult conversations to search for wisdom. Democracy in philosophising is achieved through the inclusion and active engagement of all participants, based on the generally accepted ethical norms and rules.

At the next stage of the project implementation, I conducted some trials using philosophical practice. while teaching the course on country study of English-speaking countries in primary school teachers' training. I considered this course to be relevant, as it dealt with the issues of cultural diversity and the necessity to build cultural dialogue among representatives of different ethnicities. I should accept that practice was not smooth, and I faced a number of challenges, among them: lack of knowledge and skills on how to facilitate dialogues, fear of losing control in the course of dialogue, and a weak sense of self-efficacy as dialogues sometimes grew into usual educational discussions and even into conflict situations or verbal confrontations. After that first test, I stopped practising philosophical dialogue in my teaching.

However, some positive changes began to emerge as a result of participation in this project, giving the internationalisation of education at Donbas State Pedagogical University a more practical dimension. I became aware that the university needed to further strengthen its focus on democratisation and expand its internationalisation efforts. In response, a team of university researchers, including myself, developed a project proposal for a Jean

Monnet Module under the Erasmus+ programme, which was successfully approved. This led to the implementation of the project "Ukraine – EU: Intercultural Communication in Education" and the introduction of the course "Intercultural Communication Studies" for university students. Since intercultural learning addresses key issues such as culture, identity, diversity, inclusion, and justice, the importance of engaging students in dialogical interaction became evident. It was also crucial to create a welcoming environment where students could freely express their opinions and share personal experiences, especially given that philosophising as a learning activity was not a typical part of traditional teaching methods.

Throughout the course, students did a number of activities – listening to stories about diversity and social justice issues that were connected to the risk of disclosure of their identity. Moreover, the activities in intercultural learning created some situations when students should deal with conflicts, behaving with respect and humanity. At that moment, when teaching, I was mystified about how to create the space that would include all the participants while giving them the sense of safety and confidence. So, I turned to studying the issue of safe space and ways of creating it within the classroom. I was determined to return to using philosophical dialogue the following year while studying the same course.

The start of the course coincided with the introduction of quarantine due to the COVID-19 pandemic. And the issue of physical and social isolation and safety became especially relevant. So, I tried again to use the method of philosophical dialogue to discuss not only the topics of interculturality but also the issue of safety. "What does 'safe space' mean for each of us?" appeared to be a philosophical question itself. I tried to establish a dialogical interaction among students to support their hopefulness in times of despair. These dialogues aimed to reflect on the vulnerability of people in an increasingly stressful world and get a deeper understanding that the notion of safety is differently interpreted by people and that it should be taken into account in trials to create one's personal safe space.

These dialogues were also challenged by several factors. First, they were organised entirely at a distance, which added some stress to the interaction process. Some students preferred to keep their cameras off, and in the context of a safe space, this choice could be seen as their way of creating personal comfort. Additionally, many students were focused on their own well-being and the challenges of managing daily life, which led to a lack of engagement. Through this, they didn't pay attention either to what the other said or to the fact that some students stayed "invisible".

The process of philosophising did not progress beyond the first, humanistic-pedagogical phase described by Helskog (2017), as much of the dialogue time was devoted to establishing an atmosphere of dialogical democracy. This involved setting overarching communication norms and encouraging students to adopt a reflective approach to the discussed topics. The facilitation of these dialogues was complicated by the absence of physical presence in online learning. The online learning environment is inherently less authentic than traditional classroom settings (Croft, Dalton, & Grant, 2010), making it difficult to foster engagement. Only a few students actively participated in discussions, though their written reflections later demonstrated that the topic of safety was personally meaningful and relevant to them. However, facilitating dialogue in a synchronous online setting posed another challenge: it was nearly impossible to determine whether students truly grasped the premise and content of the dialogues or whether they received adequate support from the teacher to gain valuable insights and move toward deeper understanding.

After that second trial to incorporate philosophising in my teaching practice, I decided again to return to it when the course in intercultural learning should be taught the following year. Unfortunately, the start of the teaching coincided with the beginning of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, which was followed by the relocation of students and teaching staff. We faced new problems, such as the deepening of social isolation, the increasing number of dangers, separation from family and friends, and adaptations to new cultural and language conditions for students who moved abroad. So, the issue of safety received a new meaning for the students; it has been transformed under the crisis conditions in times of war-related insecurity.

The start of the war affected me both professionally and personally. Before the 24th of February 2022, I used philosophical dialogue only for professional purposes. But this date became the turning point – philosophical dialogue impacted my personal transformations, as the issue of safe space became extremely meaningful and relevant for me.

After reflecting on the significance of philosophical dialogue in the context of my professional development, I would like to add a short paragraph about its role in my personal transformation and guiding me to a safe place in the most dangerous and stressful time in my life, a period that was full of despair and hopelessness. I present it as a one-week timeline, as I remember that period of the very beginning of the war in great detail.

During the first week of the war (February 24 – March 1, 2022), like millions of Ukrainians, I was in a state of complete uncertainty, feeling lost and not knowing what to do. The main occupations were monitoring the news and waiting for when that nightmare would finish. So, scrolling through the tapes of Facebook, hoping to find encouraging news, I came across an announcement of Guro Helskog, who invited people to participate in a philosophising session, and I registered for it. The session took place on Sunday evening, March 6, 2022. It was a starting point for this timeline. I prefer not to describe the details of my personal transformations and only show the speed of events and results. However, I should mention that during that session, a brief dialogue with international colleagues ignited a newfound inspiration within me, affirming my ability to cultivate a sense of safety amidst the chaos of war.

Sunday, March 6, 2022 – meeting with colleagues from different countries to philosophise about the pursuit of peace; agreed to meet in a week to continue practicing.

Monday, March 7, 2022 – looking for opportunities for Ukrainian scholars and finding a proposal for the fellowship "Ukrainian Scholars at Risk" at the University of Graz (Austria). The deadline is on the 8th of March.

Tuesday, March 8, 2022 – preparing the documents required and submitting the application.

Friday, March 11, 2022 – getting the positive result of the application process.

Sunday, March 13, 2022 – leaving for Graz (Austria).

When Professor Guro Helskog wrote to me to ask if I was doing well and could join the session that we had agreed on a week before, I was already on the train going to Austria, trying to create a safe space for me and my family. To be honest, I gained the awareness of these transformations, both personal and professional, a bit later, approximately in September 2022, when a new academic year started, and I went on working with students in the Ukrainian university and trying to implement philosophical dialogue in my courses, in parallel creating a safe space for them and together with them. And now I would like to combine these two parts of my experience and investigate them in this chapter.

Critical reflection

In the urgent need to support students' resilience and hopefulness during a time of war, their safety is at stake. The main question was how I could build a safe space for students in the educational process while being physically distant. Following up on the previous experience of implementing philosophical dialogue, discussions, and reflections on the issue of safe space in education, I depicted a cyclic nature of my practice that included abandoning the attempts to achieve the "ideal space" and returning to them, looking at the previous experience from different angles.

I use Gibbs' reflective cycle, which allowed me to focus on the challenging experience and highlight the insights into new opportunities. Gibb's (1988) model of the reflective cycle includes six stages that guide the process of reflection and focuses on learning from reflection: 1) describing the situation without any conclusions; 2) revealing reactions and feelings from experience; 3) evaluation of the situation; 4) analysing the situation and the insights drawn from it; 5) making conclusions; 6) building an action plan for future activities.

Overall, in my experience, I can single out two full cycles and one cycle that is now in progress. The first cycle was realised between 2018 and 2020, and its stages proceeded as follows:

1. Participation in the project on democracy education and development of the exercises for the teacher education course.
2. Feeling of enlightenment from the new experience and disappointment because of some failures while engaging students in the dialogical interaction.
3. The advantage of the situation was that the students became more aware of the fact that they could freely express their opinion and be heard; the main disadvantage was the turning of the philosophical dialogue into a traditional educational discussion with arguments.
4. The need to add a sense of safety for students.
5. The urgency of the broader representation of democracy approach, focusing on the feeling of safety.
6. Developing the application in European Studies that focuses on the democratic approach to education and fosters students' global competence.

This circle of critical analysis of my first trial marked the professional transformations. Adapting the international experience expanded the pro-

fessional horizons and necessitated taking further actions in the direction of improvement and empowering the students.

The next cycle started after getting funding for the project to teach the course of European Studies between 2020 and 2022:

1. Teaching the course of intercultural communication studies through incorporating philosophical dialogue.
2. Feeling enthusiastic about participating in the project relevant to the Ukrainian system of teacher education and having challenges of online interaction.
3. The advantage is that the topic of safety becomes meaningful for students and motivates them to actively participate in the discussion of safety; the disadvantage is the impossibility of having a physical interaction.
4. Getting a new experience of facilitating the dialogues through digital media and understanding different perspectives of safety in an educational context.
5. Need to explore the students' perception of safety in emergency situations and under the conditions of physical and social isolation.
6. Getting interested in the concept of safety and exploring its meaning in both physical and virtual environments.

The second cycle also closed at the stage of grasping the necessity to develop professionally and make further improvements to the teaching and learning process in times of uncertainties and threats to physical and emotional well-being.

The third cycle of the critical reflective analysis represents the ongoing process that has not been completed yet. This cycle also raises personal questions, as the issue of creating a safe space is now self-relevant and requires further exploration.

Based on the critical analysis of the previous situation, current crisis conditions in education, and experience of interaction with students from a Ukrainian university, I formulated additional research questions: How is the concept of safe space approached in the literature? How could the concept of safety be generated in the crisis reality? What is the role of philosophical dialogue in creating a safe space during wartime in Ukraine?

Theoretical reflection

How is the concept of safe space approached in the literature?

The concept of safety has evolved significantly, expanding beyond its traditional definition of mere protection from harm. Contemporary understandings view safety as both a state of security and a dynamic process influenced by political, economic, social, and psychological factors. The concept of safety is also in line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Sheng & Fauzi, 2022), as the second most important human need after physiological needs, such as hunger, thirst, and fatigue, have been satisfied. Moreover, safety encompasses both objective protection and subjective perception; the latter means the importance of feeling secure for individuals. This complexity has resulted in various classifications of safety, including categories of social, cultural, economic, and informational safety. In times of crisis, safety extends beyond merely physical protection and implies preserving psychological resilience, human rights, and collective identity.

Education plays a crucial role in shaping awareness, attitudes, and behaviours related to safety, making it a foundational aspect of fostering stability in uncertain times. Education for safety integrates ethical values such as responsibility, dignity, and tolerance to develop socially aware citizens. A strong sense of security within a community contributes to broader social stability and peace, reinforcing the idea that those who feel safe actively participate in maintaining and cultivating security (Wysokińska-Senkus, 2020). In the context of crisis and war, educational spaces should become sites of both protection and empowerment, offering students a sense of stability and agency. These insights provide a critical foundation for analysing how educational institutions can construct and sustain safe spaces amid crisis conditions, particularly through practices that encourage critical thinking, emotional resilience, and collective reflection.

In the part of theoretical reflection, I turned to literature analysing the concept of safe space in times of crisis that is complicated by physical distancing and the establishment of student-teacher interaction that takes place exclusively in a digital environment. Considering different definitions of "safe space", we can outline how it's approached in the literature.

The traditional background of the concept of safe space derives from a characteristic of physical safety (originally for women and LGBTQ representatives). Adopted in higher education, it meant the protection of the marginalised groups of students from discrimination, harassment, hatred, and other threats.

Exploring the examples of safe spaces in higher education settings, the safe space was implemented in the context of intercultural education. We should say that because schools are multicultural, it is necessary to ap-

proach the educational process as a safe space for diverse groups to express their identity of individual identity and to minimise the negative effect of disclosure of students' identity, especially those who are in the margins.

The notion of "safe space" is very ambiguous and widely discussed in educational contexts. The works of Boostrom (1998), Gayle, Cortez, and Preiss (2013), Callan (2016), and Fast (2018) are helpful in defining the notion of safe space. Boostrom (1998) put forth a metaphoric analysis of safe space and possible implications of safe space. Four different views of safe space arise from the metaphoric analysis: 1) physical isolation; 2) both physical and psychic isolation; 3) an uncomfortable environment where difficult dialogues take place; 4) freedom to express oneself, being a creator of safe space.

The first element of the safe space includes being a physically safe environment where everybody feels comfortable and protected, even through physical isolation.

The second aspect of the safe space is a built-in protection. It emphasises that learning includes risks and even the pain of giving up a former condition for getting a new way of seeing things. The learning takes place in safe space talks, and students decide for themselves if they want to participate in the learning interaction. For teachers, it's essential that all the students participate in the interaction of the learning process. However, to feel safe for students means to have the freedom not to participate. According to Helskog (2019), the refusal to be engaged in the dialogue is a way of non-participation that occurs in the learning process. Describing the examples of her own philosophical practice as a facilitator, she experienced a situation where one boy preferred to hide under his hood and not participate yet still wanted to retain her Dialogos books that she distributed among students for dialogical sessions and collected at the end. After reflecting on this example, she tried to establish a dialogue session with colleagues at the philosophical practice conference to find the answer to the question, "What does non-participation in philosophical dialogue mean?" (Helskog, 2019, p. 131). The answers that the philosophical practitioner comes up with in her study align with the concept of safe space presented by Boostrom (1998). If students prefer not to contribute verbally to the open exchange of experiences and opinions, they can be engaged in an inner dialogue with themselves and the subject matter. To begin speaking openly, they need to first reflect on their own thoughts and feelings and make sure that the space provides them with safety (Zembylas, 2015).

The third element of the safe space is a more complicated issue, as it implies that "safe space" is not always a synonym for the word "comfort". And the way to comfort is always fraught with stress. The most stressful thing is to be invisible to others, not physically but socially. Expressing opinions that sometimes are confrontational, as well as seeking sense-making, brings people together in the community. Boostrom (1998) says that showing differences, using their voices, and playing their roles in the communities are the true essence of a safe space.

In Boostrom's (1998) research, we can find the evidence that safe space has the common features of dialogical interaction and even philosophising, as this concept originates from Plato's educational traditions, emphasising that learning includes risks and the pain of giving up former conditions for getting a new way of seeing things. Boostrom (1998) cited the words of Plato's slave Meno, who said that in learning, there is no safe space to hide when Socrates starts asking questions. However, taking into account the complexity of the situation caused by the war, dialogical interaction in education cannot be an additional factor for risk and stress for students, so dialogues should be the source of hopefulness and resilience for students. Therefore, a more detailed analysis of the concept of safe space is needed.

Safe space is crucial for conducting difficult dialogues and emotional exchanges. An academic safe space is an inclusive environment that provides students with opportunities for interpersonal and intrapersonal development. This kind of space implies dialogue, inclusion, and respect. Focusing on the implementation of difficult dialogues, Gayle, Cortez, & Preiss (2013) describe the practice of creating safe spaces that include:

- sharing ethical guidelines for creating a safe space and developing communication rules;
- discussing the experience of participating in difficult dialogues;
- highlighting students' needs and expressing their views about the efficacy of safe space.

These findings suggest that safety in educational settings is achieved through dialogical interaction, and, on the contrary, to be actively involved in the dialogue, students should feel safe. The academic discussions revolve around the issue of difficult dialogues and their compliance with the concept of safe space. When students are at risk of meeting opposing opinions and experience contradictions, the focus of the discussion is shifted towards the concept of brave space. Arao & Clemens (2013) suggest this alternative to safe space as courageous conversations about race and racism to encourage students to be involved in discussions about diversity and social injus-

tice. They criticise the safe space for being a kind of illusion, emphasising the need for courage to position students by themselves in the dialogues for accomplishing the learning goals. Brave space is more congruent with our understanding of privilege, oppression, and the challenges inherent in dialogue about these issues in socioculturally diverse groups.

Iversen (2018) suggests replacing the concept of safe space with community of disagreement, revealing the idea that the classroom is 'a group with identity claims', consisting of people with different opinions who find themselves engaged in a common process to solve shared problems or challenges (Iversen, 2018). In this community, students are intellectually challenged, where they try out different perspectives and positions, where they dare to see things in new ways, and where they possibly may be affected and transformed by intellectually demanding learning processes.

The controversy between the concept of safe space and brave space can be explained from the point of view of Callan (2016) on such spaces. The researcher distinguishes between intellectual safety and dignity safety. Dignity safe space cannot be questioned, as dignity safety is a social condition that should be created for those who occupy public roles in a democratic society. To be dignified in a given social environment is to be free of any reasonable anxiety that others will treat one as having an inferior social rank to theirs. Callan (2016) suggests strengthening dignity and safety through the necessity to encourage civility.

The common thing for the concept of safe space and alternative concepts is that they have a dialogical nature in an educational context and take place in classroom interaction.

Several defensive statements for using the concept "safe space" instead of alternative terms can be presented. First, the current life-threatening situation changes the approaches to teaching and learning. Traditionally, in Ukraine, the main focus is on the didactic and subject-specific needs. However, the unprecedented circumstances demand approaches that go beyond the subject focus and actualise the relationality of education. Student-teacher and student-student relationships are more valuable for strengthening the feeling of safety. Second, for dialogical interaction in educational settings, the feeling of safety is prior to the feeling of bravery. The space should foster students' safety as a subjective perception, and only then they can be ready to engage in the discussion of topics that require them to be brave to participate in authentic communication. According to the humanistic-pedagogical approach to organizing dialogical interaction, the teacher (facilitator) invests considerable time in addressing humanistic is-

sues, reminding students of ethical norms, and establishing rules that foster the transformation of students' attitudes toward dialogue-such as tolerance, respect, and openness to others. Only after this foundation is established can participants proceed to the next level, which involves greater risks, as it is more strongly focused on the content of the dialogue.

Gayle, Cortez, & Preiss (2013) prove that participation in difficult dialogues maintains students' open-mindedness to understand the positions of others. The practice of creating a safe space should start with sharing ethical guidelines and developing communication rules. The discussion of the ethical guidelines for dialogical interaction takes place at the beginning of the course, and all the students are involved in the process of their setting, starting with introducing themselves and their communication style. They discuss the ways to ensure that all voices in the classroom are heard and nobody is left socially invisible. Students agree on five or six ethical rules that contribute to building a safe space and reconsider the communication rules.

Discussing the ethical rules is an important element of a safe space, as they should be appropriate in a living way, not imposed on them. Otherwise, they become violent toward students and cause harm, which does not correspond to the understanding of safety in a learning environment.

When students are prepared for the interaction and feel confident and safe, they can put the content to the fore. They do not need to hide their opinions or beliefs and can freely participate in the discussion of controversial topics (Helskog, 2017). People cannot feel confident and secure in an unsafe environment or in an unsafe situation. In the conceptual chain of these feelings, safety precedes confidence, comfort, bravery, and well-being (Avni-Babad, 2011).

Defining safe space under crisis conditions

However, the boundaries of the safe space go beyond a "risk discourse" of race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation. Safety is considered as an umbrella term for many types of issues or problems that educational institutions address to ensure the overall wellness of educational agents (Mibuta, 2021). So, the definition of "safe space" depends on the threats that arise in life. There are as many safe spaces as there are threats to the things that human beings can care about. The controversy between the safe space and education can be resolved by greater clarity about what kind of safety stu-

dents might need. In difficult life conditions for students, teachers balance between students' wellbeing, which also implies the feeling of safety, and preserving the high quality of education. A feeling of safety is necessary for students' well-being and comfort; it preserves their ability to function in an academic environment. As we can see from the focused analysis of the concept of safe space, it is approached in the literature as a space for marginalised individuals to protect them from any kind of harm – physical, psychological, or emotional (Anderson, 2021). Extending the meaning of 'safe space' under the crisis conditions changes the target group; it can be any of the students who feel discomfort or insecurity. Safe space transforms depending upon catastrophising the difficulties that arise in the normal course of life or education (Anderson, 2021). So, a safe space entails that all students are protected from negative emotions and discomfort.

The war in Ukraine deepened the crisis in all life spheres with a lot of consequences for education, and further critical situations are still possible and unpredictable. The discussion of the meaning of safety becomes extremely relevant for several reasons. First, today's world seems to be the most unsafe place for students affected by the war. The times students are living in are extremely uncertain, and danger can strike them at any time. Second, the crisis reality deepens the inequality in the society and makes the students' environment more and more diverse during wartime because of many factors: the deterioration of financial conditions, the immigration and integration in the new cultural and language conditions, the inner replacement in the badly serviced areas, etc. Third, most students experience both physical and social isolation due to their replacement, being separated from families and friends during wartime because of many factors: the deterioration of financial conditions, the immigration and integration in the new cultural and language conditions, the inner replacement in the badly serviced areas, etc. Third, most students experience both physical and social isolation due to their replacement, being separated from families and friends, and having only distance learning for a period of more than one year. All the listed facts make them more vulnerable and strengthen the feeling of being unsafe, insecure, and hopeless.

Under war conditions, the understanding of the concept of safety has been transformed. In times of war-related insecurity, the feeling of safety implies that being together with others-physically or virtually-and trusting other people may be more essential than physical safety (McEvoy, 2019), while continuity of care during separation from family and friends and periods of social isolation remains an urgent need (Bürgin et al., 2022). Fol-

lowing up on this argument, I assume that the feeling of safety in crises is supported when others care.

Feminist thinkers have expressed interest in the topic of care. Feminists mainly portray care and caring relationships as positive dimensions of our lives that were devalued by a capitalist and patriarchal order. Feminists argue that care is integrated into the current gender system and both men and women should be involved in caring relationships (Cheal, 2003). The most famous feminists who analyse the concept of care are Nel Noddings and Joan Tronto. Tronto's work on the ethic of care is devoted to care as a political project. Under crisis conditions, the understanding of others' needs, being responsive to these needs, and awareness of collective responsibility for making our lives better transform the power of caring relationships (Tronto, 2013).

Noddings considers care in the system of educational relationships. According to Noddings (1992), caring includes the moral and ethical obligation of humans to care for others. This approach in pedagogy is also defined as the ethic of care. The ethic of care fosters the feeling of responsibility and respect for others' feelings and encourages acting to protect others. Caring is a moral imperative, a social responsibility, and a pedagogical necessity.

Noddings' (1984/2003) seminal work identifies the "ethic of care" as central to the practice of teaching. She characterises the experience of caring in terms of "engrossment" and "motivational displacement". Engrossment involves "an open, nonselective receptivity to the cared-for", a willingness to "really hear, see, or feel what the other tries to convey" (Noddings, 2005, pp. 15–16).

I share this position, substantiated by Noddings (1992), that teachers' motivation to caring action is directed toward the welfare, protection, or enhancement of students being cared for. When teachers care, they step out of their personal frame of reference and go into the other's. When they care, they consider a student's point of view, their needs, and their expectations. The reasons have to do both with what the other person wants and with the objectivity of the situation (in the case of Ukraine, that is a military conflict that people can't influence much). Admitting the uncertainty of the situation, caused by the war, and the impossibility of changing it globally, it is crucial to de-stress and comfort and judge teaching in times of despair as real caring, to act by affection and regard, depending on the particular set of circumstances. The ethic of care is broad and loosely defined; it is not conditioned only by formal rules and predefined regulations of how

to act. It's shaped according to human needs, weaknesses, anxieties, etc. (Noddings, 1984).

Adams & Rose (2014) distinguish between instrumental and performative care. Instrumental care is an intention to be helpful in the academic context to support students' performances, and performative care is a willingness to live up to an "ethical ideal" without delivering any thoughtful response; it's more about staying connected between teachers and students, and students themselves. So, a safe space in a life-threatening crisis could be defined as an environment where the instrumental and performative care is delivered to students who are getting extremely vulnerable, which reduces their feeling of isolation and hopelessness and increases their engagement in education.

One of the main objectives of education, apart from maintaining the instrumental care in terms of the education quality, which policymakers concentrate their attention on, is to develop the relationships of care and trust in the educational environment, and to spend more time on building safe and cooperative spaces. Considering teachers as caring ones, their role of being an instructor extends to delivering caring and trustful relationships through attention and dialogue (Noddings, 2015).

Final remarks: Dialogue as a way to realise safe space

Philosophical dialogue is a way to realise a safe space while staying together and delivering a caring relationship. Dialogue consists of talking and listening, sharing and responding. The purpose of dialogue is for the one-caring and the cared-for to encounter ideas and understandings other than their own. Dialogue reflects an open-ended common search for understanding, empathy, and appreciation, permitting teachers and students to discuss and arrive together at sound decisions. Dialogue also contributes to the development and maintenance of caring relations because it allows students to connect to each other and the teacher through language and shared experience. In using dialogue, one-caring teachers serve as facilitators and counsellors, shifting the focus of the interaction as students' needs arise (Noddings, 1992).

Noddings (1984) also emphasised that what is received as care differs according to the situation that defines who we are and where we are in the world. Care and caring relationships in higher education are not issues of high relevance in literature and are criticized by scholars who say that

care turns a university into a marketised institution where students look for 'safe' studying and untroublesome knowledge. However, the multicrisis reality makes changes in understanding the role of effective teaching in higher education institutions and reprioritises what is important in life and highlights the importance of teachers' care. Papadopoulos (2017) notes that university teachers play a significant role in modelling 'care' as recognition of shared humanity and openness to others. Care is defined as a standard, but a standard that is flexible enough to allow us to "live as well as possible in the world" (Tronto, 2013), considering the smaller and larger contexts the care relationship is set.

The feeling of safety and being protected in war conditions is a primary need for students in Ukraine. I do not consider philosophical dialogue as a one-to-one practice between a facilitator and a participant. It's essential for our research to study a philosophical dialogue as one that can be utilised in the frames of a learning process. Establishing the dialogue in the student group, a teacher should be aware that topics to discuss differ, and they should be offered to a group in the pre-defined form (a picture, a piece of text, or the pre-defined question itself), trying to avoid traumatic triggers but motivating students to think about the current situation they find themselves in from different perspectives, their needs, and imagine the opportunities for the future. According to Helskog (2017), all the materials used by students relate to their personal life, investigate similarities and differences in others' stories, and accept them with respect and tolerance.

Helskog (2019), describing ways of philosophising, emphasises that the relationships between participants in the group play an important part in collaborative dialogical interaction, as they have different life contexts that have an impact on the flow of philosophising in the group. Considering the moral elements of care outlined by Tronto (2013), it's important for teachers to get an awareness that they can be role models of a caring personality but not to take the whole responsibility upon themselves. It's essential to negotiate the main principles of care with all the participants of the social group, passing the power to care to students. These principles can be added to philosophical practice as both topics to discuss and guiding rules of dialogue. These principles include *attentiveness* – noticing the needs of others in dialogues, being able to see the world from the perspective of the one in need; *responsibility* – responding to the needs of others; *responsiveness* – listening to the responses of participants of the interaction and sometimes becoming aware of new unmet needs; and *solidarity* – taking collective responsibility, thinking of people as both receivers and givers

of care, and thinking seriously about the nature of caring needs in society (Tronto, 2013).

To advocate for the role of philosophical dialogue, I should say that it's difficult in an online environment to be a caring personality with respect to people you have never met face-to-face. There are no faces in distance learning. Unfortunately, the education in Ukrainian higher education institutions is delivered only in online mode because of the risks of missile attacks and the unpreparedness of institutions to provide students with appropriately equipped shelters. In order to get to know each other better, the dialogical interaction should not only cover the subject area of the course but also some philosophical topics that are relevant and meaningful. It's essential to go beyond the subject focus and have space for dialogic interaction, selecting diverse philosophical topics within the subject area. According to ideas highlighted above, relating learning situations with personal experiences, listening, understanding of others' perspectives, self-reflection, and respect for human dignity and shared values, and enhancing authentic communication, friendship, and love between participants (Helskog, 2017). We assume involving people in authentic communication positively influences the relational aspects of interactional processes in a pedagogical context and stirs up feelings like trust and empathy, adding the feeling of safety to learning.

The war exacerbates the life situation and ways of life; many topics become more and more relevant compared to the pre-war period. According to Brenifier (2009), topics for philosophical dialogue should arise from pressing life conditions These points don't align with the idea of traditional understandings of safe space, but rather with the safe space as a "community of disagreement" (Iversen, 2018). To gain safety, students should share their concerns and opinions and explore different understandings and interpretations of uncertain life conditions. To better understand themselves, it's essential for students to examine their own beliefs, attitudes, and opinions critically. Philosophical practices include the stages of self-reflection for a deeper understanding of one's feelings, attitudes, values, knowledge, and boundaries, as well as for getting ready for uncertainties in life. Self-reflection also serves to comprehend the meaning of safety and safe space as having some universal criteria of safety, since each person has their own needs and perceptions of safety, depending on the hardships that a person faces. So, a safe space is not something that can be granted to a person. The rules and terms of interaction should be negotiated, expressed, and mutually agreed upon. It is preferable when these negotiations take the form

of philosophical practice, as this reduces the power imbalance of teachers while promoting a sense of responsibility and solidarity among participants.

To summarise, I will return to the practical reflection part to highlight what insights I've gained while being involved in the dialogical interaction with the theory of defining the content and the essence of safe space. My first attempts to use philosophical practice with my students and to adapt the international experience failed because of an incomplete understanding of the interrelation of safe space and the interrelation of safety and care. I tried to create a "sterile" caring environment and strived for a community of total "agreement". The harder the life and teaching-learning conditions became, the clearer the necessity of returning to philosophising was. All our lives contain cycles that change and lead us up (and even down) this spiral stairway, as in the picture of my first philosophical practice in 2018. Now I'm almost at the end of the third cycle. I have a firm belief that the question of safe space is a philosophical one, and each person can create it for themselves. To become aware of what safety means, people should delve deep into the dialogue with themselves and others, and even feel very unsafe while being with others, so that they can grasp the meaning of safety. From the teacher's perspective, it's very important to be caring, but it doesn't mean to protect students. This means to be together with them, provide the room for dialogue and give the opportunity to explore the meaning of safety. From my personal perspective, I'm still in great need of safety, and I cannot say for sure if the sense of safety gains new meaning for me and transforms, as the period of uncertainty hasn't finished. But I'm convinced that the best decisions are made under the condition of feeling safe and being involved in dialogue – either internal or external.

Notes

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