Reprint from

Reflective Practice Research

Edited by

Prof. Michael Noah Weiss
(University of South-Eastern Norway)

and

Prof. Guro Hansen Helskog
(University of South-Eastern Norway)

Volume 4

LIT

Reflective Practice Research in International Collaboration

Developing Teacher Education in Togetherness

Edited by

Guro Hansen Helskog
Ingrid R. Christensen
Åsmund Aamaas

LIT

Cover image: Amberpress by Gosia Warrink

The book is funded by the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN) and the Norwegian Directorate for Higher Education and Skills (HK-dir).

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at https://dnb.dnb.de.

ISBN 978-3-643-91235-0 (pb)
ISBN 978-3-643-96235-5 (PDF)
ISBN 978-3-643-96877-7 (Open Access)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.52038/9783643912350

© LIT VERLAG GmbH & Co. KG Wien,
Zweigniederlassung Zürich 2025
Flössergasse 10
CH-8001 Zürich
Tel. +41 (0) 78-307 91 24
E-Mail: zuerich@lit-verlag.ch https://www.lit-verlag.ch
Distribution:
In the UK: Global Book Marketing, e-mail: mo@centralbooks.com
In Germany: LIT Verlag Fresnostr. 2, D-48159 Münster
Tel. +49 (0) 2 51-620 32 22, Fax +49 (0) 2 51-922 60 99, e-mail: vertrieb@lit-verlag.de

Contents

Foreword 1
Petter Aasen

Chapter 1: Developing education through international collaboration 3
Guro Hansen Helskog, Ingrid Reite Christensen and Åsmund Aamaas

Chapter 2: The Dao of reflective Practice Research 21
Finn Thorbjørn Hansen

Chapter 3: Success or Failure? Establishing communication In International Collaboration 51
Ingrid Reite Christensen

Chapter 4: Philosophising – a Way Towards Safe Space 75
Olena Beskorsa

Chapter 5: Philosophising – a Fruit of International Collaboration 97
Olha Lukianchenko

Chapter 6: Becoming rocked: a Palestinian – Norwegian Partnership 123
Ingrid Reite Christensen, Øyvind Wistrøm, and Sami Adwan

Chapter 7: International Collaboration and Workplace Friendships 143
Åsmund Aamaas and Vaibhav Jadhav

Chapter 8: Ways of Understanding Coincidences 161
Guro Hansen Helskog, Michael Noah Weiss and Christian Stokke

Chapter 9: Exploring our Cultural-Historical Embeddedness 185
Guro Hansen Helskog and Vaibhav Jadhav

Chapter 10: On compassionate teacher-student relationships 205
Guro Hansen Helskog, Dipali Mehakarkar and Chaitali Ghosh Sinha

Chapter 11: Shifting understandings of Inclusive education 227
Audrey Paradis, Jarno Slendebroek, Leandra Ve Saskia Romey, Marianne Reuse, Md Abu Nayeem, Laurel Seppälä, Albina Marchenko and Elizabeth Harlow

Chapter 12. A Horse called Hitler: Reflections on the German guilt 247
Kerstin Bornholdt

Chapter 13: From Geopolitics to Rare Earths in Teacher Education 267
Erlend Bendik Myhre

Chapter 14: Existential Encounters – Epistemological Diversity 303
Kristin Gregers Eriksen

Presentation of authors in alphabetical order 321

10.52038/9783643912350-6

Chapter 6: Becoming rocked: a Palestinian – Norwegian Partnership[1]

Ingrid Reite Christensen[2], Øyvind Wistrøm[3] and Sami Adwan[4]

Abstract

This paper critically reflects on how to develop good project partnerships in international higher education collaboration between Palestine and Norway. While formal partnership requirements often focus on evidence-based measures and success, the complexities of international collaboration are shaped by the political realities in Palestine, where war and systematic oppression present significant challenges. Additionally, partnerships like ours are challenged by historical and cultural differences and North-South power imbalances. To explore these complexities, Mr. Wistrøm shares his experience from a 1999 meeting with Dr. Adwan in Bethlehem, where Palestinian and Israeli families engaged in dialogue. Drawing on Paulo Freire's ideas on education for liberation (Freire, 2005), this story displays how the Palestinian partner facilitates meaningful learning and how the Norwegian partner is willing to be transformed, rethink assumptions, and engage in shared suffering. With these insights, we suggest that a good partnership requires mutual acknowledgement and acceptance of difference and perhaps even a sense of professional calling.

Keywords:

International partnerships, dialogue, pedagogy of discomfort, reflective practice research, Palestine

Introduction

In this paper, the authors critically reflect on the philosophical question of how to develop a good project partnership in international higher education collaboration between Palestine and Norway. While formal partnership frameworks often emphasise evidence-based measures, progress, and suc-

cess, the realities of international collaboration present deeper challenges. Collaborations like ours must navigate profound historical and cultural differences, as well as entrenched North-South power imbalances. In Palestine, the backdrop of war, violence, and systematic oppression over decades adds further complexity to the partnership.

As a starting point for critical reflection, Mr. Wistrøm recalls his first meeting with Dr. Adwan at a 1999 dialogue seminar between Palestinian and Israeli families in Bethlehem. Drawing inspiration from Paulo Freire's vision of education for liberation (Freire, 2005), we analyse the seminar's possibilities and challenges for partnership development. Our reflection highlights the ambiguities and open questions surrounding the Northern framing of collaborations with the Global South. Acknowledging that the partnerships in higher education are far from streamlined, developing collaboration must account for deep changes of mindsets, suffering, and embracing – and accepting – difference. We critically reflect on the development of a partnership within the context of a 30-year collaboration between higher education institutions in Palestine (Gaza and the West Bank) and Norway.[5] Partnership is seen as a hope for education and a pathway to a peaceful future. Becoming familiar with the context of the project in Palestine is a prerequisite for developing this partnership. Our Palestinian colleagues have been eager to show us beautiful sunsets, rows of olive trees, delicious cuisine, and the warmth and hospitality of their communities. However, the Palestinian people also live through the hardships of occupation and conflict, marked by walls and checkpoints. Since the war in October 2023, Gaza's universities have been destroyed, and the university staff in the West Bank increasingly face unpredictable violence, including systemic surveillance, arbitrary arrests, and killings. The current situation in Palestine is harsh, yet partnership remains central in the hope of securing a peaceful future and development.

Partnership emerged as the 'new big idea' in development discourse at the beginning of this millennium (Kayizzi-Mugerwa, 1998). According to Barnett et al. (2010), a partnership is defined as "an alliance of resources and expertise between organizations aimed at achieving a mutually desired outcome." Since 2015, partnerships within higher education have evolved into a component of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 2015). Higher education is considered a catalyst for stabilization, securitization, reconstruction, state-building, and peacebuilding (Milton and Barakat, 2016). International collaborations represent investments in developing quality teaching and research, as well as in peacebuilding between

countries of the "Global North", comprising wealthier nations with more stable infrastructure, such as Norway, and those in the "Global South", encompassing politically destabilized states like Palestine (Pherali & Lewis, 2019).

Jones et al. (2016) describe factors influencing the necessary components of a partnership, including a clear aim, clear institutional mandates, good relationships, a clear conceptual foundation, as well as commitment to actions. Developing those partnerships is guided by the slogan "facts inform policy," meaning that international projects must be founded on evidence-based methods of collaboration and effective knowledge development (NORAD, 2021).

Building such partnerships, however, involves complex power dynamics and challenges associated with outsider perspectives in establishing projects abroad (Cai & Leask, 2024). However, such ideal partnerships have been critiqued for adhering to a transactional logic rather than evolving into transformational relationships – collaborative, reciprocal engagements capable of generating mutual learning and benefit across the global South and North (Enos & Morton, 2003; Knight, 2012, p. 27). The goal is to promote partnership engagement that reflects cooperation and symmetry rather than domination or imposition from one partner onto the other (Mwangi, 2017, p. 37). Nevertheless, issues of so-called "white supremacy" remain a core challenge, denoting an asymmetry and domination by the global North countries (Downes, 2013; Knight, 2012; Sutton, 2010). One question, then, is on what terms such partnerships can be developed, ensuring symmetry. The answers are many on ideal, structural, and theoretical levels, as it cannot be seen as a given that such initiatives from a country in the "north" will succeed.

However, in this paper, we see situated reflective practice and interpersonal relationships as crucial for developing insight, engagement, and transformation (Ma & Montgomery, 2019; Orton, 2000, pp. 166–167). Our experiences suggest that partnerships focused on delivering evidence-based measures, demonstrating progress, and ensuring success often conflict with the lived realities of those involved and might also fail to address the intricate dynamics inherent in global North-South partnerships. We take as our starting point a story told by Mr. Wistrøm from Norway about how a Palestinian partner, Dr. Adwan, facilitated the emergence of a long-lasting partnership, making the first steps of realizing what developing a partnership might entail, including possibilities, challenges, and stumbling blocks.

Reflecting on international collaboration

This theoretical paper draws upon key methodological elements from reflective practice research (Helskog & Weiss, 2023; Lindseth, 2021). Conducting a theoretical and philosophical exploration, we see personal experience as a key source for developing knowledge. A reflective practice approach can offer meaningful orientation marks instead of merely stating factual knowledge (Lindseth, 2017; Weiss, 2021). Reflective research aims to create systematized accounts of a philosophical problem, explored systematically through subjective experiences as opposed to an empirical research methodology, whereas data should be gathered from objective, observable phenomena (e.g., Popper 2002). Contextual and personal interpretations are not constraints but rather *capacities* to unfold the character of the social world (Barad, 1996, p. 18). Our reflective approach aims to provide orientations for meaning and seeks to develop theoretical generalizations (Flyvbjerg, 2011). In this paper, this means that our critical reflections are intended to be transferable – emerging from specific, context-bound experiences that can be recognized and applied in analogous settings by others involved in the internationalization of higher education (Lindseth & Norberg, 2004).

This paper has three authors, each contributing a distinct perspective. For practical and methodological reasons, we have chosen to focus on one story – Dr. Adwan's facilitation of a seminar – narrated by Mr. Wistrøm, with Dr. Christensen serving as a summarizing witness to our collective theoretical analyses. Methodologically, this paper follows an exploratory three-step approach, as outlined by Lindseth (2020; 2023), which can be summarized as follows:

Step 1: Narrating a personal experience marked by wonder, discrepancy, or surprise

Concrete and original reflection, where the experience is narrated "straight from the heart". A philosophical question can be described as a fundamental inquiry about reality and knowledge, and often involves morality or existence.

Step 2: Critical reflection and selecting a philosophical question. Core themes are drawn from the experience guided by the question, "What is at stake in this narrative?" A philosophical question can be described as a fundamental inquiry about reality and knowledge, and it often involves

morality or existence. The philosophical question does not seek an objective, empirical answer (Blackburn, 1999).

Step 3: Theoretical and philosophical reflection elaborating on the philosophical question

Theoretical reflection, where the themes are generalized and reflected upon in general terms, drawing on philosophical and theoretical perspectives and research literature. Drawing inspiration from Paulo Freire's ideas on education for liberation (Freire, 2005), we undertake a critical analysis of the seminar's possibilities and challenges for the development of a partnership, given the position of a Norwegian as a representative of the more powerful party in a collaborative project.

We critically acknowledge that the perspectives – and even the methodologies in this paper – are entrenched by historical, cultural, and political power issues in Western dominant epistemological frameworks (Mignolo, 2010; Smith, 1999). Building on this awareness, we will follow Mr. Wistrøm's story and his efforts to develop an authentic partnership with colleagues in Palestine, striving for collaborations that might transcend traditional power imbalances.

In the following sections, we will be introduced to the development of a partnership in higher education, with the voice of Mr. Wistrøm from Norway encountering Dr. Adwan from Palestine.

Step 1: Mr. Wistrøm's rocking experience and the birth of a longstanding partnership

As a starting point for critical reflection, we recount Mr. Wistrøm's experience during a dialogue meeting between Palestinian and Israeli families organized by Dr. Adwan in Bethlehem in 1999. Mr. Wistrøm's story is part of a broader series of initiatives and projects aimed at establishing a university partnership between Palestine and Norway. The first meeting between Mr. Wistrøm and Dr. Sami took place in 1994 during the process of the Oslo Accord[6]. Dr. Adwan was invited to Oslo to talk about education in Palestine. Mr. Wistrøm worked in teacher education at Vestfold University College, now the University of South-Eastern Norway. Hearing about Dr. Adwan coming to Oslo for a talk about education in Palestine, the two felt an immediate connection. This marked the start of 30 years of cooperation between Palestine and Norway, which has also included

Dr. Christensen over the last decade. The recent project "Developing Early Childhood Education in Palestine and Norway"[7] is a collaboration between the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN), the Islamic University of Gaza (IUG), and Hebron University (HU). The project has established two master's degree programmes at the Palestinian partner universities and an English master's degree in Pedagogy at the University of South-Eastern Norway. It has awarded several MA scholarships and engaged in extensive network-building for the future development of education and higher education.

"I was sitting in the meeting room at Talita Kumi School, originally a German missionary school at the border between Israel and the Palestinian city of Bethlehem. I had come to Palestine as a representative from the University of South-Eastern Norway (then Vestfold University College), meeting with Dr. Sami Adwan from Bethlehem University.

At the meeting, we were a group of approximately 25 people: three generations of Israelis, three generations of Palestinians, and some international participants, including me. The leader of the session was Dr. Sami Adwan from Bethlehem University. The Talita Kumi school is situated on the border between the Israeli and the Palestinian-controlled areas close to Bethlehem, where the participants entered the school from each side: Palestinians from the Bethlehem side, the Israelis from the Israeli-controlled area. But neither of the groups was allowed to cross into "the other" side. Military checkpoints and regulations secured this.

The meeting had been going on for almost three days. It was a dialogue meeting: "Telling your story". The purpose of the whole session was to hear about the others' stories and get to know them, to understand what is labeled "the others". Participation was voluntary. The Israeli group came from a settlement just outside the Palestinian city of Hebron: originally Palestinian territory but conquered and made into a Jewish settlement during the war in 1948. The Palestinians came from a refugee camp in Bethlehem, most of them originating from the very village outside Hebron that the Israelis conquered in 1948. Three generations from each side; the eldest telling their stories from the war and what happened then, and the fighting and how they lived thereafter; the second generation about building a settlement and getting a so-called "normal" life or about surviving in a refugee camp; but the youngest generation was more concerned about exchanging pictures of football idols or rock stars. Or they discussed the political situation.

In the closing session, everybody was supposed to say a few words about how they felt and thought. One of the last participants was a Palestinian teacher from the refugee camp. He stated quietly, "I am glad I participated in this meeting. I have come to know you Israelis much better: your thoughts, your opinions, you as persons. And I hope I will be in contact with you in the future because I have come to know you. But the sun that shines down on the swimming pools in your settlement – situated where the houses and farms of my ancestors lived – does not manage to shine down on the narrow street in my refugee camp and through the broken window in my small apartment where I have to live with my whole family in a two-room small apartment, in a Bethlehem locked in and controlled by the Israeli army . . . "

That statement rocked me. I had visited that refugee camp a couple of days earlier. But still, the statement rocked me in the meaning of realizing or understanding that there is a reality that is beyond the theoretical or academic picture or description of a topic or question, be it political or social or otherwise. I was shaken out of a comfortable "wishing that it is possible to end or reduce the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians through dialogue and by getting to know each other". I suddenly realized more deeply the hard political reality of injustice and unfairness as the core source of the conflict. Visiting the refugee camp was an emotional experience. But the statement suddenly embedded the joint theoretical (from reading about the history) and the experiential/emotional (through the visit to the camp) understanding of the conflict. It was a kind of reflective addition to theoretical knowledge and emotional experience and a kind of "imperative realization of facts". And has been ever since. It has been a driving force in my cooperation with both Palestinians and Israelis for 30 years, as well as when working with other political conflicts. [. . .]

[Talking] about internationalization, that has to include practice or experience or meeting with reality. It is possible to read about discrimination or racism as a theoretical question. But you do not fully understand or realize the concept of discrimination if you have not experienced – seen, experienced yourself or met a human who has been discriminated – how this impacts a human being."

Step 2: Initial question: What is a good partnership

Throughout our collaboration on this paper, we have engaged in extensive reflections (along with drafts and stories) to capture how it resonated with and impacted us. We also questioned the events and the possible underlying principles and foundational questions it might raise.

Reflecting on Mr. Wistrøm's story from Bethlehem, there is, of course, much to learn from Dr. Adwan's wise methods of facilitating dialogue. However, Dr. Adwan's approach may represent more than just dialogue techniques. The previous assumptions about international collaboration seemed to miss a fundamental insight. As Mr. Wistrøm reflected on Dr. Adwan's facilitation in Bethlehem, he became increasingly intrigued about what the partnership in international collaboration demanded from him. Mr. Wistrøm had to engage more than the typical success factors from international projects would require, such as developing evidence-based measures for partnership quality. Not even a fair understanding of the context and living conditions of Palestine was enough. As we contemplate the seminar in Bethlehem and the recent developments in Palestine, we are left with questions about what it means to develop a university cooperation. Partnerships require something deeper and more existential, which is not easily articulated. Therefore, in this paper, we formulate a philosophical problem for further inquiry: *What is a good partnership in international collaboration?*

Before addressing this question from a practical or methodological perspective, we approach it as a philosophical inquiry. Rather than focusing solely on factual and formal requirements or instrumental quality measures, we argue that partnerships may depend on subtler, implicit dimensions that call for deeper exploration.

Step 3: Theoretical and Philosophical Reflection: Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* and a re-reading of the story

Wistrøm's experience can be explored as more than a personal experience – it can also be situated within broader theoretical and philosophical discussions. The encounter at the seminar in Bethlehem raised questions that extended beyond its immediate context – questions concerning key aspects of partnership development: knowledge, dialogue, and learning. In the following section, we juxtapose selected theoretical concepts on learning, knowl-

edge, and dialogue from Freire with Mr. Wistrøm's experiences at the Bethlehem seminar. While Freire does not explicitly address partnerships in international collaboration or higher education, his foundational perspectives on learning and dialogue might offer valuable insights that enrich our understanding of the challenges and potentials of developing international collaboration.

A) Conceptual entry point: Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire (1921–1997) advocates for a transformative and liberative approach to education, knowledge, and learning. Drawing on dialectical philosophies like those of Hegel and Marx, Freire holds that education draws on potential power dynamics and structural inequality in society. Freire's conceptual framework about learning moves beyond an inner, individual cognitive process and directs attention to the social aspects of education. Raising a criticism of the Western knowledge domain, Freire establishes a philosophical, methodological account for developing collective, moral action for social justice towards liberation. The participants can come to see the world "not as a static reality but as a reality in the process of transformation" (Macedo, 2005). Freire's work critically examines the role of education in society, positing that education holds the keys to social justice and societal change, or conversely, its opposites. Liberation, according to Freire, is not solely a matter of community development but challenges deep structures within the totality of society (Freire, 1978, p. 141).

Freire initiates his critique by challenging traditional classroom teaching. He introduces the concept of the "banking model" of teaching. In this traditional approach, teaching involves depositing information about various topics such as society, history, and politics into the students. According to Freire, students are perceived as passive and empty vessels, akin to a deposit or a "bank account". The banking approach to teaching might pose significant threats to students' understanding, as, in Freire's words, "The student records, memorizes, and repeats these phrases without perceiving what four times four really means" (Freire 2005, p. 71).

The banking model, characterized by one-way teaching, also poses a danger to students, as knowledge about the world is treated as fixed and "ready-made". This implies that students are relegated to the role of memorizing and learning without engaging in critical thinking. Consequently, the

foundational knowledge about society, history, and politics becomes settled, unconscious, and resistant to questioning.

According to Freire, the "banking model" of teaching not only preserves established knowledge but also embodies a conservative societal structure. His work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* illustrates how education can uphold social injustice, undermining autonomy and critical thinking. The oppression, as outlined by Freire, is not necessarily about any authoritarian personality of the teacher but is enacted in how the teachers perceive knowledge and convey it to their students. The failure to acknowledge students' perspectives and life-worlds results in the students losing their freedom to think or speak, thereby being deprived of their human status. This dehumanization of students can lead to forms of violence (Freire, 2005, p. 44). Thus, social privileges, class divisions, and social injustice persist in this educational paradigm.

As an alternative to the banking model, Freire outlines the principles for what he presents as "education for liberation". The main means of education for liberation is *dialogue*. For Freire, the dialogue represents both a philosophical account of dialectics as well as practical methodological steps toward liberation. On a philosophical level, the dialogue must build on the students' subjective life-worlds. As opposed to fixed knowledge being conveyed in traditional teaching, true knowledge is founded on the reality of the students and local communities. Freire addresses a dialectic approach to knowledge, referring to Hegel (ibid., p. 36) and Marx (ibid., pp. 50–51): "To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: A world without people" (Freire, 2005, p. 50). Thus, the focus for education should be subjective and based on the lifeworld of the students and not only abstract knowledge with no relevance to the population. As a basis, education must take a dialectic starting point between the subjective and the collective living conditions.

Through the dialogue, Freire describes the field of education as "praxis". The term "praxis" seems to bring forth the students' living conditions (Freire, 2005, p. 141). The teacher acts as a "problem-poser", whereas the teacher leads them to reflect on social, political, and economic contradictions (Freire, 2005, p. 80). Personal experiences of injustice can reveal common societal patterns where oppression is not merely a subjective feeling but an objective reality of oppression. It is not enough, though, that the oppressed liberate themselves. Also, the oppressor needs to discover himself to be an oppressor. Freire holds that it is not an aim to only display the

guilt; the oppressor needs to overcome abstract labels and take a position of solidarity. Referring to Hegel, the oppressor and the oppressed can become "beings for another" by taking risks as acts of love and fighting at the side of the oppressed to overcome injustice (Freire, 2005, p. 50).

At the core of Freire's vision is a process called "conscientização". Conscientização is the learning process of "perceiving social, political, and economic contradictions, and taking action against the oppressive elements of reality" (Freire, 2005, p. 36). Conscientização can be described as a dynamic and participatory process. The teacher leads a thematic investigation that aims to deepen awareness of social structure and to promote critical consciousness (Freire 2005, p. 109). The pedagogy of the oppressed can ideally work as an instrument for a critical discovery: Both the oppressed and their oppressors are manifestations of dehumanization. Liberation is thus a childbirth, and a painful one (Freire, 2005, p. 50).

As a consequence, the students initiate an "inversion of praxis", aiming to transform the existing conditions for the oppressed. Personal experience can reveal societal patterns of injustice, whereas oppression exceeds the individual and reaches towards insights about an objective reality, leading to solidarity. However, solidarity does not stop with an inner change but bears on commitment to *action:*

"True solidarity is found only in the plenitude of this act of love, in its existentiality, in its praxis. To affirm that men and women are persons and as persons should be free, and yet to do nothing tangible to make this affirmation a reality, is a farce." (Freire, 2005, p. 50)

To Freire, action does not mean a practical activity but underscores the importance of an inner transformation as something existential and almost a revelation. In the next sections, we will reflect further on the development of a partnership, seeking the potential of Freire's ideas and coupling it with Mr. Wistrøm' s intriguing insights taking place in a dialogue meeting in Bethlehem.

B) Reflecting upon the seminar in Bethlehem in the light of deliberative pedagogy

The first focus of our reflection is on the dialogue and its potential implications for developing a partnership, which begins at the seminar in Bethlehem, where Dr. Adwan facilitates a dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian families.

Contrary to theories for the initial phases of successful collaborations (e.g., Jones et al., 2016), the partners should focus on aligning common aims and a rationale. However, the dialogue at the seminar in Bethlehem appears to foster more than any conceptual common adjustment; a much deeper and existential learning process seems to take place for both the Israeli/Palestinian participants and the international partners. Rather than seeking alignment, the dialogue aims to showcase the diversity and deep personal realities of family stories across generations. On an overall level, the Bethlehem dialogue creates a contrast to traditional one-way teaching methods, providing an opportunity to confront stereotypical interpretations of the Israeli and Palestinian narratives. Instead, Mr. Wistrøm and the participants gained exposure to widely different perspectives on the incidents in 1948.

Seeking comprehensive insights, not settled facts

An essential aspect of the dialogue at the seminar in Bethlehem may lie in challenging the notion of history as a settled system of facts. Dr. Adwan had the option to conduct a seminar focused on presenting and clarifying the facts regarding the 1948 geography, incidents, political decisions, and stakeholders. However, Dr. Adwan chose to avoid this approach.

We believe that adopting a conventional "facts" approach would have hindered the dialogue between Israeli and Palestinian partners. In the Palestinian/Israeli context, the very issue of strategic presentation of facts is a deeply sensitive issue. In schools in Palestine and Israel, textbooks present significantly different versions of history, geography, and each other's culture and religion. At the seminar in Bethlehem, the challenge was how to engage in a meeting of clashing stories and realities without causing a collapse of communication.

Using Freire's terminology, the textbooks may be an example of "banking knowledge", where knowledge is typically presented in a singular, fixed way. Addressing the sensitive topic of the incidents of 1948, Dr. Adwan successfully facilitated a peaceful dialogue, acknowledging the evident high risks of misunderstandings on each side. For Mr. Wistrøm, as a newcomer, engaging in dialogue served as an effective introduction to the occupation and the sufferings of the Palestinian people without imposing truths and facts on him.

While Freire primarily directed his criticisms towards Western knowledge, the issue of presenting knowledge and maintaining a fixed discourse is also relevant in Palestine. Education and the use of textbooks have played

a strategic and dominating role in mediating deeply contested facts about belonging and the legitimation of power (Mazawi, 2016).

Dialogue: The power of personal stories and the temptation of distance

Another powerful aspect of the dialogue is that the families' stories are subjective and not objective. In the moment, the subjective might have been the key to proximity and intimacy between strangers at the seminar in Bethlehem, despite deep and insolvable conflict. As Mr. Wistrøm participates in the seminar, the complexity of the individual families' stories displays a deep conflict. The subjective plays a key part in his process of realizing the complicated nature of the conflict. Similar to many Norwegians, he had previously observed the situation in Palestine as a local "conflict" that the parties should solve internally and end fighting (Tveit, 2023). Mr. Wistrøm admits a desire for brief solutions and "that it is possible to end or reduce the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians through dialogue and by getting to know each other".

The temptation to maintain a certain distance from complex issues is understandable and perhaps comfortable. However, according to Freire, such an approach represents a form of denial: "To deny the importance of subjectivity in the process of transforming the world and history is naïve and simplistic. It is to admit the impossible: A world without people" (Freire, 2005, p. 50). Dr. Adwan's approach involves facilitating a dialogue that starts with the personal stories of three generations of Palestinians or Israelis. Instead of aiming at ending or reducing conflict, Dr. Adwan makes a brave move: He invites the Palestinian families to include Israelis in their family stories and display their agony and sorrow.

During the seminar in Bethlehem, Mr. Wistrøm gained a new understanding of his own limitations in international collaboration. Through active participation and attentive listening, he comes to understand and realize the process of humanization: "You do not fully understand or realize the concept of discrimination if you have not experienced – seen, experienced yourself, or met a human who has been discriminated [against] – how this impacts a human being." He recognises the limitation of abstract slogans of peace or hopes for quick solutions and an end to conflict in Palestine and Israel. Instead, Mr. Wistrøm undergoes a change of perspective.

Becoming rocked

Mr. Wistrøm expresses that he was moved from a comfortable state into a state of being "rocked". With the vocabulary of Freire, Mr. Wistrøm under-

goes a process of "consientizaçao" at the Bethlehem seminar. He experiences a moment of truth and change. The impossibility of the participants meeting again creates an insight: The division between Palestinians and Israelis appears as a deep and inevitable truth. For Mr. Wistrøm, this "consientizaçao" – Mr. Wistrøm's realization that the Palestinians and the Israelis could not meet again – appeared to be a crucial insight – in Mr. Wistrøm's own words, a necessary "imperative realization of facts".

This realization can be described by what Freire (2005, p. 50) calls a "childbirth, and a painful one." The aspirations for development, change, and progress fall short and take unexpected detours. Thus, the Bethlehem seminar can be described as existential: for Mr. Wistrøm, the seminar represents what is also labelled a "pedagogy of discomfort", where the learning process provides insights into suffering rather than learning as mastery (Blignaut & Koopman, 2020; Head, 2020). The stories evoke his compassion, engagement, and deep sympathy. Yet, the stories also reveal the pain of gaining insights and knowledge from the situation of the Palestinian people. For Mr. Wistrøm, the "consientizaçao" also involves pain in another way: the pain when realizing the limitations of a complete understanding. One could assume that true compassion depends on a true identification, where Mr. Wistrøm had to be a Palestinian to understand the situation in Palestine. In doing so, the pain might lie in the conflicted position between the objective "realization of facts" and his own subjective position. Yet, Freire describes no "true understanding" or solidarity in terms of objective sameness. Instead, for Freire, the true sources for solidarity lie in a dialectical relation between the subjective and the objective (Freire, 2005, p. 51). There are no quick fixes through partnerships, no immediate remedies for the deep conflicts and injustices.

However, the moment of "consientizaçao" does not paralyse him. Instead, it became a turning point for Mr. Wistrøm. The seminar in Bethlehem appears to *inspire action*, commitment, and engagement. When Freire describes "praxis", he refers to the "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire, 2005, p. 51). The insight might have woken Mr. Wistrøm to solidarity alongside Palestinians. Consequently, Mr. Wistrøm has participated in missions for education in emergencies in Palestine and initiated several university partnerships between himself in Norway and Dr. Adwan in Palestine, which, throughout the past decade, also included all the authors of this paper. However, a strong partnership is also that our projects aim not only for a transformation in Palestine but also for a reciprocal exchange and change (Tadesse & Melese, 2021). On a practical level,

this means that we ensure parallel development projects at our universities in Palestine *and* Norway. However, it also demands a willingness for the universities to undertake a deeper work of reciprocal exchange where the Norwegian partners also develop insights and perspectives from the Palestinian experiences. This aligns with Freire's emphasis on dialogue and mutual learning, moving beyond a "banking model" of knowledge transfer to a dialectical approach between subjective and collective living conditions. Referring to Hegel, Freire has the vision that the oppressor and the oppressed can become "beings for another" by taking risks as acts of love and fighting at the side of the oppressed to overcome injustice (Freire, 2005, p. 50). Any exchange, in any project, will not just result in measurable outputs, such as a new master's programme or course. For us, it also involves steady work in developing dialogues with the university management, hoping for the result of an *institutional solidarity* that exceeds our personal engagement.

What is "the *good*" in an international partnership?

In this paper, we reflect on what the development of a good partnership in international collaboration might entail, with a focus on the conditions for establishing a partnership between Norway and Palestine. Over the past decade, the Middle East, and Palestine in particular, has faced escalating conflicts, culminating in the devastating and ongoing war – with horrors difficult to fathom for any outside partner. In such a context, developing partnerships may be more important than ever. As international collaboration continues to serve as a key resource for quality development, stabilization, and a hopeful future, seeking a mutual understanding across contexts is crucial.

The next question is what this mutual understanding demands in the development of a partnership in international collaboration. This reflective research paper takes a starting point in a personal experience told by Mr. Wistrøm, who attended a dialogue seminar between Palestinian and Israeli families in Bethlehem. The seminar represents a key moment of insight, where Mr. Wistrøm is confronted with former superficial explanations and ideals about the Palestinian situation. He undergoes a so-called "imperative realization of facts" – *conscientização* – about the deep division between Palestinians and Israelis. This moment, though painful, became a turning point, inspiring action and a driving force for the development of several

partnership projects between Palestine and Norway. From this critical reflection, we can propose that partnerships may require gaining reflexive insights about confronting one's own limitations and being ready to engage.

In this reflective paper, several open questions remain. First and foremost, the question about how to develop a good partnership is not a matter of fulfilling instrumental quality standards in international collaboration, although they, too, might be valuable. Instead, we can change the focus slightly, asking about *what the good is* when developing partnerships in international collaboration.

Another question concerns the power imbalances between the Global North-South relationship as a mutual partnership. All three authors of this paper reject the thought of Norway as a "white saviour" (Straubhaar, 2014), yet the underlying premises of funding and power subtexts of partnerships are inherent tensions underlying all the activities. However, the contribution of this paper might lie in how we as partners act upon these realities: On the one hand, the development of a good partnership demands an acknowledgement of our limitations and our continuous need for learning. Building partnerships between Norway and Palestine entails recognising that we will never fully grasp the lived realities of our Palestinian colleagues. Or the other way around. Perhaps the secret is not to strive for complete understanding but to embrace the insight that our *knowledge is partial.*

On the other hand, the acknowledgement of limitations also requires something from our Palestinian partner. Developing a good partnership will also demand *a sense of acceptance of the partial.* This acceptance represents an undefined "good" force, as it involves patience and a willingness to interpret suggestions and assertions in the best way possible.

Many questions remain about how to develop a good partnership in international collaboration. Partnerships inevitably involve uncertainties, differences, and partiality that all partners must navigate. While some may prefer to avoid the discomfort, misunderstandings, and time-consuming online meetings, the partners in this and many other successful projects appear to endure this. In ways that we sense rather than comprehend, we might describe this commitment as a *professional calling* (Duffy, Dik et al., 2018). This calling serves as a driving force that nurtures the good in a partnership despite power imbalances and equips us with patience and resilience, and even makes us and our universities eager to face the next challenges or threats together.

Notes

[1] Ingrid R. Christensen is a full professor in pedagogy and specializes in professional learning and ethics. Christensen has experience in teaching and supervision across all levels in pedagogy, research methodology, special needs education, and the integration of technology in education. She has led and developed research and development projects in education, including in Palestine and Ukraine. She is currently working on the development of European border collaboration at the Norwegian Police University College.

[2] Øyvind Wistrøm, Emeritus Assistant Professor at the University of South-Eastern Norway. Political/pedagogical activist and environmentalist. He has taught natural science, including environmental questions and international politics in teacher education, partly based on his own experiences. He has also worked for UNESCO in Palestine/Gaza and for UNICEF in Ukraine during the current war. Established and headed a number of co-operation projects with universities in Palestine and Ukraine. Wistrøm has also worked on democracy and action research on environmental education and is currently Vice-chair of the Grandparents Climate Campaign in Norway.

[3] Sami Adwan, a Palestinian professor in education leadership and teachers' education, worked in many local and international universities, and currently, after formally retiring, I teach as a lecturer at the Arab American University. Published extensively both research papers and books in the fields of education, early childhood, schoolbooks, religious education, and peace education. Held many administrative positions including Academic Vice President for Academic Affairs at Hebron University and dean of the school of education at Bethlehem University. Supervised many local and international PhD and MA dissertations. A unionist and a member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Quds Open University.

[4] In honour and remembrance of our co-coordinator, Dr. Ibrahim Al-Astal, who was killed in an attack on Gaza in 2023.

[5] In the past decade, the three authors have collaborated in two projects financed by the Norwegian government: EURASIA CPEA-LT-2017–10037 Developing democracy education in Ukraine, Norway and Palestine (2017–2021), and NORPART-2018–10166 Developing early childhood education in Palestine and Norway (2018–2025).

[6] The Oslo Accords refer to a series of agreements between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in the period 1993–94. These agreements were designed to initiate a peace process for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by mutually negotiating a two-state solution. (Britannica, 2024).

[7] Early Childhood Education – Universitetet i Sørøst-Norge (usn.no)

References

Barnett, B. G., Hall, G. E., Berg, J. H., & Camarena, M. M. (1999). A typology of partnerships for promoting innovation. *Journal of School Leadership, 9*(6), 484–510. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268469900900602

Barad, K. (1996). Meeting the universe halfway: Realism and social constructivism without contradiction. In L. H. Nelson & J. Nelson (Eds.), *Feminism, Science and the Philosophy of Science* (pp. 161–194). Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Blackburn, S. (1999). *Think: A compelling introduction to philosophy*. Oxford University Press.

Blignaut, S., & Koopman, O. (2020). Towards an embodied critical pedagogy of discomfort as a decolonising teaching strategy. *Alternation Special Edition, 31*, 81–96. https://doi.org/10.29086/2519--5476/2020/sp31a5

Britannica, The Editors of Encyclopaedia. (2024, January 16). Oslo Accords. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Oslo-Accords

Cai, Y., & Leask, B. (2024). Rethinking internationalization of higher education for society from an outside-in perspective. *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/17516234.2024.2406093

Downes, G. (2013). A critical analysis of North-South educational partnerships in development contexts. *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review, 16*. https://www.developmenteducationreview.com

Duffy, R. D., Dik, B. J., Douglass, R. P., England, J. W., & Velez, B. L. (2018). Work as a calling: A theoretical model. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 65*(4), 423–439. https://doi.org/10.1037/cou0000276

Enos, S., & Morton, K. (2003). Developing a theory and practice of campus-community partnerships. In B. Jacoby (Ed.), *Building Partnerships for Service-Learning* (pp. 20–41). Jossey-Bass.

Flyvbjerg, B. (2011). *Making social science matter*. Cambridge University Press.

Freire, P. (2005). *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (30th anniversary ed.). Continuum.

Gergen, K. J., McNamee, S., & Barrett, F. J. (2001). Toward transformative dialogue. *International Journal of Public Administration, 24*(7–8), 679–707. https://doi.org/10.1081/PAD-100106665

Giroux, H. A. (2009). Paulo Freire and the politics of postcolonialism. In A. Kempf (Ed.), *Breaching the Colonial Contract: Explorations of Educational Purpose* (pp. 93–110). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978--1-4020--9944--1_5

Head, N. (2020). A "pedagogy of discomfort"? Experiential learning and conflict analysis in Israel-Palestine. *International Studies Perspectives, 21*(1), 78–96.

Helskog, G. H., & Weiss, M. N. (2023). Reflective practice research and kaleidoscopic epistemology. In M. N. Weiss & G. H. Helskog (Eds.), *Reflective Practice Research in Higher Education Pedagogies* (pp. 1–34). LIT Verlag.

Jones, M., Hobbs, L., Kenny, J., Campbell, C., Chittleborough, G., Gilbert, A., Herbert, S., & Redman, C. (2016). Successful university-school partnerships: An interpretive framework to inform partnership practice. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 60*, 108–120. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2016.08.006

Kayizzi-Mugwera, S. (1998). Africa and the donor community: From conditionality to partnership. *Journal of International Development, 10*(2), 219–225.

Knight, J. (2012). Concepts, rationales, and interpretative frameworks in the internationalization of higher education. In D. Deardorff, H. De Wit, J. Heyl, & T. Adams (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of International Higher Education* (pp. 27–42). Sage.

Lindseth, A., & Norberg, A. (2004). A phenomenological approach to the interview. In *Qualitative Research Methods in Caring and Health Sciences* (pp. 146–166). Studentlitteratur.

Lindseth, A. (2017). Forskningens vei – fra livserfaring til en observerbar verden og tilbake til livets virksomheter [The path of research – from lived experience to an observable world and back to the activities of life]. In C. T. Halås, I. G. Kymre, & K. Steinsvik (Eds.), Humanistiske forskningstilnærminger til profesjonspraksis [Humanistic research approaches to professional practice]. Gyldendal Akademisk.

Lindseth, A., & Norberg, A. (2021). Elucidating the meaning of life world phenomena: A phenomenological hermeneutical method for researching lived experience. *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences*. https://doi.org/10.1111/scs.13039

Lindseth, A. (2023). Preface. In M. N. Weiss & G. H. Helskog (Eds.), *Reflective Practice Research in Higher Education Pedagogies* (pp. vii–x). LIT Verlag.

Lunenberg, M., Dengerink, J., & Korthagen, F. (2014). Teacher educators' professional learning: A literature review. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 41*, 34–46. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.03.001

Ma, J., & Montgomery, C. (2019). Constructing sustainable international partnerships in higher education: Linking the strategic and contingent through interpersonal relationships in the United Kingdom and China. *Journal of Studies in International Education, 25*(1), 19–34. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315319865784

Macedo, D. (2005). Introduction to the anniversary edition. In P. Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (pp. 11–27). Continuum.

Mazawi, A. E. (2016). School textbooks and entanglements of the 'colonial present' in Israel and Palestine. In *Pedagogy, Politics and Philosophy of Peace: Interrogating Peace and Peacemaking* (pp. 161–180).

Mignolo, W. D. (2010). Epistemic disobedience, independent thought and decolonial freedom. *Theory, Culture & Society, 26*(7–8), 159–181. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409349275

Milton, S., & Barakat, S. (2016). Higher education as the catalyst of recovery in conflict-affected societies. *Globalisation, Societies and Education, 14*(3), 403–421. https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2015.1127749

Mwangi, C. G. (2017). Partner positioning: Examining international higher education partnerships through a mutuality lens. *The Review of Higher Education, 41*(1), 33–60.

NORAD. (2021). Norad's strategy towards 2030. https://www.norad.no/en/toolspublications/publications/2021/norads-strategy-towards-2030/

Orton, J. (2000). Education and mutuality – An action perspective (Chapter 6). In A. R. Welch (Ed.), *Third World Education: Quality and Equality* (pp. 135–176). Garland Publishing.

Pherali, T., & Lewis, A. (2019). Developing global partnerships in higher education for peacebuilding: A strategy for pathways to impact. *Higher Education, 78*(4), 729–744. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734--019--00367--7

Popper, K. (2002). *The logic of scientific discovery*. Routledge.

United Nations. (2015). *Sustainable development goals*. United Nations. https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300

Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*. Zed Books Ltd.

Straubhaar, R. (2014). The stark reality of the 'White Saviour' complex and the need for critical consciousness: A document analysis of the early journals of a Freirean educator. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, 45*(3), 381–400. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.

Sutton, S. B. (2010). Transforming internationalization through partnerships. *International Educator XIX*, No. 1, 60–63.

Tadesse, W., & Melese, W. (2021). Higher education partnerships between the Global North and Global South: Mutuality, rather than aid. *Journal of Comparative & International Higher Education, 13*(2), 32–47. https://ojed.org/index.php/jcihe/article/view/3686

Tveit, O. K. (2023). *Palestina – Israels ran, vårt svik [Palestine – Israel's robbery, our betrayal]*. Kagge Forlag.