

PHILOSOPHISING THE DIALOGOS WAY TOWARDS WISDOM IN EDUCATION

**BETWEEN CRITICAL THINKING AND SPIRITUAL
CONTEMPLATION**

Guro Hansen Helskog



Philosophising the Dialogos Way towards Wisdom in Education

Philosophising the Dialogos Way towards Wisdom in Education proposes the innovative and holistic Dialogos approach to practical philosophy as a way of facilitating wisdom-oriented pedagogy. The book encourages individual and collective development through dialectical interplays between personal life, philosophical concepts and subject matter.

Based on two decades of the author's reflective pedagogical practice research, this book develops a philosophy of dialogical relationships. It analyses approaches to philosophical practice and suggests facilitation moves and philosophical exercises that can be adapted across educational levels, school subjects and higher education disciplines. Chapters provide examples of transformative philosophical group dialogues and suggest pathways towards multi perspective thinking, mutual understanding and wisdom in culturally diverse contexts.

Philosophising the Dialogos Way towards Wisdom in Education can be used as a holistic approach to democracy education, peace education, education for sustainable living and wellbeing. The book will be of great interest to academics, researchers and students in the fields of teacher education, philosophy of education and higher education. It will also appeal to practising professionals such as teachers and teacher educators in secondary and higher education.

Guro Hansen Helskog is Associate Professor at the Institute for Pedagogy, Department of Humanities, Sports- and Educational Sciences at the University of South-Eastern Norway.

‘This is a different book! It is a treasure-trove for readers looking for wisdom in the vital relations between teachers and young people. With extensive references to philosophy and psychology the author works out a philosophy of life that issues in a detailed presentation of philosophical exercises worked out by the author during years of practical trials. This is a book of true philosophical enthusiasm.’

Lars Løvlie, Senior Professor in Philosophy of Education, University of Oslo. Co-editor of *Educating Humanity: Bildung in Postmodernity*.

‘If you are looking for a straight forward and well-founded summary of key approaches of philosophical practice, which at the same time offers plenty of exercises and dialogue methods in order to improve your own work (as a teacher, practitioner, trainer, etc.), then this book is a treasure trove for you. With its strong focus on edification towards wisdom, this publication sets the tone for future developments of philosophical and dialogical practice.’

Michael Noah Weiss, Dr.phil and philosophical practitioner,
editor of *The Socratic Handbook*

‘Helskog understands the need for wisdom in our lives to make life not only sustainable but to allow it to flourish. For that we need open, inclusive and heart-to-heart dialogue, or “soft” power. Today’s world and too many of its leaders see wisdom as a form of weakness just because it does not manifest itself as uncompromising and threatening –as “hard” power. Helskog’s book recognizes the power of wisdom; it is very timely and on the mark.’

Maria daVenza Tillmans, Dr.phil, Former president of the American Society
for Philosophy, Counseling and Psychotherapy (ASPCP now NPCA,
National Philosophical Counseling Association)

‘Philosophising the Dialogos Way is a unique method of philosophical practice – an invitation to involve others in exploring ethical, philosophical and religious ideas and human relationships. Her approach will open ways to wisdom not only in education, but in many forms of dialogical interaction. I hope it will be read and practiced by many.’

Notto R. Thelle, Senior Professor in theology, The University of Oslo.
Author of *Who Can Stop The Wind?: Travels in the Borderland
Between East and West (Monastic Interreligi)*

‘I really like this book! It is ambitious and courageous in challenging established ideas and practices. Helskog gives many thought provoking examples of how the Dialogos philosophy and dialogues change participants’ lives for the better. The book makes it clear that the changes are not causal one. Rather, the Dialogos dialogues make participants start a personal reflection- and development process that nourishes their inner lives in profound ways. The book has an open and inviting writing style that made me as a reader feel taken along on a journey not only into the author’s examples, but also into her philosophical thinking. I learned a lot from reading this book – about pedagogy and brain research as well as about philosophical practice and philosophy.’

Andreas Ribe, philosopher and philosophical practitioner, co-author with
Helskog on two out of six original Dialogos books.

Philosophising the Dialogos Way towards Wisdom in Education

Between Critical Thinking and Spiritual
Contemplation

Guro Hansen Helskog

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To my parents Berit and Hermod Hansen, and to
Professor Lars Løvlie in gratitude

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Prologue

What is wisdom? What might a pedagogical approach that can contribute to the awakening of young people's longing and search for wisdom look like? Is it possible to create such an approach, and if yes, how?

These questions underlay the work that constitutes this book. Boiled down to the single sentence used as its title, the book is about philosophising the Dialogos way toward wisdom in education. Concretely, *philosophising the Dialogos* way implies engaging in a series of varied dialogues and dialogical exercises over some time. Three to four full days in a row is one option. An hour or two a week over 12 to 20 weeks another. However, this is a minimum if one is to work in line with the Dialogos approach. Contentwise, a Dialogos dialogue series should first and foremost include philosophical dialogues upon universal existential and ethical questions drawing on the world's global philosophical, spiritual or religious traditions, such as *What is respect? What is courage?, What does it imply to act compassionately? How can I become happy? How can we build trust? or What do I do when I forgive someone?* In these cases, the main concept in the questions can be used as a focus point, a regulative ideal or a compass for the philosophical dialogue process. Gradually, the concept that is empty in the beginning of a dialogue, can be filled with content in the course of the dialogue, through the method of collaborative reflection upon past experiences. Secondly, philosophising the Dialogos way should involve exercises where interpretation of texts and pieces of art is at the centre, and thirdly, it should involve exercises where critical analysis, logical argumentation and conceptual abstractions are at the core. Fourth, short periods of meditation and/or spiritual contemplation of profound and meaningful content should be included.. However, maybe the most important aspect of philosophising the Dialogos way is the profound encounters between participants when they engage in *heart to heart communication* with each other about a shared subject matter, driven by the will to wisdom.

Philosophising the Dialogos way can easily imply engaging with the content and subject matter of traditional school subjects and academic disciplines. A criterion is that participants should connect the content to their personal lives. In addition to traditional ways of engaging with subject matter, they can be

encouraged to reflect upon questions like: *What does this content say to me personally? Do I have experiences that can help me understand what I am reading now? Do I have experiences that challenges or contradicts this theory? Do I know of other people who might have such experiences? What implications do this content have for understanding life in the society or culture that I live in?* From here, questions can be formulated that are of interest and relevance to a majority of students. For instance, when studying the great historical revolutions, some possible questions that could be extracted and formulated are *What is justice? What is peaceful collaboration? What are the limits of our responsibility for the development of the world? What does it imply to work for change?* When exploring a chosen question, the students can look for examples from their own life where they experienced justice or injustice, collaborating peacefully, or taking responsibility for their community, in order to get a better understanding of the forces involved in revolutions. When working with the topic sustainable development, questions concerning one's personal responsibility could be extracted and formulated: *Am I responsible for the plastic pollution of the oceans? What is the relationship between my acts and global development?* By this, connections are made between the personal and the global, the private and the public. Students can gradually see how their lives are intertwined in complex social, cultural and historical structures, and thus connect aspects of their personal lives with the content of school subjects in profound ways.

This represents a new and different form of pedagogy, where interpretations of tradition can be developed in connection to the lives of the students here and now. The role of the teacher in this form of pedagogy is that of a facilitator of collaborative thinking through dialogue, rather than that of a transmitter of pre-existing knowledge. Questioning content and exploring different perspectives is here more important than reaching final answers and conclusions. Rather, both the students and the teacher are left in the open, free to integrate divergent perspectives into more unified stances.

Of course, this form of philosophical and dialogical pedagogy cannot and should not fully substitute traditional forms of teaching. Rather, it should be a supplement to, or better, an integrated aspect of, traditional disciplinary lectures, literature studies and problem solving tasks. Hence, I agree with Hannah Arendt, who in "The crisis of Education" (Arendt 1954) argues that pedagogy needs to be conservative. Children are born into a world that already exists, and school should introduce new generations to the knowledge and insights developed through tradition. However, what I add to this argument is the proposition that students should be given the opportunity to connect their own personal lives to global tradition through the methods of questioning and dialogical thinking. A prerequisite is that we open up for the possibility that there is *truth content* or *meaning* in all the great traditions of the world, philosophical and spiritual alike, and that seemingly opposite positions can be meaningful at the same time. This has implications for how to meet people of different worldviews, and engage with each other in dialogue. To enter a dialogue

and assume that one's own worldview is the right one, is a-dialogical, and counter-productive to a wisdom oriented pedagogy. Instead, we need to explore each other's perspectives with the willingness to change our mind if needed. This kind of openness is one of the most important virtues involved in philosophising the Dialogos way.

Building on experiences with developing the book series Dialogos – practical philosophy in school,¹ trying it out and reflecting upon the experiences through several research projects,² I am bold enough to claim that philosophising the Dialogos way is a powerful way to promote individual and collective wisdom, regardless of participants' age, cultural background and interpretation of life. This statement will be discussed more thoroughly especially in chapters 3 and 5. Let me here in the prologue begin with a brief discussion of an introductory example that shows aspects of how a Dialogos dialogue series can be set up, how it can be facilitated, and how the relationship between wisdom and philosophising can be understood.

Philosophising the Dialogos way toward wisdom in practice

I had arranged the room for three types of activities. In front of the whiteboard in the innermost section of the room, 11 chairs were placed in a circle. In the middle of the room I had created a big table for everyone to gather around when engaging with material on the screen. Close to the door, separate desks for individual participants were placed in line. These desks were for individual thinking during one of the tasks I had prepared. Hence, I had organized the room in ways that would support the philosophical activity at different points during the weekend. Moreover, I had prepared a framework with room for the main approaches involved in philosophising the Dialogos way, starting in people's lived life. This was the program for the weekend:

Friday 15.00–19.30

Personal question

Philosophical questions

Philosophical dialogue

Saturday 10.00–19.30

Comparative philosophical dialogue

Philosophical tour in Drammen: hermeneutical and Critical-analytical work based in art

Philosophical exercises

Passion in action – philosophising upon the role of feelings in actions

Contemplation – using a reading from the Dao te Ching

Sunday 10.00–14.00

Philosophical dialogue: What is the relationship between philosophising and development of self-understanding?

Meta-reflection: Searching for wisdom the Dialogos way

I made adjustments to this tentative program as the workshop developed. For instance, I included a dynamic meditation exercise between the work on emotion and the contemplative exercise. First, dancing to music for seven minutes. Then standing silently for seven minutes. Then sitting for seven minutes and finally laying down for seven minutes. Probably needless to say, many participants were brought out of their comfort zone during this activity. However, this can in itself be an important philosophical experience, forcing us to look at ourselves from a different perspective than normal.

The philosophical questions created by participants on Friday afternoon were perfect for our philosophical work on Sunday, making me reformulate my suggested question in order to include the questions of the participants. The participants ordered their priority as follows:

- 1 How can I be wise?
- 2 What is the relationship between philosophising and the development of wisdom?
- 3 How can I bring wisdom to the world?

Sunday morning they were sitting in the circle again, facing each other, seemingly eager to find out what kind of insights this last day would bring. So was I, and I asked them for permission to write about our dialogue in this book that I was working on. They all gave their permission, and in the following, I will give a brief description of the structure and content of our dialogue. I include it for three reasons. First, I would like to give you, my reader, a first impression of how a philosophical dialogue might be *structured* and *facilitated*. Second, the *content* of the dialogue goes to the core of this book. The participants explored not only how to be wise, and the relationship between wisdom and philosophising. They did it in such a way and with results that constitute the perfect example for a prologue like the one you are reading now. Third, starting with the narration of a practical experience is in line with reflective practice research as advocated by Anders Lindseth (2017), to which I will return.

How can I be wise?

Inspired by Socratic dialogue in the Nelson-Heckman tradition (see Chapter 4), I asked each and every one of the participants to find an example of once in their life where they experienced to be wise. The examples shared by the participants involved experiences of:

- changing one's work place
- not sending an e-mail in a situation of affect
- "sleeping on" a decision before acting
- seeking help to change one's way of relating to a family member

- organizing life differently to cope with heavy responsibility
- see possibilities instead of hindrances
- choosing to see one's parent(s) in a different perspective.

The example chosen by the group was the one where the example giver chose not to send an e-mail in a situation of affect. The person's first reaction was to want to respond immediately, as the e-mail had made him/her upset, hurt, and angry. S/he experienced that the person sending the e-mail had broken an agreement. But instead of sending the e-mail, s/he decided to wait until the day after, then ending up not sending a response at all.

Going deeply into the perspective of the example giver – first through questions to details in the example, and then by philosophising generally – participants suggested that wisdom in this example and more generally implied:

- acknowledging one's own feelings and reactions in a situation, and calm down, making the effort to see and embrace one's own pain, and accept the feelings, while also acknowledging the feelings of the other;
- considering what is most important in order to obtain a shared goal; letting something outside of ourselves lead (i.e. a shared goal, an idea of what would be universally good or other);
- understanding the role of right timing and of patience; taking the time needed to find the best possible course of action;
- embracing difference; not trying to force other people to do or give something they are not capable of giving;
- letting go of one's own expectations and of the assumptions that one's own needs are the same as the needs of the other;
- letting the lower dimensions of the ego (destructive feelings which we all have and which are deeply human) serve as a red flag and indicator that wisdom is needed. This is where wisdom comes in;
- understanding the difference between reacting with furious verbal attack and calmly saying that "we have some issues here";
- not arriving at conclusions, but rather opening up for different possibilities;
- understanding that wise action is always situational;
- acknowledging that one does not know all aspects of the situation;
- asking oneself the questions: "What kind of human being do I want to be?" "How can I communicate honestly without letting my ego come in the way?"

When one of the participants after approximately two hours of philosophising on the first question, argued that "*we need to be in dialogue with others in order to become wise*", it was as if space was created in time for a move toward the second question: *What is the relationship between philosophising and the development of wisdom?*

What is the relationship between philosophising and the development of wisdom?

During our dialogue, the participants kept referring back to the philosophical dialogues and exercises we had during the weekend, and to their shared experience that philosophising together this weekend *had already made them wiser*. Because they were so deeply immersed in this experience, I chose a facilitation move that was oriented towards generalization and abstraction rather than concretization and exemplification. By this, I wanted to give them the chance to transcend these experiences, and look at them from a more distant and objective perspective. Concretely, I asked participants to write a statement that could serve as an initial answer to the question, from where we could depart. This move created a thoughtful, contemplative atmosphere in the room for a few minutes, while participants were thinking and writing. The suggestion of one of them was written on a flip chart paper for all to see, as a place to depart:

If wisdom

- 1 comes through reflection
- 2 requires patience
- 3 embraces difference

and philosophising

- 1 is a reflective process
- 2 that takes time
- 3 and welcomes difference

then wisdom follows from philosophising

The group philosophised upon this suggestion for half an hour or so, looking at the different elements, arguing back and forth. One person wanted to add that *openness* was essential to the development of wisdom. People placing themselves within dogmatic religion mostly believe in *one* answer, while wisdom require openness to the possibility of *multiple answers*, this person argued. The wise person is open to the idea that as humans, we can never fully know. Moreover, the wise person is open to other people's views. Hence, wisdom requires the ability to go beyond our own little world in a form of transcendence, and the dogmatic religious person is often not open in this sense, s/he argued. This suggestion was discussed thoroughly. At first, participants focused on the need for dialogue with other people to get a perspective that is different from our own. They were referring to the dialogues during the weekend, acknowledging how the perspectives of the others had made them reconsider, deepen, and/or expand their own perspectives. However, they also acknowledged that sometimes the "Other" could be a book, but that a book seldom had the same power as other people had. "You are not touched by a book the same way you are touched by

other people”, one participant argued, as for instance when philosophising together like we had done through the weekend. Moreover, sometimes you need help from a more experienced reader if you are to understand a book, because you are not able to ask the author, they argued. One participant then gave the example of working with a difficult philosophical text for hours, thinking that s/he had understood, but when presenting it in philosophy class, the teacher had stopped her and said that s/he had not understood the text. Then he had given the class *his* interpretation of the text, which made much more sense. Thus, she needed a third more experienced person to help her understand the perspective of the author of the book. In either case, *dialogue* was essential, and hence the original model of the relationship between wisdom and philosophising was slightly adjusted. A forth point was suggested: Wisdom is developed *through* dialogue, and philosophising *implies* dialogue, which again requires openness:

If wisdom

- 1 comes through reflection
- 2 requires patience
- 3 embraces difference
- 4 *and is developed through openness and dialogue*

and philosophising

- 1 is a reflective process
- 2 that takes time
- 3 and welcomes difference
- 4 *and is developed through openness and dialogue*

then wisdom follows from philosophising

Now, looking at our piece of work, one of the participants argued that our model was too rational. Wisdom could be found in many places and emerge from all kinds of activities, s/he argued. Someone can be wise even though the wisdom cannot be explained conceptually, or philosophised upon through rational thinking procedures. Wisdom can be *experienced*, without or beyond words, s/he argued. The group agreed. Humour, fun, playfulness, self-challenging, experiences in nature, art, creative activities, sense of adventure, boredom, banging the head against the wall, and suffering were all essential elements on the way towards wisdom, they argued. I now asked the group whether such attitudes and experiences *automatically* implied or would lead to wisdom, or if something extra was needed. The group discussed this point in relation to the modified model, some arguing that experiences were not enough in themselves. One needed to draw *meaning* from the experiences. Hence, some of the participants argued, *reflective thinking* was indeed necessary. The person who had started to problematize the model, disagreed, and continued to argue that the model was too “rational”, and that wisdom primarily came from *experience*. *Wisdom just is*, s/he argued. It is *given*, and it is more a

question of *discovering it* and *connecting to it*, as we are all already dwelling in it, than of reflecting our way towards it.

The person had been thinking about what we had done during the weekend, and acknowledged the Dialogos approach as an approach to philosophising that could lead to the development of wisdom, or rather help people *connect to* wisdom. His/her suggestion was written on a flip chart paper and taped to the wall: In order to become wise, a person needs to:

- Discover/find/choose a method or process that works
- Create a space of trust and sharing
- Give others (and yourself) space and time
- Listen to and respect other perspectives
- Share (feelings, thoughts, ideas and doubts) honestly and without fear
- See patterns and interconnections
- Make connections between seemingly unconnected things
- Seek the greatest good

The author of the statement explained that it was connected to what had been worked out by the group earlier in the weekend, especially in the contemplative part where we had meditated and contemplated more than analysed and conceptualized, and in Friday's philosophical dialogue, where the person's own example was the one we had reflected upon. S/he had been "mind-blown", in a positive way, s/he exclaimed.

When comparing the two different ways of answering the question, the group found that it seemed first to be two distinctly different ways of approaching the development of wisdom. While the first suggestion seemed to be a procedural logical-analytical model, the second suggestion seemed to be an experiential-existential-spiritual model. However, as the group discussed the two approaches, they came to the conclusion that they were not really opposed to each other. Rather, they could be viewed as mutually related and interdependent. Also in the first suggestion, wisdom involved experience, and even natural science theory is based on experiences and experiments that has been carried out over and over again, one person argued. Both the rational-analytic-conceptual-procedural approach *and* the spiritual-existential-experiential approach were needed in the development of wisdom through philosophising, the group concluded. They were interdependent and equally necessary.

This two-sided understanding of philosophising in relation to wisdom is central to what is often referred to as respectively "Western" and "Eastern philosophy". Both approaches had been exercised and related in complex ways during our three day Dialogos dialogue workshop, and different people had responded differently to them. One person stated that s/he had accepted the spiritual-contemplative exercises that were part of the weekend because we had focused so much on rational-analytical thinking approaches as well, finding that this created a balance that was now explicated in our two related models of the

relationship between philosophising and the development of wisdom. Another argued that it was the contemplative parts of our dialogue weekend that had been the most important. As we shall see throughout this book, I agree with the group that the two perspectives and approaches need to be seen as inter-related and mutually dependent on each other when philosophising the Dialogos way toward wisdom in education.

How can I bring wisdom to the world?

The third question in the list that the group created for our last day of the workshop – *How can I bring wisdom to the world?* – remained unanswered by the participants as time ran out on us, but I will mention one comment that was related to this question. “If wisdom *comes* with openness and dialogue with others, we can *bring* wisdom to the world by being open and in ongoing dialogue with others”. In fact, this comment can serve as a summary of the elaborated answer given in this book. Moreover, the question itself can be included in the list of questions that has driven the work with this book: What is wisdom? What might a pedagogical approach that can contribute to the awakening of young people’s longing and search for wisdom look like? Is it possible to create such an approach, and if yes, how? If I actually have succeeded in creating such an approach – how can I use it to bring wisdom to the world?

Content and structure of the book

My answer draws on inspiration from wisdom perspectives in world philosophies and spiritual approaches, and on reflective pedagogical action and practice research conducted with students in schools and higher education institutions and in diverse contexts across society for more than two decades. Contextualized within the modern fields of wisdom research and philosophical practice, the book proposes the Dialogos approach to practical philosophy as a pedagogical approach that might enhance people’s wisdom. The book consists of seven chapters in addition to this prologue.

Chapter 2 crystallizes possible wisdom oriented pedagogies based in selected philosophical, spiritual, and psychological perspectives on wisdom and wisdom development. The first part of the chapter interprets the project of Socrates as first self-investigative, and then *agogic*, aimed at *guiding* others so that they could reach insights similar to his. Further, the chapter discusses distinctions between rational and spiritual wisdom perspectives. The second part of the chapter describes and discusses contributions in the field of contemporary (mainly psychological) wisdom research. Possible wisdom oriented pedagogies based in the different perspectives are crystallized and summarized in a table at the end of the chapter.

Chapter 3 discusses possible dangers involved in creating practical pedagogies based in principles, ideas, and ideals, while advocating the *will to wisdom* as a central ideal. A methodological discussion follows, contrasting experimental

quantitative research methods aimed at generalizability and replicability, with phenomenological and hermeneutical qualitative methodologies aimed at interpretation of phenomena. The methods applied in the work underlying this book are presented as a middle way, the discussion leading to the presentation of *the Dialogos six-dimensional map for wisdom-oriented pedagogy*. This model can function as a compass that makes it possible for me as well as other researchers, pedagogical practitioners, and philosophical practitioners, inside and outside the context of institutionalized education, to guide and support people of all ages in their quest for wisdom and in their striving to live a meaningful and morally sound and justifiable life. The mutually interdependent dimensions are respectively a *relational-communicative* dimension, a *cultural historical* dimension, a *practical-ethical* dimension, a *critical-analytical* dimension, a *spiritual-ideal* dimension, and an *existential-emotional* dimension. The chapter further discusses the development of wisdom oriented pedagogies culminating in the Dialogos approach. Included are phenomenological developmental work in the contexts of secondary education, family work in a psychiatric hospital, multicultural and multi-religious upper secondary school and finally in higher education contexts.

Chapter 4 analyses and discusses central approaches or ways of philosophising in the field of philosophical practice. Limited to dialogical philosophising in groups, the approaches included are Matthew Lipman's philosophy for children (P4C) approach, Oscar Brenifier's Thinking dialogue approach, Leonard Nelson's, Gustav Heckman's and Finn Thorbjørn Hansen's Socratic dialogue approaches, Michael Noah Weiss' guided imagery approach and finally Ran Lahav's contemplative philosophising approach. The approaches are mapped within the Dialogos six-dimensional map for wisdom oriented pedagogy, and interpreted as either mainly rational-epistemologically or spiritual-ontologically oriented, based in the notions *reflection* and *sensibility*. The analysis reveals that the communicative-relational wisdom dimension oriented towards profound "heart to heart encounters" that can combat isolation, loneliness, and separation, is the dimension least developed by the analysed approaches – a dimension that is central to philosophising the Dialogos way.

Chapter 5 discusses some of the basic attitudes or virtues involved in philosophising and searching wisdom *the Dialogos way*. The virtues are discussed by combining Jasper's notion of the drive for authentic communication as one of four basic drives in the search of wisdom, Buber's notion of profound communication in genuine I-you encounters, and Skjervheim's emphasis of the third – in our context the subject matter – as necessary in subject-subject encounters as opposed to subject-object encounters. Through examples of dialogues with children, youths, and adults in different contexts, the chapter shows and discusses how the attitudes might be lived in practice, and how children can reflect in ways that imply a will to and search for wisdom. Supported by research on the human brain, it is argued that learning to communicate "heart to heart" is important for human development in general, and thus for a wisdom oriented pedagogy in particular. This involves "speaking truly about life". The last part of the chapter reflects upon

a philosophical dialogue in teacher education, leading to deep personal transformation of Masih, a Muslim student. With a background from Afghanistan, Masih's personal transformation is discussed in relation to the Dialogos six-dimensional map for wisdom oriented pedagogy.

Chapter 6 suggests, describes, and discusses a wide range of possible facilitation moves and ways of organizing dialogical philosophising in education and beyond. Distinctions between authoritative, authoritarian, and neglecting facilitation styles are outlined and discussed, and it is argued that an authoritative facilitation style is preferred. Ten facilitation moves are suggested. These involve organizing the bodies in the room, writing and/or drawing as part of longitudinal Dialogos dialogue processes, taking the lead in creating a calm and centred atmosphere in the room, and letting participants engage personally with subject matter. Further, it includes leading the process of crystallizing as a focus point, opening a space for inner dialogues, opening a space for honest heart-to-heart communication, and challenging participants to think critically and abstractly. Finally, moves suggested involve problematizing answers and closing up the dialogue, and opening a space for meta-reflection. The chapter ends with advice concerning setting up longitudinal Dialogos dialogue series.

Chapter 7 suggests exercises that can be utilized and adapted across educational levels, school subjects, and higher education disciplines. The first group of exercises (A) are concerned with possible distinctions between empirical, psychological, and philosophical questions. The second group (B) are focused on interpretation and reflection upon experiences, while the third and fourth group of exercises respectively involve statements, arguments and reasons (C), followed by criteria and perspectives (D). The series of exercises continues with interpretation and understanding (E), and with exercises involving emotions and attitudes (F), before moving on to ethics and moral action (G). The last two groups of exercises are centred around the human being in cultural and historical context (H), and on existence and enlightenment (I). Altogether, the exercises cover the six dimensions in the Dialogos map for wisdom oriented pedagogy.

The final epilogue – Chapter 8 – reflects back on the book, both methodologically and content wise. The chapter categorizes and discusses excerpts from meta-reflections of students who participated in a longitudinal course on philosophical dialogue set up “the Dialogos way”. The excerpts were categorized under the different dimensions in the Dialogos map for wisdom oriented pedagogy. The chapter also includes the story of the authors own “journey out of and back into Plato's cave”, and reflections on how philosophising the Dialogos way might enhance wisdom and change people's lives for the better, which again will have implication for the smaller and greater context within which they live.

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Notes

- 1 Helskog 2006a, 2006b; Helskog and Ribe 2007a; 2007b; 2008; 2009.
- 2 See Helskog 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2018; Helskog and Stokke 2014; Stokke and Helskog 2014.

Perspectives on wisdom and wisdom development

It might be argued that the idea of philosophy as wisdom oriented pedagogy has its roots dating back at least 2,500 years, if we take the practice of Socrates as a beginning. However, it can be argued that also the Indian Yogic traditions, the Chinese Daoist and Confucian traditions, and the Buddhist traditions imply wisdom oriented pedagogical practices. If we accept this as a possibility, wisdom oriented philosophical practice might be dated between 5,000 and 10,000 years back. Concepts and ideas from all these traditions are included in the Dialogos philosophical exercises in Chapter 7. However, in order to discuss some possible relationships between pedagogy, philosophising, and wisdom, I will take my point of departure in Socrates as we meet him in the dialogues of Plato.

Selected philosophical and spiritual understandings

In Plato's *Apology* (Plato a), the defence speech of Socrates written around 480 B.C.E., we meet a Socrates who depicts the story of his life project as divided into two main parts – a *self-educative* part and an *other-educative* part. He had heard via others that the Oracle of Delphi had claimed that he – Socrates – was the wisest man of Athens. He could not understand this, and wanted to find out if it was true. Was he really the wisest of men? He, who did not have any wisdom at all? His method of trying to find out was to go to different people, politicians, poets, craftsmen, and others, asking them questions about the virtues and of the highest things, finding that they all claimed to know things they could not possibly know. Socrates found that even if they were wise in their area of craft or expertise, this did not make them wise in all things. In this sense he was wiser than them, because he did not claim to know things that he did not know, Socrates concluded, in the words of Plato. His insight into his not-knowingness was his wisdom, but according to himself, he was still not wise, because only God was wise. After finding this out, he started to work with others so that they, too, could discover this insight, become more enlightened, gain inner freedom, and face death with peace, as he did in the moment where he was about to be judged guilty of blasphemous activity and of misleading the young.

The wisdom oriented agogy of Socrates

At first, Socrates' project implied self-investigation or self-edification. Later it turned into an other-educative pedagogical project – or maybe better, an *agogical* project. “Agogy” means leading or guiding (Van Manen 2015:19), while “pedagogy” includes the prefix “ped” from “pais”, referring to child or children.¹ Skjervheim (1976) calls the practice of Socrates “psychagogy” – soul guidance. Though questioning his interlocutors, Socrates leads them into confusion about their previous convictions – into *aporia* – often by making them contradict themselves. Plato's allegory of the cave can be interpreted as a description of this inner process in which a “prisoner” becomes a “philosopher” – i.e. a lover of wisdom – who goes through an edifying process of unlearning false knowledge and discovering universal existential truth.

The allegory begins with Socrates stating that he wants to show his interlocutor, Glaucon, in a metaphorical or allegorical way “how far our nature is enlightened or unenlightened.” He describes human beings living in an underground den. They have been there from their childhood. They also have their legs and necks chained so that they cannot move their heads. Thus, they can only see what is right in front of them. Above and behind them, a fire is burning. Between the fire and the prisoners there is a low wall, like the screen that marionette players have in front of them, over which they show puppets. Glaucon comments that Socrates has shown him a strange image, with strange prisoners, whereby Socrates replies that “like ourselves (...) they see only their own shadows, or the shadows of one another”, and “if they were able to converse with one another, would they not suppose that they were naming what was actually before them?” Glaucon agrees. People who have not seen anything other than shadows on a wall all their lives will think that what they see is reality, and they will talk about what they see as if it was the truth.

Socrates then asks Glaucon to imagine what will happen if one of the prisoners is suddenly released and compelled to stand up, turn around, walk, and look toward the light. This prisoner will suffer great pain, because the glare of the light will blind and distress him. If he in addition is told that in his former state he had seen only shadows, which were illusions, and that now, as he is approaching “nearer to being” and his eye is “turned toward more real existence,” he has a clearer vision, he would be utterly confused and perplexed. When he approaches the light “his eyes will be dazzled,” and he will not be able to see anything at all before he has become accustomed to the sight of the upper world. Finally, the prisoner will be able to contemplate the sun as it is, Socrates argues, in the words of Plato. It is important to note that the prisoner who has become a philosopher does not stay outside the cave. He goes in again to encourage others to free themselves of their chains. However, inside the cave he is ridiculed by those who are still captive. Many of them have no interest in his invitation.

I interpret Socrates (Plato) to be speaking both about his own experience of becoming free of his chains, and about the experience he tries to give his interlocutors through his agogical practice. Instead of running away from the bullying of many of his fellow Athenians by escaping from the cave again, Socrates started his mission of teaching others. He engaged with his fellow young citizens so that they, too, could become humbler and less confident in their presumed knowledge, yet more confident in their *being*.

The allegory of the cave describes the process of enlightenment as a process that can actually be experienced, however implying that wisdom cannot be taught in a direct way. It depicts wisdom as something that is already there to be discovered by the individuals. The sun exists even though the prisoners facing the wall cannot see it. Whether or not they discover it depends partly on the help of another who has already seen the sun, partly on their own *will* to keep on climbing out of the cave – their *will* to become enlightened – their *will* to wisdom.

The participants in the international Dialogos dialogue workshop depicted the relationship between wisdom and philosophising in similar ways. We remember that the first proposition depicted the relationship as a logical one: Wisdom follows from philosophising because philosophising is a reflective process that takes time, welcomes difference, and implies open dialogue. The second proposition depicted the relationship as one implying that philosophising makes the person *connect* to the wisdom that *already is*. Both interpretations are possible interpretations also of the “journey out of Plato’s cave”.

Other wisdom oriented schools and practices

Wisdom was a central concept not only to Socrates and Plato, but also in other ancient philosophical schools, Pierre Hadot argues in his famous book *Philosophy as a way of life* (Hadot 1995). In addition to the school which followed Plato, other schools were established based on the philosophies of Aristotle, the Stoics, the Epicureans, and the Sceptics. Hadot shows how all the schools developed their practices around an idea of spiritual progress towards their respective visions of wisdom. The schools taught formalized practices that could not be combined with each other, as they were distinctly different. Each school demanded undivided devotion from their students. Hence, the schools practiced systematic wisdom-oriented pedagogies in correspondence with their visions of wisdom and idea of the Good or virtuous and wise life.

Similarly, the much older Hinduist-Yogic and Chinese-Daoist notions of oneness with the universe, and the Buddhist notion of Nirvana, imply existential “before and after enlightenment”, i.e. a notion of transformation from “not yet enlightened” to “enlightened” that makes a difference to how one acts in the world and relates to other people. Also these traditions are centred around notions of living a Good (i.e. wise) life, and how to pursue it.

Another variant of the transformative stance can be found in the Judeo-Christian tradition that speaks about God in a way parallel to how other traditions speak about the universe. For instance, Olav Fjærli² argues that in its natural state, the human being has no wisdom at all, because *God* is the source of all wisdom, and to become wise, human beings need to open up to God. A person can have knowledge, intelligence, or a strongly developed sense of logic. However, this “human wisdom”, makes the mistake of putting the human being (and thus the ego) in the highest position, Fjærli argues. Wisdom is searching for the essence and core of a subject matter itself, writes Fjærli, arguing that wisdom is a God-given insight and ability to *see the true nature of an issue*, and to apply the will of God in the situation at stake. What in Plato is called “enlightenment” can be compared to the Christian notion of “salvation”. The person who is saved can be interpreted as having reached a form of spiritual enlightenment. With the danger of making comparisons of phenomena that cannot really be compared: In the Yogic and Buddhist tradition, one speaks instead about opening up to the universe – of becoming one with the universe.

Some philosophers, among them Lydia Amir (2017), is not willing to label religious and so called Eastern traditions “philosophical”, while others, among them Norwegian philosopher Arne Næss are. Arne Næss included Eastern philosophies in the *examen philosophicum* curriculum at the University of Oslo, which all Norwegian students entering the University needed to pass. However, these philosophies were later taken out of the curriculum, and a pure “western” curriculum remained, according to Dag Herbjørnsrud (2016). He problematizes this development, arguing that there is no such thing as “East” and “West” on the globe, and that in fact, the ancient Greek philosophers were living on the border between the two regions, and are no more “Western” than “Eastern”. Hence, we are better off speaking of global philosophies, global traditions and global knowledge, he argues, while Lydia Amir (2017) argues that there is a distinction between what she calls Western and Eastern philosophies, and that the Western tradition requires a secular “fully fledged rationality”. She sees this in opposition to what she calls Eastern and New Age philosophies. Drawing especially on the approaches of Karl Popper and scepticism, she outlines the concepts called *homo risibilis*, that is, “a sceptical and secular vision that rivals the benefits of established religions without needing religious and metaphysical assumptions.” (p. 273). To her, the sceptic reduces life to its simplest expression, “to no more than what it actually is, revealing thereby life’s inherent richness” (p.277). The sceptic is characterized by the willingness to change his or her mind when assumed knowledge is falsified.

While the discussion above reveals differences in how to define, understand, and teach wisdom, others argue that there is a relatively common agreement on how to define wisdom today. For instance, in their quantitative survey, Jeste et al. (2010) asked 30 international experts that all had published at least two research articles each about wisdom or spirituality to answer questions about commonalities and what is distinct about the concepts “intelligence”,

“wisdom” and “spirituality”. Their survey showed a striking consensus among the experts on the characteristics of wisdom, which again were remarkably similar to lay definitions of wisdom.³ The experts agree that a wise person has a high degree of self-insight, a rich knowledge of life, and that he or she embodies social cognition, empathy, altruism, and a sense of value relativism. The wise person recognizes the limits of his or her knowledge, has a desire for learning and exercises a high degree of self-reflection. He or she is to a high degree able to learn from experience, is open to new experiences, and is able to regulate emotions, tolerate ambivalence and differences amongst others, and accept uncertainty in life. Moreover, the wise person is other-centred, has developed maturity through experience, and has a sense of a higher power.

Regardless of disagreements on the definition of wisdom, wisdom is considered an ideal belonging to the realm of the highest good in most ancient philosophical and spiritual traditions. For instance, Fischer (2015) has found that there are striking similarities between the conceptions of wisdom of Socrates as we meet it in the dialogues of Plato, of Confucius in China and Buddha in India, and of Jesus as we meet it in the gospels of his disciples. Enlightenment in all these traditions is encouraged through meditative practices, also focusing on interpretative *understanding* of the human condition. Central principles, such as “you should do to others as you want others to do to you” are shared, and can, in addition to shared ideals such as love and compassion, be a grounding for a wisdom oriented pedagogy based in the traditions. Questions suitable for inter-faith dialogue could be for instance “What is true love?” “How do I recognize an act of benevolence?” or “What does it imply to do to others as you want others to do to you?” These questions can be part of a secular wisdom oriented pedagogy aimed at “a fully fledged rationality” as well. Both could imply practicing logical and critical thinking and reflection upon alternative actions and reactions to incidents aimed at developing autonomy, independent thinking and readiness to change one’s mind if ones believes are falsified or refused by better arguments. This said: How do people who call themselves *wisdom researchers* understand wisdom, and what would possible wisdom oriented pedagogies drawing on their understandings look like?

Psychological perspectives: The field of wisdom research

The study of Jeste et al. (2010) above can be contextualized within a growing field of empirical wisdom research, and I will now give a brief overview of some of the most important contributions in this field, also reflecting shortly on how their perspectives and major findings may be relevant to a wisdom oriented pedagogy. I have divided the section into 11 parts, starting with G. Stanley Hall and his notion of wisdom as a spiritual life attitude, continuing with Erikson and his idea of wisdom as ego-integrity, moving to Clayton, who differentiated wisdom into three dimensions, and Chandler, who defined wisdom as enlightenment, self-knowledge, and ego-integrity. I also include The Berlin

Wisdom Paradigm (Baltes and colleagues), the MORE-model (Bluck and Glück) and the balance model of wisdom (Sternberg and Ardel). Further, I include Sir John Templeton's work, as well as the wisdom research group led by Howard Nusbaum at the University of Chicago, and Kallio's work in Finland.

Hall and wisdom as a spiritual life attitude

G. Stanley Hall is regarded as the first psychologist who engaged with the concept and virtue of wisdom (1922). He divided life into five phases: 1. childhood, 2. adolescence (from puberty to sexual maturity), 3. midlife (from 25/30–40/45, the peak for developing our inner capacities), 4. senescence (from early 40s to old age), and finally 5. senectitude (old age). Wisdom, he writes, “acts like a balance wheel to regulate the impulses of youth, which always need to be more or less controlled” (Hall 1922:173), and real wisdom is developed in the 40s as the effects of specialized training and education have bleached (Ibid: 386). Then the individual develops “maturity of judgment about men, things, causes, and life generally that nothing in the world but years can bring, a real wisdom that only age can teach.” (Ibid: 402) The two last phases of life involve for a few people a wisdom similar to:

the wisdom of Salomon and the Psalmists, the vision of the mystics, and it exists only in those senescents who have found the rare power of developing and conserving the morale of their stage of life, which, as always, consists in keeping themselves at the top of their condition.

Only when we understand these mechanisms can we understand the youth-like mentality of those who are really wise in the school of life, he argues. Hall further describes the development of wisdom in a human being as the development of a meditative, spiritual life attitude and inner calmness and tranquillity late in adult life. However, he argues, wisdom does not come because of educational and vocational specialisation and expertise, but despite it.

A wisdom oriented pedagogy building on Hall's theory would have to aim at practicing judgment, i.e. “reflection, about men, things, causes”, and life generally before midlife, in order to develop the inner capacities that according to him is at its peak in the midlife period from 25 years on. This would, following the theory of Hall, be the best age to engage in wisdom oriented practices. However, I do not see any reason why we should not start this kind of educative work already in early childhood. It would also imply practicing meditative or mindfulness oriented exercises, in order to prepare for the calmness and tranquillity that according to Hall belongs to wise adult life. Moreover, it would imply practicing teaching and learning higher education subjects in ways that engages the student in more existential ways. I believe Hall would agree that this is especially important in professional education aimed at work with people, such as teaching, nursing, and police work.