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From a school rebellion to a rebel school – its people and their initial struggles with democracy in education

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Abstract
The following text is a translation of two chapters from a Norwegian book, "From a school rebellion to a rebel school" by Mosse Jørgensen (Jørgensen, 1971). She was the first "principal," i.e., the "school leader" and a teacher in a democratic high school, The Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo [Fosøksgymnaset i Oslo] in Norway. Although this book was translated into eight languages in the 1970s, it never was translated into English. The editors of this Special Issue decided to translate and publish[1] two chapters of the book: Chapter III – The People and Chapter VI – Difficulties with democracy[2]. These chapters represent a valuable addition to the special issue on Dialogic Pedagogy and Democratic Education. They illustrate, complement, and complete four other studies in this Special Issue issue, which also focus on The Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo and its Swedish sister school in Gothenburg (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg, & Gradovski, 2023). We are publishing translations of these two chapters in honor of their author Mosse Jørgensen, who is no more.

Mosse Jørgensen (1921-2009) was one of the founders and the first principal of the Experimental Gymnasium in Oslo (EGO) [Forsøksgymnaset i Oslo]. As one of the founding members of the EGO planning group, together with about 15-20 founding students, Mosse initially performed the role of the school administrative leader for two years (1967-1969). When she stepped down from the school administrative leader's position, she became a regular teacher in the school, teaching in the broadly defined area of the "orientation in the present times" (something like combined social sciences). A number of her articles and books about the school inspired and influenced many Norwegian educators and educational researchers. She was active as a writer, speaker, and peace activist. Some of her books include *The Art of Surviving With a Teenager in the House*, 1969; *From School Rebellion to Rebel School*, 1971; and *Each other. How can the school educate about community and social responsibility?* 1981.

[1] *Dialogic Pedagogy: An International Online Journal* was given gracious permission to publish parts of the book *"From a school rebellion to a rebel school"* by the current owner of the estates of Mosse Jørgensen and the Pax Publishing house. The original book "Fra skoleopprør til opprørsskole," published in 1971 in Norwegian, is available free of charge as an Open Access option through the Norwegian National Library System. Although the book was translated to 8 languages, it was never published in English. *Dialogic Pedagogy: An International Online Journal* is the first to publish excerpts from this book.

[2] Chapter III – The People (Menneskenne) and Chapter VI – Difficulties with Democracy (Vanskeligheter i Demokratiet) were translated to English by Ms. Gro Asland, a Norwegian translator. The Forward to the book written by Mosse Jørgensen was translated by Ana Marjanovic-Shane with the help of Google Translate.

Foreword to the book "From a school rebellion to a rebel school" by Mosse Jørgensen

This is not a book about "The art of creating school democracy."

Nobody can write that book yet. For no one has managed to create a fully-fledged school democracy.

It is a book about difficulties and failures, driving oneself to despair, defeat, broken hopes, and new impulses and inspirations. It does not provide many solutions to problems encountered on the road to direct democracy. But it reveals and clarifies some of them. Uncovering the problems and bringing them to light is the first thing that must be done if you really want to find solutions.

I do not think many people are aware of the problems that direct democracy in school raises. What Experimental Gymnasium in Oslo has done is that we stepped into the midst of the unknown and faced whatever confronted us with open eyes.

This is why our experiences should be of interest to most educators if one really wants to expand democracy and implement it in schools, that is, if everything declared about democracy is not just empty talk.

Whatever may be, whether democracy means something or not: it cannot be avoided anymore, there is no way around it. Our schools must become more democratic than they are now. Therefore, it is necessary to bring to light all the difficulties we encountered – and it is necessary to tell about all our joys.

For this is not a book about unhappy students and teachers. It is a book about a group of people who experienced insecurities and fears, sorrows and joys in a stronger combination than most school people do. In short, a book about people whose lives were more intense than the lives of others.

Democracy also means people's right to be themselves and live as themselves as much as possible. Therefore, we became closer to each other, and we came closer to what is the lived reality of human beings. We brought school closer to life.

It's not easy to live - but it's exciting. That's why school democracy is not easy - but it's exciting.

For far too long, people - and especially school people have believed that problems can be put under the rug. This is one of the reasons why our societies have become greenhouses for stressed neurotics.

That is also why school democracy is necessary.

Chapter III – The people

The student

When students enter high school, they have completed 9-10 years in a school system that is becoming more and more merciless and competitive year by year.

In that school, all behavior is centrally administered and regulated from minute to minute, so to speak. You always sit at the same desk, always in the same position in the rows of desks. You leave the

classroom and enter it when the bell rings. You work on the assignments handed out from the teacher's desk, and you read what others have decided.

This is what a wise 14-year-old writes about his obligatory school attendance:

> Doesn't all interest in learning and acquiring knowledge get killed by the burden of duties, warnings, and endless demands to comply both with discipline and "cleverness"? Yes, this ambition to be the best is destructive for many students. And then there is the fear of not living up to the standard the teacher wants you to have. The fear of not getting a good grade for behavior is an underlying constant worry. In all of this, what should have been the primary concern – gets drowned. Namely, it is to stimulate the 14-year-olds to develop as independent, decent, mature, and well-prepared in various subjects, as well as for life.

The feeling expressed by this 14-year-old is reinforced during the following school years.

The years between 16 and 20 are probably the most challenging period in a human being's life in our society. Hardly a generation ago, most 15 to 16-year-olds were part of the workforce and could look upon themselves as useful members of society. Now, most young people are left outside of society and forced to be passive in a strict school system until way past the age in which their consciousness of the surrounding society awakens. At this age, they ought to have the chance to contribute to the public debate and development of society with new and fresh blood and new perspectives. Instead, they are dependent on their parents economically and are expected to submit to the school's demands concerning discipline, obedience, and passivity in relation to their surroundings.

During these years, the majority experience their first sexual encounters, accompanied by feelings of insecurity and unrest.

They are expected to choose a profession and their place in society. The freedom to choose a profession – a great advantage for people in our time – is also freedom connected with doubt and stress.

During these years, many of them are sitting in their high school classrooms, nicely behind each other at their desks. On the surface, their lives look respectable, well-groomed, and orderly. But, just underneath this surface, there is a chaos of inner unrest and disorder. Sometimes grown-ups may get a glimpse of what is covered by the slick school facade.

Most high school students are aware of a lot of changes that have been going on out in the world that the school has completely missed out on. Some have parents whose views of upbringing are in tune with what has happened during the past 50 years. Their children can't help discovering the enormous gap between attitudes that have become commonplace in society and the practices of the [antiquated] school system.

All of the mentioned tensions are the background of young people's rebellions. These rebellions take so many shapes, like the hippie- and drug culture and uncompromising political extremism.

It's against this backdrop that The Experimental High School (*Forsøksgymnaset*) was established.

Torild Skard[3] has examined the 230 applications to The Experimental High School and analyzed the applicants' motivation. The majority express strong accusations against the school and the school

[3] It is not clear from the original text whether Torild was a student or, a teacher or another adult in the school.

system. Everything they don't want is clearly expressed – but underneath, there are vague dreams and varied needs that they want the new school to fulfill. To sum it up, the essential aspect seems to be a need for a place of healing after living in the old school system.

And what did we get: A school without rules or compulsion and with a minimum of artificial authority. In this way, we had taken away some aspects of the old regime. Something traditional and important. However, we had hardly anything to offer in replacement. We had enormous expectations and demands toward each other. We demanded that everybody suddenly should take full responsibility for his or her own self. At the same time, we wanted to develop a school democracy, the contours of which we could hardly see. We expected everybody to take part in building a school from scratch, while at the same time, we were attacked and, at times, exposed to the full political storm. This we expected of students who, during 9-10-11 years, had been subjected to a disciplinarian regime that had prevented them from developing any kind of self-discipline.

Not surprisingly, this led to various reactions – from withdrawal into Nirvana and doomsday prophecies – to fear and unrest. The students had been torn out of their closed, cocooned environment and thrown out into a vast emptiness. The remains of the old system that we still carried with us only made the situation more confusing.

We had to slowly build our own system from scratch. It could only happen through labor, slow and hard labor. But could we expect this from our students?

How could they, through labor and hard work, build something, the results of which they themselves wouldn't see? At most, *they* might get a glance of the promised land in their time at school. But they needed to taste freedom immediately. Any restriction put on freedom felt like compromising the holy mission.

But we learned something: freedom is a lonely state of mind. Absolute individual freedom is only possible on a deserted island. Many students in The Experimental High School lived on their own deserted island of private freedom. They had been longing for freedom for several years. Now they had obtained it – but for many, the price was anxiety and loneliness. The price for contact with fellow human beings, warmth, and a feeling of belonging is the sacrifice of many small individual freedoms. It deals with having enough self-discipline to be considerate of others. It is to demand of yourself those limitations that cooperation requires.

The students at The Experimental High School had to find their own way from an imposed discipline where others decided everything to self-discipline that is born in interpersonal relations and communication. The road became a difficult one. Nothing was done to facilitate it. Words couldn't help anybody. They had already been given too many words. Most of them were immune to words.

They couldn't see through their own situation – they simply had to live it through.

But one group of students distinguished themselves in this picture. They were the 7 or 8 students who came from the Rudolf Steiner[4] school in Oslo. From the first moment, it was evident they managed to take responsibility in a mature way. For them, freedom was something self-evident – and not something new that had to be tested from scratch.

[4] Rudolf Steiner's schools are better known today as the "Waldorf" schools.

Other students also showed this maturity, but the Steiner school students marked themselves as a group.

I asked Karl Brodersen, who was a teacher in the Steiner school for several years if he could offer an explanation. He did, and it was short:

"It's because they were allowed to be children when they were children."

If one can judge the tree by its fruits, the Steiner school must be the tree that the state education ought to get to know from its roots to its top.

Karl Brodersen's answer was in agreement with an observation I had made myself. Because it was evident that playing was a strong need in these 16-17-18 year-olds, they played with equipment and materials. The teaching of arts and crafts started with gigantic cut-and-paste activities that you would suppose had been outgrown after the 3rd grade of elementary school.

In the beginning, the school could only fulfill a few of the expectations that the students had. On the other hand, the environment made almost superhuman demands on them. This led to anxiety and disappointment with the school and with their own shortcomings. One would have expected that students would leave the school in great numbers. I myself expected so at times.

But a miracle happened: The students thrived in spite of everything.

Social scientists led by associate professor Harriet Holter[5] examined this during the second semester. A large majority responded positively about the school. This probably reflects something about the school from which they had come.

After all, difficult and cold freedom was better than total compulsion.

And in fact, we had achieved something. Most important was perhaps the contact between teachers and students that had been established from the very first moment.

Young people at this age have a strong need for close and deep contact with adults. This is well expressed in the first paper from Ingrid, Knut, and Jon[6]. And contact is what they got to a large extent. In our environment, we shared a lot more than what is usual in the school.

Satisfaction was also due to the fact that school democracy started to function and that the students were aware they took part in developing it. Their participation and engagement at "*Allmannamøtene,"* the general assemblies, tell that story.

I myself believe that part of what carried the students through the difficulties was the feeling of omnipotence youth can have, paradoxically alongside the feeling of deep powerlessness. They feel that they are capable of everything - even changing the world in a short time. They haven't yet met with the

[5] Dr. Harriet Holter was a social psychologist, professor of Oslo University and a mother of one of the founding students of the Experimental Gymnasium, Øystein Gullvåg Holter, who Ana Marjanovic-Shane interviewed in 2019. See more about Harriet Holter here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harriet_Holter

[6] The three students whose leaflet calling for a student-run school in the spring of 1966, was the spark that kindled the whole project of the Experimental High School in Oslo.

nooks and crannies of the society's bureaucracy and the demands it places on human adaptation – which creates powerlessness in almost everybody when exposed to it.

Those who established The Experimental High School had this feeling of omnipotence to a large degree. They believed our difficulties were due to coincidences and special circumstances at our school.

The feeling of omnipotence is an enormous strength in young people. Our students were not scared.

And they were right. They would overcome the difficulties – even if it took longer than the pioneers anticipated.

The teacher

The encounters between teachers and students at The Experimental High School were tough and hard – that is, when and if we met at all. There was no obligatory attendance, so the students tended to stay away from classes. Here was exactly the area where freedom had to be tested. Thoroughly!

Teachers would come into the office, sobbing and in need of consolation when they had been to classes where no one, or just a small group of students, was present.

This was hard to experience, especially for young teachers. Their self-confidence could easily be broken. But it was also hard for those of us who were experienced. Had our work in previous years only been possible because the students had been forced to listen to us? In order to endure this, we needed to feel secure and confident and believe in the cause we were working for.

I myself felt time and again like the lady in the English song who sings, "I took my harp to a party, but nobody asked me to play."

You would come well prepared, equipped with newly upgraded knowledge and exciting methods, plus a good portion of enthusiasm. And the students simply were not there. They didn't get to partake in the gifts we wanted to bring to them. We didn't even get to show them these gifts.

And a serious danger inherent in the system became apparent: A kind of a hit list developed concerning the teachers and subjects they taught. The most entertaining teachers and the most exciting subjects, or those that were the most important for the exams[7], were chosen at the cost of less amusing teachers and subjects. And at the cost of such subjects that aren't tested very strenuously at the exams.

Another side of the matter was that some teachers became enormously popular as the time of the exams approached. They were haunted almost day and night by students who needed to catch up on their curriculum. Some teachers were almost trampled down and torn to pieces during those periods.

But why did we embark on all of this? Why did we, as teachers, leave the safety of the old, smoothly polished system?

[7] The Experimental High School of Oslo did not administer any exams. However, to enter a University in Norway, a high-school student must pass a National high school graduation exam (*artium* in Norwegian). The students at the Experimental High School of Oslo were allowed to take this test in other schools, after going through an intensive prescribed preparation.

Because we didn't want to continue sacrificing young people, the genuine acquisition of knowledge, and our own humanity on the gray altar of security.

Because we in school never reached each other as human beings. Because we noticed that the young people who wrote: *the school denies us friendship – denies us love*[8] – they were right.

We stood helpless in front of each other, each with our own joys and sorrows, our insecurities, and our concerns. We cooperated for years but only met with a tiny part of each other.

We lived on the opposite sides of the bars. Close, but at the same time, far away.

And the bars are the system. The system with its grades, its reports, and regulations, threats of punishment, dread of exams, and teacher prestige that we are forced to keep up. This was also true for the students.

We could come a bit closer to each other at common breakfasts during the final school year celebrations with beer and booze. Because then we were to part soon, anyway. Oh, – all these 17th of May [Norwegian national day] speeches: We were really so fond of you – we did punish you – you always hurt the ones you love. And the students: a bit surprised perhaps, but altogether too intoxicated by the booze and the exams being over and done with. Too exhausted to reflect on this eternally tragic love at any depth. And they heard these kinds of speeches this time only. But we [the teachers] listened to them, equally powerless, every year.

There is hardly any other place where you have so many people around you all day as a school. But few professionals are as lonely as teachers.

Others have colleagues with whom they can discuss work tasks, compare themselves and evaluate the workplace. The teacher – especially a high school teacher – is in class day after day, year after year, without any other measurement of what he does than the results of a distant exam.

Prestige among colleagues makes it difficult to admit your weaknesses. Most teachers are loyal toward colleagues outside of the class. But mutual help and support are impossible when you're not supposed to reveal your weaknesses.

Satisfaction and well-being could have been a measurement, but they aren't because boredom, discontent, and feelings of shortcomings are not allowed to be expressed. The system has no safety valve for student discontent.

The duty that society places on the shoulders of the high school teacher is to lead every student to the best possible exam results based on his abilities. To this end, every teacher conveys knowledge. He is to interpret, explain, go through what is in the textbooks, and control what is acquired. He does so via daily, random tests. The tests are evaluated in relation to a grading system.

A lot of teachers do a thorough and honorable job. They convey accurate knowledge; they take no part of the curriculum lightly; they strive to evaluate conscientiously in accordance with a given grading

[8] These were the words used by Ingrid, Knut and Jan, in their leaflet. See parts of the leaflet's text in the Prologue in Marjanovic-Shane et al. (2023, this special issue)

system. Some put a lot of effort and great interest into teaching knowledge in a way that makes classes livable for the students.

The best give something else in addition. The best are filled with a genuine enthusiasm for their subject and want to share this enthusiasm with young people so that the knowledge can enrich the lives of the young, just like it enriches their own.

Having classes with these teachers can even be a great experience.

But some teachers do not have enthusiasm. Not everybody has a lot of knowledge or the ability to convey and communicate. Like in all other professions, there are people with varying degrees of skills. And this can't be avoided. But in other professions, cooperation may offer possibilities for development.

However, in contrast to many other professions, inferior work in school is almost patent protected by the system. Grades, punishment threats, and ridicule are weapons used against students who express too clearly that classes with certain teachers are boring or a waste of time.

And this is the situation in spite of the fact that there are few professions where inferior work affects so many values.

There are teachers who do not submit to the system. Who do not report misdemeanors to the school authorities, who do not push every student to achieve the ultimate at whatever cost, and who are willing to let go of prestige and let students feel they are equals.

This, however, is not built into the system. On the contrary. Such a teacher is often looked upon with mistrust by his or her colleagues. And he will easily feel like a traitor toward the system he is responsible for serving – and somewhat disloyal in relation to colleagues who are totally loyal to the system.

Devotion to the subject matter characterizes the best teachers.

By the way, it's strange that devotion to a subject matter that is highly appreciated does not more often come in conflict with the system. Because if you see it as your life mission to impart your beloved subject to new generations – then it must feel kind of like pimping to have to force-feed this beloved subject to a group of students. No matter how much passion the teacher tries to convey, there will always be some who will, first and foremost, use the knowledge of that particular subject to earn credit in the form of points in the final exam.

The conflict between loyalty toward the students and devotion to the system is felt by some. But if there is an open conflict between the student and the system, the system will always be victorious. Few teachers will support students openly against the system - even if the system is in direct violation.

To be a teacher at The Experimental High School meant that suddenly you lived without bars between yourself and the students. We had no obligatory attendance, no grades, no rules and regulations of conduct, and no punishment to threaten with. We were as unprotected in relation to the students as they were toward us. We met with the much larger part of ourselves.

Loneliness decreased – but so did peace.

Prestige was futile to hold on to. We didn't have to teach our subjects to those not interested – but we did not get the chance to arouse interest in them either.

A revolution first affects the previous power elite. And we were, after all, the representatives of the old power structure. We had to bear that brunt while freedom was being tested. Some of the problems were temporary phenomena that would be solved as time passed. But time neither could nor should solve them all.

We had to critically examine ourselves and our profession as we were in the melting pot.

We could not permit ourselves to escape behind some new bars in order to go back to safety. We had to stand where we were fully unveiling ourselves - including our weaknesses.

But it was difficult!

Because when we presented ourselves like this, it might have become apparent that we didn't live up to the demands of being a teacher. It could be a shock. But perhaps best for everybody involved, in the longer term.

And it was difficult because the students were not prepared for the situation. The system at The Experimental High School means the rights and the duty for both students and teachers to discuss conflicts in the open – to expose feelings – for example, the feeling of disappointment when students didn't show up in class.

But if we did so, it happened that the students would be scared. They perceived us as traditional authorities and reacted with strong aggression. No wonder. But it made us keep silent about emotions that should have been aired - and it made us insecure.

When we showed our despair concerning problems, it happened that we were met with a cold shoulder or humiliating arrogance from the students. I believe that high school students – perhaps especially in the big cities – due to age and environment, are a group characterized by a high degree of self-assertiveness. This is perhaps the most difficult group of young people to expose oneself to.

But then again, it happened we were met with understanding and warmth that surpassed everything we had dreamed of.

The reactions of the students and our own insecurity made it easy to fall into old patterns. The "cool" teacher – or "the kind aunt" who pets the child's head - "you're really so sweet." Both are quite condescending attitudes. But attitudes that lots of students more or less consciously expected to meet. After all, they were just attitudes the students knew to be positive, many of them.

But we had to be "real grown-ups."

Harald Herberg, who is currently an inspector at The Experimental High School, adopted the concept of "the real grown-up" for our context. It is, however, Johan Borgen who created it. In the book *Barndommens rike [The Kingdom of Childhood],* Borgen talks about what he, in his childhood mind, called real grown-ups. They are people who treat children and young people seriously. But also, in such a way that they dare to be really angry, those who dare to meet young people without pretending. Johan Borgen felt the great contrast between these people and those who pat children mindlessly on their heads or condescendingly say: "How are you, young man." Those who don't feel deep inside that children and young people really are people.

Because it's only when you take youth seriously that you listen to what they have to tell us. And vice versa: then you can tell them the truth even if it's uncomfortable. Only then we can expect they will listen to us. Then we have created a real trust, and only then can fruitful dialogue occur, a dialogue that is a precondition for mutual growth and development, occur.

Because the best thing about working as a teacher in such a school is the fact that we are in motion and growing. For that reason, there's hope that we can overcome the problems that we meet in The Experimental High School and find methods for our profession that let us use more of our potential. So that other teachers also may profit from it.

How can we transform our profession?

The first step is to gain the confidence of our students. But still, we carry the burden of a thousand hours of boredom. We can't leave that burden behind as long as we hold up a curriculum in front of the students. How are the students going to believe me when I say: "I have something to give – something I'm happy to give, but it happens to be the curriculum for the final exam."

We have to be organizers and supervisors for young people who learn to find knowledge for themselves. Then we can tell them: "I have something to give you that may be of use to you." Then we can expect them to come to us with real confidence. Then the dialogue may start.

And we have to develop a deep and genuine relationship of trust among ourselves as teachers. We have to know one another so well that we can show our weaknesses without shame. Then we can help one another.

We have to get rid of all kinds of professional vanity, competition, and triumphs. We should not for a moment glance at the popularity lists. Then we'll never get rid of them.

Such cooperation will make the teachers less lonely - more confident.

Perhaps we have to get away from the sharp division between student and teacher. Both parties may learn something every day – from each other.

We have to organize teaching in many different ways and use a variety of methods. Then it will be possible for teachers to function in more than one single social situation and with many more work tasks than now. The potential for success will be extended. It will be a happier solution than the poor feeling of safety behind bars.

But if we're to transform our profession, we'll have to redefine our responsibility as teachers from scratch.

Marie Killengreen, a teacher at The Experimental High School, has come up with the following formulation: "We have to find out how we as teachers and adults may contribute in the best possible way so that students can master the problems of their own existence."

Even the best possible exam results in our respective subjects can contribute to this goal to a very small extent. That may happen in some cases, for example, when a student needs final exam points in order to get admission to a [university] department to study a subject he really wants to study. Or when his self-esteem needs to be boosted in this way.

For most students, it would be better to be allowed to work in their own way and rhythm, take some subjects more easily and concentrate on others. And for many students, it would be better to be allowed not to take the final exam but instead to be allowed to work on something entirely different. In order to find out what would help each student master his or her existential problems, we have to get to know each student well.

You may ask: Are we a high school when our goal is not, first and foremost, to motivate students to pass a final exam?

Then we ask in return: Is the high school we have today geared toward helping young people master the problems they have with their lives?

As we are working to find solutions to our tasks at The Experimental High School, we have to consciously try to create a school that is better suited to be a place of learning for human beings. We shouldn't, as teachers, be content with standing between the student and what he or she needs to master for their existential problems.

It has been argued that teaching should not be a filling up of empty vessels with knowledge. It should be lighting torches. As teachers, we should be the sparks that light those torches.

In order to make that happen, we need a new school – and we're starting to see the contours of it.

Cooperation among the teachers

The aim of the initial leaflet written by Ingrid, Knut, and Jon [the initiators of the idea of a new high school] was to offer students and high school teachers "the opportunity to take part in building a democratic high school."

Not a single lecturer with an M.A. or an M.S. degree seized the opportunity to transfer to this school.

But in the group that gradually became permanently employed by The Experimental High School in Oslo, there were people with a genuine interest in the human aspects of education and the social responsibilities of schools.

For example, the young inspector Bjørn, who had the very best recommendations from a teaching job I've ever seen – at Oslo Cathedral School. His talent as an educator is quite unique – and so is his ability to relate and connect to other people.

Some had a particularly strong background in their subject, like Herman [Ruge], who had been doing research for years, and Nils Braanaas, who was one of the pioneers of teaching drama in higher education.

I myself have always had a special interest in the relationship between children and adults and have educational methods among my subjects and 9 years of teaching experience in high school and junior high. Others had experience working with young people in school and out of school.

In addition, many of us had seriously tried other occupations than teaching – not only as holiday jobs. And I think that's essential. It offers close-to-life contact with the world of the student, different from the circular route school – university – school.

But because few people dared to take the full step into, and thus a full job at The Experimental High School from the beginning, we became a far too big group. That was also part of our difficulties.

So, there we were; out of 32 teachers, 6 were permanently employed, and we had an urgent need to cooperate. Just to gather this over-sized group once in a while was impossible.

But from the second year onward, we were 22, 12 of whom were permanently employed. Of those who started in 1967, quite a few had disappeared already in the following year.

The reasons why they disappeared might be interesting to look at. Some of our part-time teachers disappeared because they couldn't manage to adapt to our type of school when they simultaneously worked in another totally different environment. Others stayed in their old positions when they had to choose between the old and our school. Some disappeared because the atmosphere with us was very demanding and, in many ways, unsatisfactory.

Some of the teachers who quit were a type of teacher that appeared and disappeared from all three experimental schools in Oslo, Bærum, and Gothenburg. They were efficient educators, often employing unique methods and ambitious pedagogical aims that they felt they didn't get to try out in the ordinary school system. They came to The Experimental High Schools with high expectations about the effectiveness of the schools in which they would be able to try out their methods on independent and mature students.

They were bitterly disappointed. The students were not at all determined to go along with the hard work required, which really didn't mean independence for them but rather freedom for the teacher to try out his methods. It may happen someday in more well-established experimental high schools that there will be students who would appreciate this type of teaching. But up till now, the students who apply for admission to these schools have had quite different expectations. This type of teaching is totally incompatible with the freedom to attend that is practiced in our school.

In Oslo, we've also had some teachers who've expected the students to take the initiative. Clearly a reasonable expectation, given the students' demand for independence. But our students were not capable of taking the leadership role in teaching or taking the initiative. This is something they've had to learn gradually. The teachers had had to lead to a large extent, actively and consciously - admittedly with a view to stepping back when students were ready to take over. Those teachers who waited for what the students would tell them to do were also bitterly disappointed.

Disappointment among these teachers has cost both them and the school a lot of worries.

Even if many disappeared, there were more teachers than we needed who wanted to get a permanent position when we started in the second year. All the permanently employed from the first year continued.

We've worked hard to find our own ways of supporting each other, those of us who continued.

To have school councils regularly, like at other high schools, was impossible for us. We were never there at the same time. The first attempts at organizing cooperation were what we called teacher- and class-representative meetings. We felt it was wrong that teachers should meet without students, so the chosen representatives from each class took part in meetings. They had to be held in the evenings and privately. Most often, we were at the house of Herman's father, Herman Ruge, the elder, who also took part in the meetings. He was for many years principal at "*Pedagogisk Seminar*" [Department of Education at the

University of Oslo] and represented perhaps more than anybody the best traditions in Norwegian educational science. It felt like we bonded together, past and future, there at his big dinner table.

At every meeting, we had innumerable questions on the agenda. Problems queued up, and in the first year, there was more or less chaos. But being together gave us a lot. Particularly the fact that we ate and drank together afterward. We discovered that the problems we had were quite different from those dealt with in teachers' councils at other high schools. Such problems were settled at "*Råds- og Allmannamøter,"* Council-assemblies, and General-assemblies [in which everybody working at our school participated]. The teacher- and class representative meetings had no decision-making authority. Our discussions often dealt with purely pedagogical problems. And it struck me as strange that pedagogical discussions simply have no place in an ordinary high school.

All of us felt a strong pressure to talk about the problems involved in teaching. During the first year, we only got to touch lightly on all the issues we would have liked to discuss.

During the first summer holidays, we moved to the old Hammersborg school. We called for a two-day teacher- and class-representative meeting before school started.

It didn't turn out to be very successful. As often before, things didn't go well when we tried to copy others. And it was the Swedish idea of "*planeringsdager,"* planning days, that occupied our minds. The new and unfamiliar rooms didn't make it easier either. It mostly resulted in a discussion of the use of the rooms.

We continued our teacher and class-representative meetings. The pedagogical discussion was better now since we had fewer participants. We could discuss school, and it could be done in more informal settings. We approached "*fagseksjoner*," subject-based sections. Teachers who worked with the same subjects discussed their problems in more or less organized forms.

In the spring semester of the second year, we found a way of working together that suited us. The teachers met for a two-day seminar while the students were sitting for their exams. They discussed subject after subject in plenary sessions so that everybody got to know about the problems of others – and finally, common issues were discussed.

Erik led part of the seminar and divided us into groups. It was a strange experience. Everybody who uses group work in their teaching ought to try out being in a group themselves. The problems involved in organizing the work, listening to each other, and putting the results together, which only a few of us had experienced first-hand before.

And then Nils led drama activities. They resembled play but aimed at sharpening our senses and ability to listen to one another. We came to see one another in new ways. And the most important was perhaps that we laughed so much together. We became better acquainted with each other during those two days than we did during the rest of the year. And in addition, we learned something about what our students experienced in Nils's classes.

These seminars turned out to be just what we needed, and they have been followed up and developed further.

Now the school had reached a stage in its development that permitted us to take a step in the direction of satisfactory teacher cooperation. We've taken two weekly hours from teaching and scheduled two consecutive hours for teacher cooperation. The students worked alone during those two hours.

We've reached the conclusion that teacher cooperation is so important for pedagogical development, and therefore also for the students, that these two hours will benefit the school more than if they were spent directly in teaching.

A valuable aspect inherent in this type of cooperation is that the teachers would gather as a class and would themselves experience the situation the students are in. However, this work has only just started, and no report has yet been written.

In developing teacher cooperation, we had a conflict that we had to deal with, and that seems to appear also in other schools. One of our, perhaps a bit naive views of the concept of democracy was that students and teachers should share absolutely everything. Teachers should never isolate themselves from the students. There was almost a unanimous agreement on this point. And perhaps it was necessary during the period of establishment. However, those who did not agree were fervently engaged in this issue. After a while, it happened that groups of teachers, bigger or smaller, who felt the need to discuss common problems, came into the office – or went together to a cafe. The office developed into a regular teachers' cafe. The students grumbled. Was there a teachers' staff room? Was there a class difference in our school?

There was really no class difference or staff room – just a demonstration of a need to be able to talk in peace with colleagues in a quiet place. The recreation room – the only common room – was always noisy and smoky. But the students were never denied admittance to the office cafe.

The need for a quiet place was solved in such a way that the school got an extra recreational room for those who wanted a quiet hour – students included.

The need for staff meetings was solved in such a way that the teachers' need for cooperation as a group was recognized. The teacher- and class-representative meetings continued as before.

The suspicious attitude on the part of the students concerning teacher cooperation seemed to be a stage left behind. Now nobody grumbles about it. That's one out of many examples that problems that once seemed insurmountable were really only teething troubles that would be overcome.

There are other forms of teacher – student cooperation. For example, when Bjørn appeared and asked for a teacher of Chinese, it meant he also wanted to be a student. Unfortunately, we didn't manage to provide a teacher of Chinese, but anyway he participated as a student in Natalia's Russian classes. Many teachers have participated as students. I myself joined a group of arts and crafts students and quite a few of us have participated in PE. More teachers ought to be students, particularly in the subjects in which they are weak. It makes you understand the problems that weak students meet in a new way.

In addition, we have to a large extent, used students as teachers. Students who are members of "*klassens fagråd,*" the class council, often step in when teachers are absent. In this way, we have saved a lot of money. And doing group work also implies that students must take on the teacher role.

Students have also taken over teaching and received a salary. Our student, Trond Halle, who is an expert in music history, has given a series of lectures illustrated with samples from records that attracted a lot of listeners. And Micheline – who was a midwife by profession and a mother of three – took over sex education in all classes.

This mixing of roles ought to be developed further. The far too strong boundaries between teachers and students can be torn down in this way.

The many ways of organizing teaching and the diverse methods we tried to develop, together with close cooperation between the teachers, will hopefully result in the possibility of much more individual freedom to expand teaching than the traditional teacher role permits. There will be a use for a broader range of skills.

This may, to a certain extent, compensate for the difficulties we meet in our system.

But our most important task in this connection is to create a really warm climate for cooperation among the teachers. We have found some ways of paving the way for such cooperation. But this doesn't work unless it leads to deep and genuine relationships. Only then we can really help one another – not only by sharing our strengths but also by showing our weaknesses without a feeling of defeat. And we have to be friends in the sense that we can tackle conflicts in a civilized way and tolerate the aggression of others.

We have to find common ground for what we want to achieve with our work. From the outset, each one of us may have thought that we had a common ground. But it has become apparent through daily practice that our starting points have been different – so different that they may divide more than what is good for the school.

If we don't manage to find a least common multiple as our starting point – a common platform, well, then we have to prepare ourselves for the conclusion that we may have to part as friends.

"Discipline"

Cohabitation at The Experimental High School is not without conflicts and shouldn't be so either. But it isn't conflicts between one system and a teacher group on one side and students on the other. Perhaps human conflicts between teacher and student occur more often in our environment than in other schools. The atmosphere invites us to take the conflict into the open. But conflicts between a teacher and a student are not different from, for instance, a conflict between two students or two teachers. Such conflicts are part of our daily life and can't be regarded as so-called disciplinary problems. They are problems of cohabitation. And we will always have them because we are human beings.

Of course, we have problems – and they are big problems on another level.

We don't have rules for and punishment for small transgressions.

Smoking in places where the agreement is that it shouldn't be done is not punished but understood as lacking the ability to take mutual responsibility.

With no obligatory attendance, truancy, of course, does not exist. However, extensive absence may signify difficulties with the subject or with work in general. Lacking the ability to adhere to resolutions may reveal immaturity in relation to authorities.

At The Experimental High School, we're not preoccupied with small misdemeanors and small problems but concerned with what may be real existential problems for members of the school community.

We have tried to avoid punishment and, as far as possible, be solution-oriented in our work.

We have tried to find the emotional, social, or intellectual issues that may cause these larger problems.

But since, to a large extent, this is only a noble theory, it's because an overwhelming number of problems washed over us from the start.

The pure existence of The Experimental High School attracted a lot of students who had difficulties in their ordinary school. The freedom at our school was alluring, and some difficulties disappeared, but far from all. And for some, it has taken time.

The Experimental High School was established when the first big wave of drug use surged over high schools. Many of those who had dropped out or were on the point of dropping out of their schools as the consequences of drugs applied to our school. But the first effect of drug abuse is that a student does not manage to fulfill daily duties. In a school where attendance is obligatory, that means truancy. And truancy is a reason for being expelled. So many had been expelled or had dropped out of high school, and the real reason was not always clear.

We were aware of the problem and prepared to deal with it – not the east because we believed a warmer school atmosphere would help. For that reason, it felt especially unfair that a hard attack on the school was launched exactly in this field.

But we were hardly aware of the extent of the problem. What schools were, by the way?

We faced a difficult balance between protecting our environment and helping the individual student. It turned out we decided, to a rather extreme point, to help the individuals and let the environment take the strain.

Educators often say that students are tough when dealing with disciplinary matters. Surely, they see it from experience, but our experience was the opposite. In our "*Allmannamøter,*" there was never a wish to follow a hard line. The big majority of students were always in favor of a mild attitude.

This is compatible with the theory that the harder a group is pressed from above – the bigger the aggressiveness among the group members. The mild attitude was a consequence of the freedom we had.

Still, during the second year, we approved a rule saying that a member of the school who did not function, either work-wise or socially, could not claim to be admitted in the following semester. It was first and foremost based on the belief that an individual could be at risk of hurting himself in our environment. But this rule had been used only once up till now.

It was difficult to deal with these problems, just as a thousand smaller and bigger wheels were to be set in motion – and especially when the big attacks from outside made it almost impossible to work in peace in a reasonable way with the problems.

We didn't manage to act reasonably in those times when each day we picked up the newspaper we shivered from fear of new attacks.

We were too few to deal with them. Most of the teachers worked part time and couldn't have the contact with the students that was necessary.

Nor did we agree within the school about how these matters were to be dealt with – yes, not even whether we should deal with them at all. Uncertainty in relation to school democracy played a part. The freedom to attend complicated the matter. Because when a student didn't show up at school – or just sat in the hall, it felt like a violation of freedom to nag him. And you could never know if drugs were part of it.

The difference in opinion didn't run between the teachers as a group and the students. Many teachers felt insecure in this area.

We had many discussions among the teachers about whether it was right to interfere in any way and whether it was the right of the individual to drop out if he wanted to.

When dealing with the cases, we followed a certain procedure. The homeroom teacher was the first to try to find a solution. We discussed for a long time whether the class representative should join in – but decided that he shouldn't. It would put too much pressure on an individual student. But it happened to a large extent that students felt responsible for their fellow students and tried to help before the homeroom teacher stepped in.

If the homeroom teacher didn't manage to settle the matter, the parents, the psychologist, and the school leader could be contacted. The student should take part in all meetings that concern him.

It became a difficult problem to involve parents. It did give students a feeling of security that no contact with his home should take place without him. But when we felt the need to involve the parents, it often led to conflicts. This, I thought, was the area where the highest price for freedom was paid mostly by the administration. Because responsibility toward parents was abandoned, it was left behind together with the traditional administration. Regardless of whether the school wanted it or not – no matter whether we ourselves wanted it or not.

A school leader or a teacher cannot contribute to keeping parents in the dark when their own children are concerned. It is a consideration, and a very difficult one, whether to involve parents or let the school try to settle the problem and at what time. But when students evidently led their parents to believe they attended a school where they never went or that they functioned at school when they never showed up in class, we couldn't go on keeping up the lie.

In many cases, parents would come to school with their worries, and the cards would be put on the table with the young one present if they wanted to be there. Often the school, as a neutral third party, could help solve conflicts in a family.

Gradually the school's psychologist started to function. But it took a long time before students were able to make use of this option.

In this area, options that nobody had seen in theory appeared. The best possibilities for problem-solving came in unexpected areas.

The most important was perhaps the poetry group. It was established spontaneously by students and came to include students with a special need for help and contact. It was because the leader of the group, a student named Jan Myhrvold-Hansen, had a good way of working with the other students. Moreover, poetry was also inherently useful in letting communication take a turn toward mental health topics.

Both Jan and his group were thoroughly criticized by the rest of us. We thought it was both noisy and demanding. It was only a long time afterward that it dawned on me that Jan had taken on the part of the urgently needed therapeutic work in our school.

Arts and crafts also became such a retreat. It became apparent that creative subjects had a special function as safety valves and therapy. But the subjects in themselves couldn't function like this if the

teachers in the subjects were not ready to take on this side of the task. Both Nils in drama and Finn in arts and crafts did so.

If only all those who deal with disciplinary problems on all school levels and with so-called problematic students could see the potential of these subjects: To be allowed to create something – and to meet a person who is listening, means such a lot. And it is even more valuable when these two needs can be combined.

In these areas, I think that small, permanent groups of students are the best. The students will more easily get in contact with each other and be able to support each other.

How The Experimental High School, up till now, has functioned as a problem-solving school is difficult to say. Such an account will never be settled. But if there is some truth in what many professional educators say, that the merciless, competitive school system contributes to breeding problem youth, then an environment like ours surely offers a way out. Up till now, our tasks have been too big, but when more experimental schools are established, the mental health effects of the environment will be more clearly seen. And as we gain experience, we will hopefully be better at tackling the problems we meet.

We see examples of students who have been almost inactive for three years and then suddenly throw themselves into work with genuine job satisfaction. Whether they have just lost valuable time and would have managed much better in a more demanding school, we cannot tell. But we have the experiences from Neill's *Summerhill* to build on. He has seen students who, after years of inactivity, have become active and creative human beings. Perhaps in some cases, there is a need for such possibilities for young persons to be able to overcome the injuries they may have suffered during their upbringing.

But I also believe that it is through work and cooperation with others that a human being reaches his or her fullest potential. And I mean work in the widest sense.

Erich Fromm says in *The Art of Loving* that a healthy human being is always active when he or she is awake. But it doesn't have to be external activity. We may seem most passive when we work most intensely, thinking.

In our young, formative years, a relationship with work is established that can be decisive for our development as human beings.

This we ought to put across openly and explicitly.

It's up to the young ones if they want to listen. But we fail them if we don't tell them.

Even if we, as teachers at The Experimental High School, shouldn't take academic responsibility for the students, we can't disclaim the responsibility that we have for them as human beings.

We've seen examples of students who've come to us with a doctor's certificate that they need to change schools. And it has happened that they have developed into calmer, happier, and more harmonious human beings. One of them told me he was terrified during the first weeks and just wanted to escape. "But thank God, I didn't do it," he said with a big smile that stayed in my life for a long time afterward.

We've had students – severely hurt by drug abuse – who have, in one way or another, managed to get through the years at our school and to get an exam that may well prove to be of use later on. Not

everybody has managed to keep going on after leaving The Experimental High School. This points to the need for a freer and warmer environment.

The difficult question is whether one should intervene in young people's problems, and if so, in what way. This dilemma makes rules so impossible. They may, in most cases, only hurt. It's necessary to have contact with each individual and understand his situation. And each individual case must be treated in its own way.

The question if there should be intervention is really the question if a human being has a right to perish in peace. It's only from an extremely liberal perspective that one can answer it in the affirmative.

From my point of view, people are dependent on each other and are concerned with one another. We will all be in situations when we're totally dependent on the human community. When a person is on the point of perishing, it's often because this community has failed him. For that reason, we should always try to hold out a hand. How deeply we should get involved is always a question we have to consider.

But reaching out a hand applies even more toward the young ones who are in the most difficult period in a human being's life. For that reason, we mustn't just reach out a hand but perhaps also support, even if we're not asked to offer that support.

Chapter VI – Difficulties with democracy

Organization and administration

The Experimental High School needn't be ashamed that it hasn't found administrative ways that are perfectly compatible with direct democracy. As far as I know, nobody has managed to do so, neither in school nor in industry. But it is an important challenge for us to develop such ways of working.

The way we are organized and working at present carries a lot of inherited traditions. First of all, there is the formal triumvirate of the leader, the inspector, and the secretary from the old school system that doesn't resemble our «*Allmannamøte*» [General Assembly] and «*Rådssystemet*», [the daily leadership group, consisting of 4 students, 3 teachers, the school leader, and 1 parent. cf. p.61]

But our school democracy forms also have patterns that are inherited from our two step-parents: the parliamentary system in our society with "*Storting,"* parliament, and government; and the good old organizational practice developed together with the labor movement and formulated by Einar Gerhardsen [Prime minister of Norway after WW2] in his handbook *"Tillitsmannen*" [The representative].

This is a way of working that gives a voice to various groups and decides matters by voting – the opinion of the majority shall be the basis for the organization's work.

It is a working method that presupposes strong disagreements. This means it's up to the individual or the group to express their opinions and hopefully get them implemented. The rules of the game are that one should fight for one's own views against those of others. Poll democracy presupposes a big or small minority that is set aside.

These ways of working stem from parliamentarianism – the democracy of representation. Direct democracy has to find other ways of working. Some examples may be mentioned:

The Steiner school is led by a whole team of teachers. The teachers' meeting is the highest authority of the school. One of the members does the executive office work for one year at a time. Nobody is a permanent leader.

At the Steiner school in Oslo, this system is working well in a group of about 30 teachers. But the characteristics of such a group are quite different from those of a group of 150-200 or more. According to their teachers, the pupils at the Steiner school are of an age when participating in the school administration wouldn't be relevant for them.

The Quakers – the Society of Friends – have a way of working that may be interesting in this context.

They are organized in basic groups as small as 7 - 8 and preferably not above 40 members. If more than 40, they are split up. The small groups are then brought together in larger groups, and those again in even larger groups, up to huge meetings with as many as several hundred participants.

The small groups meet for worship. But the Quakers also have varied practical activities that need to be organized. This takes place at business meetings where several smaller basic groups are assembled.

These business meetings have an agenda, and the individual items on the agenda are often discussed thoroughly. Decisions are not made by vote but by consensus. Contrary to the form of our organization, the main thing here is to find solutions that everybody can accept. The basic attitude among the Quakers is that they want to find a solution, a consensus that comprises everybody. Self-discipline and strong motivation are necessary for this way of working.

An important aspect of this way of working is the practice that each participant in the meeting may propose a couple of minutes of silence in order to reflect and calm down. A wish that is respected by the other members.

One member of the group is elected to write down - to formulate the essence of the meeting. In Norwegian, he is called a "*skriver,"* in English, a clerk.

The clerk's job is also to put decisions into practice and do secretarial work. The clerk's job may also be done by a group.

Everybody may suggest ideas and make proposals at the meetings. But it's up to the proposer to convince the whole group before the proposal can be put into practice. Proposals may fall if they do not get support. Or it may take a long time to convince the whole group. Time is an important factor in this democracy.

The clerk is elected after discussions in the small groups about whom they want to suggest. The discussion of persons may be tough and open – but the election of the clerk is not done by vote but rather by reaching a consensus.

The leadership of various areas can be delegated to small groups. Here too, after mutual and open criticism. One ought to be able to tell one another: this is not suitable for you.

The Quakers have practiced their big and worldwide peacemaking organizational model for hundreds of years.

The working methods of both the Quakers and the anthroposophists[9] are based on an attitude of tolerance but nevertheless have a firm philosophical basis.

The Quakers' way of working seems to be a goal worth striving for at The Experimental School. But it may prove to be a distant goal.

Because perhaps The Experimental High School already has solid fundamental ideas – but these ideas are not consciously present in the minds of many of our members for the time being. And then this way of working may well result in Pandemonium.

The other big obstacle for us would be the factor of time in this democracy. Taking time as a helper is not compatible with our wish to clear new paths.

Furthermore, we have a long way to go before we realize that the more we use democratic working methods, the more each individual has to administer self-discipline.

But it is also interesting to notice that parts of this system have developed in our school. We leave some areas for small groups to decide, and we have a mutual and often quite open criticism.

Even if we can't transfer organizational practices from the anthroposophists or the Quakers, we can, in the meantime, learn something from them.

The Quakers' way of making proposals – to permit things to develop, is important. The way it often happens at The Experimental High School is that the bright ideas that may shake the very basis of the school are thrown at an unprepared "*Allmannamøte*" or a defenseless leader. This is, in reality, deeply undemocratic. And it serves as a hindrance to the work's peace and progress. It is not democratic to let one out of 180 people demand that their *ad hoc* ideas be given immediate treatment. The school has to find a procedure that guarantees that fundamental ideas are given proper consideration. It is a question of practical nature. Democracy has to be given some time to develop. Dictatorship is the fastest of all ways of administration.

The second thing we can learn from the Quakers is their concept of the role of the leader – the clerk. His challenge ought to be, in our school as in their organization, to come to an agreement about the "meaning" of the meeting. To try to unite fractions to find comprehensive solutions and take responsibility for putting them into practice.

* * *

In The Experimental High School, the dream of organizing school in new ways is alive. It is a good thing the search for such ways is ongoing.

Based on my experience and knowledge, there are certain options to choose between:

Either a direct democracy led centrally – or an indirect, that is to say, a representative democracy in which leadership may be decentralized.

[9] R. Steiner's Waldorf Schools are following the principles of his philosophy that he called "anthroposophy."

Either a loosely organized group under constant change with a central leadership – or a firm and permanently organized institution with decentralized leadership.

Either an organization where common responsibility is less developed but with a firm leadership that can take over responsibility for the welfare of the group – or an organization where responsibility for the common concerns is strong among each individual member and without leadership that has to take responsibility.

Either an organization where the philosophical basis for the work is weak in the individual members but with a central group that carries and supports the ideas – or an organization where the basic ideas are strong among a large majority of the members and no group specifically carries them.

The degree and form of leadership will shift as these various points move between the extremes that are mentioned.

Or expressed in another way:

as long as The Experimental High School is an established direct democracy where all members have an equal right to participate -

as long as the form of organization and ways of working are not firmly established -

as long as collective responsibility is less developed -

as long as only a few members are conscious of a basis of ideas for the school -

It is that long the Experimental High School would need to have a central focal point in one form or another to hold on to.

There needs to be something at the center that works against the centrifugal forces.

If this is to be a leader, he has to be approved by the "*Allmannamøte"* and be accountable to it. He needs to be easy to replace. If he doesn't act in accordance with the "sense of the assembly" he has to resign. The democratic principle is based here.

It is feasible that this role could be shared by various persons. However, this could easily lead to a bureaucracy that would be hard to control for the members and *"Allmannamøtet."* And it could be more difficult to influence than one single person.

One cannot choose to be without a central focal point, a firm structure, without established ways of working, without the individual's ability to take responsibility, and without a common basis of ideas.

Maybe some can manage this, but a majority would be thrown into a situation they wouldn't be able to handle.

If so, we would have the dictatorship of the self-imposed intellectual elite.

The situation of the minority

A recurring allegation from the "doomsday prophets" is that "there are so many unhappy people here." This could be the situation of the minority.

In a direct democracy where big groups discuss and vote over important questions, the danger is always that the minority is trampled down. Or at least pushed into a corner.

There is always the danger that especially precocious and outspoken students set the tone and the direction for the majority. It may even happen that a majority is suppressed because it lacks a spokesperson. This is especially harmful when applied to questions of what and how to teach. It's natural that students who have a theoretical orientation and often an intellectual background become whistle-blowers. And thus, it becomes difficult for a minority to voice their opinions. Here lies the biggest danger that we may develop into an elite school. In my opinion, an important job for the leader is to be a spokesperson for these groups – or to get them to speak up for themselves.

His position at the center gives him an overview that others don't have. From that position, he has to find his way to such groups and defend their case in relation to the stronger ones. Perhaps even protect them from injustice.

However, school democracy would fail if the students did not gradually learn to take the minority's view into consideration. But the question is if we can come that far without changing our very organizational model that presupposes debates, fractions, and voting.

This problem falls in under what is our fundamental problem—the lack of a sense of community and responsibility for the common good, the whole school community.

Democracy needs to permeate the whole school system from the bottom up

One of the clearest lessons to be learned from The Experimental High School is that if school democracy is to become a reality, it has to permeate the school system from the bottom up. The high school students themselves have to start the process. The ideas of the new school have to come from students. Only students know where school oppresses because they attend it. And only high school students can be strong enough and conscious enough to take on the job of creating their own school.

The students, however, come from a school system totally different from ours, and the cost of transition will, for that reason, be high. Not only the 9 – 10 years in another system make the transition difficult. An additional factor is an age between 16 and 19, which is probably the age when young people do not tend to take on extensive organizational challenges. It's the period of transition from the world of childhood to that of the adult world when they face the demands of our harsh society.

It is also the period when many young people need to look inward into themselves and be allowed to be left undisturbed. It's the age of falling in love and the age of poetry. The age of pondering, uncertainty and discussions. The period in which theories dominate disproportionately. When principles are more important than realities and practice. In the years before and after that period, human beings are more down-to-earth and practically oriented, more tuned in to their surroundings. For that reason, it would probably be easier to develop new ways of cooperation with younger age groups.

A woman from India who came to talk to the students about yoga and meditation was involved in an intricate discussion about Indian foreign and domestic politics. Finally, she said, somewhat overwhelmed, 'life is not a speculative game." But that's precisely what life is like for many young people.

Once, we had a statute debate at our *"Allmannamøte."* We discussed changing our mission statement. We wanted to drop the word *contribute*, and make the paragraph stronger by saying we wanted

to change the present high school system. A radical group pressed hard for change. The debate was time-consuming and intense. The radicals won. It was decided that the mission statement was to be changed.

When the new mission statement was copied, the clerk forgot to include this change. It was never discovered. Our mission statement still says to *contribute* to changing high school. The discussion was the most important. We play "the speculative game."

For high school students, words play a major part. Action is often of less importance. For younger people, action is important. When it comes to those age groups before high school, we can learn from examples in other countries. Especially in Denmark, numerous groups have worked to develop new cooperative working methods on all school levels. And now, these experiences have started to influence public schools. A lot can be learned from Henrik Sidenius at Værebro school outside Copenhagen. Our own Steiner school, which obviously prepares students for responsibility, should be our closest influencer.

Contrary to high school, which has traditions going back a thousand years, our *"ungdomsskole,"* junior high school, is an incomplete newcomer in our country. It needs to search in a variety of ways to establish its form. A natural testing ground for school democracy should be here.

Surely many parents and students would be willing to try new ways in junior high school.

For me, this is a natural consequence of our experiences at The Experimental High School. The most helpful thing I can do is to use my experience and capacity for work trying out this system in junior high school.

At the elementary level, there is already the Norwegian Summerhill organization willing to try new ways of working. But the authorities are not interested. They claim there are no facilities. If only local authorities could spend a little less on equipment in the schoolyards they are building and let the parents, children, and teachers who want to try out new ways have a barrack in which to exist, they would be happy. And the local authorities would get eager colleagues to help them with their research and experimentation.

Running around in circles

A danger concerning school democracy is that The Experimental High School may end up resembling an overgrown kitten. It is cute to see a small cat run around chasing its tail. But it would be disgusting and unnatural if the cat continued running around endlessly instead of developing into a reasonable, grown-up cat with a taste for hunting and sex life.

In an organization where members change every third year, and everybody has a voice, there is always the danger of running around in circles. Everybody is going to develop the school. Ideally, every year from scratch. The same mistakes – the same blunders are going to be repeated again and again. Because all the students still come from the same background. The oldest students who have the final exam in front of them contribute to this development because they tend to withdraw from big organizational debates. After all, they are going to leave soon anyway. They leave it to the teachers, along with the new students, to start anew. Even if they were the closest to contributing by sharing their experiences.

Intelligence has been defined as the ability to learn from experience. The Experimental High School as an institution is in danger of becoming an idiot if we cannot learn from our own experiences pretty soon. The new students must be informed about what has happened before their time. It ought to be an essential task for the school to gather experiences in an easy-to-read leaflet. The new students ought to trust what others have done and experienced before them. They should be able to build on that foundation. Something

has to be routine, something has to be a tradition, even if those are words the students hate. If every tiny thing is to be done in a new way each time, it will exhaust a growing number of the school members and take the focus away from what is the most important in our mission. And something has got to be a tradition. The school has to find some forms, forms that the school genuinely owns that can be inherited.

Until now, we have been rather unsuccessful in creating the necessary trust among the new students who enter our school. It has to do with the feeling of togetherness and belonging that we have never quite managed to create. Untill now, it has been natural to have a period of trial and error for many issues. We have had to develop our own standards. But now, in the fourth year of the school's existence, it may look unprofessional if we continue going around in circles. It seems like it is more important to throw away what others have done before than build something new on the foundation of what has been created.

It doesn't mean we should stop being critical. That is not the same as throwing away everything in principle. Those who have worked in the school, so far, have found some valuable solutions to challenges. We may easily end up as a stagnant pool of backwater, where a small group that is left behind fumble with their things and make something "new and exciting" every year that has no importance for anybody because there is never any substance attached to it.

It's a lovely game – but it will never be anything but a game.

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