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A paradigmatic dialogue-disagreement in a democratic school: A conceptual analysis of a soul-searching assembly meeting

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Abstract

In this article, I attempt to conceptually analyze points of disagreement among the students of the first democratic high school in Norway, The Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo (EGO). The clashes and disagreements among the students started heating up immediately after the school was opened in the fall of 1967. As they were learning how to run their school, the students discovered profound differences in their views of education and its purposes. Their deep disagreements about the meaning of education and conflicts about their school practices almost broke up their school right at the very start of its existence.

Their different understandings of education erupted in a passionate and dramatic general assembly meeting, which they later referred to as the Soul-Searching Assembly[1]. This four-and-a-half hour-long meeting was recorded and its transcript was published (Hem & Remlov, 1969).[2] In this article, I analyze the dialogues from the assembly, looking for the students' diverse ideological and conceptual positions, views, desires, and underlying values. The tensions and clashes the students voiced echo the profound paradigmatic differences in conceptualizing education throughout the modern history of education, from the Enlightenment until now, a few decades into the 21st century. The purpose of my analysis is to examine these paradigmatically different views and the concerns behind them. These radically different paradigmatic, conceptual, and axiological positions have an effect on what we may consider being good, ethical, just, and true for human existence, human relationships, and human rights in general, and especially in education. The EGO students' intensive and urgent ontological need to explain their very different positions to each other allowed me to take a closer look into the tensions and conflicts still existing in the larger cultural-historical public sphere of discourse on education.

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[1] Read more in depth about this meeting in two other articles in this Special issue, Marjanovic-Shane (2023a, 2023b).

[2] *Dialogic Pedagogy: An International Online Journal* was given a gracious permission to publish extensive parts of this transcript, which is a part of the book by Hem & Remlov, "Forsøksgymnas i praksis" [Experimental Gymnasium in Praxis], by the current owner of the estate of Pax Publishing house.

Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, 20, 68-79, and a book: Matusov, E., A. Marjanovic-Shane & M. Gradovski, (2019). *Dialogic pedagogy and polyphonic research art: Bakhtin by and for educators*, Palgrave Macmillan. Ana lives and works in the USA.

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Introduction

> Free children are not easily influenced; the absence of fear accounts for this phenomenon. Indeed, the absence of fear is the finest thing that can happen to a child (Neill, 1960, p. 9).

Alienation in education and the experience of a loss of dignity were the primary reasons motivating the young Norwegian students in Oslo in 1966 to create a school for themselves in which they will have equal rights in the decision-making (cf. Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg, & Gradovski, 2023). In the original leaflet by the three 16-year-olds, they expressed a strong critique of alienated learning in their rebellion against the foisted alienation in Norwegian conventional schools. Their piercing critique is loud and clear from the very first paragraph of the leaflet they sent out to all high school students and the adults' educational community in Oslo in the spring of 1966,

> Many students feel that the authorities are pressuring them into despair. They feel that the old, worn-out (wasted?) people deny them opportunities to develop, deny them friendship, deny them freedom, deny them sex, deny them the very youth (original leaflet quoted in Jørgensen, 1971, p. 16).[3]

The problem of alienation in education is serious and deep in my opinion. It leads to stifling students' joy in life and learning, and worse, it often creates a profound feeling of the lack or the loss of human dignity. Alienation produced by foisted education is not only frustrating, hard to endure, and handicapping healthy development but ultimately anti-educational. In this respect, I agree with the founding students' claim that the alienation in the traditional schooling is harmful: it transforms a supposedly educational practice into its own antithesis, an educational desert — out of which many students emerge with a mind that simultaneously resents and follows orders of an authority, a mind that often does not know the difference between an authoritative voice of dogma and one's own authorial voice, and a mind that was strongly discouraged and even sometimes prohibited to enter genuine dialogues where one can critically evaluate diverse truths, perspectives, opinions, values, and views of the world. One might ask why, in the world, anyone would design education in such a way to produce students' alienation, despair, and loss of agency in their own learning and development.

In our study of the Scandinavian experiment in the democratic education (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2023), my colleagues Tina Kullenberg, Mikhail Gradovski, and I discussed the paradoxical legacy of the Enlightenment thinkers that set modern public education on its authoritarian ideological course. Despite the

[3] See also in the appendix to the article "A Soul-Searching Assembly – a Vignette" (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b).

Enlightenment's most important belief in human freedom and autonomy as the conditions for human dignity, the Enlightenment thinkers, starting from Kant, treated education as a practice in which students cannot be granted personal freedoms and autonomy in making decisions for themselves, especially not educational decisions. According to Kant, only mature people who are rational and informed are able and can be trusted to make good decisions, good both for themselves and for society. Such maturity and rationality can be achieved through education, but education itself cannot be for the students a matter of free choice and design. It needs to be enforced, i.e., "foisted on uneducated and undereducated, immature, irrational, uninformed, and ignorant people in order for those people to be able to achieve their autonomy and, thus, human dignity later on, when education is done on them" (Matusov, 2021, p. E12). In our study, my colleagues and I further argued that in the foisted education, the student has a status of a recipient, i.e., an object of a pedagogical preparation by the others. In this enforced *enlightenment by another*, the students are denied authorship of their learning. They don't have legitimate "equal rights of consciousness" (M. M. Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6) to fully test their ideas, values, beliefs, and desires in a genuine ethical ontological dialogue.

In my opinion, this is what the Oslo students rebelled against, this alienated position of a person stripped of dignity, with no personal rights in following their learning interests and initiatives, the violence of the foisted education with its zombifying effect. Gaining freedom and control of their own lives and education was their anti-alienating project. However, as my colleagues Tina Kullenberg, Mikhail Gradovski and I described (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2023), when the Oslo students finally gained the right to open a school and launched the Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo (EGO), they experienced a series of strong tensions and conflicts among themselves. They discovered that fundamentally diverse ways of understanding and approaching education existed among them. The deep disagreements about the meaning of education and practices in the school they now started to govern almost broke their school at the very start of its existence. Mosse Jørgensen, the first school leader, described the eruption of their internal conflicts that took place in a general assembly meeting on November 2nd, 1967, as "fireworks in a can." Later, the students referred to this fateful meeting as the "Soul-Searching Assembly" or the "Hell of an Assembly"(Hem & Remlov, 1969, p. 22).[4] Mosse thought that the main problem lied in the fact that the traditional view of education still had a strong grip in the school.

> The conflict was not resolved. And it still is not resolved. But the problems became clarified, and emotions were vented out. […] And the following seems to have become obvious, once the great explosion was over: The new ways of schooling - those the students created to satisfy their own needs, they worked. It was the old ways that had to be blown up by the fireworks of freedom. This explosion was necessary for us to start finding these new ways.
>
> What did we expect from school democracy and freedom? […] Many people had obviously expected the following: After a few weeks, this would become a school with democracy and freedom of assembly, but with a traditional time-table, curriculum and exams, that would function organizationally exactly like any other school. If the students did not show up for class, they would have failed. If the school did not function "normally" then it would be proven that freedom under responsibility was impossible.
>
> But what is freedom then, if the result is exactly the same as before the freedom? If students sit at their desks out of loyalty to a cause, or to a teacher, we are back in almost the same situation as the one where they sit there in fear of expulsion, reprimands, or bad grades. They may have learned something about loyalty, but the system remains the same.

[4] In Norwegian "Sjeleallmannamøtet" and "Kjempeallmannamøtet."

> We can give people freedom, but don't we panic when they actually start to use it? (Jørgensen, 1971, p. 40).

The issue EGO students were faced with was to define what it means to be free to actually own and direct their education. Proponents of democratic education and dialogic pedagogy approaches often claim that genuine, authorial education happens when the students legitimately own their learning and education (Matusov, 2020; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2017). Here in EGO, the students became the governors of their own school. And as such, they immediately confronted an unavoidable question: What does this *ownership of education* actually mean? Or, better, what does it actually mean *to them*? Who (or what) is and who can legitimately be, not merely a governor, but the true owner, the ultimate author of education, with all the rights of making educational decisions? Who has a right to legitimately define educational freedoms and responsibilities?

The EGO students owned the democratic governance of their school, but their conflicts about defining the scope and the boundaries of each student's personal educational freedoms, educational rights, and educational ownership pointed to deeper differences among their fundamental ideas about education, its nature, meaning, and its role in human life. The explosive confrontation in their soul-searching assembly unchained and let out the EGO students' paradigmatically diverse, mutually exclusive contradictory views, ideas, concepts, values, beliefs, and desires. Conceptualizing their differences, finding the boundaries of the ideas along which they diverge or converge could illuminate some deeper existing paradigmatic differences in the ideological, ethical, and/or political worldviews that still pervade our contemporary educational theories, practices, and politics more than 50 years after this faithful meeting.

The purpose of my analysis is dual: a) to find out what education could have meant to different EGO students at the moment of the Soul-Searching Assembly, in order to deeply understand what happened to their relationships during this event, as it seemed that they transcended their clash on some level, and although not agreeing, they were able to develop relationships in which their school could continue to exist, instead of completely breaking down; and b) to find out what worldviews and educational philosophies these students held, may promote cultural, political, and practical humanization of education, transforming education into an unalienated practice of the students' own meaning-making. A praxis that is genuinely significant to the student by the student's own evaluation. In the clashes of the EGO students' ideas, I look for the echoes of the collisions of the worldviews of our era at the beginning of the 21 century – the strife between the liberal vs. authoritarian paradigms of life (Berlin, 2014); the trust in and the encouragement of the intrinsic search for truth, goodness and beauty vs. the (blind) trust in the higher ideals and the Enlightenment by the wisdom of the generations who came closer to the ultimate truth, harmony, and perfection; the egalitarianism of the dialogic stance that meaning-making takes place among "a plurality of [unique] consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world, [that] combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (M. M. Bakhtin, 1999, pp. 6, italics are in the original) vs. the monologic trust in the hierarchy of the established powers among the people based on the merging of their consciousness into the pool of universal knowledge and rationality.

Rarely does one have an opportunity to closely examine and analyze ways in which concepts and ideas about democracy, freedom, education, etc., play against each other in an actual event dialogue in a group of people for whom these concepts are of vital importance on a day-to-day basis. The "Soul-Searching Assembly" was one such event, and it was important enough to its participants to be recorded and later transcribed and published (Hem & Remlov, 1969; Jørgensen, 1971). The existence of the transcript created a unique opportunity to analyze the students' actual, unique, and ontologically significant personal positions, opinions, beliefs, and desires regarding the very concepts of "democracy," "freedom," "responsibility," the "rights of consciousness," and the nature of the "relationships among the participants"

in education. This dramatic meeting revealed complex disagreements and paradigmatic differences among the EGO students regarding their concept of education and the meaning of educational freedoms and rights.

I created three different analyses of the transcript[5] of the Soul-Searching Assembly. The analysis in this article is the third one – a conceptual analysis. I first approached the transcript through a *dialogic analysis* (cf. Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg, & Curtis, 2019). The result of this dialogic analysis is a vignette I wrote based on the transcript (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b). In the vignette, I look at the Soul-Searching Assembly as a relational drama of disagreements among "the friendly enemies" (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015) in the course of the four and half hour meeting. What did they want *for* themselves, *for* each other, *from* each other? What were their urgencies in the clashes – as they addressed each other, striving to make their points meaningful and persuasive to the others, and to clarify, formulate, test, and potentially transcend their own deeply held cherished ideas, etc.?

According to Bakhtin, such events as the Soul-Searching Assembly are the birthplace of ideas. The dialogic analysis in the vignette helped me understand the event in which different voices emerged and started to take shape. In other words, the Soul-Searching Assembly event became my theoretical "unit of analysis." Looking at the whole event enabled me to construct and prepare the evidence for the emergence of several distinctly voiced worldviews, particular concerns, and the relationships among these worldviews out of the raw ethnographic data of the transcript.

Moreover, for Bakhtin, "The idea *lives* not in one person's *isolated* individual consciousness – if it remains there only, it degenerates and dies. […] The idea is a live event, played out at the point of dialogic meeting between two or several consciousnesses" (M. M. Bakhtin, 1999, pp. 87-88). By taking the floor in the Soul-Searching assembly meeting, the students confronted each other from the bottom of their hearts and minds, testing each other, both as ideas and as people. The ideas they tested were their embodied intentions, motives, reasons, and desires – what Bakhtin called *person-ideas* (M. M. Bakhtin, 1999). In order to summon the living urgency, the very pulse of the EGO students' ideas, to make them vividly true, I tried to (re-)construct them as four Bakhtinian person-ideas, adding imagined internal monologues to the actual (transcribed) passionate speeches and comments, hints, and innuendos loudly expressed in the impassioned internally persuasive discourse of the Soul-Searching Assembly. That partially fictional analysis-synthesis helped me, and hopefully, it could help you, dear reader, to step into each person-idea and look at the world and at others from the inside, as if through their own souls. I believe that these "living" person-ideas can deepen our understanding of the internal logic of abstracted ideological positions that I analyze in this article. The analysis-synthesis of the four person-ideas is published in a separate article in this special issue (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023a).

In this article, I develop a conceptual analysis of the ideological positions the students held, and I try to map out relationships of convergence and divergence among their views. I look at the premises of their theories of education and their worldviews. I attempt to deconstruct the students' conceptualizations of democracy in their school governance and their understanding of what and how should be governed in their educational practice as personal vs. collective rights. I try to infer how the students espoused the purposes of education and what guiding values they adhered to as they struggled to persuade each other to accept their visions.

Several points of divergence and contention emerged among the EGO students' conceptualizations of their education. In my view, these points of divergence represent the most important philosophical and ideological divides about education, not only among the students but throughout the

[5] It should be more precise to say that I approached *a translation* of the original Norwegian transcript into English.

history of education until today. In this article, I discuss the students' confrontations, clashes, misunderstandings, and struggles around the following three points of conceptual divergence:

a) Negative Freedom vs. Positive Freedom in education, their implications for the legitimacy of the students' educational ownership, and the meaning and scope of democratic decision-making.
b) Monist vs. Pluralist worldviews in education and the question of guiding values in democratic education and schooling
c) Responsibility vs. accountability in education and their inherent contradictions.

Voluntary attendance and the meaning of freedom

> Roar[6]: … We are all aware that now that the whole thing [the school spirit] is beginning to slip out of our hands. One can sit quietly and say: It is a transitional period - when the first glowing enthusiasm is still high. [But] we have to be careful not to let this [spirit] completely slip out – while we just sit there … […] People sit in the hallways when they should be in classes… – as if they should not have classes. […] We should not be allowed to just sit on our asses – not give a fuck - excuse the expression….
>
> Dag: The point is that we *are allowed* to sit on our asses - **that is what voluntary attendance is.** So, we continue to do it …
>
> Roar: Of course, one is allowed. This is a free school. You can work at home. You can do anything. If a student prefers to sit in the library to work instead of in a class – of course – that's fine. But there is **not just one thing called freedom** – there also exists **another term; it is called freedom under the responsibility [accountability]**. I repeat, **under the responsibility [accountability][7]**. We are responsible for our fellow students. We are responsible for our own schooling. (Hem & Remlov, 1969, p. 26, cursive in the original, bold by me).[8]

During the Assembly meeting, many students appeal to the notion of freedom and responsibility/accountability. It seemed that The EGO founders understood mandatory attendance as the primary source of the student's alienation from education. They made sure that the first principle in their school be the voluntary attendance of classes and other educational activities. The principle of voluntary attendance legitimizes each student's freedom of (non)-participation in any organized educational activities. It seemed that for them, having the right of voluntary attendance guaranteed each student freedom to be the owner of their education. In other words, it seemed that all students (and teachers) agreed that the right of voluntary attendance would protect the student from educational coercion. Indeed, voluntary attendance seemed to be the most sacred principle that promised freedom, and it was probably the most significant for the EGO students.

[6] All the participants I quote here are students unless I indicate that someone is a teacher. Their names were already changed in the original publication of the transcript by Hem and Remlov (1969), and I use the same ones.

[7] "Men det er bare noe som heter frihet - og så et annet begrep som heter frihet under *ansvar*. Jeg gjentar: Under *ansvar*." The word "ansvar" in Norwegian means both "responsibility" and "accountability." Sometimes it is not clear whether it is meant in one or the other sense, and this has to be disambiguated by the context. In English, too, the term "responsibility" can be used as a synonym for "accountability" although the two concepts are very different. In translating the word "ansvar" from Norwegian, I made different decisions in different contexts, using sometimes "responsibility" and sometimes "accountability" depending on a context. However, I use both terms in this instance, because I think it is also important to preserve the ambiguity of this term. This ambiguity, lumping the two concepts together, could perhaps explain how difficult it may have been for the students to understand precisely and deeply the roots of their lines of disagreement. I discuss this issue in greater detail later in the paper.

[8] Throughout this text, when quoting the transcript of the "Soul-Searching Assembly" meeting on November 2, 1967, I use the original page numbers in the publication of the transcript in Hem and Remlov (1969). The bold parts of the text highlight the crucial evidence for my conceptualizations of the emerging issues that the students were arguing about. Thus, in this particular excerpt I coded the issue of having unlimited freedom including legitimacy of non-participation in education vs. limited freedom of education where nonparticipation is not allowed.

> The freedom was magic! Incredible, magnificent freedom for which everyone fought. The freedom consisted of being able to smoke wherever and whenever with no fear nor regard; of being able to spill and mess up things carelessly; of playing music loudly in front of doors behind which someone [else] is working and defending one's right to do that. Wasn't the freedom voted on? Isn't freedom - freedom for all? Should it be possible to limit freedom because of such trivial things as the narrow hallways and the existence of other people? […] (Jørgensen, 1977, pp. 41-42).

But at the same time, freedom seemed to create problems, at least for some. Once mandatory attendance was abolished, many students started to spend their time in the hallways, playing guitars, hanging out, not attending classes, and disturbing those who did attend them. This behavior was not welcomed by some, although not all, students. It was not easy for the teachers, creating problems for them even when they stood by the principle of voluntary attendance. Jørgensen (1971) described great professional and emotional conundrums of teachers whose classes were not attended.

> 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, had met. … But why did we embark on all of this? Why did we, as teachers, leave the safety of the old, smoothly polished system? Because we didn't want to continue sacrificing young people, genuine knowledge acquisition, and our own humanity on the gray altar of security (Jørgensen 1971, p. 99).

Most of the teachers who chose to remain supported voluntary attendance and started to search for innovative teaching approaches.

Tensions started to grow between different groups of students about the extent, the boundaries, and the very meaning of educational freedom.

Negative vs. Positive Freedom

Some students interpreted freedom in the sense of what Berlin called "negative freedom," while the others, mostly the founders and some of their close followers, conceptualized freedom as Berlin's "positive freedom" (Berlin, 2002, 2014, 2017). Berlin defined "negative freedom" as that "area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons" (Berlin, 2017, p. 34). Negative liberty is about the boundaries of a person's sovereignty, autonomy, dignity, and privacy, within which no one else has a right to interfere, sanction, censor, or ban the person's actions. According to the principle of negative freedom, unless something is prohibited by the law, it is legally allowed. Negative freedom is "freedom from" – freedom from communal or societal control. If education is within this sphere of personal freedom, then the student's voluntary attendance means freedom to decide about all aspects of their education, including both *whether what* and *how* to participate in the educational activities (Marjanovic-Shane & Matusov, 2017, February; Matusov, 2020). As one student, Dag, said, "The point is that we *are allowed* to sit on our asses - that is what voluntary attendance is" (Hem & Remlov, 1969, p. 26). If, however, education is within the sphere of societal control, then the student's voluntary attendance means "positive freedom" to make "good, responsible choices," where goodness and responsibility are defined by society.

In contrast to "negative freedom," "positive freedom" is predefined by some authority and specifies what the person is free to do. The question, according to Berlin, is only "What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?" (Berlin, 2017, p. 34). For Berlin, positive freedom is defined by a "wish to be a subject, not an object; to be *moved by reasons*,

by conscious purposes, which are my own, not by causes which affect me, as it were, from outside" (Berlin, 2017, p. 44). In other words, positive freedom is freedom *for* being and acting in some positively defined way, directed to some "good" end, which is defined by authority. For instance, freedom to make *rational* decisions, where what is "rational" is defined by some authority. When educational freedom is conceptualized as "positive freedom," then voluntary attendance may mean freedom to choose among diverse but still "good" as defined by the school authority – the Nannies, the Department of Education, and the taxpayers, – such as preparing for the national exams, studying academic subjects deeply, and so on. Namely, positive freedom may mean that the students are free to decide only what to study from the predefined choices and *how to participate in educational practice*, but not to decide *whether or not* to participate in it. In positive freedom, the students are free to decide which classes or activities to choose to achieve the given legitimate educational goals predefined by the authority. But the students are not allowed to follow or create their own interests, purposes, and goals if they fall outside of the sphere of legitimate, predefined educational purposes and choices. Their freedom is bound to a predefined practice and its legitimized goals. Replying to Dag, Roar (another student) formulated this clearly, "But there is not just one thing called *freedom* – there also exists another term, it is called *freedom with (under) responsibility [accountability]*. I repeat, *with responsibility [accountability]*" (p. 26, italics in the transcript). In my view, the concept of "freedom under accountability to someone or something" may be a very good definition of positive freedom, according to Berlin.

This conceptual difference in understanding freedom had profound implications for all other issues the students raised in the Assembly. The students, the teachers, and their principal, Mosse Jørgensen, all refer to "freedom" and its counterpart, "freedom under (with) responsibility." Some argued for "freedom," the others for "freedom with responsibility." It was deeply intertwined with the students' understanding of responsibility and their approach to educational ownership and authorship. And significantly, it affected the relationships among the individual students regarding the way they envisioned their democratic governance of the school.

In my view, this dichotomy became the most important watershed for all of their ideas because it seems that it had roots in much deeper and further-reaching conceptual differences that Berlin saw as "… two views of life of an irreconcilable kind, the liberal and authoritarian, open and closed, and the fact that the word 'freedom' has been a genuinely central symbol in both is at once remarkable and sinister" (Berlin, 2014, p. 73). I argue that the EGO students, not only the concept of "freedom" was in the crux of their clashing authoritarian[9] vs. liberal outlooks, but that they perceived all other aspects of education through these two ideologically opposing lenses.

Democracy vs. personal negative freedom

In addition to these profound conceptual and ideological differences, there existed another source of tension in the school. This tension was generated by the very democracy as a form of governing the school.

There are many definitions of democracy, its variants, its scope, and its ways of regulating the powers of diverse stakeholders. In principle, democratic governance protects the sovereignty and freedom of a group of people to make all decisions for themselves, by themselves, rather than being ruled by outside powers. In an educational democracy, the primary sources of power lie within the immediate educational

[9] Berlin uses the word "authoritarian" in a generic sense of legitimizing the hierarchical power of an authority over others, whether political, educational, within a family, a corporation, etc. He contrasts the "authoritarian" with the "liberal" outlook, that gives power equally to all members of a society, a group, or a practice. Education has ostensibly been an "authoritarian" practice for most of the time, at least when understood as the right of an authority (of a parent, a society, an expert, etc.,) to impose or foist education onto a student, with or without the students' consent.

community, rather than outside of it. The power distribution in a democratic community should be horizontal, protecting the rights of input in decision making of all of its participants, regulating who can be a part of decision making. Democracy is also about regulating ways and forms of the legitimacy of imposing decisions of the majority on the disagreeable minority without the use of violence, i.e., ways that impositions can be viewed as legitimate by a disagreeing minority. Thus, democracy in education is both about the educational sovereignty of a group of people and about the internal relationships and power distribution within the group members. Internally, democracy is about the equal rights of input for the participants in making all decisions (direct democracy), and externally it is about the right of a community to have sovereignty, i.e., not to be subordinated to any other outside authorities in making all critical decisions.

However, as part of Norwegian public education, EGO was not completely sovereign and not free from the Norwegian Department of Education. The EGO agreed to follow certain curricular and other policies of the Norwegian Department of Education so that the academically aspired EGO students could be allowed to take the national graduation exam (*artium),* without which they could not continue their education at Norwegian Universities. This fact greatly affected the internal issues in the EGO's democratic governance[10], leading to tensions between the students who had academic aspirations and others who came to school for other reasons.

These tensions started to reveal to the students the fact that democracy, as a form of government, a form of power ("κρατία" in Greek, like in demo***cracy*** – literally "power of people"), i.e., a form of imposition, is not about personal freedoms, but about the limits of these freedoms based on the common rules, regulations and internal policies. Having equal rights to input in the school's democratic government does not automatically guarantee personal educational freedoms. In some cases, as we shall see, democratic governance may limit or even abolish personal educational freedoms altogether. Democracy can be extremely oppressive to personal freedoms and rights (cf. "a tyranny of the majority"). In some cases, as we shall see, democratic governance may limit or even abolish personal educational freedoms. According to Berlin, a democratic government, in itself, does not automatically guarantee personal freedoms:

> … Liberty in this sense is principally concerned with *the area of control*, *not with its source*. Just as a democracy may, in fact, deprive the individual citizen of a great many liberties which he might have in some other form of society, so it is perfectly conceivable that a liberal-minded despot would allow his subjects a large measure of personal freedom" (Berlin, 2017, pp. 41-42, italics mine).

As a form of governance, democracy is about the (semi) universal right to have an input in collective decision-making. But democratic governance does not guarantee that each participant would agree with all decisions all of the time. Although Habermas (1996) idealized consensus as a criterion for making rational democratic decisions, according to Berlin (1990) and Mouffe (2000), in principle, it is impossible to resolve the plurality of incompatible and incommensurable ideas, desires, values, beliefs, and personal circumstances. Therefore, although the principle of democratic governance promises that everyone's input will be allowed and taken into account (often literally, by counting votes), it does not guarantee that everyone's interests, wishes, opinions, desires, freedoms, etc., may be fulfilled all the time, or even some of the time. In fact, democratic governance, a particular use of the power of imposition, almost certainly guarantees that some people's opinions, positions, desires, and interests may be sometimes overturned. In that sense, some personal desires could be and would be impinged on. In that sense, democracy can

[10] This issue is discussed in greater length in another article in this trilogy, "Scandinavian Experiments in Democratic Education" (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2023).

be liberal – with the protection of the minority rights, or illiberal – a tyranny of the majority. Greek democracy in Athens was illiberal (Zakaria, 2003).[11]

Like any other form of governance, democracy may create a larger or a smaller sphere of personal freedoms ("negative freedom") by defining what aspects of life may or may not be publicly regulated. In other words, democratic governance may be more or less liberal – depending on what spheres and what scope of personal life it attempts to control.

The difference between democracy and other forms of governance is in the rights of all the members to have an input in the decision-making. One of the cornerstones of democracy is freedom of speech and, with it, the protection of the freedom to express and stand for one's opinions. And that means – the legitimacy of the dissensus of the opinion.

Thus, the two foundational principles of EGO, the principles of voluntary participation in education, e.g., personal "negative freedom," and the principle of democratic governance, don't automatically go together. One does not guarantee the other. In fact, the two principles stand in conflict with each other. A tension exists between personal rights to educational freedom, i.e., negative freedom, and democratic decision-making when a decision may affect the scope of the student's personal educational freedom. The tension lies in the question of personal educational rights: what should be considered a legitimate core of personal educational freedom, free from collective control? What is the sphere of guaranteed personal educational liberties? In my view, one of the primary sources of disputes in EGO was the very question of what is that "certain vacuum around [a person that] has to be created, [that] certain space within which [a person] may be allowed to fulfill what might be called [their] reasonable wishes," (Berlin, 2014, pp. 55-56). What is the scope of the educational space where one has the liberty not to be impinged by another?

What is education? Should it be a matter of personal realm, free from collective control, or should it mostly lie in the provenance of society in some way? We could answer this question from a kind of relativist birds-eye point of view that understanding of education depends on the person's overall worldview regarding the nature of truth and their leading ethical thoughts and systems of value that guide their relations to others, to the world, and to self. We could acknowledge the conceptual relativism by finding that the concept of education depends upon each person's convictions and standpoints regarding what is good, necessary, and true about actions that are believed to lead the people (both the self and, more so, the others) to the truth(s) and values necessary for survival and achievement of a better life.

However, education and beliefs about it are not just a game of academic exercise. Both on the personal and the social level, education is an ethical endeavor, resting upon,

> … [the] beliefs about how life should be lived, what men and women should be and do, ... [These beliefs] are objects of moral inquiry; and when applied to groups and nations, and, indeed, mankind as a whole, are called political philosophy, which is but ethics applied to society (Berlin, 1990, p. 2).

But the acknowledgment of conceptual relativism, according to Bakhtin, does not provide an "alibi in being" to an educationalist or, for that matter, to a student! The ethical question of education is the question not about concepts but about unique deeds, i.e., acts addressed to and affecting others, and personal "answerability" for one's deeds in each particular, unrepeatable and unique situation.

[11] I want to thank Eugene Matusov for this additional remark and reference.

> This fact of my *non-alibi in Being*, which underlies the concrete and once-occurrent ought of the answerably performed act, is not something I come to know of and to cognize but is something I acknowledge and affirm in a unique or once-occurrent manner. The simple cognition of that fact is a reduction of it to the lowest emotional- volitional level of possibility. In cognizing it, I universalize it: everyone occupies a unique and never-repeatable place, any being is once-occurrent. What we have here is a theoretical positing which tends toward the ultimate limit of becoming completely free of any emotional-volitional tone. There is nothing I can do with this theoretical proposition; it does not obligate me in any way. Insofar as I think of my uniqueness or singularity as a moment of my being that is shared in common by all Being, I have already stepped outside my once-occurrent uniqueness, I have assumed a position outside its bounds, and think Being theoretically, i.e., I am not in communion with the content of my own thought; uniqueness as a concept can be localized in the world of universal or general concept and, by doing so, one would set up a series of logically necessary correlations. (Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 1993, pp. 10-11).

From Bakhtin's point of view, it is the monologic universalism, as a meta-belief, that leads to "moral relativism" (anything goes). And according to Berlin, the main line of conceptual disagreement regarding the ethical issues could be framed in terms of the monist vs. pluralist worldviews (Weltanschauung-s) – guiding each particular, unique ethical decision. In the next section, I explore the EGO students' monist vs. pluralist worldviews that seemed to underpin their conceptualizations of education and schooling as practices.

Monism vs. pluralism in the students' worldviews

Monism

Monism, a belief in the "unity or harmony of human ends" (Berlin, 2002, p. 4), can significantly impact one's approach to education and schooling. A belief in the possibility of an ultimate single truth and a single set of values according to which one can judge all people leads to assuming that education can and should have these truths and values as its singular goals that need to be reached by each person. According to Berlin, the monist dogmas entail,

> … the corollary that the realisation of the pattern formed by them is the *one true end of all rational activity*, *both public and private*. If this belief should turn out to be false or incoherent, this might destroy or weaken the basis of much past and present thought and activity; and, at the very least, affect conceptions of, and the value placed on, personal and social liberty (Berlin, 2002, p. 4, italics mine).

Thus, monism in the approach to education means having obligations to act in manners derived from a single principle that unites all aspects of the educational practice. In a monist lens, educational activities are guided by the belief in the universality of the Truth, which is not only knowable but presumed to be already known by the educators and unproblematic regarding its internal unity of compatible and commensurable values, rules, and norms. A monist approach to education is, thus, in principle, based on the notion of the transmission of known truths and values, socialization into socially reasonable and valued practices, and promotion of harmonious relationships, agreement, cooperation, and sense of belonging to the community.

In EGO, however, there existed two different and conflicting monist views. The two were guided by the students' conflicting primary principles and values. These two types of monism can be called:

a) Epistemological Monism; and
b) Relational Monism.

"Epistemological monism" is a traditional form of educational monism. It focuses on the acquisition of valuable knowledge and skills as the primary goals and the ultimate purpose of education. In opposition to the traditional epistemological monism, there emerged a rather non-traditional "relational monism." In this view, love for others was seen as the supreme guiding principle in their school that should prevail over all other ideological and pragmatic educational values, principles, purposes, and goals (like the acquisition of knowledge and skills or pursuit of social justice, etc.). Below I discuss these two types of monism as they emerged in the Soul-Searching Assembly.

Epistemological Monism

> Åge (student): … [Sarcastically] Of course, you should be able to do what you want! – [Seriously] But **when 150 people do what they want**, or 100 people do what they want, they each go in their own direction - in 100 directions. Then, **this will be no school** - there will be a place where 100 people meet and do what they want. So… **you can't do that at this school**. That [what you say] is *just whining*. This school leads up to the *artium* [graduation exam]! – [Turning to Reidar, who wants to accept diversity of the students' goals] And I will **strongly oppose** what you say - **that we should tolerate deviants**… (pp. 28-29, bold by me).

The traditional *epistemological* monist view of education is based in Berlin's three dogmas[12] applied to education: a) that the Truth is universal, i.e. that there is in principle one answer to each genuine question, and thus that all students can be and should be given thus truth; b) that the answers to the genuine questions are in principle knowable and, thus, that education is about hard academic work to obtain the known truths, and c) that it is possible to imagine one harmonious educational sphere in which all students should be immersed to develop as ideal, "educated" people. Thus, the educational traditional monism promotes a preset educational curriculum of learning the known and knowable truths and relies on educational experts to define and prescribe it.

This traditional monist view of education as an epistemological endeavor of acquiring culturally, socially, ideologically, ethically, etc. existing body of knowledge, wisdom and values, was predominant in the founding students' vision of their school. Åge, apparently the most prominent "Nanny" among the students, seems to think that educational practice in their school must be defined by a set of unifying principles, rules, and goals. For Åge's person-idea, the diversity in the students' interests, desires, and purposes is at best irrelevant, and at worst, it must be suppressed, if not eliminated. Several times, Åge emphatically rejects any suggestion to accept diversity in the students' educational interests and desires as legitimate (see above Åge's person-idea).

Epistemological monism is intrinsically related to understanding "freedom" in terms of Berlin's notion of "positive freedom" (Berlin, 2017). In other words, for Åge, the scope and the manner of one's educational freedom must be limited and positively defined. For Åge and other students who embraced epistemological monism, the students' freedom of action [to do "what they want"] may be legitimate only within a well-defined unity of epistemological educational values, goals, and purposes. They define this positive freedom as freedom within the obligatory hard academic work to pass the national graduation exam (*artium*). So, Åge declines to tolerate "the Deviants" who ask for their "negative freedom" to do "what they want" – since this fundamentally clashes with his monist views: where freedom is only "freedom under responsibility," i.e. Berlin's positive freedom (Berlin, 2017). Åge sees academic freedom not as a personal right, but as legitimate only if and when it supports and promotes the agreed upon, predefined and singular

[12] For Berlin, three unquestioned dogmas lie in the root of monism: (a) "that to all genuine questions there is one true answer and one only" – and that this applies equally to the "questions of value no less than to those of fact;" (b) "that the true answers to such questions are in principle knowable" and (c) "that these true answers cannot clash with one another, for one true proposition cannot be incompatible with another; that together these answers must form a harmonious whole" (Berlin, 2013, p. 209).

educational vision. Although in principle, in their democratic school the students can participate in defining some aspects of this unified vision of education, the vision still has to fall within the monist scope of the socially, historically and ideologically known truth and ethics. In addition, once the students have defined their singular educational vision, all the students are then obliged ("responsible" in the sense of accountable) to abide by it and work hard to uphold it. Roar, a student who introduced the phrase "freedom under responsibility" appeals to others to accept this self-imposed obligation to unquestioningly comply with socially known and accepted truths and values through his appeal to "be an adult."

> Roar (Åge person-idea): … We call ourselves "adults," – we've been adults enough to form a school – we've been adults enough to form our own rules – we've been adults enough to hire teachers – to plan our own teaching. We should also show ourselves as adults who can bring this [school] forward to success (p. 26).

Appealing to everyone to "be an adult" is a diplomatically placed, purposefully ambivalent phrase that can unite both the appeal to maturity and self-reliance and the appeal to the importance of being like other adults, i.e., to accept the existing cultural set of norms and values loosely defining an ideal adult into which they should strive to develop. "Being an adult," Roar's brilliantly placed "boundary object" phrase (Star & Griesemer, 1989), is aimed at calling for agreement and harmony among the participants, regardless how different they may interpret its meaning.

Thus, in the epistemological monist view, no student can be left entirely free to be what *they* want to be and do what *they* want to do. Their freedom can only exist within the scope of the unified educational vision to which they must subordinate, i.e., "freedom under responsibility." From the point of view of epistemological monists like Åge, Tone, Sverre, Anders, and others, "negative freedom" cannot be legitimate in their school. Negative freedom would create a loophole for a diversity of the students' educational truths, goals, and desires, and monism cannot allow for diversity in the pursuit of truth and values. Pursuing some uncharted personal goals, purposes, and values would destroy their epistemological monist vision of education. "This will be no school," as Åge asserts. "**This is a school and not a playroom, indeed!**" (Åge, p. 25). Øyvind, a teacher, adds, "… we're not a youth psychiatric clinic… […] And those who […] find out that they are here because they think this must be a youth psychiatric clinic - they should think of something else" (Øyvind, p. 28).

The epistemological monist view seeks to define rigorous boundaries of schooling as an organized educational practice with strictly one primary goal and purpose. Thus, there should be a boundary between a "school" and a "psychiatric clinic[13]" (teacher Øivind, p.28) or between a "school" and a "youth club" (teacher Arne, p. 63). For Anders, Tone, and Sverre, it was essential that all "agree on the ideas we have" (Tone, p. 34) and then control their impulses, wishes, and desires. They need to sacrifice their wish "to go down the hall to play guitar" (Anders, p. 34). In their view, it was important to have one (epistemological) purpose that would unite them all so that they "go in to get this [agreed upon] idea worked out…" (Anders, p. 34). Berlin's concept of positive freedom was epitomized in Tone's notion of "the personal freedom of the school,"

> Tone (Åge person-idea): Well, well - personal freedom, and personal freedom. - You can't just go for your own personal freedom. We have to have something called **the personal freedom of the school.** - And then **we all together have to agree on something** - so that not

[13] Øivind here refers to the fact that some students explicitly expressed their need to psychologically heal from the pressures of their other authoritarian schools. In addition, many of the newly admitted students struggled with issues of drug use (Jørgensen, 1971).

> everyone keeps following their own head - and constantly shoving personal freedom… (pp. 34-35).

For the epistemological monists, dissent from their agreed-upon educational vision is illegitimate. For them, the very notion of responsibility is based on the idea of an obligation to subordinate oneself to this agreed-upon, unified set of values, goals, norms, and principles that define their vision of the educational practice. Thus, in the epistemological monist view, the meaning of responsibility is about accountability to the predefined practice.

In conventional schooling, epistemological monism is at the core of the authoritarian approach to education, where the authority is institutionalized and enforced on the students through various compulsory forms of power (mandatory school attendance, predefined curriculum, prescribed textbooks, standardized tests, national graduation tests, etc.). I think that it was the epistemological monism in their approach to education that guided Åge and the like-minded student in their conceptualization of a democratic school. Epistemological monism led them into a trap of becoming "Nannies," playing the role of authority and imposing their views of education on all the other students. In their daily nagging of others[14], they tried to inflict on everyone their monist understanding of education in which the students' freedom is considered legitimate only when they willingly subordinate their own educational judgments, interests, and desires to the power of the pre-planned, given authority of the Nannies' educational vision. In my view, this was the sense of the phrase "freedom with (under) responsibility," where "responsibility" means accountability and subordination to the authority of the educational practice.[15]

Although the students were involved in running a democratic school, the Nannies among them who espoused epistemological monism did not see any contradiction in having everyone agree with their monist approach to education. And that, in itself, is not contradictory. We know from Berlin that autocracy can tolerate liberal views, while democracy can sometimes curb personal liberties. In a particular sense of negative liberty as a sphere,

> of privacy itself, of the area of personal relationships as something sacred in its own right… liberty … is not: incompatible with some kinds of autocracy, or at any rate with the absence of self-government. Liberty in this sense is *principally concerned with the area of control, not with its source*. Just as a democracy may, in fact, deprive the individual citizen of a great many liberties which he might have in some other form of society, so it is perfectly conceivable that a liberal-minded despot would allow his subjects a large measure of personal freedom (Berlin, 2017, pp. 41-42)

Thus, the Nannies tried to reduce the area of the students' personal educational freedom (negative freedom), in the name of their epistemological monist approach to education. This authoritarian approach, espoused by the most vocal Nannies (Åge, Tone, Roar, Sverre, Anders, Egil, etc.) was strongly opposed by many other students, who for the most part, came to EGO because they wanted to run away from the conventional authoritarian schooling (Jørgensen, 1971). Many of them (Inge, Tom, Fin, Erling, Elisabeth, Torleif, Dag, Viggo, Liv, etc.), were doubtful about the Nannies' insistence on "freedom with (under) responsibility," which clearly felt as an attempt to curb their negative freedoms. It felt as the false promise of democracy. It was a "democracy" that would, nevertheless, require suppression of their subjectivities, their interests and desires. They heard Anders saying that the mission of EGO to improve Norwegian education was worth controlling one's impulse "to go down the hall to play guitar," that it was worth

[14] See particular examples and discussions of the "nagging" further below and in the Marjanovic-Shane (2023b).

[15] I discuss the concept of "responsibility as accountability" in more detail below, in the section that focuses on the students' views of the nature of the educational practice.

renouncing something, it was worth a self-sacrifice on the monist altar of predefined truths and values. This left no room for personal uniqueness, diversity and, for them, the most important right of self-defined ("negative") freedom to create, design and control their own education. They saw a fundamental contradiction between their right to educational freedom and the Nannies' epistemological monism that obliterates the noncomplying other, the Deviants ("Yes, call them 'deviants' or call them whatever you want," Åge, p. 29) to the point of "casting them off" (Roar, p. 32) or "freezing them out" (Elisabeth, p. 55). This was contrary to what they imagined a democratic school to be: a place where students can support each other in their personal growth and respect each other for who they are, "*being able to be yourself*" (Torleif, pp. 58-59) and want to be.

While most of the students opposing the authoritarianism of epistemological monism rejected monism in principle and moved to (or already held) a radical pluralist worldview (Inge, Tom, Fin, Erling, Elisabeth, Torleif, Dag, Viggo, Liv, etc.), one student, Torleif, started to develop a different type of monism – relational monism. I will discuss the pluralist approach later on, but first, I will analyze Torleif's relational monism.

Relational monism around Love

In developing his non-traditional, *relational* monist worldview, Torleif focuses exclusively on the quality of interpersonal relationships – demanding harmony, unconditional acceptance of the other, and elimination of conflicts. He insists that the supreme guiding principle in their school should be Love. "It is really one of the things that is fundamental for this school – [that] you **only act [toward each other] with Love**…" (Torleif, p. 46). According to Torleif, Love should be the determining principle in making all decisions, especially when it comes to differences in opinions, beliefs, interests, and desires. Conflict among the students should be avoided. Torleif insisted that there should be no place for the arrogance of those who have strong opinions and believe they know the truth belittling everyone who disagrees. He accused the Nannies of silencing those who disagree with their views, pointing out that silencing others is not just a lack of humanness and love but, as suppression of subjectivity and agency might be detrimental if not anti-educational. "Everyone bites here. It's so creepy. […] …we who are strong here at school – we hardly think of those not so strong, those who dare not rise up and say anything. Those who may have to say [what they believe] in the hallways instead of here. How many are these? 100? 150? How many people dare to get up and say something really serious here, ah? They are afraid of being thrashed" (Torleif, p. 45).

Although some other students (e.g., Elisabeth, Inge, Tom, Finn, etc.) also saw humanness as one of the most important educational values, they saw it as a complementary, even dominant value among other guiding principles, including serious Academic Work. Torleif, however, insisted on a sharp, even irreconcilable contrast between Love as the guiding value and the principle of serious Academic Work. For him, any reverence of "Academic Work" necessarily obliterates Love and humanness in school, his primary and the only *raison d'être*.

Paradoxically, while accusing the Nannies of their unanimity in their rigid epistemological monist approach to school, Torleif seems to be as exclusive in his *Monist Love approach* to education. When Anne points out that the school (as it is envisioned) cannot function "if the classes are empty. We need to get people to show up" (pp. 51-52), Torleif cannot reconcile his own monist insistence on the principle of "Love" with the principle of "Academic Work." For him, the two cannot go together. This is why his view is not pluralist, even if he would allow for diversity of students' personal goals. Love as a principle, for Torleif, eliminates judgment of others' goals and others' own responsibilities and accountability to these goals. Love as the highest principle is unconditional and thus irreconcilable with demands of accountability for Academic Work. This makes Torleif's approach monism of its own kind.

Maybe because Torleif was so uncompromising, his powerful critique helped to reveal an underlying link to the conventional alienated education (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2012) in the Nannies' epistemological monism: a disregard for the students' subjectivity and interests and a tendency toward suppression of the students' personal educational initiatives and authorship.

> Torleif: If we agree that this school here should be a school that will make human beings … If so, this … does not fit with what the Press and the Department of Education are expecting from us. What do we do then? If we all agree [with the Department of Education's expectations] … - […] we get to pull, jerk and tug ourselves, tug - tug - and tug, and eventually, we'll become a regular high school. Or, we oppose the Department of Education. If we oppose the Department, then the school can be closed. - Well, it *will* be closed. [Sarcastically] "We did a good job!" If we then repent, it will not be closed. – [But] then it will not be the school of love - the school of humanity we had been praying for. That is the dilemma! Should we hold on to love as long as we can, until the school is closed, or should we collude with the Department and keep it open? I think that is very important. I don't want to compromise with myself - I'd rather have the school shut down, than have it be a regular high school. It is very important (p. 60).

Other students did not exclude love and humanness as values their school should uphold. Even when they sensed tension, they did not make them completely incommensurable to the academic work. Students like, for example, Elisabeth embraced love and humanness as part of their pluralist worldviews[16] and critiqued Torleif for being exclusive and monist in his approach to love. For instance, Inge pointed out that "love" has no educational orientation nor content, "… it is very difficult to show love without somewhat thoughtful mind work. We simply can't sit day in and day out and just be loving and kind. And it is in the synthesis of these two concepts [love and academic work] that one finds true humanity" (p. 60). Liv also thought that love and hard academic work are not exclusive of each other. "There are different ways of showing love - and … […] those who […] [work hard] have as much love for the school and as much need for love…" (p. 59).

On the other hand, the Nannies sensed a sharp clash between their "epistemological monism" and Torleif's relational "love monism." For instance, even when Åge seemed to acknowledge the importance of "love" for their school, he, like Torleif, thought that there was an inherent contradiction between these two principles in education and that you must choose one over the other, to the point of having to sacrifice love for the sake of the academic success.

> Åge: But *we can't just live on love*. It is regrettable - but you can't do this in the world, […] We can't… - […] - And even if we are to promote understanding and tolerance, and **be a school full of love, it must not come at the expense of *artium*. You can get to the *artium* and still be a good person**… and still be able to keep your human and sensitive feelings. It is not necessary to let it come at the expense of each other (pp. 57-58).

The clash between these two monist views produced one of the greatest conflicts in the Assembly. My colleague Eugene Matusov commented, "Of course, since monism does not know true diversity (i.e., outside of the preset unity), it cannot tolerate it [the diversity] – that is why, in my view, the personal-ideological fights (cf. Bakhtin's notion of "person-idea," 1999) were unavoidable there" (cf. Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b).

[16] See more about the pluralist worldviews in the next section.

Radical Pluralism

As mentioned above, in contrast to the monists, students who expressed *radical pluralist views* in the school argued for the legitimacy of the diversity of students' goals, purposes, values, and interests, even when conflicting with each other. For Berlin, the idea of radical pluralism entails more than just an irreconcilable and often contradictory plurality of values, goals, purposes, and interests. Radical pluralism is about the acknowledgment, acceptance, appreciation, and legitimation of the existence of often conflicting and contradictory ideas and values – impossible to unite, to transcend, or resolve – as inevitable.

> … the ideals of one society and culture clash with those of another, and at times come into conflict within the same society and, often enough, within the moral experience of a single individual; that such conflicts cannot always, even in principle, be wholly resolved (Berlin, 1978).

For Berlin, "there is a diversity of values and ends in our moral world and […], there can be conflicts among these values. The values and ends that we pursue in our lives and that we, within our particular moral frameworks, consider as precious or ultimate, cannot always be combined into one harmonious whole" (Aarsbergen-Ligtvoet, 2006, p. 11).

A radical pluralist worldview has substantial implications for education, especially for democratic education. Like Berlin, the radical pluralists among the EGO students supported recognition of the students' diverse and inevitably conflicting ideas, desires, and goals, which should be appreciated, and supported in one way or another. Their recognition and support of diversity ranged from "tolerating" the Deviants to rejecting any coercion that would force students to go to classes, to actively supporting the students in their own educational journeys, acknowledging and encouraging their diverse, even conflicting purposes, interests, and needs. For instance,

> Roar (Tom person-idea): …Some others may argue, "let's cast off the deviants" … But I think we are a school of 150 individualists [unique personalities]. We cannot expect everyone to have the same attitude [towards the school] … […] So, I would like us to, together… We start with ourselves… We start embracing people who have a slightly different attitude to this school - we bring them *in* instead of casting them *off*. This [casting them off] would cause great dissatisfaction, I think (p. 32).

Tom, Erling, and Fin advocated for the recognition of the students' personal educational rights to explore their own motivations and responsibilities and to critically examine and "try to find one's own [authorial] opinions in all matters…" (Tom, p. 37). At one point, Tom came to a profound insight that others should be recognized and respected in principle, no matter how different, unknown and unknowable they may be. "[W]*e cannot know how someone really thinks*. We have to put ourselves in the situation that here is an entirely different human being… A very special human being… and not the one like myself, indeed – who cannot be judged based on the same moments [of my life] … and then just discarded and shitted on, and such… That's basically it (pp. 48-49).

Inge, the most radical pluralist in the school, in my view, argued that the apparent diversity of the students' educational values, desires, visions, and goals should not just be tolerated and accepted but, most importantly, that the school should actively support the students' critical examinations and reflections of their interests and desires, no matter how diverse and conflicting their desires and ideas might be.

> Inge: We have been talking for a long time about whether one should be allowed or not to do what they want. But then, something I wonder is this: How is it that, really, **so many people want**

> **different things here at school? I think there are many people who do completely different things and conflicting things too.** And this may partly come from the fact that there are many who… most… Most of us **don't have a big goal ahead of us**. We are not visionary enough, I think. And here **I think that Øivind's proposal about… [writing a] new [mock] application [for this school] or something like that, could be… - [an opportunity] that we can ask ourselves: What is it we want?** [But] this, what Øivind came up with, was later misunderstood. For many, this became the case for not tolerating the deviants. [In a paraphrasing tone] "This should not be a youth psychiatrist clinic." [But] I think, you… - That's just it! **At this school here, we should be able to tolerate all people, from the most hopeless neurotics to the most hopeless fighters for freedom and love, Maoists, and such** (Some talk and turmoil) (p. 36, bold mine).

In her speech, Inge suggested that the school should actively create opportunities for the students to examine their personal views, positions, interests, and desires. Her view implied that, in fact, their school should be just the right place where the diversity and radical plurality of the students' interests and goals could be appreciated and supported. This is why Inge strongly criticized the Nannies' monistic attempts to dominate others and even coerce them to go to classes. For her, the essence of their schooling was based on radical pluralism that acknowledges and legitimizes diversity and internal incommensurability of values, interests, and desires.

Many other students were also opposed to coercion of their peers, seeing it as a lack of humanness, or a lack of appreciation, understanding of, and respect for each person, no matter how unique and different (Tom, Finn, Erling, Torleif, Elisabeth, etc.). However, many of these pluralists still sought to find an ultimate "higher" unifying goal of education. Their non-radical pluralism might be characterized as "pluralism with a monist horizon."

Pluralism with a monist horizon

Social Justice as "pluralism with monist horizon"

Some students, like Tom, Finn, Elisabeth, and some others, were rather ambivalent in their pluralist views, trying to find some overarching, final unitary purpose of education. For instance, for Tom and Erling, one of the highest educational values, if not the highest one, lies in the intrinsic motivation for personal development, i.e., in educational ownership. What Tom, Finn, Elisabeth, Erling, and some others are suggesting is that students must have the right to educational freedom and exercise their educational activism. They recognize that this right of personal educational freedom – Berlin's "negative freedom" – legitimizes diversity of educational goals and values, i.e., that it means legitimization of educational pluralism. However, they still profess the belief that such educational freedom should also ultimately be in the service of becoming a valuable community member who helps improve the world – the final unity of all human values. For instance, Tom claims,

> Tom: … in that very moment [when you expel the Deviants, you imply] that this school is not for the students to become responsible community citizens who are aiming for… not to study for the graduation exam, but [for] the knowledge to do something in the community they live in. To try to change their society, to become socially conscious, to have the freedom and free will and to be radical. It certainly is not some [comfy] sleeping pillow, indeed, but one of the hardest [things to do]. That is exactly what one should try to find, one's own opinions in all matters. To work with the society and oneself, it's as tough as nails. Nothing is as easy as being conservative and just hanging under some authority. Great. […] But *the moment the school does not manage to convey that [other] sense of responsibility, the sense of that*

> *you are a world citizen, and a sense of having a will to try to fix [the world], then [the school] is unsuccessful*. (pp. 37-38, italics mine).

It seems that Tom's pluralism has a monist horizon of Social Justice – that, their school should work on making sure that the students acquire values of social justice as the ultimate highest goal of education. It seems that not every kind of students' intrinsic motivation would be acceptable for Tom (or Finn, Erling, or Elisabeth). The educational legitimacy of students' intrinsic motivations is limited. Unless the students are motivated to "become a responsible world citizen with a yearning to fix the world," their intrinsic motivation might lie outside the institutional educational realm. In that sense, this view seems to still be founded on Berlin's "positive freedom." It is freedom FOR becoming a "world citizen with a will to try to fix the world." It would have been interesting to explore this "social justice" horizon of monism with Tom and the other students at the time of their meeting.

Harmony of values as "pluralism with monist horizon"

Another type of pluralism with a monist horizon seems to be a view of a possibility of unity, harmony, and complementarity within the diversity and the uniqueness of the students' interests, goals, purposes, and ways of being (held by Roar, Reidar, Tom, Finn). For instance, Tom argued for legitimizing the Deviants' rights to have different educational purposes besides and instead of studying for the graduation exam. Finn, on his part, tried to strike a balance between what seemed to emerge as two equally important educational purposes: personal development to become an independent, responsible member of society and academic work to acquire knowledge and skills. "I think… this […] school […] has obviously completely failed in the area of personal development and has only focused on an academic, knowledge-based approach to the case. But just like work is completely central to one's life later - the life for which one is being prepared in school - the academic work must be just as central in the EGO. … Equally important is responsibility. *Responsibility – an ability to take a stand - an ability to get involved – an ability to take a stand on the things that are going on in society.* This is [also] very important in the life that comes later - and therefore, the preparation for it must be just as important in EGO. So, I don't think you can … [prioritize one over the other, the academic knowledge-based approach over the development of responsibility approach]" (Finn, pp. 49-50).

Thus, for Tom, Finn, and a few others, a diversity of educational purposes and goals should be legitimate, but they still recognize just those purposes that are compatible and complementary to each other. In this sense, they potentially limit their pluralism of values, purposes, and goals – to exclude conflicts between the values, interests, goals, etc. One could argue that this view sets much, much broader limits than the extreme epistemological monism of one legitimate educational goal – to study for the graduation exam. They appreciated and supported the inevitable plurality of personal interests, purposes, and goals as the very essence of personal education as the examination of the self, the other, and the world sustaining the students' agency (cf. Matusov, Smith, Soslau, Marjanovic-Shane, & von Duyke, 2016). However, in my view, their pluralist position had a monist horizon because, ultimately, all diverse students' educational purposes, goals, and values had to be justified, compatible and harmonious with each other. In this sense, the liberties they were prepared to accept for the students were endowed with "positive freedom" – a tell-telling sign of monism. I would say that their appreciation of the plurality of individual paths, which ultimately still lead towards socially and culturally valuable purposes, was a form of monism.

Students' grappling with the contradictory implications of monism vs. pluralism was also reflected in their attempts to verbalize two opposing concepts of "responsibility" that lie in the core of the Norwegian word "ansvar" – accountability to someone or something vs. critical responsibility. I discuss these two conceptualizations and their implication for the EGO students understanding and legitimization of the students' ownership and authorship of education in their democratic school.

Students' approach to responsibility vs. accountability

As discussed above, in the section on the concepts of freedom, the students disagreed about embracing freedom as Berlin's "negative freedom" or embracing freedom in terms of Berlin's "positive freedom," which they called "freedom under responsibility" (see p. A227 above). However, throughout the Soul-Searching Assembly, two distinctly different conceptualizations of "responsibility" emerged, causing further tensions. "Responsibility" is a term that could be described as a "boundary object" (Star & Griesemer, 1989). Star & Griesemer define it as

> … an analytic concept of those […] objects which both inhabit several intersecting social worlds […] and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them. Boundary objects are objects which are both plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of the several parties employing them, yet robust enough to maintain a common identity across [the users]. […] They have different meanings in different social worlds but their structure is common enough to more than one world to make them recognizable, a means of translation. The creation and management of boundary objects is a key process in developing and maintaining coherence across intersecting social worlds (Star & Griesemer, 1989, p. 393).

"Responsibility" is such a term, as it can be used to refer to two very different concepts: critical ethical personal responsibility on the one hand vs. accountability in terms of fulfilling an obligation to an authority.[17]

Both conceptualizations emerged among the students in the meeting and were another point of disagreement among them.

Responsibility as accountability

> Åge: But listen here: One must begin to realize that **in a democracy, one must also have some rules that must be followed**. It must be possible, for example, to meet up for a class… […] **[The students who do not attend classes are completely indifferent to how the school works**. (p. 24-25, bold mine).
>
> Roar (Åge person-idea): … We are all **under obligation to the social milieu** here… (p. 32).

Although the EGO proclaimed voluntary class attendance, the most severe conflicts emerged around the meaning of "voluntary." It seemed that the founders (Nannies) assumed that "voluntary" attendance should be limited only to the choice of classes to attend. Complete non-attendance of classes was inadmissible. It would deviate from the "spirit" or "vision" of the school they had in mind and could not be completely a matter of the personal decision of each student. Rather, the personal decision of the students needed to be constrained in some way in order to "keep the vision." They formulated this constraint as "responsibility." In other words, they imagined "responsibility" as the students' *accountability* to fulfill various obligations to the authority or authorities interwoven in their vision of education from the very start. It seems that they envisioned education as a preplanned practice with clearly defined goals – a *poïesis* in Aristotelian terms (Aristotle, 2000).[18] Such a practice would have the power of supreme authority over the students (and teachers), defining their roles and obligations. The authority of such a preplanned practice

[17] Even in English, "responsibility" is often used interchangeably for both, but in Norwegian, there seems to exist only one term: "*ansvar,*" and its meaning must be disambiguated in context.

[18] According to Aristotle, *poïesis* is "an activity where its goal, value, form, and the definition of what constitutes its quality preexist the activity itself" (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Gradovski, 2019, p. 253). Participants in a poïetic type of activity act within preset roles, subordinating their subjectivities to particular predetermined forms of participation geared to pursuing given goals, values, rules, and norms.

would institute a set of evaluative norms to judge each participant's compliance with its rules and norms. In the case of the Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo, it seems that the particular vision developed by the founders was based on a modified conventional authoritarian approach to education. That hegemonic approach was supported by the Norwegian Department of Education, the educational researchers of the University of Oslo, The Teachers Union for High-School Teachers, and some other teachers' organizations (Øygarden & Svartdal, 1979).

In other words, the students have the freedom to choose HOW to participate in this poïetically determined educational practice, but not WHETHER to participate or not. The concept of the poïetic obligation to the practice itself led Åge (and other like-minded students) to see a big problem in the principle of open voluntary attendance that lowered the overall class attendance to less than 50%. At some point, Anne (a "Nanny") pleaded,

> Anne (Åge person-idea): I just hope that everyone will understand that we [the Nannies] do not mean… we don't mean… that everyone should do as **we say**. But we will be very happy to be allowed to exist, too… **we who want to work**. **But we can't work if the classes are empty. We need to get people to show up. We must get people to show up**: for bodybuilding at the gym, for psychology, philosophy, and in all classes. Everywhere! To make it a richer school environment than what you had where you went before (pp. 51-52).

Anne seemed to imply that students should find a way to fit themselves into the rich selection of the given classes rather than the education be left to the students to define.

In other words, in the students' poïetic approach to education, the term "responsibility" assumed the meaning of accountability to the authority of the established educational practice. When they discuss "freedom with/under responsibility," Åge, Roar, Anne, and others talk about having obligations to this particular poïetic vision – "the spirit" – of their school. They offer many arguments appealing to the students' accountability:

1. Being fair to and **keeping the trust of the wider society, "the taxpayers,"** who expect the school (i.e., the students) to keep its promise to deliver education as they know it. "… we are paid for by the public - … There is a consideration for taxpayers …, there are, after all, very many people who sacrifice part of their income - who work all day - and have to sacrifice part of it its income for us to be here today - and I mean that there is nowhere else in a society where anyone can sit down to do as little as we can - that is" (Tom, p. 27, bold mine).
2. Being accountable for each other's education. "… We are **responsible[accountable] for our fellow students**. We are responsible[accountable] for our own schooling…. if we all - we start with the individual - we start with [going to] the classes - we can manage the school - and we can manage to get it to become a good school" (Roar, pp. 26-27, bold mine).
3. Helping the school fulfill its mission to play a serious role in the educational experiment to improve the Norwegian schools, "… we are an **educational endeavor to try to change the current school system**, the current one high school - that's what the goal was, namely, and if it is to have any relevance at all, then one must think about: what is a school - what is the Norwegian school (Tom, p. 27, bold mine).
4. An obligation and a duty to avoid the failure of the school as part of Norwegian institutionalized education. "… This school is leading up to the graduation – […] - When [the deviants] go here – then the school may expect to have a failure rate of 50%. - Yes, one cannot tolerate that" (Åge, p. 29) and "… then we absolutely have to keep some record of what … is going on. We have to keep some **production control** - like any other institution - and so we have to run with subject tests instead - **so instead of attendance duty, then it becomes a duty to learn** (Arne, a teacher, p.

33, bold mine).

5. An obligation to show solidarity in supporting the vision of the school. "It doesn't help to twirl around here at school and tolerate each other back and forth... It helps absolutely nothing – […] - you have to show solidarity and responsibility (Sverre, pp. 35-36).

Having such obligations to the practice itself limits and reduces the students' ownership and authorship of education. When being obliged to the practice (and its different external owners), the student's educational authorship is reduced to technological, to HOW to participate in the predesigned, preplanned given practice, rather than to be able to create and construct one's own education. In other words, the students' educational authorship cannot be fully based on their own values, interests, and desires. As Torleif said, the students must constantly be "… playing someone else, […] constantly having to be [in a rat race] on a treadmill" (Torleif, p. 58-59).

Responsibility as a critical dialogic ethical stance

Students who focused on humanness, self-guided personal development, and the concept of "negative freedom" as the highest guiding values of education and in their school were developing a very different conceptualization of responsibility. Responsibility for them was something that must be viewed as personal development that requires freedom for critically evaluating one's own positions and deeds in the relationship to society and the self. For instance, Tom probably expresses this view when he argues that,

> Tom: … this school is […] for the students to become responsible community citizens […] not to study for the graduation exam, but […] *to have the freedom and free will and to be radical*. […] *That is exactly what one should try to find, one's own opinions in all matters.* To work with society and oneself, it's as tough as nails. Nothing is as easy as being conservative and just hanging under some authority (Tom, p. 38).

Tom's view was underscored by Erling, who emphatically argued for legitimizing the emergence of the students' own views as part of their self-defined responsibility in education, "I believe that, if one is to be educated for responsibility **-** then *one must be given this responsibility! – This must not be violated. One has to have this responsibility for oneself* (Erling, p. 38, italics mine).

In their approach, responsibility is conceptualized as part of the student's personal ethical development: as a transcendence that could take place when one is free to act according to one's own conscience in a critical dialogue with oneself and society. According to Bakhtin, responsibility is an integral part of one's ideological becoming, which "refers to how we develop our way of viewing the world, our system of ideas, what Bakhtin calls an ideological self" (Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 5). When Tom says that one should try to find "one's own opinions in all matters," instead of "just hanging under some authority" (p. 37-38), he seems to echo Bakhtin's view that "there is no alibi in being" (Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 1993, p. 40). In other words, according to Bakhtin, ontological circumstances are not what defines people. "What people actively do with and in their ontological circumstances is defined by their responsibility" (Matusov, 2009, p. 228).

When Finn says, "*Responsibility – [is an] ability to take a stand – an ability to get involved – an ability to take a stand on the things that are going on in the society,"* he seems to focus on the responsibility defined as developing a critical ethical approach to oneself and the world, answering to challenging questions and taking into account alternative positions. All of that could lead to making critical judgments and decisions guided by internally persuasive discourse (Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 1991; Matusov & von Duyke, 2010).

Tom and the like-minded students seemed to view educational practice, not as *poïesis*, a fully predefined practice with norms and rules "written in stone," an authority to which the students' have to subject themselves. On the contrary, they seemed to see the educational practice as an evolving and transcending way of being and acting, i.e., an Aristotelian *praxis*.[19] For Tom, Finn, Erling, Inge, and others, a student's critical ethical responsibility cannot be predefined, nor can it be imposed by any authority. Students' personal responsibility can only be and should only be promoted, supported, and nurtured. There the very vision of educational practice should be built upon the notion of responsibility as a personal stance reached through critical dialogues, where each person can become an author of their own ethical position in the events of the moment (Inge).

I wonder whether the tension between the two different conceptualizations of responsibility – responsibility as accountability to an authority vs. personal (critical) responsibility, was what Torleif had in mind when he pointed out the incongruity between Åge's expectation to subordinate oneself to the vision of EGO as approved by the Department of Education, and the legitimacy (for Torleif, "Love") of the idea of being oneself, having one's own independent values and principles.

> Torleif: … If we agree that this school here should be a school that will make human beings… If so, this … does not fit with what the Press[20] and the Department of Education are expecting from us. What do we do then? If we all agree [with the Department of Education's expectations?] … - […] we get to pull, jerk and tug ourselves, tug - tug - and tug, and eventually, we'll become a regular [conventional] high school. Or we oppose the Department of Education. […] *That is the dilemma! Should we hold on to love as long as we can until the school is closed, or should we collude with the Department and keep it open?* I think that is very important. I don't want to compromise with myself - I'd rather have the school shut down than have it be a regular high school. It is very important (Torleif, p. 60, italics mine).

It seems that many more students (and not only among the Nannies) approached the concept of responsibility as accountability than solely as a personal critical responsibility. The question is why that was the case in a school that was run by the students. An answer may lie in the fact that their school's sovereignty from the Norwegian Department of Education was problematic. At best, it was limited, and at worst, they had no sovereignty. Not having full sovereignty might have made the founding students (and some others) highly anxious, limiting their desire to leap into unknown and non-experienced explorations in developing a liberal democratic approach to education – where they could afford to have "negative freedom" for each student and each teacher. These fears were expressed by teacher Olaf, who, at one point, openly wonders "to what extent EGO is a legislative institution" because it is "good to know where we stand right there […] it's absolutely crucial for my attitude to just about everything we talk about." Olaf further wonders … "Do we have the authority to do that? Or is … [what we can do] limited to […] loosening up some of the well-worn tracks in the old school, - or have it been extended to a larger area. It is absolutely crucial for what I want to stand and vote for in all these things here" (Olaf, p. 43).

Concluding discussion - Education, Freedom, Democracy, Responsibility, and Dialogue

I started the overall project of this special issue to answer a question of the relationships between democracy and dialogue in education. What underlying ideas of democratic education foster and promote

[19] For Aristotle, *praxis* is "such an activity where its goal, value, form, and the definition of what constitutes its quality emerge in the activity itself" (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Gradovski, 2019, pp. 255-256).

[20] The Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo had a lot of media coverage in Norway at the time of its opening.

dialogism, and what kind of dialogism in education? Which perspectives on democracy in education may potentially limit dialogism and promote monologism in education?

Of course, the students did not discuss "dialogism" as a topic per se in their meeting, but their explicit positions on freedom, democracy, education, and responsibility can be taken as implicit indicators of their understanding of dialogue in education and the nature of education as a practice.

According to Bakhtin, genuine dialogue takes place among "*a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*, [who] combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (M. M. Bakhtin, 1999, p. 6, italics in the original). Such a definition of dialogue has several implications for education in general and specifically for democracy in education. These implications concern the understanding of freedom, monism/pluralism, and the understanding of the nature of responsibility/accountability. In a word, genuine dialogue needs an educational approach based on legitimate personal "negative freedom," pluralism, and responsibility as a personal critical and authorial relationship to self and others.

However, disagreements in the Soul-Searching Assembly reveal that even in a school in which the students have legitimate power of decision about most of the issues of their schooling, and even in one of the potentially quintessentially dialogic meetings of "the plurality of consciousnesses with equal rights," education was not perceived by all as a dialogic meaning-making process.

One could argue that Åge's monist person-idea envisions education not as a practice of personal meaning-making but as a hierarchical process of transmission of cultural, historical, and scientific truths, knowledge, and skills deemed necessary for becoming a certified socially accepted "adult" through passing the national graduation exam (*artium*). It also might be that Åge's position comes from his progressivist views, i.e., that it is important to base education on the student's meaning-making, yet, meaning-making that is heavily bounded by socialization into and the acquisition of the given culture.[21] From that point of view, it seems that Åge's person-idea would oppose education based on genuine dialogue understood as an encounter of the consciousnesses with equal rights engaged in internally persuasive discourse. Yet, at the same time, Åge was one of the founders of the democratically governed school, where the students have equal rights of input in making decisions about their education. For Åge, however, the democratic process of decision-making would place a limit on students' educational interests, desires, purposes, and the full legitimacy of personal meaning-making as a basis of education. It would force uniform rules of education on all, rules that would enforce uniform purposes, goals, and predefined, given truths on all students. In other words, Åge's monism would grant the students only "positive freedom" (Berlin, 2006) to study predominantly what the school had decided (albeit through a democratic process) to comprise good education. In that sense, Åge's educational democracy could be described as illiberal democratic education. In this kind of democracy, the student's personal educational rights would be significantly limited. In a certain way, the students' democratic school governance could be seen as acting in a similar way as any other external educational authority, where students cease to be "consciousnesses with equal rights" participating in an internally persuasive dialogue. Dialogue as a genuine meaning-making practice would be severely limited, distorted, and reduced to serving approved predefined purposes, preset-goals, and a hierarchical educational distribution of power, placed to ensure the transmission of knowledge, truths, and skills.

In my view, this is what Torleif's person-idea was deeply rebelling against, trying to precisely annihilate this hierarchical power distribution and, instead, make place for students' "negative freedom." Yet, Torleif's solution, his Love-based monism, would also limit, if not completely omit, dialogue from

[21] I am grateful to Eugene Matusov for this insight.

education. An educational practice that is rooted in unconditional Love and Acceptance, the way Torleif attempted to formulate it, also eliminates meaningful dialogic examination of students' diverse interests, opinions, positions, desires, purposes, and truths as a significant aspect of education. It empties education of any content. As Inge pointed out to Torleif, "… it is very difficult to show love without somewhat thoughtful mind work. We simply can't sit day-in and day-out and just be loving and kind" (p. 60).

Democratic education, however, can lend itself to supporting and promoting genuine dialogue as a foundation of education if and when it is based on a pluralist outlook, the legitimacy of the students' rights of "negative freedom," and conceptualizing of responsibility in terms of a personal, ethical, and dialogic process of "taking a stand." These views were espoused by Inge's person-idea, and to a large extent, although not completely by Tom's person-idea. Their view of democracy could be called liberal democracy in education. The school as a democratically governed entity would not only be based on the concept of the student's rights of "negative educational freedom" but would actively support students in developing and reflecting on their own educational purposes, goals, and values and defining their own educational responsibilities in a critical dialogue. Such school democracy would ostensibly create an educational ecology where critical dialogue would be welcome as an important meaning-making process of education.

There is, however, one more consideration to be made about dialogue in democratic education: dialogue has at least two different purposes in democratically run schools. On the one hand, dialogue is an integral part of democratic deliberations in making decisions in the process of governance. On the other hand, dialogue serves another purpose in joint thinking through academic topics: deliberating truths and values, constructing positions and opinions, and exploring the world, others, and the self. In these two roles, dialogue has different purposes and aims that may be even contradictory to each other. As a part of democratic governance, dialogue must end in a decision that will have some sort of implication for all the members of the community. In this sense, dialogue is instrumental to some other purpose, defined by democratic governance and aims at agreement, or at least persuasion of the majority in one point of view. While in educational dialogue, no common decision is necessary, and dialogue as such is not an instrument but a medium for internally persuasive discourse to be born. In my view, it is possible to envision Åge's monist position valuing instrumental dialogue as being important not only to make school governing decisions but also for making decisions about good education for all, where once decisions are made about educational matters (curriculum, instruction, evaluation, participation, etc.), they need to be adhered by all because "This is a student *democracy* and not student *anarchy*..." (Åge's person idea).

Critical dialogue and democratic education

> … the aim of democratic politics is to transform antagonism [i.e., involving hostile adversaries who try to annihilate each other] into agonism [i.e., involving friendly adversaries, whose right of the existence is recognized by each side, if not even appreciated] … Modern democracy's specificity lies in the recognition and legitimation of conflict and the refusal to suppress it by imposing an authoritarian order. (Mouffe, 2000, p. 103).

The students could not completely resolve their conceptual and even paradigmatic disagreements in this Soul-Searching Assembly meeting. They finally adjourned it after four-and-half hours, without making any decisions. They could not fully resolve their disagreements, either in this meeting or later, throughout the years of the school's existence (Jørgensen, 1971; Melheim, 2019). Their differences were not reconcilable. There is no "middle point" between the paradigmatically distant points of view they held. Seeing their practice from one paradigm could not "incorporate" parts of the other paradigm. Each paradigmatic view captures the totality of all the relationships, giving each particular "element" a different

meaning. A good example is the paradigmatically different meaning of "responsibility," either as a personal, human responsibility to take a stand for one's beliefs and deeds vs. accountability, to fulfill an obligation to someone or some predefined practice.

However, in my view, it was in the Soul-Searching Assembly that the students were able to transform their *antagonisms* into *agonisms* – where in turn, their fights and clashes could be transformed into tense but productive dialogues among people willing to take each other seriously. Traditionally, "[e]ither an agreement has to be reached (cf. the Enlightenment project) or the dissensus will deteriorate into antagonism of 'us versus them,' where a weaker dissenting party is eliminated or expelled" (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015, pp. 211-212). However, the aim of democracy, according to Mouffe, is to "'limit and contest' (Mouffe, 2000, p. 22) violence and antagonism by accepting the unavoidability and desirability of power, authority, and politics" (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015, p. 212) in a critical dialogic reflection. This democratic deliberation can be described as dialogue among "friendly enemies" or "agonistic dialogue" where one can appreciate a disagreeable other as "a potential source for one's own unknown self-limitation of truths and values" (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015, p. 212). In my view, Tom's person-idea brought up this point in the meeting: the realization that disagreement is not merely unavoidable but that it could be appreciated as a productive source of unpredictable truths that can only come to life on the boundaries of consciousnesses that are opaque to each other (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015).

I think that this realization made the Soul-Searching assembly the *making-point* of the Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo, which enabled the school to survive and last for almost four decades.[22] What made their school internally possible, what made it survive and endure in a rather hostile environment of Norwegian conventional educational policies, was the students' (and their teachers') sense of respect for and appreciation of each other's diverse viewpoints. They started developing a culture of respecting others' disagreeable positions in this very Assembly. It was the experience of the Soul-Searching Assembly that created an educational culture where the ideological tensions could actually become a source of constant reexaminations of their ultimate educational desires and personal interests, reexaminations of the nature of the society and possibilities of freedom (Hem & Remlov, 1969). It was also possible because of their shared commitment to the idea of keeping the principle of voluntary attendance, i.e., the students' personal right to join or to leave any educational activity – which is an ultimate condition for "negative freedom."

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[22] The EGO was finally closed by the Norwegian School Authorities in 2004, based on many societal and bureaucratic changes and pressures, and against the will and desires of its students and staff (Melheim, 2019).

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