

Scandinavian experiments in democratic education



Ana Marjanovic-Shane
Independent Scholar, USA



Tina Kullenberg
Kristianstad University, Sweden



Mikhail Gradovski
University of Stavanger, Norway

Abstract

This article is the first of four articles exploring democratic schools co-founded by teenage students in Norway and Sweden. Our larger project explores the relationship between democracy in education and educational dialogism. Both democracy in education and educational dialogism are partially rooted in the idea that education should be a personal meaning-making practice where the participants can create and organize their lives in ways that make sense to them and explore their interests, values, and desires. We describe the processes of founding two schools – one in Oslo, Norway, and the other in Gothenburg, Sweden – in which students practiced the right to democratic governance. We describe the process of the founding of these schools against the background of the students' movements in the late 1960s and the 1970s and the social and political conditions in Norway and Sweden at that time. We explore the students' perspectives on the possibility, desirability, and legitimacy of the students' voices in ethical-ontological dialogues in which the participants jointly examine their relationships with the world, with others, and with themselves. Further, we explore the forms of democratic school governance that Norwegian and Swedish students created and identified tensions that appeared between the legitimacy of individual students' rights to ownership of their learning, teachers' ownership of teaching, and the conventional normative educational policies in Norway and Sweden.

Ana Marjanovic-Shane is an Independent Scholar interested in ethical ontological dialogism and meaning-making in education, democratic education, students' academic freedoms, and students' critical and creative authorship in self-education. Her articles in English and Serbian were published in various journals (e.g., *Mind, Culture, Activity Journal, Learning, Culture and Social Interaction, Dialogic Pedagogy Journal*) and as book chapters in books on play and education. Two recent publications include: Shugurova, O., Matusov, E., & Marjanovic-Shane, A. (2022). The University of Students: A place for joint self-education. *Dialogic Pedagogy: An International Online Journal*, 10, E1-E42; Marjanovic-Shane, A., Meacham, S., Choi, H. J., Lopez, S., & Matusov, E. (2019). Idea-dying in critical ontological pedagogical dialogue. *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.

Tina Kullenberg holds a Doctor of Philosophy in Education, currently working at Kristianstad University (Sweden) as a lecturer in teacher education programs and postgraduate courses in Educational Science. Her research focuses on pedagogical communication, applying dialogic and sociocultural perspectives on teaching and learning. Lately, she has been especially engaged in Bakhtin-inspired approaches to education. She also has a special interest in addressing democratic issues with a relational lens, for example, exploring the intricate dynamics of power-relations in educational dialogues between teachers and students or peers, premises for student agency, and other institutionally embedded dilemmas or opportunities in schooling. Moreover, she has a background in the area of music education, in theory, and practice.

Dr. Mikhail Gradovski is born in Minsk, Belarus. After graduating from the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim as Doctor Rerum Politicarum in 2008 with a thesis devoted to the Norwegian Dialogue Pedagogy, Gradovski has participated in both national and international research projects on doctoral supervision, professional supervision, use of dialogue in education, and mental skill development. Currently, he is a main coordinator of an international EU Horizon2020 project that focuses on the development of Ph.D. candidates' skills. He has supervised both postgraduate, graduate, and undergraduate students. As a teaching practitioner, he is using a dialogical approach based on an understanding of both teacher and learner as partners with equal rights to make judgments on what is relevant, important, and true.



Prologue

In the spring of 1966, three high school “dropouts,” Jon Lund Hansen (age 16), Ingrid Kviberg (15), and Knut Boe Kielland (16)¹, wrote a leaflet to all high schools, the University of Oslo, and some prominent intellectuals of the time. They issued a call to the students, teachers, and educators to create a new gymnasium in Oslo. The leaflet started with the following words:

Many students feel that the authorities are pressuring them into despair. They feel that the old, worn-out (waisted?) 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, 1977, p. 12).²

They strongly condemned the very foundations of Norwegian education, its strict authoritarian philosophy and practice, in which the students are subordinated and cannot develop as people with full, strong, and healthy subjectivities and agency. They outlined a vision of a school they hoped to make:

Concretely that means that we want to work on establishing a new gymnasium in Oslo as soon as possible. In that [high] school, the teachers and the students would have equal rights. Together, they will determine the necessary rules and act as judges when these rules are broken. In that school, there will be no grades and no traditional homework. Attendance will be as much as possible voluntary, and the students will not have to bring excuse notes for missed classes. The teachers and the students will together establish the

¹ These are the actual students' names published in several books about the beginnings of the Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo (EGO) (Hem & Remlov, 1969; Jørgensen, 1971). Later in the text, synonyms are used for all the students.

² This is Ana's translation to English from the Serbo-Croatian translation of the original Norwegian book. The book “Fra Skoleoprør til Opprørsskole [From a school rebellion to a rebel school]” by Jørgensen (1971), was translated into eight languages in the 1970s, but not into English. Section III of the book, “The People,” was translated into English and is being published in this Special Issue of *Dialogic Pedagogy Journal*. In this article, many of the quotations from this book are my translations from the Serbo-Croatian edition (Jørgensen, 1977). However, I, Ana, have also used the original book in Norwegian with the help of Google Translate and, in some places relied on it to make the quoted paragraphs clearer and potentially more precise.

curriculum. Freedom will be limited only by the student's desire to finish school through a formal graduation exam and non-traditional subjects the teachers feel competent to teach. They will together create and plan the syllabi. We hope there will be more room for individuality, development, tolerance, and working constructively in such a school (original leaflet quoted in Jørgensen, 1977, p. 13, italics in the original)³.

Introduction

Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, three Scandinavian countries, experienced a strong movement of high-school students demanding academic freedoms in the 1960s. The students wanted to democratically run their schools, participate in shaping their education, and have equal rights in making educational decisions about their schooling together with their teachers and other educational authorities.

Like in many other Western countries, these student movements were a part of the broader New Radicalism movement that Scandinavian countries experienced in the 1960s. It was a time when large groups of university and high school students in the USA and Western Europe engaged in protests against the social and political establishment, the existing social, racial, and gender injustices, and the wars (especially the American war in Vietnam). The youth demanded equal rights and equal powers over their destiny, not only for themselves, but first and foremost for all disempowered groups: the poor, the ethnic and racial minorities, the women, sexual minorities, etc. (Anderson, 2008). In Scandinavia, the New Radicalism included a movement for the emancipation of youth (the teens and young twenty-year-olds) who demanded equal rights with adults in decision-making about their own lives and education. One of the active participants in the movement, Norwegian educationalist and peace activist Birgit Brock-Utne (1986), writes that those who criticized the traditional, established pedagogy were conceived under the same magnificent rainbow that stood over the same stormy sea; they were the children of the same protest and came out of the fight against the Vietnam War and the authorities; they fought against the same paternalism in domestic relationships and the unequal societal place of the youth.

The organized movements of the high school students seeking democratic participation in school governance in Norway, Sweden, and Denmark, were in some ways, and to some degree successful.⁴ They were able to establish a few democratically run high schools. The first school established in 1967 was the Experimental Gymnasium in Oslo⁵ (henceforth: EGO). Similar schools were soon opened in Bærum, Norway; Gothenburg, Sweden; and Copenhagen, Denmark. The EGO existed for 27 years, closing in 2004.

In this article, we focus only on the early years of two of these schools: The Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo, Norway (EGO) and the Experimental Gymnasium of Gothenburg, Sweden (EGG). Our study of these educational uprisings is based on historical data (see below), recent memories of former students, teachers, and researchers (in published collections of memories and oral interviews), and a few scholarly publications (books and articles). In addition, for more historical description, parts of the original book "From a school rebellion to a rebel school" by Mosse Jørgensen have been translated and published in this special issue (Jørgensen, 2023).

I (Ana Marjanovic-Shane, the first author) learned about the Experimental Gymnasium in Oslo long ago, in the 1970s, when I still lived in Yugoslavia. The school was described in a book by Mosse Jørgensen (1971), its' first "principle."⁶ The book was published in translation to Serbo-Croatian in 1977. It immediately

³ See the full translation of the leaflet in the appendix to the "Conscience Assembly – a Vignette" (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023c).

⁴ We discuss in our conclusion in what ways creation and existence of these schools could be seen as a success (success of what, and success for whom).

⁵ "Forsøkgymnasiet" – a Norwegian name, that can be translated as Experimental Gymnasium

⁶ The title "principle" was used by the Norwegian Department of Education. Internally Mosse was a part of the democratic government of the school and known as the "school leader."

became a source of considerable influence on some Yugoslavian educational practitioners and researchers.⁷ My curiosity about the Experimental Gymnasium in Oslo and its sister school in Sweden was recently renewed as part of my focus on the relationship between dialogic pedagogy and democratic education.

The second author, Tina Kullenberg, contributes to the investigation of an extensive collection of archival materials and official reports from the Experimental Gymnasium in Gothenburg (EGG), Sweden, in the Gothenburg Archives. These materials included a variety of surveys and other documents reporting on the students' and the other school participants' perspectives on various challenges and tensions they faced in their democratic school practice. Tina has also conducted interviews with three of the former EGG students whose voices are included in this study. We included Tina's analyses of the Swedish schools in the hope that they will help us sharpen our examinations through comparison and contrast of the two schools. In some cases, the difference in the perspectives between the Norwegian and the Swedish students helped us to better understand them. But without a more extensive study of the archival materials left by both schools, we cannot be sure that these comparisons helped us to the full extent.

Mikhail Gradovski, the third author, has been researching Norwegian Dialogic Pedagogy, its context, and its development since 2000 (Gradovski, 2008). In this article, based on the historical approach, he particularly contributes to the development of the methodology behind this study and the description and discussion of the social and political contexts behind the start and development of EGO and EGG.

The problem

Like the three dropout high school students whose leaflet sparked the creation of democratic schools, we see alienation in conventional institutionalized education as one of, if not THE gravest student problem of contemporary authoritarian education. In that sense, we are not the first nor the only educators who searched for changes in educational practice that could promote students' subjectivity, agency, and dignity. In fact, the whole progressivist educational movement in the education (Bruner, 1990; Dewey, 1902; Kant, 1784; Rousseau, 1979) has been motivated by the realization of the same educational problem: the students feel oppressed, demotivated, disinterested, disgusted, and depressed by the demands of the educational authorities, their teachers, the whole educational system. The progressivist movement sought solutions based on "students' *intrinsic* motivation, *interest* in the subject matter we taught, and the *deep understanding* through our students' *construction of knowledge* guided by the teacher" and a desire to turn the whole students' life into an educational experience, the so-called "'learnification' of the students' life – totalized transformation – totalized reduction – of the students' everyday experiences into learning (cf. Biesta, 2013; Biesta, 2017)" (Matusov, 2021b).

However, the progressivist solution was only to soften the oppressive and alienating nature of education by designing ways to make the non-negotiable, mandatory practice of education less oppressive and more engaging. We claim that alienation in education is a symptom of a much deeper human problem – a problem of the human right of freedom of consciousness, a right to be a legitimate author of one's own views of the world, the others, and the self.

⁷ Interestingly, although the book described a movement of the high school students, it had the strongest impact on preschool education scholars and practitioners. This pedagogical area was not closely politically regulated by the Yugoslav state, leaving more freedom to preschool educators, practitioners, and scholars to envision and practically try out diverse more open, child-centered educational approaches. In the views of several Yugoslav preschool educationalists, open education involving democratic decision-making could promote students' agency (Beljanski-Ristić, 1983, 1999; Marjanović, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c; Pešić, 1989, 1998, 2002, 2008). Several alternative preschool centers were opened in Belgrade, Yugoslavia⁷, at the end of the 1970s and throughout the 1980s. I (Ana, the first author) was involved in these movements in the early 1980s.

Namely, we claim that education is a complex personal meaning-making praxis. When personal meaning-making practice is suppressed, thwarted, or even forbidden, a person experiences alienation – a loss of sense, purpose, meaning, and motivation – a veritable intellectual death. One of the most important aspects of human personal meaning-making is that it takes place in continual, never-ending dialogues with others and the self. Inspired by the Bakhtinian philosophy of dialogism, we claim that the most important characteristic of specifically human meaning-making is that each participant can test their own ideas, views, values, and desires against multiple alternative views, ideas, opinions, values, and desires of other people. We further claim that such dialogue of freely testing one’s own and others’ ideas, opinions, values, and desires can only be fully realized when the participants relate to each other as “*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*” (Bakhtin, 1999, pp. 6, italics are in the original). We call this an “ethical-ontological dialogue” since the participants treat each other as people with dignity who take each other’s opinions seriously. In ethical-ontological dialogue, participants acknowledge each other’s diverse ideas, interests, positions, values, and desires as legitimate alternative positions worth examination without aiming to agree unconditionally, but with an intention to jointly think through a multitude of alternatives and where, in such a discourse, each participant aims to arrive at, what to them are self-conclusive, i.e., self-persuasive truths, values, and positions. In Bakhtin’s words, such dialogue can become an internally persuasive discourse (IPD) (Bakhtin, 1999; Matusov & von Duyke, 2010). According to Matusov, “The Bakhtinian dialogue is inherently deconstructive, positioning the participants of the dialogue as spoilsports – of each other’s dear and familiar truths, ideological positions, beliefs and desires” (Matusov, 2021a). Therefore, Bakhtinian dialogism points to the necessity of the students’ educational freedom as an integral condition for education to be not merely a meaningful, purposeful, and motivated practice but also a reflective practice of self-examination and self-evaluation leading to each participant taking responsibility for one’s own *ideological becoming* (Bakhtin, 1999). In other words, “to be authentic, [education] must be decided by the student, not by the teacher, by the school, or by the state. Learning becomes educational only when it is appreciated by the learner” (Matusov, 2021c, p. E3).

The problem is that in most public and private schooling, education has been established and organized as a strictly hierarchical, authoritarian (or at best authoritative) practice, in which the teachers are tasked to transmit predefined, normativized, and mostly uniform ready-made truths. At the same time, students are expected to accept and memorize these already known truths – without questioning, deconstructing, or attempting to make personal sense of the given curriculum. Such practice is, at its core, dogmatic. The students have little or no freedom nor the right to examine and question the mandated curriculum, instruction, and evaluations that are foisted on them. Furthermore, in the conventional and progressive educational approaches, dialogue, if it exists, is mostly seen as an instrumental educational technique (method) known to increase student’s engagement and interest, often leading to better outcomes in the form of the quantity and perhaps the duration of the retained curricular information (cf. Lefstein & Snell, 2013; Nystrand, Gamoran, Kachur, & Prendergast, 1997; Skidmore, 2000).

A rare exception to the authoritarian and authoritative nature of contemporary schooling can be found in democratic schools (in the wide sense of the word), in which the students, by default, participate in making almost all decisions (Greenberg, 1991; Matusov, 2020b, 2020d; Neill, 1960; Rietmulder, 2019). For A. S. Neill, the founder of the first democratic school in our times, Summerhill⁸, education is meant to promote and support students in fully developing their interests, opinions, values, and desires, which can only happen when they can be free, and they know and feel that they are free. Neill claimed that “At Summerhill, it is ... approval and the freedom to be true to oneself” (Neill, 1960, p. 40). Thus, it seems that democratic schools can create an educational environment that may promote genuine dialogues among

⁸ A.S. Neil founded Summerhill school in 1921 in Germany and soon moved it to England in 1923. See more about its history here: <http://www.summerhillschool.co.uk/history.php>.

the people with equal rights to their opinions. This is why it became important to us to explore the potential of democratic schools to promote and support Bakhtinian ethical-ontological dialogism, as well as the potential limitations and barriers that democratic schooling may create for that kind of educational dialogue.

Our conceptual approach to dialogue in education

Dialogic pedagogy is not a monolithic educational approach. It entails at least two major approaches: a) an instrumental approach, where dialogue *is a tool* or a method for better transmission of preset curricular goals; and b) a non-instrumental approach “where dialogue is viewed as the *[educational] medium*, in which and through which meaning-making and truth live” (Matusov, 2018, p. 274, italics ours). In contrast to the currently prevailing instrumental approach that sees dialogue as an instructional technique, the Bakhtinian concept of dialogue in education focuses on the students’ ontology (issues of their existence), subjectivity, and the relationships among the dialogic partners. In other words, it can be characterized as an *ethical-ontological dialogism* (Marjanovic-Shane, 2021; Matusov, 2021a). For Bakhtin, an important aspect of dialogues in Dostoevsky’s novels was their ethical and ontological character. “Dostoevsky neither knows, nor perceives, nor represents the ‘idea in itself’ in the Platonic sense, nor ‘ideal existence’ as phenomenologists understand it. For Dostoevsky there are no ideas, no thoughts, no positions which belong to no one, which exist ‘in themselves’ (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 31). On the contrary, people participate in dialogue with their whole beings, putting their beliefs, fate and reputation at stake” (Matusov, 2021b).

In our study of EGO and EGG, we focus on the ways their democratic and educational practices support and promote, or limit and hinder ethical-ontological dialogism and, with it, the student’s personal, educational, and ideological becoming. Thus, we particularly focus on the evidence of the students’ *voice in and authorship of* their educational and democratic practices.

For Bakhtin, *voice* is not merely about its physical properties, like “height, range, timbre, aesthetic category (lyric, dramatic, etc.). Voice is first and foremost about a person’s worldview and fate. A person enters into dialogue as an integral voice. He participates in it not only with his thoughts but with his fate and with his entire individuality” (Bakhtin, 1999, p. 293). *Voice* is about taking a personal stance in spoken or written dialogues. Hence, voice is a concept that embodies individual values, opinions, feelings, attitudes, and so on, based on their cultural existence in which they are intricately embedded in interrelated layers of speech genres, discourses, and social activities (Bakhtin, 1986; Linell, 2009). For Bakhtin, to be human is to have a voice – *to be a voice*. Furthermore, according to Nikulin, this means that “every voice that speaks is *meant to be heard*, and every voice that is heard is *meant to be responded to*, and thus every voice craves dialogue” (Nikulin, 2006, p. 39, italics ours). In that sense, although belonging to each unique person, voice is inherently a dialogic concept – as it only exists in dialogue.

Furthermore, Bakhtin claimed that a personal stance and the worldview it expresses exist in dialogue as a “person-idea.” 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” (Bakhtin, 1999, pp. 87-88). Moreover, a person-idea is a “fusion, [...] of personal life with worldview, of the most intimate experiences with the idea. Personal life becomes uniquely unselfish and principled, and lofty ideological thinking becomes passionate and intimately linked with personality (Bakhtin, 1999, pp. 78-79). A person-idea lives through their voice in dialogues with others.⁹

⁹ I (Ana) further rely on Bakhtin’s concept of “person-idea” in my dialogic analysis of the events that transpired in one of the critically essential assemblies in the EGO, published in this Special Issue (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023a).

Authorship refers to the student's voiced agency – an authorial agency (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2014) emerging in ethical-ontological dialogues (Bakhtin, 1999). The concepts of “authorial teaching” and “authorial learning” (Matusov, 2011, 2020a) lead us to envision the participating students and teachers as critical and creative authors of the educational events and educational paths. As authors, students develop authorial agency to purposefully and deliberately seek out ideas, values, and knowledge that transform both them and their social contexts, rather than exist as compliant and conforming individuals who focus on pleasing the teacher.

“Authorial agency” is not merely a competence or a tool for reaching strictly rational goals, but rather, the authorial agency is “the individual’s unique culture making activity on both larger, more recognizable, and smaller, less recognizable, scales.” (Matusov, von Duyke, & Kayumova, 2016, p. 18). Culture making implies unique, new, unpredictable, and unforeseeable contributions in dialogues with others. The idea of authorial agency implies socially recognized and positively valued personal transcendence of the culturally given. Thus, a fully owned, authorial, intrinsic education in which the student’s voice gains legitimate authority both for the student and for the others “demands an important educational right – the right of the student to define his/her own curriculum, instruction, and valuation (what to value in his/her education)” (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2019, p. 32).

Democracy and freedom in education

What does democracy, the governance of the “common people,”¹⁰ mean for education envisioned as meaning-making in critical and creative dialogues among the “common people?” Bakhtinian concept of the ethical-ontological dialogue implies that the people relate to each other as equals in terms of the powers and authority they have in their relationships. This seems to imply freedom to voice one’s own opinions and be taken seriously. Importantly, it implies a personal right to freely draw one’s own conclusions in such a dialogue, i.e., a right to freely arrive at personally constructed truths in an Internally Persuasive Discourse (IPD) (Bakhtin, 1999; Matusov & von Duyke, 2010). It is a right not to be coerced in any way, nor by anyone to accept others’ views and beliefs, but rather, a right to freely form one’s own views and positions. Ethical-ontological dialogism implies freedom in the sense of what Isaiah Berlin called “negative freedom” (Berlin, 2006, 2014). “Negative freedom” is a sphere of personal *freedom from imposition*, limited only by explicit and concrete prohibitions. For instance, “do not kill” is such a Biblical limitation. It is “negative” because it does not define nor describe what a person *is* allowed to do. It only describes the boundaries of personal freedom, leaving the person free to act in any undefined and unknown way, except regarding killing. Berlin defines “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, 2006, p. 34). For Berlin, as soon as freedom is defined in any way, it turns into an entirely different concept, a concept of “positive freedom” or “*freedom for*.” However, just like a mathematical concept of “degrees of freedom,” any definition that specifies what freedom should be, what it should be used for, or what it should mean immediately limits the degrees of freedom the person has. Thus, whenever freedom is defined as something, it falls out of the unpredictable, undefinable personal sphere of negative freedom. It can be defined by others, thus taking a chunk out of the person’s negative freedom.

Ethical-ontological dialogue, i.e., dialogue that critically and creatively deliberates and deconstructs topics of its focus, can be realized to its fullest potential and scope when personal meaning-making is unlimited, free, emergent, undefinable, and untamable. In other words, personal meaning-making emerges from the participants’ (negative) freedom from explicit or implicit coercion, compliance, or obedience. The

¹⁰ Greek δημοκρατία (*dēmokratia*), “popular government,” from δῆμος (*demos*) “common people,” + *kratos* “rule, strength”

smaller the sphere of negative personal freedom, the smaller the reach, the breadth, and the depth of ethical-ontological dialogue.

But what about “positive freedom?” One of the reviewers of our early drafts asked: “The ethical-ontological dialogism emerges from negative freedom (Berlin), but can we think that it takes the form of positive freedom? Can the tensions between individual rights to educational freedom and democratic decision-making be analyzed and explained by referring to the concept of the ‘common good?’ Or in the ‘best interest’ of a child? Why is the concept of ‘positive freedom’ unsatisfactory?” In our view, and according to Berlin, positive freedom has to do with “the answer to the question ‘What, or who, is the *source of control or interference* that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?’” (Berlin, 2006, p. 34, italics ours). Without going into a deeper discussion that would take us in a different direction, we think that ‘positive freedom’ limits and possibly distorts *genuine* dialogue by introducing *authoritative discourse* (Bakhtin, 1991), which imposes predefined (monologized) views, goals, and beliefs, like, for instance, the concept of ‘the common good’ or ‘the best interest of a child.’ In other words, not only the boundaries of the sphere of personal freedom are more limited, but also the positive definition of what freedom is for introduces a voice of authority, an authoritative, magisterial discourse, thereby limiting the free dialogical pursuit of the internally persuasive discourse. In that sense, positive freedom limits the students’ “ideological becoming,” defined in terms of “how we develop our [own] way of viewing the world, our system of ideas.” According to Bakhtin, a person’s ideological becoming takes place in a transformation from participation in authoritarian to internally persuasive discourse (Freedman & Ball, 2004, p. 5).

For us, the main question is whether any kind of educational democracy promotes personal negative freedom and, with it, genuine ethical-ontological dialogue for the students’ educational and ideological becoming. Following Berlin’s definition, one might assume that such personal negative freedom has more chance to be realized as an educational right in a liberal democracy than it would be the case in an illiberal democracy with guided by authoritarian, monistic values. Thus, it became important to us to explore ways the two Scandinavian democratic schools, EGO, and EGG, promoted and supported personal rights of education, in which education legitimately belongs to the sphere of personal “negative freedom,” i.e., where each person can define and author their education. Furthermore, we were interested in the nature of the barriers and limitations the two school democracies might have imposed on personal negative freedom.

Research questions

Two related overarching research questions define our research:

- a) What kind of democratic governance was emerging in these experimental democratic schools? What impact did it have on the relationships among the students, teachers, and other participants? and
- b) What aspects of this new, student-owned, educational democracy promoted or limited ethical-ontological dialogues in which the student’s voice and educational authorship could freely emerge? In other words, what was the nature of the students’ ownership of their own education?

To answer these questions, we explore both the larger social, historical, and cultural context in which these schools were founded and the evidence of the students’ voices and their emergent authorial agency. We look for the circumstances, events, and leading ideas in education in Scandinavia of the 1960s that influenced the ways in which these schools could operate, creating specific conditions in which the students had opportunities to transcend their old studentship defined by conformism, submission, and alienation of the authoritarian schools, against which they rebelled in the first place. At the same time, we explore EGO and EGG students’ voices and authorial agency as we examine the ways they searched for, defined, designed, and practiced their democratic school governance. We attempt to infer their personal approaches to education and the philosophical, ideological, and conceptual positions that guided them in

creating their new schools. We are interested in the implications of the dramatic shifts in the students' experience of changing the school regimes: from conventional, authoritarian schooling to having legitimate participation in decision-making, not only regarding their own learning but also regarding the pedagogical and organizational issues of their schools.

Sources

Information about the two democratic schools – the EGO (Norway, 1967–2004) and the EGG (Sweden, 1969–1975) – comes from several sources. We originally found a lot of information about EGO in a book by Mosse Jørgensen, “From a School Rebellion to a Rebel School,” written in 1971, just four years after the EGO was founded. Mosse Jørgensen describes the dramatic and eventful start of the school and the diverse difficult issues encountered by the students, teachers, and others in the first year of its operation¹¹. Lars Hem and Tom Remlov’s¹² book “Experimental Gymnasium in praxis,” published in Norwegian in 1969 (Hem & Remlov, 1969), provided us with invaluable data, including a full transcript of one of the vitally important General Assembly meetings, the so-called “Soul-Searching Assembly.”¹³ We also used other sources about EGO, including some published academic studies and an interview with a former student.

Most of the information about the Experimental school in Gothenburg (EGG) was found in the contemporaneous observations, transcripts of important meetings, school newsletters, surveys, reports, evaluations, etc., which were a part of the city archive¹⁴ of Gothenburg (Stadsarkivet) and in the official state reports about the school. Additionally, Tina Kullenberg interviewed three former students and analyzed reports and other publications in her study of the EGG.

Methods of investigation

In our Bakhtin-influenced approach, we believe that socio-cultural phenomena are a matter of spirit and interpretation rather than given, immutable, static objects. A Bakhtinian scholar, Mikhail Epstein, wrote, “Since the very object of the humanities embraces the free will and spiritual activity that escapes mathematical or naturalistic definition, the humanities elaborate their own criteria of precision and challenge [a reduction to positivist] scientific approaches to culture as a system of informational codes” (Berry & Epstein, 1999, pp. 16-17). Furthermore, as subject to heuristic interpretation, cultural and social practices are better studied using multiple lenses, generating a plurality of visions, each providing unique opportunities for insight. Thus, in our study, we use a mixed qualitative research method, combining historical analysis of the primary and secondary data sources, i.e., actual artifacts (transcriptions of meetings, school journals and newsletters, photographs and video recordings), and previously published articles and books and recent interviews, reports, studies memories and books. We construct our interpretations and assumptions not introspectively but rather in a dialogic analysis (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Gradovski, 2019; Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg, & Curtis, 2019), trying to join the long past dialogues in which the students and teachers grappled together to make sense of their schools,

¹¹ Parts of the book “From a School Rebellion to a Rebel School,” are published in this special issue

¹² Tom Remlov was one of the founding students of the Experimental Gymnasium in Oslo, who later became a very prominent dramatic artist (actor, director) of Norway (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Remlov). Lars Hem was a young scholar and a research assistant to Dr. Harriet Holter, from the University of Oslo who led an extensive study of the school. “I was part of a research group lead by the late professor Harriet Holter, which followed the school. We conducted several surveys and systematic interviews and audiotaped most of the meetings. I also did a two-month participant observation in the classes. My Ph.D. from The University of Stockholm was my main contribution to the research group (Hem, Lars: Forsøks-gymnaset. Oslo University Press 1971), but we published several other reports.” (Personal correspondence, October 6, 2019)

¹³ An in depth analysis of this meeting is contained in two other articles in this special issue, “Soul-Searching Assembly – a Vignette” and “A paradigmatic dialogue-disagreement in a democratic school: A conceptual analysis of a soul-searching assembly meeting” (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b, 2023c).

¹⁴ They are housed in the “City Archive” in Gothenburg [Stadsarkivet i Göteborg].

themselves, their society, and their lives. Moreover, we also address you, the unknown reader, inviting you to make your own interpretations and new transcending points of view.

Contexts of the founding of the two democratic schools

The Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo (EGO)

The Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo (EGO) was conceptualized in the spring and summer of 1966 by three young people, Jon Lund Hansen (16), Ingrid Kviberg (15), and Knut Boe Kielland (16), high school “dropouts” who were mainly inspired by A.S. Neill’s school “Summerhill,” (Neill, 1960) as well as the ideas that stem from the works of Plato, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and a Norwegian reform educator Olav Storstein (Jørgensen, 1977). In the spring of 1966, they wrote a leaflet calling Oslo students and educators to change the existing deadly education (see the prologue). They distributed the leaflet throughout Oslo, sending it to the high schools as well as to the most prominent educational experts and public persons they knew. These three students invited interested people to join them in creating a new kind of school, where the students can participate in its governance. Several enthusiastic educators, culturally prominent intellectuals, and people related to education,¹⁵ together with about 60 high school students and some of their parents, replied to their leaflet. They held a meeting in the fall of 1966. About 20 students, together with a few university professors and some other prominent Oslo intellectuals, started working on the conceptual plans for the new school. After a very dynamic and dramatic year of preparations (Øygarden & Svartdal, 1979), and two rejections of the proposals by the Norwegian Board of Education, they received conditional approval to start a new experimental gymnasium. The approval came on July 14, 1967, and their school started to work in September 1967. The school lasted until its formal closure in 2004.

We believe that the founding of the EGO can be seen as a part of an overall “student radicalization of the 1960s,” which in turn was closely intertwined with the general intellectual trends in Norway (Jarring, 1997) and wider, known as the New Radicalism movement in Scandinavia. The New Radicalism was a movement that can be defined as a set of certain values and issues discussed in Norwegian society during the 1960s and the first part of the 1970s of the twentieth century¹⁶ that took place under certain economic, social, and cultural conditions. Gradovski (2008) (the third author of our paper) describes the Norwegian New Radicalism to be a phenomenon where the main questions on the social agenda were: centralization versus decentralization, depopulation versus urbanization, internalization, cultural minorities, language, commercialization, and environmental problems. Gradovski (2008) points out that the movement of New Radicalism in Norway manifested itself in a number of social uproars: the social movement against membership in the EEC¹⁷, the student revolt, the youth revolt, the feminist movement, the minority rights movement, the environmental movement, and the periphery revolt. These movements left their mark on political and social life not only during the 1960s and 1970s but also in the 1980s and 1990s. And not only in Norway but also throughout the Western world, including Europe and the USA.

Gradovski (2008) points out that the values of the New Radicalism movement were not entirely new: equality, the right to speak one’s own dialect, populism, and love for the Motherland with its deep fjords and high mountains had been debated, discussed and fought about in the Norwegian society long

¹⁵ E.g. Arne Næss, professor of philosophy at the University of Oslo; Jo Vogt, the wife of the Rector of the University of Oslo, helped in the practical organizational problems, lent her home for the initial organizational meetings, acted as the financial officer in the first fundraisings, and gathered other important educators; her husband, the rector of the University of Oslo; philologist and novelist Carl Hambro, Arne Stai, a magister from the University of Oslo; August Lange, a former director of the Teacher College; and about 50 other educationalists (Jørgensen, 1977, pp. 17-18).

¹⁶ Different historians and social scientists define the time of New Radicalism differently. Alfred Oftedal Telhaug defines New Radicalism between 1965 and 1975. Berge Furre speaks of the time between 1961 and 1973, although not using the term New Radicalism at all. Øystein Rottem considers the years between 1965 and 1980 to be the golden years of the youth revolt and Left Radicalism in Norway, see Beyer, Edvard (ed.) (1997) *Norges litteratur historie*, Vol. 7, J. W. Cappelens forlag, p. 13.

¹⁷ European Economic Community

before the movement appeared. The initiators of the EGO brought in a new interpretation of these values: they reinterpreted them in accordance with the needs and realities of their generation, thus suggesting a new way of understanding them. Gradovski (2008) claims that the New Radicalism of the 1960s and 1970s had its precursors in the 1950s. The two main events in the Norwegian cultural life of the 1950s that chimed in, as the Norwegian historian Stig Werner Forsberg (2000, p. 14) writes, the things that were to happen were the rock revolt (*rockeopprøret*) triggered, among others, by the film *'Rock Around the Clock'*¹⁸ shown in Norway right after it was made in 1956, and Jens Bjørneboe's novel *Jonas* that was published the same year. The rock revolt was a cultural protest of teenagers against parents and a society where only adults could make decisions¹⁹. *Jonas* was a protest against the authoritative nature of the educational system and the society that gave life to it. The main character is a school child named Jonas, who has dyslexia. Being unable to bear the pressure of the school environment that considers him an idiot, he ran away from home on a boat. Given the national outcry these two events had in the Norwegian society, we think that the actions and values of freedom, and the demand to be respected just the way one is, inspired the high school students who initiated the Oslo Gymnasium.

In our view, the creation of the EGO in 1967 and other democratic high schools in Sweden (1969) and Denmark was one of the crucial sparks that ignited the movement of Alternative Pedagogy, which was a Scandinavian phenomenon with followers in Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Sweden, and Finland. Erling Lars Dale from Norway, Gert Z. Nordstrøm from Sweden, and Knud Illeris from Denmark were considered by many the founders of the movement (Foros, 1981; Mathiesen, 1981; Vaage, 1981). Gradovski (2008) writes that the expression "Alternative Pedagogy" was used to define many different approaches with one common element: protest against the hierarchical, authoritarian educational thinking, which was in accord with the student and youth movements in Europe and North America of the 1960s. These alternative pedagogical approaches included phenomena known as Dialogue Pedagogy/Dialectical Pedagogy/Emancipatory Pedagogy (*dialogpedagogikk /dialektikk pedagogikk/ frigjørende pedagogikk*), Critical Pedagogy (*kritisk pedagogikk*), Pedagogy of awareness (*bevisstgjørende pedagogikk*), Polarised Pedagogy (*polariserende pedagogikk*), Alternative Didactics (*den alternative didaktikk*) and Marxist Pedagogy (*marxistisk pedagogikk*) (Foros, 1981; Mathiesen, 1981; Vaage, 1981). Gradovski (2008) defines the Alternative Pedagogy in Norway as a movement that appeared at the end of the 1960s as a result of a protest movement against the Established Pedagogy. Another Norwegian author, Birgit Brock-Utne (1986), in her analysis of the criticism of the Established Pedagogy, singles out three main areas where the representatives of the Alternative Pedagogy criticized the Established Pedagogy:

- a) The scientific area (protest against Positivism and promotion of neo-Marxism)
- b) The area of educational practice (the criticism was directed not only towards the understanding of children and the way they learn but also the area of research on children in general), and
- c) The area of students' rights and participation in the teaching process

Gradovski (2008) writes that representatives of the Alternative Pedagogy in Norway wanted to promote a pedagogy founded on the picture of reality as it was understood and experienced by children in their social situations. Such an understanding led to the introduction of the following elements in the process of teaching: learning projects, where teachers and students are considered equal with respect to making decisions, the flexibility of the teaching process (flexible timetables, flexible choice of subjects, cooperation

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DJO428IAvJ0>

¹⁹ Note by Ana, a member of the same generation of the youth of the 60s as the Scandinavian students: In my opinion, calling the Rock-an'-roll music and culture, a "rock revolt" and a "cultural protest" is only partially true. This era was not just a revolt. In many ways, it was also a wave of hope for many young people, hope that the tensions between the values of individual liberties and the social justice can be reconciled. It was a belief and a hope that these are not opposing values, but, on the contrary, that they can and do go hand in hand. For many of young people of the time, hope, optimism and egalitarian values, were as important as "the protest" and "the revolt." In my view, belief in the good will of all (youth and elders) to acknowledge both the uniqueness of each individual and the right to be equal with the adults in making political and educational decisions about their lives, were crucial for taking initiative to both demand and design education that answers the youth's interests and needs.

between teachers in projects), the introduction of open areas in schools or completely open schools (both physical and material) (Foros, 1981). For instance, in his description of the curriculum and instruction of mathematics in the EGO, Bjørn Damsgaard, the math teacher, highlights the importance of the student-centered pedagogical approach where “[f]rom the teachers' point of view, [math topics] are only loosely outlined in what we see is essential: that the entire work is discussed gradually and develops in collaboration between students and teachers” (Damsgaard, 1969, p. 120, translated by Google and improved by Ana).

The Experimental Gymnasium in Gothenburg – EGG

The Experimental Gymnasium in the Swedish city of Gothenburg (EGG) was opened in 1969 and existed until 1975. It was a radical democratic high school, an upper secondary school for students aged between sixteen and nineteen. The first leader of the school, a so-called “experimental leader” who served as a school principal, had 12 teachers in his team and 200 enrolled students in total. This school was initially promoted by the Committee of primary and secondary school students, candidates for the future school who were engaged in politics, interested particularly in socialism in theory and practice. Three of these young students authored a document with recommended guidelines for a new alternative democratic school where the students were allowed to exert influence, i.e., considerable democratic decision-making in their school life. Soon, they became assisted by the local liberal politicians²⁰ and some educators in Gothenburg, who also believed that the students should have a right to influence their own schooling. These educators had the ambition to work for alternative pedagogies that strongly promoted students’ agency in schools organized as democratically governed environments.

Based on interviews with former students and the School Board Reports (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980, [School Board Report]), a small group of students, who initially fought for a radical high school alternative, have already been involved in educational issues that the teachers let them continue to influence the organization of the school. Their experience of educational issues of the time came from their participation in a national student organization called SECO (an acronym for “the Swedish students’ central organization”). SECO took the initiative to produce alternative schoolbooks/texts: for example, a textbook for history, as well as other educational materials in which the students were rethinking pedagogy and ideology according to their extremely left Marxist political interests.

Despite the divergent ideological motives between the extremely leftist, Marxist young students, the local politicians leaning to the liberal right, and liberally minded educators, several former students said that it worked out quite well in practice. However, interestingly, the interviewed former student Ove Sernhede, now a professor in sociology specializing in youth cultures, deliberately dropped out from the EGG for ideological reasons soon after its opening. He argued that too many well-informed students with political awareness were, as he put it, “gathered together on an isolated island” and, hence, he preferred to inspire others. This means to study in the middle of the ‘normal’ society (the Swedish city of Gothenburg), in a traditional upper secondary school.

As Anderson (2008) writes, in contrast to the American Universities’ campuses in 1968, where the police were often called to break up the students’ protests, causing considerable violence, Scandinavian politicians actually supported the students in their endeavors to reform education. The liberal Nordic establishments acknowledged that they needed to encourage the youth’s initiatives and genuine interest in the world, as well as the youth’s activist visions, dreaming of a less authoritarian education and their strong desire to gain more general and practical influence in decision-making about their education. We think that the ideas of these liberally minded politicians and educators might explain their open-minded eagerness to

²⁰ As Bo Ranman, one of the former students, and now a teacher said in a recent video, the students’ proposal got political support from the right-wing parties, especially the Folkpartiet which was the biggest one.

try out new schooling models that allowed for individual freedom from the perspective of the students and not only 'from above.' This might also explain their tolerance and even support for the initiatives of the politically left students, members of the radical left (Marxist) Swedish students' central organization SECO, who were among the prominent founders of the EGG. Inspired by EGO in Norway, in spring 1968, three of these SECO-proponents proposed a vision for a new democratic school:

In a leaflet to the schools, they explained that they wanted to create a school where the students and the teachers decide together. All decisions of importance should be taken at a common public meeting where students, teachers, and the school leader have one voice each [in decision making]. Grades should not be given – the school based on competition, and the pressure of being graded should thus disappear. Students and teachers should plan the studies together, studies that were aimed to be carried out in a very self-dependent way. The mandatory attendance would be abolished. The school would be open both evenings and Saturdays, and Sundays [in addition to Monday – Friday].

There were students and teachers with clearly articulated political values of socialistic nature, which regarded the Experimental Gymnasium as a part of, and a means for, the struggle for a socialist society; due to their intense activity, they came to form a part of a dominating group. There were teachers who, in this attempt, saw a new opportunity to try out their methods and models for teaching. There were students who, within the organization of study, saw a chance to get through the gymnasium education in a shorter time than usual and with greater opportunities to get high grades (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980, p. 2f, translation by Kullenberg).

Of note is that grades and assessments of student achievements were largely eliminated in the school system of the EGG. Only in the last semester, in conjunction with the endpoint of the education, do the students receive grades in order to have the possibility to continue studying at the university.

As for the issue of teaching methods and the role of the teacher in teacher-student relationships, the teachers (with support from the school leader) were expected to organize non-traditional forms of schooling, and so they did. However, as with every aspect of pedagogic practice in this school, the proposed teaching methods were continuously dialogized and, thus, dynamically in the making in ways the participants could not grasp initially.

The opinions varied. For instance, a survey about teaching conducted by the school's psychologist and the school leader shows that only 7 out of 61 participants (students and teachers) thought that the teachers were "experimental enough" (Experimentgymnasiet, 1974). However, it is hard to distinguish between the students' vs. teachers' opinions since both responded to the same surveys.

One salient result of these surveys was that many students criticized the teaching for not being "experimental" enough. In contrast to their earlier, traditional schooling, here, the students were expected to reflect on the teaching, bringing in their own ideas as co-organizers. They had several options for legitimate protests and dialogues about change, such as discussions at open meetings where all participants were gathered (e.g., the teachers, students, and school administration) or writing freely in the school journals. In one such essay, Peter Rundkvist, a student, wrote

The school lessons are many times orderly events where not many words are uttered, except by the teachers. /.../ EG has, for many of us, become final salvation, a green oasis in a grey school desert filled with grading rush, teacher pressure, oppression, dictatorship, and so on. So, let us do what we can to nurture this oasis and its increasing liberty that we actually experience in many ways (Rundkvist, 1970, Kullenberg's translation).

The critique of the partial changes in the overall organization of the instruction can also be discerned in another essay from the EGG school journal:

We have now abolished the classes, and we have divided into groups instead. But this is just an ostensible change of the system in an ordinary school – it is the teacher-led teaching we have to free ourselves from! (Starke & Hansson, 1970, translation by Kullenberg, underline in original).

On the other hand, some students complained about the creative ways of organizing teaching and learning, mainly due to the fact that their highly valued study time was consumed by the democratic meetings on how to organize the school. This was one of the primary tensions that I, Tina, recognized in the overall analysis of the documents of this particular school: the time-based tension between studying vs. democratic organizing. This tension further reveals not only a fundamental conflict between the collective voice and the individual voice but also a conflict between diverse conceptualizations of learning and education. We will come back to this issue.

Generally, despite being critically oriented from the students' perspective, these significant dialogues between students and teachers were accepted as an organic part of the experimental nature of this experimental school by definition: *Experimental Gymnasium*. Hence, both dialogues, teaching, and learning gained a tentative character or, speaking with Bakhtin (1986), attempted to create a schooling approach based on 'unfinalizing' and dialogizing.

Guiding principles and challenges in the two democratic schools

The two democratic schools, EGO and EGG, were opened in the historical context of the late 1960s in Norway and Sweden, the 60s that represented both similar and yet rather different political and ideological "chronotopes" (Bakhtin, 1999). Both schools were founded in the spirit of the students' desires to liberate themselves from the educational and ontological alienation they experienced in conventional authoritarian public schooling of the times. The students wanted to create schools in which education could be meaningful to them. To paraphrase Matusov (2021c), it seemed that their desire (at least for the founders) was to create a school in which their learning would be educational, not as defined by the external authorities (state, society, etc.), but which they themselves could recognize and appreciate – education that would have significance for their own learning transformations and changes in their relationships with others, with themselves, and with their life. In other words, it seemed that the students desired to be the authors and the owners of their education. To that end, they had to change almost every parameter of the traditional conventional schooling.

In conventional education (in the 1960s and now), almost all aspects of education are in the hands of the various authorities – the ministries of education, the school boards, the district administrations, the principal, and the teachers. These authorities make almost all educational decisions ranging from the pedagogical, organizational, technical, and operational to the various political, financial, economic, cultural, and religious matters. At the bottom of this hierarchy are the students, whose position is to subordinate to their teachers' pedagogical actions and to work hard to fulfill the innumerable educational tasks imposed on them, without many possibilities for questioning, deconstruction, or examination of these tasks and their contents. The students have little to no legitimate freedom of decision-making about any aspects of their education. Their freedoms are mostly limited to making limited choices regarding their individual or group assignments, e.g., having a choice of themes within the structure of already preset and predefined curricular endpoints, forms of instruction, assignments, policies of enforcing these assignments, evaluation norms, and standards. The school curricula, instruction, and evaluation are often dictated by the authorities outside

of local school settings (e.g., national, federal, state, or municipal boards of education) (Dahlberg & Moss, 2005).

One of the master keys to enforcement of the conventional, authoritarian education is the state legislated and enforced mandatory school attendance. It is the mandatory school attendance that enables educational powers to foist preset curricula, instruction, assignments, and evaluation onto the population of students without their consent.²¹ Mandatory attendance in all contemporary societies is part of the educational laws and regulations and is strictly enforced through punishments of truancy that could involve not only the students but their families, too.²² Almost everything about the current functioning of the public and many private schooling depends on mandatory attendance. And thus, an important key to overthrowing conventional authoritarian education is for the students to gain the freedom to make educational decisions for themselves and create their own rules and principles of conduct, including the legitimacy of abolishing mandatory attendance. Indeed, both the EGO and the EGG made sure that the first principle in their schools was voluntary attendance. The principle of voluntary attendance is meant to guarantee each student freedom of participation, including non-participation in the educational activities. It is the condition for the legitimacy of the student's negative freedom in education. When education is in the student's sphere of negative freedom, they can freely make decisions about almost all educational aspects: the curriculum (what to learn), instruction (how to learn it), what learning has been or would be important and good (evaluation), whether to engage in organized educational activities (participation), what kind of student the learner wants to be in any particular situation (role), etc. (Matusov, 2020c; Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2019).

The second, equally important key to creating student-owned schooling is the democratic governance based on the principle of the students' equal rights of input in decision making, together with other educational participants: teachers, other school staff, etc. However, and crucially, although democracy guarantees equal rights of input to all, it does not guarantee that these democratically made decisions will always uphold the students' "negative freedom" of personal decisions about their own educational matters. In extreme cases, there is nothing to prevent a school's democratic government from making rather illiberal rules where decisions about education would be placed outside of the sphere of the student's personal negative freedom. In fact, according to Berlin, "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 liberalminded despot would allow his subjects a large measure of personal freedom" (Berlin, 1969, p. 7). In that sense, a school's democratic governance may or may not legitimize curbing individual educational freedoms.

Coming from different sources and different considerations, these two principles – voluntary attendance (coming from the student's negative freedom) and democratic governance (coming from the collectively imposed definitions of freedom, e.g., positive freedom) can be and often are in conflict! It is these tensions that the founders and other members of the EGO and EGG schools experienced and often discussed in their clashing ideological and political orientations to education and democracy. We describe these tensions below.

Tensions between individual and collective rights

Facing these contradictions between individual rights of educational freedom and the democratic decision making at the very start of their school in 1967, the students and teachers in the EGO were plunged into a situation of growing tensions deeply rooted in their diverse visions of education, diverse life

²¹ This is true for the teachers too! In many cases, the curriculum, instruction and evaluation are also imposed on the teachers by the higher educational authorities in schools, districts, and states.

²² See more at: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truancy>

philosophies, guiding values and purposes of education. The tensions were progressively intensified in day-to-day clashes, expressed daily in the name-calling between two fast-forming and strongly opinionated groups of students. The first was a smallish group of about 20+ students, most of whom were the school founders, working hard to keep the school running and urging all others to do the same. In their year-long work on the preparation and conceptualization of the new school, they have already formulated the school's basic principles, rules, and laws, and now they urged everyone to abide by them. They were soon labeled the "*Tantene*" ("nagging Nannies") by a large group of newly admitted, "rebellious" students. The founders resented being called the "Nannies." They perceived the new coming rebellious others as rule-breakers and, in turn, started calling them the "*Avvikere*" [Deviants].²³ They perceived the rebels, the "Deviants," as defying their (the Nannies') original educational project in almost everything: not attending any classes and refusing to do other school chores (Jørgensen, 1977, p. 47). Jørgensen thought that these tensions indicated persistent lingering of traditional educational conceptualizations, values, and beliefs, clashing with the school's new paradigm.

In our view, these tensions and clashes were about the nature of educational freedom: i.e., is it a collectively defined – positive – freedom, equal for all, or the students' personal – negative – freedom to decide what education means to each one of them (see our discussion below). The internal conflicts among the EGO students were heightened by additional external pressures of the educationally conservative Norwegian Ministry of Education, which scrutinized every formal and visible aspect of their school practice, and used traditional criteria of educational assessment, threatening the possible immediate closure of the school (Jørgensen, 1977).

Tensions between individual rights of educational freedom and democratic, collective decision-making also existed in the Swedish Experimental Gymnasium of Gothenburg (EGG). In Sweden, however, these tensions were especially prominent in regard to the nature of the democratic governance itself and its relevance for the student's involvement in making decisions. We found a strong political divide between the students and the teachers in EGG: the students, inspired by the students' movements throughout Europe and the USA, leaned toward Marxist ideas on the political left (Makko, 2012)²⁴, while the Swedish school authorities, who launched the school in cooperation with the local politicians, were mostly leaning toward the liberal political right. The same political division also existed among the students: the tension between liberal and collectivist views, placing education on different sides of the positive-negative freedom divide. This created tensions regarding the meaning of personal vs. group decisions. For instance, one of the interviewed former students of the EGG, Ilona (pseudonym), explained massive peer pressure regarding which personal ideology was legitimate to reveal in public. According to her the pressure came from the leftist students and their collectivist visions of school independence and the realization of idealized political values. Additional pressures came from the fact that, like the Norwegian EGO and possibly even stricter, the EGG was also controlled by the Swedish Educational laws and Ministry of Education in terms of the imposed curriculum and the control of the educational achievement as defined by the authorities.

The tensions and conflicts the EGO and EGG students experienced right from the start of their schools opened for them the issues of who owns education, who has the legitimate power, and the authority in making decisions regarding different aspects of running the school. These tensions concerned, on the

²³ "*Avvikere*," as described at the beginning of the paper, is a harsh word, meaning literally "deviants." I (Ana) thought it could be translated best as "punks" or "lazy punks" – to preserve its hard, insulting punch. Øystein Gullvåg Holter was actually slightly taken a-back when I quoted it from the published transcript of the General Assembly meeting on November 2, 1967. "Was it *that hard word* used?" Øystein was not sure if translating it as "punks" would be good, because he associated it with the punk rock, which was nonexistent at the time, and the expression "punk" was not known to the Norwegian teens in the 60s.

²⁴ For instance, "The early half of the 1960s in Sweden had been a time of transition, of intense societal and political changes. Driven by the redefinition of standards of morality (as exemplified by the sexual revolution and debates on gender equality), the influence of Western popular culture, and a keen interest in the Vietnam War, the younger generation shifted toward the political left" (Makko, 2012, p. 68).

one hand, the issues related to the outside pressures of the State Educational authorities (Departments of Education in Norway and Sweden), and, on the other hand, the tensions concerning the schools' internal power distribution and organization of decision making. Below we present both types of tensions and concerns.

Decision-making processes and organization of the school governance

Being free from external institutional pressures and powers (at least to a degree) does not automatically mean that the tensions and disagreements among the democratic school members could be eliminated. On the contrary, freedom from external authorities demands defining the internal organization of powers in decision-making, including what counts as a legitimate authority in the face of disagreements and conflicts. In this sense, democratic schooling brings another dimension into the educational horizon – an exploration of one's own, as well as the diverse and conflicting other views and values that guide important decision-making. We acknowledge that conflicts of opinion may create conflicts of power. And in dealing with conflicts of power, it is important to define ways of decision-making, especially the boundaries between formal and informal types of decision-making. We agree with Rietmulder when he writes that "Reflecting the social movement [of the 60s-70s era of social revolution, counterculture, and liberation movements], many free schools [in the USA] sought to eliminate power, structure, and authority generally [...]. The result was not usually *anarchy* but instead pervasive informality: *informal power*, *informal structure*, and *informal authority*. Some free schoolers tended to gloss over or 'not see' the presence of power, structure, and authority in their schools" (Rietmulder, 2019, p. 15).

In EGO and EGG, we see both tendencies: a) to create a more formal organizational and governance structure and b) to promote a more flexible, ad hoc, even "chaotic" environment. Here we discuss the organizational aspects and issues of decision-making in the two schools and try to infer their meaning for the students.

EGO in Norway

The highest school authority in EGO was the General Assembly, which they called a "control organ." "[The General Assembly – Allmannamøte] is a meeting of *all* people present in the school – the students, teachers, and any others who happen to be in school at that moment (such as an office assistant, caretaker, janitor)" (Hem & Remlov, 1969, p. 19). They gather to deliberate and make decisions about all school matters. The General Assembly meetings are prepared by a five-member steering board that includes four students and one teacher elected each semester. Besides the General Assembly, explicitly named the "control organ," EGO formally institutionalized other controlling forms of governance as well. Among them was a "Council" as an "executive authority. It consists of three teachers and four students elected by the General Assembly, the school's head (= "principal"), and a representative of the Friends Association ["Venneforeningen"]. The Council establishes the broad guidelines of the school's activity and decides on all possible practical and educational, and academic issues in collaboration with each class as far as possible. The council answers to the General Assembly meeting, where minutes from the Council meetings are read. Council meetings are held twice a week.) They are usually open but can be closed if special reasons warrant it. (Hem & Remlov, 1969, p. 19).

The EGO organizational chart (see Hem & Remlov, 1969, p. 20) seemed to represent a highly formalized and hierarchically organized decision-making process rather than a horizontal direct democracy in which every participant had equal rights of input in every single decision. The General Assembly at the top seemed to control the other subordinated councils and steering committees. Hem and Remlov actually had a critical remark about the school's organization, characterizing it as governance that "may seem complicated, perhaps bureaucratic. And we need to admit: the danger of bureaucracy is imminent in such

a scheme. [...] it might be that direct democracy is just an illusion and perhaps not at all a viable in practice” (Hem & Remlov, 1969, p. 21).

The issue of “direct democratic” vs. a “bureaucratic” organization in decision-making was discussed by Mosse Jørgensen, who seemed to echo an awareness that existed in school – that realizing “direct democracy” may not be without complexities.

The experimental gymnasium does not have to be ashamed that it has not invented forms of administration suitable for direct democracy. As far as I know, no one has so far – neither in school nor industry. But it is an important task for us to develop such forms (Jørgensen, 1971, p. 149).²⁵

The EGO students seemed to experience two potentially interrelated problems in governing their school, at least in the first years of the school's existence. The first problem was the fact that the General Assembly meetings were not well attended, which raised the questions of responsibility for school governance and what did it practically mean (see more in Marjanovic-Shane, 2023c). The second interrelated problem of the governance in EGO lay in the profound differences and disagreements among the students regarding the purposes, the meaning of, and the approach to education (cf. Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b; Marjanovic-Shane, 2023c).

EGG in Sweden

The organization of decision-making in EGG was somewhat different from the EGO. In the EGG internal publications, e.g., the school journals and newsletters, Tina Kullenberg (the second author) found that all the EGG students had a direct power to prepare the agenda in the context of their General Assemblies (In Swedish: *Allmänna Möten*, e.g., general, open meetings²⁶) referred to as “AMs.” In contrast to EGO's more hierarchical, bureaucratic regulations of administrative powers, in the EGG, the meetings were organized more freely and spontaneously (and, perhaps, also more chaotically). There did not exist a “control organ” nor any other social group with a pre-given mix of elected teachers and students with a specific area of decision making, as was the case of EGO. Rather, the immediate student needs were at the center of each meeting's decision-making. When the students needed to declare certain issues and announce things, they took the initiative and summoned all the other students and leaders (as they called the teachers). Moreover, the Swedish EGG leaders, with support from the national school board, openly welcomed chaos as an inevitable consequence of the experimental education and the initial nature of the school's organization in progress. In this sense, uncertainties and chaos were legitimately viewed as a potentiality rather than as an obstacle to the organizational development of democratic education (Carlsson & Lundgren, 1976; Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980).

Despite the freedom and spontaneity of the prevailing form of democratic decision-making in the EGG, it was also repeatedly subjected to critique by the students, teachers, the School Board inspectors, and other social and political groups and institutions. In practice, the low attendance of the common General Assemblies made them function more as some kind of *ad hoc* representative democracy rather than as a direct democracy the founders originally envisioned. This was a problem for many students who commonly believed and complained that the decision-making was taking place somewhere above most students' and sometimes even teachers' heads and that it was done, to a large extent, by the administrative leaders. This

²⁵ We want to thank Eugene Matusov for his remark about direct democracies in education. He disagreed with Mosse Jørgensen, adding that “she probably did not know about Quakers or Sudbury Valley School [the first democratic school in the USA], which (barely) existed at that time. Also, Ancient Athens had [direct democracy] as well.”

²⁶ Similarly to the Norwegian “Allmannamøte”, in Swedish, it is “Allmänna Möte” – where “allmän” means public and *general*, as in “all men”; and “möte” means *meeting*.”

was perceived as undermining the ideal democratic role of the AMs. Paradoxically, Carlsson & Lundgren claimed that this was a result of the very low attendance of the AMs, so it left the teachers (leaders) and a small number of students to make most of the decisions. As they put in their assessment:

The attendance frequency at the general meeting was, as mentioned, low, and the dissemination of information via notes rarely reached everyone. Direct democracy has brought about certain disadvantages since the concentration of all decision-making into the AMs is considered to have left little room for individual measures and, in addition, inhibited personal initiative (Carlsson & Lundgren, 1976, p. 25, translation by Kullenberg).

In a school journal, Chris, an EGG student, candidly concluded that “AM is just a glorious mask we project outward pretending to maintain the idea that we have democracy, in which we, after all, have the right to be engaged.” Another former student I (Tina) interviewed, Johan Öberg, also doubted that the school democracy was genuine. “Ultimately, I think it all was in the hands of the leader,” he said. In this sense, democracy was somewhat illusory in his and other students’ eyes.

We suspect that there may have been three major causes for what the EGG students perceived as malfunctions of the democracy. First, like the EGO in Norway, the EGG lacked full educational sovereignty from the Swedish Educational authorities (see more below in the section on the limited sovereignty). This is confirmed in the national school inspector’s report, bringing up precisely this dilemma regarding power. Furthermore, this might be the reason why the school leader became a target of the students’ critique:

The [students’] relationship with authorities was sometimes tense. This could be linked to high expectations as many initially imagined EG as a free upper secondary school, that is, a self-governing unit assigned full freedom. Then it is quite natural that every time you experience restraints to that freedom, you perceive it as an imposition by the authorities. One group that was subject to criticism was the administration, which is the school leader and his assistant. As their function was to also serve as experts in accordance with the authorities’ rules and decisions, especially the school leader appeared to be the primary obstacle to the freedom, [the students] thought was possible (Skolöverstyrelsen, p. 52, translation by Kullenberg).

Second, there existed a tension between the individual students’ needs and rights of personal educational freedom and self-determination on the one hand, and the collective pressures from the school authorities and some peers to actively participate in school meetings’ collective decision making, on the other. According to a 1974 survey²⁷, out of a total of 59 EGG students, three declared that they never participated in the AMs, and 18 declared that they “rarely” participated. Thus, 21 students out of 59, i.e., 36%, barely participated in the decision-making. Explaining their choice not to participate, some of the students declared that the AMs were irrelevant, insignificant, and boring for them. For instance, one of the students remarked, “There is a lack of debate questions and questions about our studies.” Other 16 students declared that the AM forum entailed “not intriguing issues, [was] generally boring, [and it was] a waste of time.” Six students wrote: “too much shit talk; only a few [students] talk all the time and claim they know everything.” For four other students, the reason for non-participation was “the feeling of insecurity: you get booed or stared down if you say something.” Other responses include statements like “AM is a fake.” Consequently, some students regarded this institutional way of engaging in democracy as a waste of time and had no reason to participate. At least one-third of the EGG students did not feel that collective decision-making about the school issues mattered in their lives or in their education. For some students, participating in collective democratic decision-making was in conflict with their studies.

²⁷ This survey and its results are part of the archival materials found in the Gothenburg Archive of the EGG school.

Third, in the EGG, there existed an implicit distinction between the so-called “organizational” and “pedagogical” areas of practice. The “organizational area” [referred to as the “social area” in the archived school documents] pertained to the decisions regarding school governance, i.e., running the school as an institution and organizing the social aspects of school life, for instance, making decisions about the physical maintenance of the building (furniture, equipment, resources), about the time schedules, extracurricular activities, trips, etc. On the other hand, the so-called “pedagogical” area of practice referred to the educational aspects of practice, including teaching and learning, creating curricula, deciding on the forms of instruction, educational duties and obligations, evaluation, etc. These two areas of practice, the “organizational (social)” and the “pedagogical” areas, were often counter-positioned, creating inherent tensions. For instance, some students faced a dilemma about what to prioritize: being active in democratic decision-making processes (i.e., the social area) as a member of the organizational collective or engaging in one’s own studies as an individual student, at one’s own pace, according to one’s own desires, (i.e., the pedagogical area). These two kinds of engagement, the two perceived forms of students’ agency, competed for precious time and for recognition, working at the expense of each other.²⁸

In addition, it seemed that the students’ governance was potentially limited in scope. My (Tina’s) impression (based on the documents left in the archives) is that the Swedish school authorities, including the EGG administrative leaders, perhaps considered “the social-organizational area” of decision making to be a more legitimate field of students’ engagement in governance than the so-called “pedagogical area” that was often referred to as “mainly the teacher’s area of practice” (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980). In other words, the EGG students were not given full sovereignty over their education, even when they were granted rights to make various decisions regarding their schooling.

Lack of full sovereignty from the national educational authorities

Both the EGO in Norway and the EGG in Sweden were officially regulated through their state’s public-school policies. They were not completely independent private schools – like the Summerhill in Great Britain or the Sudbury Valley School in the USA. This meant that both schools had limited sovereignty within their respective state educational laws and regulations and in the eye of the larger society. However, there existed differences in the ways these limitations were played out in practice and, in turn, how they interfered with the student’s decision making, educational rights, and their own understandings of and approaches to education.

EGO in Norway

The EGO had to adhere to the state-recommended guidelines regarding curriculum, instruction, and some other educational areas. Still, the Norwegian authorities provided rather wide curriculum guidelines for EGO, as it seems that the students had a lot of opportunities to make specific decisions regarding all areas of their education and school organization (see below).

Nevertheless, the partial sovereignty often led to the students’ and teachers’ disorientation and fears, which had an impact on the students’ interpersonal relationships, as some students pressured their peers to attend the “obligatory” classes despite the school’s proclaimed principle of voluntary attendance (see more in Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b, 2023c).

However, it must also be highlighted that the EGO teachers and the students were not completely deterred by the Norwegian educational authorities. Actually, they continued to experiment with the curriculum and instruction, changing them in different ways and constantly applying to the authorities for

²⁸ xTo paraphrase an alleged saying by Oscar Wilde or George Bernard Shaw: “The trouble with [democracy] is that it takes up too many evenings.” <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2019/06/03/evenings/>

the new permissions, and sometimes even getting them approved. As we describe below, the students' voices in creating the curriculum were relatively strong.

EGG in Sweden

Like in Norway, the EGG was also bound by the national curricular imperatives and dependent on the national School Board regulations and its judgments, coupled with regular school inspections. EGG had to follow the state-defined curriculum, assessments, final grades, and other educational regulations. This led to the limitations of the students' voices in decision-making about the "pedagogical area" of practice. Tensions between the students' voices and the actual practice of education were noticed by Danish lector Maria Sommer when she visited the school in Gothenburg. In a school newsletter, Sommer reveals how puzzled she became while observing the Swedish teachers at this school (Sommer, 1971). While the EGG students attempted to engage eagerly in self-initiated student-led learning, the teachers adhered to the imposed state-based curriculum. According to Sommer's impression, unlike the Norwegian teachers, the Swedish teachers did not, or perhaps could not, interpret the national curriculum freely and were teaching or were forced by the state to teach this curriculum uncritically, word for word. Sommer was concerned about the students' academic freedom as perceived by students in the light of the teachers' conventional approach to teaching and learning.

The EGG students shared Sommer's concern for their democratic education, as it is evident from the testimony of a student, Rundkvist, we quoted above,

We sat there, silent, and shy, and only the teacher talked. From time to time, he/she threw out a question that after, like five minutes, finally was answered in a shy whisper. 'Well,' one thought, 'it will soon be better when everyone knows each other. The spontaneous work pleasure will probably emerge.'

But it never did. And when the school day was over, all had to rush home.

Today, we still stand in the same place. The lessons are, in many ways, silent performances where not many words are spoken, except by the teacher (Rundkvist, 1970, translation by Kullenberg).

The EGG students were fully aware that their school lacked full sovereignty from the Swedish Educational authorities. In the archival documents of the school, Tina Kullenberg found lots of examples in the students' texts where the students referred to the greater society outside school as an enemy: a threat to their freedom to practice radical democracy in school and a threat to the personal educational freedom of its diverse participants. The lack of sovereignty contributed to the students' growing discontent and frustration with what they saw as fake democracy.

As a counterstrategy that potentially further undermined the school democracy, Carl Gustav, the EGG's "experimental leader," and other administrators in the school tried to re-direct the students from focusing on the school's lack of sovereignty to their own irresponsible attitudes to participating in the school's democratic governance. Carl Gustav articulated the issue of low participation in democratic governance in his letter to students published in the EGG's School Newsletter. He framed the problem as the students' subjective issues causing their low participation,

*We know by now that our self-determination has certain limits. If you want to express it head-on, you can say that we decide on our environment and on our study situation. /.../ If democracy now means that **everyone has the right to participate** in the decisions, then we have democracy. If, on the other hand, democracy means that **everyone must participate** in the decisions, then we have a bad democracy. Now I think it is irrelevant how we define the concept of democracy. *The only thing that matters is that we have what we want**

or that we accept what we currently have as the best until we find something else that is even better. The urgent question then becomes: Do we have it like we want it to be? A follow-up question will then be: What are the causes that have contributed to the current situation [of low participation in the school general meetings]?

[Is it that] we are not interested in decisions about the [school] environment?

Should we leave the right of decision with joy and confidence to those who want to own it?

Are the issues [that we discuss here] boring?

Is the reason [for non-participation in the AMs] the lack of time?

Is it perhaps irrelevant to us where the walls are, whether we have carpets or not, whether they are yellow or green or if we have curtains?

It is very possible that all this is true. None of us know it. We should, therefore, find out how it is through a survey (Sundén, 1970, translation by Tina Kullenberg, italics and highlights are ours).

In the continuation of this letter, Carl Gustav addressed a potential need for transforming the school's social order because of what he saw as problems with the school's existing distribution of power. He highlighted the vital role of the General Assembly forum, AM, as an organ of democratic governance, but only if the members of the school found it important and interesting enough to participate in. His premise was that they should together aim at achieving the agreed view that collective decision-making really matters to all of them. This was a recurring critical element of the school's democratic nature: the necessity of imposing collective principles on individual freedoms. This paradoxical equation of individual and collective freedoms rested on the unresolved tension between the individual and collective needs and was continuously contested throughout the everyday life of the school.

In students' opinion, Carl Gustav acted as an extended arm of the Department of education rather than protecting the EGG's sovereignty and supporting the students in their claims for more freedom and full ownership of their education. By rather cynically blaming the students for the lack of interest and engagement in the school governance, Carl Gustav elevated his and other school leaders' (the teachers and the school administration) authoritarian powers. The EGG students were well aware of that, as we witnessed in their multiple publications in the school's newsletters and journals, in the surveys and interviews with the school psychologist, and in the interviews with Tina (the second author). They started to perceive the school democracy as illusionary rather than a full-fledged genuine democracy. They had a feeling that they had just tasted something delicious that they dreamt of and worked hard for, unparalleled in their school history, but were not quite allowed to have. They wanted their full freedoms and ownership of education to blossom forth, freely and abundantly. The outer societal authorities and the in-school leaders who assisted these authorities were, understandably, viewed as obstructive to the realization of the student agency.

Finally, these authoritarian pressures that undermined students' agency might have intensified conflicts and tensions among students with different educational interests and goals: those who were more interested in the school governance itself and those who were not actively participating in it (for many different reasons). For instance, some students wanted to spend more time on their academic studies, which left them less time to engage in school decision-making. However, they were chastised by other politically left-leaning students for the lack of solidarity. The school board noted: "Some students abstained from attending the public meetings [AMs] in order to gain time for studies, which others experienced as acts of non-solidarity" (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980, p. 48, translation by Kullenberg).

* * *

In our opinion, there was a profound difference in orientation to their respective state educational authorities between the two school leaders. It seemed that Mosse Jørgensen, the EGO leader, tried to

shield the fledgling students' democratic school from the open pressures of the Norwegian Department of Education. On the other hand, Carl Gustav, the EGG leader, sometimes seemed to act more as an extended arm of the Swedish educational authorities than as an EGG democratic member with equal rights. This is not to claim that there were no other problems with Mosse Jørgensen's seemingly patronizing and authoritarian educational streaks, known to us from other sources (Melheim, 2019). However, a detailed discussion of that sort is out of the scope of this article.

Although the EGO and EGG seized to exist due to multiple external and internal reasons, some of which have been discussed above, the very fact of their existence left a lasting mark on the educational systems in the two countries. First and foremost, the requirement to allow the students to voice their opinions on all the conditions of the educational process the students are involved in became a must and was embraced on the political level as it has been stipulated in various forms in different documents, including the national laws that regulate the secondary parts of the educational systems and national curricula from the 1980s on. Thus, it is safe to conclude that the existence of the two schools, together with other educational establishments where Alternative Pedagogy had been practiced in both countries, indirectly contributed to a higher level of students' participation in the decision-making processes in education in both countries. Further, the very fact that such educational establishments could appear and exist made such experiments possible in the future. In Norway, the most visible mark of the educational epoch that these two schools represent is the existence of amphitheaters in some schools and higher educational establishments. It might be that the main reason behind the end of the schools was a new set of requirements for educational systems that appeared in connection with the economic development trends in both Sweden and Norway in the 1980s. The internal aspect of such educational establishments that was criticized a lot was the level of individual freedom that these schools allowed and the lack of a systemic approach to leadership practices (Gradovski, 2008).

Students' voice, authorship, and the ownership of education

In this section, we explore how the newly emerging democratic school governance supported, promoted, or limited and suppressed opportunities for ethical-ontological dialogues where a student could be a legitimate author of their own ultimate truths, values, and desires. We explore our second question: What aspects of the EGO and EGG democratic governance created educational ecologies that legitimize ethical-ontological dialogism in which the students can test their ideas and author their truths and subjectivities? In other words, what did the democratization of their schooling mean for the students' authorial agency?

Conceptualizing learning as **authorship of one's relationships to the world, to others, and to oneself** has particular implications on the notion that decisions about education belong to the personal sphere of negative freedom – i.e., that “area within which the subject is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons” (Berlin, 2006, p. 34). However, this educational right of negative freedom has been either denied or extremely limited throughout the history of education. Even the Enlightenment thinkers starting from Kant, who insisted on human autonomy as the condition for human dignity, denied such autonomy in the matters of education to children, the immature, ignorant, and irrational people. This Kantian paradox has its roots in the belief that not everyone should be given autonomy (personal negative freedom) in making important decisions, including about themselves, especially educational decisions. The rationale was that only those people who are mature, rational, and informed are able to make good decisions, good both for themselves and for society. In other words, education becomes a liminal practice of *enlightenment by another*, imposed and “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, 2021c, p. E12). In other words, education stays outside of the personal bubble of “negative freedom” and the learners cannot be considered as responsible authors of their relationships. In terms of ethical-ontological dialogue, positive freedom implies that there is an extrinsic authority (other people, established beliefs and values, etc.) that independently defines what is good for the learner) that overpowers the learner, abolishing “equal rights of consciousness,” and thus the dialogue itself. Learning from the “positive freedom” becomes accomplishing predefined “good and true” end-goals.

In contrast, conceptualizing learning as an authorial endeavor and education as a matter of the students’ own evaluation of their learning authorship (Matusov, 2021c) puts education right back into the sphere of the students’ personal negative freedom. Elsewhere Matusov and I claimed that authorial intrinsic education is fully socially promoted and realized through the emergent ethical-ontological dialogues in which the learner legitimately has multidimensional academic freedoms which include the following negative freedoms: a) Freedom to decide what to learn (curriculum); b) Freedom to decide how, when, where, and with whom to learn and ask for guidance (instruction); c) Freedom to engage or disengage, freedom to learn or not to learn (participation); d) Freedom to determine what is or is not important for the learner to study or to do, the quality, and the purpose of his/her education (valuation); e) a right to have access to and opportunity for a rich educational environment, pregnant with and supportive of diverse discourses, practices, and values (ecology); e) Freedom to define one’s own approach to learning for particular areas of knowledge and skills, i.e. whether to engage in learning as a critical learner, a credential student, a creative learner, an autodidact, an apprentice, etc. (role); and f) freedom of necessities, e.g. needs such as hunger, sickness, concerns about shelter, concerns about safety, concerns about future well-being, and so on (having leisure) (adapted from Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2019, p. 32). We want to especially stress here that having legitimate rights of personal negative freedom in education does not mean that education can exist in a vacuum, without and apart of the others, the society, and the culture in which it takes place. On the contrary, we argue that the right of personal academic freedom is a necessary condition for genuine ethical-ontological dialogism, in terms of being taken seriously in the relationships with others, society and culture, as a “consciousness with equal rights” of the critical and creative production of new and unique cultural and social meanings.

The question is, what kind of ownership of education did the EGO and EGG students seek, and consequently, what kinds of freedom the students had and/or wanted to have. In this section, we investigate the multidimensional boundaries of the personal educational “negative” freedom that the EGO and EGG students (and teachers) negotiated as they democratically governed their schools. In other words, we try to infer students’ (and teachers’) diverse conceptualizations of education out of their (recorded and described) discussions, their demands, and their critiques of their own democratic governance.

Overall, it seems to us that in both schools, at least some students and teachers may have begun to be more accepting and support the students’ right to bring their own political and ideological explorations into the school discussions. The members of these schools became more open to including students’ political and ideological activism (“student power”) in their formal education, as well as the students’ subjectivity, educational desires, values, and needs. For instance, in the Swedish EGG, the students could freely express and discuss rebellious leftist political ideologies not shared by all teachers and thus, in these matters, act as equals to all others. For instance, In the EGG school newsletters and journals, one can find highly idealized and romanticized ideas of Marxism and Russian-influenced socialism illustrated with pictures of Moscow or citations of Russian poems.

At the same time, in both EGO and EGG, there existed considerable disagreements among the participants regarding what aspects of their academic freedoms mentioned above could legitimately belong

within the sphere of the students' personal authorial (negative) freedom, i.e., within the sphere of personal agency.

The tension between democratic governance and personal educational freedoms

What seemed to surprise many students at the very start of their schools was the fact that the democratic governance of a school in which they were expected to freely participate did not necessarily promote students' personal freedoms to pursue and realize their individual educational projects. In the case of Sweden's EGG, one of the major tensions that penetrated the school activities, and, above all, the students' school existence was the clash between the collective norms, values, and ideology they tried to establish and the students' individual desires. The students experienced pressure to establish uniform, collective values, interests, and views. These pressures came not only from the State educational authorities or the school administrative leaders but were especially strong coming from the idealistic, socialist-minded peers who often staunchly demanded collective solidarity at the price of the individual voice. That implied prevalence of the value of a single-voiced, monologic discourse, a monistic view characterized by consensus-oriented calls for loyalty, unity, and making decisions as a tightly bound community of like-minded individuals. In practice, that ended up with significant compromises when coming to students' individual preferences for their studies, corrupting and undermining the students' sense of ownership of education, as well. Perhaps the most salient and frequent example in practice, found in the EGG archived documents (e.g., local surveys and school papers) and interviews, were constant collective appeals to the individuals pressuring the students to participate in all kinds of school governance meetings; the unrelenting summons to uphold the democratic functions of the school organization itself. However, as mentioned above, the problem for some involved students with high ambitions in their comprehensive studies was that participating in public meetings indeed stole their individual, precious time for studying. At least, this is how the problem was experienced among several students. Relentless meetings became a time-consuming endeavor in many students' eyes, and this conflict was not easy to solve in the psychological sense. Hence, there existed high tensions and conflicts between the students' rights and needs to fully engage in their personal educational journeys and the pressures of the imposed obligations to actively participate in the collective ownership of and decision making about the educational practice.

The tension between the obligation to democratic governance and the rights of personal academic freedoms has another important dimension. As the first author (Ana) discovered in the analysis of the crucial Soul-searching Assembly in EGO that took place only two months after the school was opened, “[h]aving equal rights of input in the school's democratic government does not automatically guarantee [decisions that support] students' personal academic freedoms. In some cases, ... [democratically made decisions] may limit or even abolish some or most of the educational freedoms” (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b(p. ?)). In that sense, democratic decisions, just like the decisions of authoritarian governance, can be extremely limiting to personal freedoms and rights (cf. “a tyranny of the majority”). As discussed above, in Belin's words, “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 liberalminded despot would allow his subjects a large measure of personal freedom” (Berlin, 1969, p. 7).

In that sense, the concept of the students' “ownership of education” is not identical to the concept of democratic school governance. In fact, tensions between the collective and the personal rights and obligations both in EGO and EGG indicate that the students' authorial agency expressed and examined in ethical-ontological dialogue may be better supported and promoted when the educational democracy is liberal, making the “bubble” of the personal negative freedom big enough to legitimately include diverse aspects of education. Limiting personal educational freedoms also limits the width, depth, and scope of the ethical-ontological dialogism in education by imposing the pre-given, non-negotiable truths and values considered as the untouchable and immutable guiding principles and rules in such educational ecology.

In the next section, we explore the ways several aspects of education in EGO and EGG were democratically deliberated and negotiated in terms of the boundaries between the spheres of students' negative and positive freedoms, as well as the reasons and rationales provided (when available) for different positions.

Freedom of participation – collective and personal perspectives

EGO in Norway

One of the greatest disagreements among the EGO students at the very beginning of their school erupted around the issue of the promised (and seemingly guaranteed) voluntary attendance of classes. Namely, the school founders made voluntary attendance one of the school's main principles, but in the span of just a few weeks from the school opening, this led to more than a 50% drop in class attendance. This became a problem for some students and teachers, many of whom were the school founders. They decided to raise this issue as *the* problem at a General Assembly held on November 2, 1967 (Hem & Remlov, 1969). The heated discussion started with a debate on the meaning and the rights of educational participation, but it quickly triggered passionate confrontations among the students (and teachers) about the meanings of students' personal freedoms, responsibilities, rights, and obligations – an examination of their diverse and conflicting views of the purpose of education and the principal life values. The debate lasted more than four hours, as the students deliberated and revealed vastly different conceptualizations of education they held, and many voiced strong disagreements with the founders' pre-adopted approach to education and schooling. It became apparent that there existed different, opposing, and even mutually conflicting views of the freedom of participation.

Negative and positive freedom of participation in EGO

The EGO students' disagreements about participation could be conceptualized as the tension between two views:

- a) Each student has a right to personally decide both WHETHER to attend the teacher prepared classes and HOW to participate in them (which classes to pick, which ones not); and
- b) The students are only allowed to make decisions on HOW to participate in classes – which classes to pick, as long as they pick some. There was also a debate on whether it would be enough to pick any classes the student wanted to pick or whether some classes were implicitly mandated (those with academic content) while others were truly elective (swimming, dancing, etc.).

When the school opened in September 1967, a rule of “voluntary attendance” was explicitly formulated. Soon it became obvious that this can have different interpretations. Some incoming students immediately interpreted the principle of voluntary attendance as their personal “negative freedom.” Many rarely attended classes, if at all, staying in the school hallways, playing music, and socializing. Some attended only “bodybuilding or swimming,” but it turned out that the founding students considered these classes to be “extra-curricular” rather than the primary classes. The founding students, “the Nannies,” realized that this was not really what they meant by “voluntary attendance” in planning their school. For them, it became a problem of the very possibility of the school's existence. In the Soul-Searching assembly, Åge, one of the leading “Nannies,” formulated this problem as the tension between personal freedom – i.e., negative freedom; and collective responsibilities/obligations and values – i.e., positive freedom. Åge viewed complete non-participation in classes as illegitimate, and those students who systematically stay out of classes as indifferent toward the school and its community.

- Åge: 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... [...] Yes, [those students who do not attend classes] are completely indifferent to how the school works. [...]

– Should those students be allowed to go here? ... Does our school have an interest in having students who are entirely unmotivated to [be in] our school? [...] I'm hoping that people will realize that – this is not a school where you can be completely indifferent. It is a school... that is serious! A serious educational endeavor [...] There is no place for people who can do what *they* want. This is a school and not a playroom, indeed! (pp. 24-25).

The problem was conceptualized as the existence of “two kinds of freedom” by another student, Roar,

Roar: ... But there is not just one thing called *freedom* – there also exists another term, it is called *freedom under [with] the responsibility*. I repeat, *under the responsibility*. We are responsible for our fellow students. We are responsible for our own schooling (pp. 26-27) ... Personal freedom! Of course - personal freedom! – ... [But] we are all under obligation to the social milieu here, because we're all human, and that milieu consists of [the opinions of all] people (p. 32).

Roar and Åge interpreted freedom of participation in education as the “positive freedom,” in their words, “freedom under responsibility” to the socially and culturally predefined educational rights, what Roar called “social milieu” already described, defined, and accepted educational policies, values, and rules. Even if the school “milieu” (approach to education) could be negotiated, “freedom under responsibility” is definable in principle, and it should be defined as the unifying educational approach to which all the participants can be held accountable (responsible). In this view (held by many founders), “voluntary attendance” means “positive freedom” of HOW to engage in education and excludes personal rights to decide whether to participate or not.

But Åge, Roar, and other like-minded students were opposed by others who argued for the student’s personal right to freely decide about their educational participation. According to this opposing view, EGO should protect each student’s right of (negative) freedom of participation, namely their freedom to deliberate, define and make their own decisions regarding all matters of their own educational responsibility. In other words, students’ right to define what they want to do for their own personal development, how, and why. Tom, also one of the prominent founding students, realized that it is negative freedom that is an absolutely necessary condition for a person to become both a self-responsible and a socially-responsible person:

Tom: ... [If you say that you want to expel the “Deviants”], ... in that very moment, [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 freedom and free will, and to be radical.* [...] That is exactly what one should try to find, one’s own opinions on 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... (pp. 37-38).

EGO students conflicting views about the negative and positive freedom of participation revealed (both to themselves and to me - Ana) their deep paradigmatic differences regarding the very nature, purpose, and value of the education they wanted to practice in their school (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b). I (Ana) delve deeper into the students’ paradigmatically different and conflicting ideological and conceptual views in the article “Paradigmatic dialogue-disagreement in a democratic school: A conceptual analysis” in this volume (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b).

At this point, we want to bring to the attention the fact that the students' differences regarding freedom of participation might also have been amplified by the pressures of the Norwegian Department of Education, from which the school was not completely independent. Namely, Norwegian educational policies (both then and to a certain extent now) include a gatekeeping condition for enrollment in Norwegian universities by requiring that the students pass a pan-Norwegian high school graduating exam – the *artium*.²⁹ But even applying for this exam was conditioned on having taken certain “advanced level” predefined academic courses in high school. This educational policy strongly affected the considerations and views of the more academically oriented students in EGO. Mandated by the Department of Education, this policy limited the student's personal (negative) educational freedom. Educational freedom of participation under their rules becomes “freedom under responsibility,” i.e., positively defined freedom. In our view, once accepted, positive freedom limits the scope of the ethical-ontological dialogue regarding participation, narrowing it to the deliberations of “HOW” to participate, and thus, potentially leaving legitimate space only for deliberating the “electives,” as some students' remarks indicated (see more in Marjanovic-Shane, 2023c).

EGG in Sweden

The EGG students' participation in democratic governance directly affected the relationships among the participants, their rights, voices, and agency, and their freedoms of education. What decisions are passed depends, of course, on whose voice and opinions will prevail. Non-participation in making decisions means not having a voice and power. But, it means much more. Democracy ceases to be “democratic” if people stop raising their voices. When just a small number of group members participate in democratic decision-making, democracy itself is eroded. The governance becomes the rule of a small group – an oligarchy, if not a straightforward dictatorship. The necessity of hearing all or most voices in democratic decision-making was recognized already in ancient Athens. In some periods in the Athenian democracy, participation in making decisions (voting) was not only a citizens' right but an obligation, too³⁰. They could be fined or otherwise punished for non-participation. People who stayed away from participating in the politics of the Athenian governance were called “*idiots*,” a patronizing label meaning pejoratively people who have no skills or interests but “one's own.”³¹

The practical challenge to direct democracy can come from a lack of opposition to the opinionated voices of a small but loud minority. Decisions made by a minority may become imposed on the whole group, potentially limiting personal liberties by creating predefined “positive freedom” by defining what is “good for all.” Thus, the question for democratic education becomes the question of having personal rights and liberties in general and of the boundary between positive and negative freedom of participation, in specific – both in the educational and in the legislative aspects of the school.

As we mentioned above, the leftist-oriented students exerted considerable pressure on everyone to participate in the decision-making AM meetings. In our view, they considered participation in the democratic process as a matter of the students' positive freedom, shaming those who would not come to the meetings. However, the EGG school leader, Carl Gustav, addressed the problem in his letter to the EGG students that we quoted above – from the position of the students' negative freedom to make their own decisions regarding participation in the general public meetings (AMs) where voting and decision-

²⁹ “**Examen artium** was the name of the academic certification conferred in Denmark and Norway, qualifying the student for admission to university studies. Examen artium was originally introduced as the entrance exam of the University of Copenhagen in 1630. [...] In Norway, examen artium was formally discontinued after the 1982 class (but the term is still sometimes used informally to denote the diploma from today's “videregående skole”).” – Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Examen_artium, retrieved on July 29, 2021.

³⁰ See more here: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Athenian_democracy

³¹ The Online Etymological Dictionary gives the following definition: “Greek *idiotēs* “layman, person lacking professional skill” (opposed to writer, soldier, skilled workman), literally “private person” (as opposed to one taking part in public affairs), used patronizingly for “ignorant person,” from *idios* “one's own”

making was at stake. The fact that many students chose non-participation in the AMs puzzled Carl Gustav and forced him to further problematize what school democracy is or should be. Despite the dangers of the low AM meetings attendance, Carl Gustav framed the problem in terms of voluntary participation in the school governance rather than forcing the students to participate. “If democracy now means that everyone *has the right to participate* in the decisions, then we have democracy. If, on the other hand, democracy means that everyone *must participate* in the decisions, then we have a bad democracy” (Sundén, 1970). In the face of such a dilemma, we can see here how Carl Gustav implicitly approached the dialogic problems of voicing – as the perpetual tensions between individual and collective preferences. In this case, it also seems that Carl Gustav placed the participation in the democratic governance in the sphere of the student’s negative freedom, leaving it to the student to freely decide.

Freedom of curriculum, instruction, and evaluation – tensions between students’ ownership of learning, teachers’ ownership of teaching, and the state educational policies

While the meaning of freedom of participation in education seemed to be often debated in terms of the students’ negative and positive freedoms (at least at the start of both EGO and EGG), freedom of curriculum, instruction, and evaluation was a different story. We claim that the students’ freedom in the matters of curriculum, instruction, and evaluation was debated mostly as a matter of the scope of their positive freedoms, i.e., in terms of degrees of freedom for navigating an already preset curricular and instructional sphere and the norms set by the overall state gatekeeping exams like the Norwegian artium or high grades in relevant school subjects in Sweden. Although there existed some students (in EGO) with pluralist views on education, who argued for the students’ complete negative freedom to decide the purpose of their education, even if that meant a conflict with the existing predetermined curriculum, their number was small, and their ideas were not always clear to the others.³² To us, it seemed that in both schools, ethical-ontological dialogues around curriculum, instruction, and evaluation were promoted only as a matter of the positive freedom within the positively defined curriculum and the teachers’ creativity and mastery of instruction.

EGO in Norway

The experimental high school has not been granted permission [by the Department of Education] to conduct curriculum experiments. We have been desperate about that. Eager students and teachers with lots of ideas have their wings slashed. We submitted piles of experimental proposals to the Department of Education, but all we received back were rejections. At best, we were allowed to “try out” only what others had done first. There is a state monopoly on [educational] pioneering activities in Norway (Jørgensen, 1971, pp. 78-79).

Students’ voices and agency in the Norwegian EGO were promoted by organizing small group dialogues (not more than 13 students per group) either about some organizational decisions or regarding matters of the curriculum and instruction relevant to the group.

For instance, Jørgensen wrote,

Just before the summer break [of 1967], after a long discussion with both the old and the new students, we decided to start the next school year in the area of social studies, with the exploration of the problems of the developing countries. During the summer break, I [the teacher] read three books about these problems, and I felt considerably prepared. When the new school year started, and we came to the first class, I hardly, so to say,

³² See detailed analysis in the Paradigmatic dialogue-disagreement in a democratic school: A conceptual analysis (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b).

opened my mouth when Ulf [a student] said: "Do we really have to talk about the developing countries? I am so bored by constantly being fed information about them that I can't stand it anymore." Others agreed with him. It turned out that all of them were fed up with this topic because all of them had heard a lot about it in their [previous] schools. Developing countries are currently a hot political issue, and it is commonly thought to be an important topic in education.

So, what should we do?

We started to discuss this.

We talked for several hours, touching on a lot of topics. Some students wanted one thing, another wanted another, and there was always someone who had strong opposing reasons. In the end, we found a topic we were all interested in – school and education. Then we argued for a long time about how to organize the work. We split into four smaller groups to look for the literature (Jørgensen, 1977, pp. 152-153, translation by Marjanovic-Shane).

It seemed that in small study groups, students had the freedom to develop dialogues about curriculum and instruction within several larger curricular areas. Namely, although EGO and EGG were obliged to follow the prescribed state curriculum, the students and teachers together decided to group all the prescribed subjects into fewer larger areas that could be explored in more creative ways. These small groups of students and teachers would look for resources both in the existing official textbooks and in other publications like paperbacks, popular books, and journals. For instance, in one of these smaller groups working in the area of social studies, the students became interested in educational theories based on Freud's psychoanalysis. In another group, students decided to interview people from different social classes and walks of life about their own understanding of education. The study was a long-term project at the end of which their teacher, Mosse Jørgensen, had to leave for a 10-day trip. The students continued to work on the project without her, wrote reports on their findings, and distributed copies of their reports to each other. Based on that, it is possible to believe that some of the students actually made this research experience their own educational project. Jørgensen also reports that in the course of a reflexive discussion of this project, the students have already started to plan a study of the next topic of interest, which they defined as the "means of mass communication" (Jørgensen, 1971, pp. 121-122).

There existed other collaborations among the students and teachers in defining the curriculum of the students' own interests, but for each curricular innovation, they had to apply to the Department of Education. In some cases, the school would get permission, and a new area of studies would be opened. This was the case with the computer and data processing studies. When they received permission, the students and their math and science teacher, Herman Ruge, worked on designing a mini-computer "Benjamin." They jointly prepared three seminars in computer data processing for other high school teachers who wanted to teach this subject in their own high schools (Jørgensen, 1971, p. 80).

Thus, although students' initiatives in the curriculum and instruction were supported, the final word of approval and evaluation was outside of their legitimate rights, i.e., their negative freedom.

The impact of the students' ownership of education on teachers

When the students have the right to decide about their participation in education, including the right of non-participation in academic practices, and when they have the right to influence curriculum and instruction, it leads to enormous changes in the way teaching and teachers' roles are conceptualized³³. This was potentially the most shocking discovery for the teachers in both schools. In a democratic school,

³³ At this point, we do not discuss the kinds of instruction and the overall evaluation of the kinds of pedagogy, and especially dialogic pedagogy in the democratic school. Here we want to focus only on the change in the teachers' and the students' roles regarding the choice of the curriculum and the legitimacy of the student's choice to prevail over the teachers' choice.

the value and the importance of the teachers' guidance may be freely determined by the students rather than by the wider social and academic communities, educational experts, or the teachers themselves. For the teachers, this change of placing the power and authority in the hands of the students is both valuable and risky! It may provide the teachers with the important and necessary feedback about their teaching from those who matter the most – the students! But precisely because of that, it exposes the teachers to a real risk of failure in their traditional role of unquestioned and unchallenged authority.

In a recent interview, former EGO student, Øystein, said:

I think, also as a sociologist, that I venture to say [that the issue of who owns the education] was the main cause of this conflict, you know. The main principle for the pupils was that they were to be treated like, almost like the [university] students³⁴. Meaning *they* would choose if they showed up or not. Right. Very radical. ... Yeah. All right. And then come the teachers, right? And then comes a mechanism that I don't think anyone had anticipated: How many persons are in your class. Yes? So, if it's three pupils, it reflects badly on you, even though you [may agree with] these principles of freedom... So, it's a very... a quite natural reaction in a sense. ... I can remember very well teachers going around and saying: "Don't sit here in the corridor playing guitar. Please come to the classes. Yeah, we know it's up to you... [you are the ones] that have [the rights] to decide. But please come." And you could feel sorry for them almost. (from the interview with Øystein Gullvåg Holter, October 15th, 2019).

We read a similar report in Jørgensen's book:

The encounter between the teachers and the students in the Experimental Gymnasium was turbulent and difficult – if we even met each other. Without an obligation to attend the classes, students mostly did not attend them. Exactly this was the main domain where they could thoroughly test their freedoms.

The teachers would return to the teacher's lounge crying and looking for consolation when they experienced entering a classroom in which there was no one or in which there sat a very small group of students. This was a very hard experience for young teachers because their self-confidence could be shaken. It was pretty hard, even for us who had a lot of experience. Was our work in the past possible only because the students were forced to listen to us? To endure [and overcome] this anguish, we needed a lot of self-confidence and faith in the cause we fought for (Jørgensen, 1977, p. 121).

The new democratic regime in the EGO threw many teachers into an existential crisis, an urgent need to find a new meaning of being a teacher. Without the well-known institutional scaffold of the old school, the teachers "... needed a deeper examination of ourselves and our professions... We could not hide behind any new barrier to protect our own safety. We had to uncover our whole personalities, including all our weaknesses, in the open... And that was very difficult! Because if we showed ourselves openly, what if it revealed that we had no ability to be teachers. It could have been a shock! Although, in the long term, such a shock would have been lucky for both sides (Jørgensen, 1977, pp. 125-126).

When we look at the teachers' dilemmas from the point of view of what it means to promote ethical-ontological dialogues, it seems the very concept of a teacher in the traditional sense is based on the assumption of a hierarchical relationship to the student. There is no actual equality between the teachers' and the students' consciousnesses. The students' educational freedom of curriculum, instruction, and

³⁴ In many European languages the term "students" is commonly reserved for the University students only, e.g. the more adult, more mature people. Children and youth attending elementary, middle and high schools are commonly referred to as the "pupils" – always subordinated to the adults.

evaluation can only be conceptualized in terms of positive freedoms – where the teacher is the one who defines what this freedom is good for and the scope of its legitimacy. Students' right to non-participation in the teacher-defined curriculum denies the very role of the teacher in creating a real existential crisis.

EGG in Sweden

Similarly, the Swedish teachers in the EGG had to learn the hard way about what the students' freedoms meant for transforming their teacher role directed by this new school regime: its democratic framing that allowed the students to mobilize their power according to their own desires regarding teaching matters. An interesting case of such a teacher dilemma is described in Carlsson & Lundgren's analysis of what happened to the pre-planned school semester in 1972.

A schedule for all activities that were included in the introduction semester was made up, and a follow-up group was appointed. Perhaps one had made too hard efforts, perhaps the goals were too ambitious. Complaints were immediately heard, and in late October, the whole organization of the activity was canceled. This could be seen as one example of how difficult it might be to carry out an experimental activity in a school that allows influential students to overthrow the planning. (Carlsson & Lundgren, 1976, p. 24, translation by Kullenberg).

Nevertheless, the Swedish teachers seem to have been able to adapt to the ongoing circumstances with an open-minded attitude, aware of the inevitable challenges of launching a new democratic school system like this. Also, they engaged democratically in the teacher-student relationships, in the sense of respecting the students' choices and expressed needs and preferences regarding what and how to study or how to be taught. Both the former students of the EGG that I [Tina] interviewed and the authorities' reports (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980) give the impression that the expected teachers' role in this school was to engage as equals with the students in stimulating dialogues. Their role was to engage in education "as curious co-learners," according to what a former student, Ilona (pseudonym), told me (Tina). Ilona, who thought that the teachers were influenced by Freire³⁵, added that what transpired could be characterized as a kind of Freirean dialogic pedagogy.

The formal evaluation of the EGG school by the National school board noticed that teaching tended to be personalized for the individual students. The school board provided an interesting reason for what might have facilitated what they saw as instrumental dialogic teaching. It was the absence of conventional classroom teaching as it happens in big classes,

Teaching in big classes did not exist; rather, it was group work to a large extent. In many cases, the groups were so small that the teaching changed to individual supervision instead. The teaching thus became more intense, the discussions livelier, the speech exercises in language more effective, and the adjustment of learning content and method for the individual's needs and ability improved. So did the contact between the teacher and student (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980, p. 7, translation by Kullenberg).

However, despite this open-minded teaching attitude, Ilona further reflected that "the teachers were permissive but not creative." Her opinion is supported by the results of a 1974 survey of the students' opinions about the teachers. For instance, in answering the question "Are our teachers enough

³⁵ Paolo Freire's educational ideas became known in Scandinavia long before his influential and much discussed book "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" was translated into the Scandinavian languages. Already in the 1960s Freire's ideas and methods of education of illiterate populations became known and widely discussed in Scandinavia. As I (Tina) understood Ilona, Freire was the name she associated with the kinds of dialogues in EGG. She wanted to give me an idea of the dialogic spirit in general, and the fact that the students were seen with agency/voice in the dialogues with their teachers.

experimentally oriented?” the majority of students, 61% (36 out of 59), gave negative answers, and 30% (18 out of 59) of them responded with “I do not know.” Only 12% (7 of 59) of students answered “yes.” The follow-up question asked those who answered “no” to specify what they really missed. The most prominent answer given by ten students was that they missed alternative forms of study.³⁶

The language used by the National school board provides indicators supporting the students’ feeling that their education had not much changed in the new school and that the teachers retained their conventional educational approach guided by the goal to achieve transmission of the pre-set curriculum. In our opinion, transformations in teaching may have come from the emerging progressivist educational approach, where the imposition of the pre-set curricular end-points is softened or hidden by the attempts to engage students’ subjectivities. For instance, the teachers regarded small group dialogues as a tool to make their instruction “more effective” and to achieve students’ “improved abilities” with the given frame.

Still, there were some changes in the student-teacher relationships. For instance, many students challenged the teachers’ ideological views to the very limits, especially if they expressed opinions that were considered ideologically too conservative. The teachers generally tried to be responsive in thought-provoking ways, with strong voices of their own. In some cases, we know that the teachers challenged the students’ leftist ideas and had interesting discussions and provocations (from Tina’s interview with Johan, a former student). Johan described the teachers as extremely interesting and well-educated persons. He also appreciated the change in the students-teachers relationships. The teachers started to appear to him and the other students as unique *persons* rather than as empty institutionalized role figures, as was common for teachers in the conventional schools at that time. In some instances, teachers were also seen as co-learners (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1980).

However, in support of our suspicions about the teachers’ conventional educational approaches, it is also notable that the lessons were said to be teacher-led, at the expense of the students’ own voices, according to a school newsletter from the EGG. In Peter Rundkvist’s article in the school newspaper, we can see how he experienced his school in this respect:

Today, we still stand in the same place. The lessons are, in many places, silent performances where not many words are spoken, except by the teacher (Rundkvist, 1970).

In their rebellious call, the young authors and former students Starke and Hansson (1970) argued for the suspension of teacher-led teaching in a volume of the school journal “Kritstreckat” [The Chalk Line]. The reason was students’ impatient disappointment with the existing pedagogical state of affairs, that is, the moderate change of pedagogical regime that was argued not to be radical enough. In this respect, they even explicitly accused the EGG school leader Carl Gustav of introducing what only seemed to be teaching reforms, but that in practice worked only on the surface level. In this context, the students encouraged what they termed “free studies” as the ideal alternative. They do not leave the reader with any doubt about how such free studies should be defined, stating: “Free studies mean that each group, regardless of the decisions of other groups, designs their studies. The most important thing, however, is that we free ourselves from the authoritative teacher-led teaching” (Starke & Hansson, 1970). I (Tina) also noticed one more interesting aspect of this definition: the former students are explicitly talking in terms of the *group level*, not the individual level, and, thus, the individual needs are expressed more implicitly (sometimes

³⁶ On another note, when I (Tina) analyzed the surveys from the archive I was very surprised by the fact the same questions were asked of all participants, including the teachers and the students. To me, this means, they were asked to engage in the same shared school issues but from different perspectives. My reaction stems from the experiences I have from schooling in our current age, where everything is bureaucratically separated into the distinct teacher vs. student roles. At least today [in 2022] here in Sweden, it is quite unthinkable to let students and teachers answer precisely the same set of questions about their shared organization.

deliberately subordinating the individual needs for collective goods, according to the cultural norms at that time).

Conclusion: democracy and dialogue in EGO and EGG

The Experimental democratic Gymnasiums in Oslo and Gothenburg were projects of passionate, educationally, and politically engaged teens and youth. They sought to establish control over their school lives, demanding the right to make decisions about all aspects of their education. We were able to glimpse their struggles as they started to examine and take hold of the social, cultural, political, pedagogical, and ideological complexities of educational practice. Creating a democratic school was, for all the involved, a project in which they grappled with defining and redefining diverse aspects of their own beliefs and philosophies of schooling and education. In our view, this entailed dialogues of reconceptualization, critical deconstruction, and potential transcendence in at least two important and closely intertwined spheres:

- a) In the sphere of decision-making, as a part of the school governance, where the students took the role of the stewards of education in their school.
- b) In the sphere of their intrinsic personal education where the student acts in the role of a learner. In this sphere, ethical-ontological dialogues together with the co-learning teachers are a medium of meaning-making where the learners can test their ideas, values, beliefs, desires, visions, etc., focusing on matters of their own interests.

Ethical-ontological dialogue in the sphere of democratic governance

Gaining the rights to participate in educational governance opened for the EGO and EGG students a whole new sphere of life and learning, exposing their personal unexamined ideological positions, familiar truths, beliefs, and desires about education (cf. Matusov, 2021a) to the scrutiny of testing them against multiple contested practical, ideological, cultural, political, etc., issues and positions involved in designing an educational ecology in their schools. In the role of *the stewards of their own education*, suddenly, they could deliberate important issues of their school. They approached the governing practice from the position of equal rights in direct democracy where all members participate in decision making, and decisions are brought by a simple majority (e.g., Jørgensen, 1971, p. 56). The students had the freedom to express and discuss their positions, tensions, and conflicts as people with equal rights of consciousnesses to be taken seriously. It is precisely the legitimacy of their freedom of consciousness that drove and energized their numerous, passionate ethical-ontological dialogues (cf. Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b; Marjanovic-Shane, 2023c)

Ideological differences regarding democracy

The ideological differences among the students regarding the form, shape, and participation in the school governance itself were frequently and clearly voiced on various occasions: in school general assemblies, school newsletters and journals, etc. (Carlsson & Lundgren, 1976; Hem & Remlov, 1969; Jørgensen, 1971; Melheim, 2019).

We found, both in EGO and in EGG, vast differences among the students in terms of their personal involvement in and relationships to the school's democratic governance: from being extraordinary passionate and opinionated about designing and governing their school, to the almost complete abstinence and disinterest in the matters of school governance, to the outright rejection of being governed by anyone and anything. The more involved students in both schools accused the others of being irresponsible, indifferent, uncaring, and rule-breakers. In EGO, the non-participating students were exposed to shaming and threats of being expelled. In EGG, similar intimidations also had ideological overtones of the politically

left values of collectivism and common good above personal freedoms, needs, and interests (i.e., the collectivistic expectation to participate in decision-making meetings at the price of time for individual in-depth studies). On the other hand, the less involved students had diverse reasons for non-involvement in the governance itself: from preoccupation with their own learning interests and finding school governance boring and irrelevant; to considering the whole practice of the school governance rather disingenuous and fake since the school had no full sovereignty from the National Departments of Education. They felt that real decisions are ultimately made “somewhere above.”

Ethical-ontological dialogue in the sphere of the learners’ intrinsic education

On the other hand, the situation was more complex when it came to the students’ personal rights and negative freedom in learning. We wonder what domains of learning were considered to belong to the personal negative freedoms of the students as learners – which would potentially open a path for them to enter into dialogues from the positions of the equal rights of consciousnesses with their teachers (staff)? And vice versa, what learning domains were regarded as falling into the students’ positive freedoms – in which the hierarchical difference of consciousness between the teacher (an expert) and the student (an ignorant novice) is still preserved?

We don’t know directly about dialogues that took place within their educational activities (class meetings). But we suspect that in both schools, ethical-ontological dialogues about the matters of the curriculum were not always supported. As we reported above, the matters of the academic curriculum were largely preset by the Departments of Education, and the learning activities were planned and prepared by the teachers. In that sense, it was the outside authority who defined what is good for the students, and the so-called “educational content” was (positively) defined, placing it within the students’ positive freedoms. As soon as there is an authority that is outside of the student, an authority that has the power of judgment over a person, a genuine ethical-ontological dialogue is suppressed since this person is not in the position of having equal rights of consciousness. Of course, ethical-ontological dialogues focusing on testing opinions about curricular issues probably happened anyway. We suspect, however, that if and when ethical-ontological dialogues happened, they emerged by chance and, at least in EGO, not always as a result of the overall school stewards’ educational approach. There are some indices that such dialogues might have emerged within a non-traditional curriculum that was equally novel for the teachers and the students, such as the novel computer science. We also think that such dialogues might have emerged in educational activities where the students had legitimate negative freedom to determine and plan the curriculum and instruction; and, most importantly, to freely evaluate their learning (what it meant to them, how useful it was to them, etc.) without having to follow any known standards and norms.

* * *

Many questions remain. For instance, what was the relationship between having the role of the steward of education and the role of the learner in education (a student)? Did the way the students could relate to each other and to the teachers and other authorities as the educational stewards influence their voice and agency as the learners? To us, it seemed that some students-as-stewards of their school tried to limit or even embrace limiting the right of negative freedom of the student-as-learner. They pressured others to comply with some predefined “responsibilities” regarding (traditionally required academic) classes (EGO), or they ideologically shamed those who wanted to focus only on their own studies and not participate in studying certain political and ideological curricula (EGG).

We wonder what the reasons for their (illiberal) decisions were, decisions that potentially limited a learner’s right to negative educational freedom. To what extent did the students make decisions pressured by the fact that their schools were not completely sovereign from their respective Departments of Education

dictating conditions for graduation and entering universities? Were they pressured by the social and cultural expectations of the prevalent traditional views of what a school must be? To what extent do these, sometimes illiberal, decisions result from the students' own views, understandings, and visions of education? We don't really know. What we know is that the educational ecologies in the two schools differed in their cultural, social, ideological, and political aspects. We suspect that some of the EGG students' illiberal views were potentially more ideologically driven by the radical socialist ideology, embracing collectivism and cooperation as an unexamined and unreflective bias to subordinate their educational negative freedom to follow their own ambitions and dreams. And we suspect that some of the EGO students' illiberal views resulted from their fears of being closed by the Norwegian Department of Education, and, from the fact that some of them seemed to hold the traditional philosophical and cultural understanding of education as a praxis of enculturation into the existing social milieu.

To answer some of these questions, Ana (the first author) undertook a deeper analysis of the EGO students' underlying concepts and worldviews they passionately discussed with their hearts and minds in a particular crucial General assembly meeting they later referred to as the Soul-Searching Assembly. This multifaceted analysis is presented in the next few articles in this special issue (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c).

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