

# Phronesis and Authenticity as Keywords for Philosophical Praxis in Teacher Training

Finn Thorbjorn Hansen

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Résumé de l'article

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# *Phronesis and Authenticity as Keywords for Philosophical Praxis in Teacher Training*

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FINN THORBJØRN HANSEN

Aarhus University, Denmark

*This essay describes the growing interest in and use of concepts such as phronesis and authenticity in educational research and practice. While phronesis seems to be connected to the ethical dimension of education and educational guidance, the concept of authenticity seems to be connected to the existential dimension. This essay shows the relatedness between those two concepts and the relevance of an “existence philosophical” perspective on phronesis and authenticity. The author points to the importance of an ontological approach where phronesis and authenticity are understood as two ways of respectively sensing and understanding the Being-dimension. This existence philosophical approach opens up for a new kind of praxis of Philo-Sophia, which could be realized in teacher training, when the focus is on how to become more mindful and aware of the Bildung-process in education and guidance. The essay suggests that this Being-dimension can be approached through the emergence of Communities of Wonder between the teacher and teacher student in the classroom or guidance session.*

## **Can We Have ‘Evidence’ for Good Teaching?**

This essay is about the importance of working or sensing the *existential dimension* of education and guidance in teacher training. Let me make clear from the very start, that when I talk about the ‘existential dimension’ I do *not* understand it in extension of the way Sartre or other existentialists may define it. The existential dimension as I will be elaborating on will rather be understood in the tradition of the late Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Gabriel Marcel and the Danish philosopher K.E. Løgstrup. They emphasize that ‘life meaning’ and our fundamental values in life are not something we “construct” or invent but rather something we ‘meet’ or ‘hear’ or that ‘happens to us’ in our engagement *in* life. Thus, there is a fundamental difference between the existentialist’s “meaning-making-paradigm”<sup>1</sup> and the existence philosophical “meaning-receiving-paradigm”. This will be a leading thought through the rest of this paper. I hope to show that the concepts of *phronesis* and authenticity, which can be adopted as counter-concepts and counter-conceptualisations in the debate on ‘evidence-based teaching and research’, can be seen as concepts that point to this ontological Being-dimension in education and guidance, which the epistemological and methodological approaches are not able to “sense.”

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<sup>1</sup> Although there is of course a difference, it is also obvious that there is a certain congeniality between the existentialist’s and late modern social constructionism’s view of and appeal to a ‘meaning-making-paradigm’. See my elaboration on that in Hansen, 2007.

The need for focusing on the ethical and existential dimension in teacher education and guidance has become a hot topic in educational research nowadays. One reason is the enormously political and professional pressure on the educational system educators experience today, that force them to work and live as professional teachers in a system based primarily on “scientific knowledge and methods.”<sup>2</sup> Many school leaders and teachers in contemporary education systems are being asked whether they have evidence that their way of teaching and leading schools is the “best practice” or most “effective” one. “Can you prove that it works?” educational evaluators and politicians ask rigorously and often with visible signs of skepticism. The British educational researcher David Hargreaves (1996, 1997, 1999) accuses educational research of not having generated a cumulative body of relevant research and methods that are verified and empirically tested. He thinks that educational research should provide teachers with clear guidance for their work, and that teachers must be educational professionals who have specialized scientific-based knowledge and methods for their profession. Good teaching should basically be seen as a scientific enterprise, or more correctly as an application of and transmission of scientifically based knowledge and methods. In the *Manifesto for Evidence-Based Education* from the organization “Evidence-based Education UK,”<sup>3</sup> they call for a culture “in which evidence is valued over opinion” and they argue that any approach to decision-making that is not evidence-based is simply “pre-scientific.” Therefore, the argument goes, we must base educational practice and research on empirical and experimental research which, according to proponents of evidence-based education, is the only method that is able to provide secure evidence about “what works” (Hargreaves, 1999; Oakley, 2001).

The British philosopher of education, Gert Biesta (2007), has given an interesting and critical description of these attempts to look at education as basically a scientific enterprise, and he has also analyzed the reactions from the opponents to this new tendency in educational research and policy. His main critique against this scientific understanding of education and what good teaching is all about is that

1. education and good teaching is fundamentally a *normative* practice, and
2. empirical evidence-based research can tell us what *worked*, but cannot tell us what *works*.

He argues that evidence-based research relies upon a causal model of professional action. But the wise thing to do in a teaching-student-relation can seldom—if ever—be deduced from general rules and prescriptions or methods but has to be sensed in the situation in a more experienced and intuitive way. In those specific “teachable moments” (Garrison, 1997), it is often not a question about what has worked, but what works or will work in this concrete and particular case.

It seems that proponents for evidence-based educational practice already know from the very beginning what the end is, and they only want to find the most effective and evidence-based way to reach those ends. As Biesta writes:

On the research side evidence-based education seems to favor a technocratic model in which it is assumed that the only relevant questions are questions about the effectiveness of educational means and techniques, forgetting, among other things, that what counts as “effective” crucially depends on judgment about what is educationally desirable.... The focus on “what works” makes it difficult if not impossible to ask the question what it should work *for* and who should have a say in determining the latter. (2007, p. 5).

He finds that teaching is not a treatment or cure or intervention with a clear result in mind (it is not a

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cemcentre.org/renderpage.asp?linkid=30324000>

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.cemcentre.org/ebeuk/manifesto.asp>

rational cause-and-effect-relation) but open-ended processes of mutual interpretations of what should be the end and best mean for reaching those debatable ends. The most effective means to reach an end might not be the best thing to do when seen from an ethical perspective. As Biesta concludes:

What is needed for education is a model of professional action which is able to acknowledge the non-causal nature of educational interaction and the fact that means and ends of education are internally rather than externally related. What is needed, in other words, is an acknowledgement of the fact that education is a moral practice, rather than a technical or technological one—a distinction which goes back to Aristotle's distinction between *phronesis* (practical wisdom) and *techné* (instrumental knowledge). (2007, p. 10)

I want to follow up on this critique and try to elaborate why teacher training as well as educational research and educational practice as such always must try to operate within two tracks:

1. A professional and evidence-based track, which has to do with effectiveness and the question “what works?” (This is the level of competence development.)
2. An existential and normative track, which has to do with the fundamental purpose of the educational practice and with the teachers and students self-relation to themselves as teachers or students. Or said in another way: how they understand themselves in what they are saying and doing. (This is the level of the *Bildung* process.)<sup>4</sup>

In the first track, we are as teachers and researchers engaged in didactic procedures and methods through questions such as “*What* subjects shall we teach?” (content), “*How* should we teach the subjects?” (methods and techniques) or “*Why* should we teach in this subject?” (critical reflection). Here the emphasis is on teaching as a professional activity where the teachers require specialized knowledge, skills and methods and where ends and means are understood as distinct and that professional teachers focus on finding appropriate means to create a “high quality learning environments” to attain some pre-determined ends. This calls for Standards.

But teaching also involves both ends and means simultaneously. As it written in the official Standards for Education, Competence and Professional Conduct of Educators in British Columbia, Canada<sup>5</sup>, teaching should also aim at “the preparation of citizens to live productive and fulfilled lives” by relating “intellectually, pedagogically and ethically with children”. They even write that teaching is a “moral activity intended to benefit both the individual and society” and that teachers are expected to “value and care for all children”, and “act as ethical educational leaders” and demonstrate their responsibility to students, the public and the profession. The problem with this declaration of Standards for educators in British Columbia is—as Canadian philosopher of education David Coulter and co-writers (Coulter et al, 2004) sees it—that although there seem at first to be two tracks of concern in play in the Standards in reality, and when we read further, the second normative track seems to disappear. After having read the document, the reader is left only with a conception and some practical and pedagogical suggestions to follow the knowledge-oriented and *instrumental* track.

But knowledge and methods are not enough, when teachers have to act ethically. The teacher has also to engage him or herself in ethical and existential questions such as: “What seems to emerge in the situation?”, “What would be the right thing to do in this specific situation with this unique student and maybe inspite of the common Standards?”, “What is expressed here as the good life?”, “What is the good life at all?” There may even be more existential questions such as “*Who* am I who teaches in this subject?”, “Where am I in my thinking, speaking and teaching this subject?”, “Who am I in my

<sup>4</sup> *Bildung* is a German word for a kind of existential learning process, which is difficult to translate into English. Some will call it *self-cultivation*, others *edification* and others again *formation* or *liberal education*. (See Lovlie et al, 2003)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.bcct.ca/documents/edu\\_stdts.pdf](http://www.bcct.ca/documents/edu_stdts.pdf)

relation to my students?”, “What do I really long for and think about this subject and teaching?”, “What is the deeper meaning of this enterprise – for me, for the community and for the world as such?”

So where we in track one are occupied with more pragmatic and instrumental questions in a functional *problem solving* and *critical* attitude, we would in track two be occupied with more existential and ethical questions from a more *wondering* attitude that is also related to questions such as “What is experienced as meaningful and wise to do in this moment?”, “What is or should be the existential and ethical criteria for what works?” and “What is it all about?”

One could also say that where the first track deals with science and evidence-based methods and practices and reflections *on* specific problems and reflections *within* a specific professional paradigm and culture, the latter deals with an existential and phenomenological description of and dwelling *in* the “lived experience” (Van Manen, 2001; Løgstrup, 1995, 1997) on the one side, and a philosophical hermeneutical understanding and reflection *from* that lived experience and meaning (Gadamer, 1960; Arendt, 1978) that is embodied in the educational practice and the actor’s engagement in this practice, on the other side.

In the next sections, I am going to elaborate further on the relation between these different forms of reflection with a special emphasize on what can be understood as the existential and normative reflection in education and teacher training. I will argue that it is when we want to clarify these kinds of reflections that Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis* becomes important as well as the concept of *authenticity*. But, I will also point to the problematic tendency in contemporary educational research not to take in the more existential and ontological dimension, when those two concepts are being used and described.

### **The Revitalization of Aristotle’s Concept of Phronesis in Educational Thinking**

Both Biesta and Coulter et al. choose to point to Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis* to make room for proper reflection on the ethical dimension in teacher training and classroom teaching as such. They emphasize that we must make use of Aristotle’s distinction between *poeisis* and *praxis* to really understand what good judgment and practical wisdom can be in teaching and educational guidance. *Poeisis* is described as an activity based on theoretical judgment and the application of this theory in practice in a mean-ends activity. *Praxis*, on the other hand, is described as an activity understood as a value in itself (like friendship, playing the flute, walking in the forest, parenting, playing, loving, etc.) and based on a practical judgment of what is the wise thing to do in this particular moment, case and context. As Coulter et al. write:

The ultimate end of *praxis* is to act well, to lead a good and worthwhile life, an activity that inevitably involves relationships with other people and the intertwining of ends and means. (2004, p. 3-4)

*Poeisis* is connected to propositional knowledge (“knowing that”—*episteme*) and procedural knowledge (“knowing how”—*techné*), where as *praxis* is connected to a non-propositional and often tacit knowledge, which is described as judgment and attitude—a special way of being in the particular situation.

To exercise this kind of judgment and attitude and act from *praxis*, the person has to be tuned into the particular. *Phronesis* is, as they write, “knowing or perceiving the particular, that is grasping the relevant features in a complex or rapidly changing environment (such as a classroom)” (Coulter et al., 2004, p. 6). So, the teachers must have a very good sense of each student and their individual needs, longings, and problems to be able to “do the right thing at the right time for the right reasons with the

right people.” As they argue

Teaching understood simply as the application of standards (a form of theoretical judgment, that is, the application of the general to the particular) would result in the same feedback to each author [student]. (Coulter et al., 2004, p. 7)

What *phronesis* is about is to find the general *within* the particular and see it from an ethical perspective, that is, how can this activity make the life of the student a more wise, good and beautiful life? As one of the co-writers says in an earlier article on practical wisdom:

An education that embraces practical judgment prepares us to dwell within the rough ground of experience, to appreciate its complexity and deep interpretability and to respond ethically. (Phelan, 2001, p. 53).

At first, it might seem reasonable to bring Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis* into the contemporary discussion about the necessity and use of evidence-based practice and research in teacher training and education as such. For people who are only familiar with a rational and instrumental (or the empirical-analytical) approach to education, Aristotle’s distinction between *episteme*, *techné* and *phronesis* can be an eye-opener. It becomes a way to qualify and develop a more nuanced and sensitive form of reflection. *Phronesis* can be understood as a concept for increased awareness of the particular situation, a name for a qualified reflection, a judgment upon tacit knowledge in practice of professions, and an intuitive form of “situation knowledge.” It then becomes how one masters a specific situation; that is, it becomes “knowledge-in-action” and “reflection-in-action.”

But we have to be cautious when we are dealing with the concept and practice of *phronesis*. *Phronesis* can so easily, in a modern conceptualisation and use, be transformed into something quite different. If the concept and practice of *phronesis* in reality is used as a *means* for something else, then we are in risk of losing the deeper meaning of what *phronesis* is. Yet the concept of *phronesis* is often misused in contemporary educational research and theory in subtle ways.

David Coulter and John Wiens (2002) and Philip Dybicz (2004) have made us aware of this instrumental use of *phronesis* in some of the contemporary theory-practice-discussions. They point for example to Imre (1985), Scott (1990), DeRoos (1990) and Korthagen and Kessels (1999) who describe *phronesis* as an approach that mostly is directed towards helping the practitioner in *perceiving* more (tacit knowledge) in a particular situation. Many following in the line of Donald Schön (1983) and Polanyi (1967) hope in the concept of *phronesis* to rediscover an approach that can help the practitioner in his or her reflection-in-practice to become better practitioners in the sense better to master, solve or cope with the problems and situations in the profession. DeRoos writes: “If knowing-in-action refers to our practice habits, reflection-in-action refers to our ability to recognize the uniqueness of each situation and to adjust our problem-solving accordingly” (DeRoos, 1990, p. 284).

But if they think of and use *phronesis* as a kind of ‘practical knowledge perception’ to make the practitioner more effective in his profession, they have misunderstood what *phronesis* is all about. They have confused and mixed up the distinction between practical knowledge and practical wisdom and made *phronesis* into an instrumental enterprise—a *poesis* instead of a *praxis*.

Instead, we must understand that *phronesis* is, as Coulter and Wiens posit, an amalgam of knowledge, virtue and reason that aims at living an ethical good life as such. It is not just connected to professional practice and problem-solving and its ethical ideals and rules for doing that but also to the tacit norms and values of *sensus communis*, that is of the community of professionals and practitioners in the society and culture (*polis*).

And further more – *phronesis* is not knowledge we can observe from a distance as it were. It is embodied judgment. A teacher who display *phronesis* must not only understand what to do, he or she must do it. So *phronesis* has also a lot to do with a kind of *personal integrity* as well. And an integrity that is

also embodied in the common and surrounding culture of which she or he is part.

Now, moving from the functional and problem-solving approach to *phronesis* to the critical and emancipatory approach to *phronesis*, we still find a *poesis* approach in many of the attempts to understand and apply *phronesis* in the critical tradition of educational research. From this “camp” of educational thinkers (Flyvbjerg, 1991; Dunne, 1993; Coulter & Wiens, 2002; Biesta, 2007) which are typically inspired by Critical Theory (Habermas, early Arendt), there is a tendency to connect *phronesis* to a critical and political education (critical reflection, political *Bildung*). The person who has *phronesis*—the *phronimos*—is then seen as an emancipated citizen who is very conscious about his or her own values and norms, and who acts according to those deliberated and chosen values.

Gert Biesta as well as David Coulter can be seen in that perspective. When, for example, Biesta wants to make room for moral reflection in education and point to the concept of *phronesis*, this is basically done with the purpose to strengthen the democratic possibility to have a political dialogue about the ends of education. While this, of course, is a worthwhile and necessary quest in contemporary education, it nevertheless is a reduction of *phronesis*. *Phronesis* becomes a political means for something else. If *phronesis* at all can be said to be a means for something else—which Aristotle in fact does in book 6 of *Nicomachean Ethics*—then it is only as a mean or way to *Sophia*, that is wisdom in a more ontological sense.

When, for example, educational researchers criticize “the cult of effectiveness” in education, the argument is very often (as in the case of Biesta), that it will undermine the democratic and community created values of the society. But as important democratic values and “citizenship education” may be in the school system, it should not, as the Danish philosopher K.E. Løgstrup has pointed out (1987), be the overall purpose of the school. The overall purpose should not be the creation of good and effective citizens, but to create “free spaces” for people to search for wisdom, beauty and meaningfulness. From this perspective the school should be a place for *praxis* in Aristotle’s sense, that is, education as a purpose in itself. This was, as will be known to many, the old meaning of the Greek word *scholē*, and this is, what many existence philosophers and existential educationalist have argued for when they gave views on the purpose of education and teacher training. (Bollnow, 1976; Løgstrup, 1987; Palmer, 1998, Hansen, 2003).

But one could also point out that there might be a problematic limitation in the very concept of *phronesis* itself. *Phronesis* is, so it seems, first of all connected to *sensus communis*, to *polis*, that is, to the social and cultural contexts of the practitioner. It is the *Sittlichkeit* or cultural embodiment of the citizens in a culture—that is the main landscape (or backdrop) of *phronesis*. Looked upon in this way *phronesis* can end up being a concept for keeping and expressing a special form of culture. It becomes a *conservative* element; a concept that focuses on and keeps us in the cultural context and the way of life gestated through this culture. *Phronesis* then help us to become good citizens and practitioners in this particular culture. But is that always a worthy thing to become? Well, of course, it depends on the culture we are living in. German people were, as we know, looked upon as good citizens and practitioners if they followed the culture and ethics of the Nazi-regime in Germany before the Second World War. So the concept of *phronesis* has in a way to be further qualified or supplied with another concept. This concept, as we shall see later, is the concept of *Sophia* and the Socratic *Eros* of *Sophia*. But a more modern concept, authenticity, might be a candidate to be this other qualifying concept in the educational theories of *phronesis*.

### Is the “Authentic Teacher” an Ideal?

So, before we turn to the concept of *Sophia* and the Socratic *Eros* of *Sophia*, I want to make some reflections on the concept of authenticity, which has also received growing interest in contemporary educational research and practice. As it will be developed here, authenticity can be seen as a “bridging concept” between *phronesis* and *Sophia*, because of its “self-transcending nature.”

But let me start by showing some of the ways that authenticity has been understood and used in contemporary educational research and practice.

In Scandinavia, for example, there has been a growing interest in seeing authenticity and the “authentic teacher” as ideal, that for which we should strive in the educational system. One of the main arguments is that to prevent the increasing individualization in late modern societies and educational systems from becoming too narcissistic or too instrumental, we must try to qualify this individualization in a way that connects it to a *moral* ideal of authenticity and a striving for “the good life.” It is basically the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1991) and his analysis of modernity and authenticity which is being referred to in this Scandinavian discussion (Jørgensen, 2003; Laursen, 2004; Nyeng, 2004, 2007; Schei, 2005; Hansen, 2006c; Raffnsøe-Møller, 2007).

This interpretations and “use” of the concept of authenticity is, though, in some cases very problematic. Let me just give you two examples.

In his book *The authentic teacher* [*Den autentiske lærer*] (2004), the Danish professor of pedagogy, Per Fibæk Laursen, defines authenticity in the following way:

Authenticity, which is an essential part of personal professional competence, presupposes a harmonic relationship between the professional task and the professional’s own existence in general. (p. 36, my translation)

Authenticity is to act in correspondence with one’s own life values. Therefore one must be clear about one’s value orientation to be authentic. (p. 107, my translation).

So the teacher must ask herself questions such as: “Why do I want to become a teacher?”, “What do I really want?”, “What are my values in life, and how do they match the values of the teaching profession?” In other words, in the eyes of Per Fibæk Laursen, authenticity is a question of personal integrity for the teacher when dealing with professional ideals and attitudes and personal life values.

His colleague, Professor and psychologist Per Schultz Jørgensen, continues this line of thinking in his article “The personal teacher” (2003), in which he writes that in order to become an authentic teacher and to create authentic learning processes, it is not enough to have solid professional (curriculum) and pedagogical (didactic) insight. The teacher must also be able to defend her professional actions on a personal level and dare to bring her own attitudes and values into play and put them into question in the classroom. Such an authentic learning process can be practiced through “personal training” based on the Socratic idea of the need to “know thyself”, in which the student teacher strives to develop “... a personal epistemology: that is a meta-model or a *personal philosophy*, which can function as a strengthening of the personal professionalism in a direction of greater coherence and personal authenticity” (2003, p. 105, my italics, FTH).

It is, at least in my eyes, obvious that this kind of definition of authenticity is deeply problematic. It is symptomatic of these kinds of didactic and psychological approaches to authenticity that they lack normative and philosophical reflection. If we only look at authenticity and authentic learning as a kind of process that will help the teacher student to develop his “personal integrity” or “personal philosophy,” we then continue to think in line with the evidence-based and evaluation-oriented educational thinkers whose main interest is, as we saw, to see “what works.” If they were to ask themselves on what ground, or from what criteria, it should be measured or judged what works, then they would—as Gert Biesta has shown us—necessarily to have reflected on more ethical and philosophical questions such as, for example, “Is every ‘personal integrity’ or ‘personal philosophy’ in it self good?” Again—would not the Nazi officer, or religious fundamentalist, think and live from a very strong integrity? Would not the intelligent but psychotic person live with a very clear “personal philosophy?” In what way should the conception of the good be approached if we want to qualify our understanding of authenticity so we avoid those kind of “closed” forms of personal integrity and philosophy?



To further on this critique of the use of authenticity, it can be said—very much in line with my critique of the use of *phronesis*—that many educational practitioners and researchers, such as Jørgensen and Laursen, approach and use the concept of authenticity in a very instrumental way. In their operational perspectives, authenticity becomes a means to achieve something else (better didactic learning processes or democratic attitudes).

This instrumental view of authenticity is displayed if we, in an organizational setting, try to take a *utilitarian* approach, saying, for example, "In what way can we use striving for authenticity to maximize our employee's ability to work and thereby create more money?" Or, in a milder version, "In what way can the quest for authenticity create better democratic citizens?" And, "How can we maximize the learning processes through the learners' striving for authenticity?" All three approaches to authenticity are equally instrumental.

An artist would very rarely feel comfortable in the company of an art therapist because the art therapist *uses* art as a means to achieve something else instead of seeing art as an activity of great value in itself. In the same way the authentic learning process or act must be seen as having value in itself. As Aristotle's might have said—authenticity is connected to *praxis* and not to *poesis*.

Yet another and even more profound problem with many contemporary educational researcher's or practitioner's view on authenticity is that they reduce the concept of authenticity to a question of self-realization or "personal development" and social relations. This is what I would call the pitfall of *subjectivism* and *anthropocentrism*.

Both Taylor and Heidegger emphasize in their thinking on authenticity that this concept is not connected with the subject (*res cogitans*) but with existence (*Dasein*).

Existence philosophy provides a radical critique of the subject. And Taylor's concept of authenticity is, first of all, a concept he uses to fight the "Culture of Self-realization" and subjectivism and anthropocentrism in human science. For him, authenticity has two dimensions:

1. A life-aesthetic dimension, in which one tries to be true to oneself and express one's originality, and
2. An existential dimension, in which this self-formation or "*Bildung* process" is embodied into a number of meaning horizons—that is, social, cultural, historical and metaphysical contexts.<sup>6</sup>

Only if there is a balance between these two dimensions can you talk about authenticity.

In other words, personal integrity can only be seen as a pre-stage of authenticity. Authenticity is first of all connected, as we shall see, to a radical openness and dialogue with the world and human being and life as it reveals itself as great incomprehensible *mysteries*—not as *problems* to be solved (Marcel, 1973).

Some psychologists, though, have an eye for this. The existential psychologist Emmy van Deurzen-Smith writes in her book *Existential Counselling in Practice* (1995), that authenticity is not in itself a sufficient virtue. Isolated authenticity can be synonymous with madness. As an important sounding board for authenticity is it necessary also to work with another endeavour of a more philosophical nature, that is an existential and ontological search process, where one does not only live in accordance with one's own values of life, but where one also continuously problematizes and asks questions about one's own and others' assumptions about what the world, human being and the good life is. Or, as Emmy van Deurzen-Smith writes: "... The moment you are able to live authentically, it becomes important for you to find new criteria to decide what is right and what is wrong" (1995, p. 89, my

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<sup>6</sup> It is well known that Charles Taylor does not correspond to a full-hearted social constructivism in the sense that he also appeals to the ontological and spiritual dimensions of life. To be in a *Bildung*-process and to understand what authenticity is, one also has to reflect these dimensions as well. (See his interview with the American television network PBS, March 20, 2007.)

translation). These criteria would, of course, be ethical and philosophical. And it is in reflecting on *those* criteria in relation to one's *own* life that the person makes room for a genuine *Bildung* process in the sense that Wilhelm von Humboldt, Herder, Goethe, Kierkegaard and later Gadamer talked about *Bildung*, that is, as a way to spiritual or existential awareness (Garff, 2004; Hansen, 2005, 2006a & b).

To sum up, I would therefore conclude that if we are going to talk about and work with so called “authentic learning processes,” then it is best understood as a genuine *Bildung* process, that is, as space free from pragmatic, therapeutic and utilitarian reflections and a place—a *scholē*—for the Socratic *Eros* of wisdom.

### The Relation Between *Phronesis* and Authenticity

At this point, I would like to emphasize that there is a difference between, on the one hand, practical reflection, knowledge and values that are connected with the particular professional context in a specific society—the teacher in the classroom and in the school of a specific culture—and on the other hand, the *existential* reflection, certainty and life expression and experiences that are connected with the teachers' views on life and values in general. That is, his personal relation to Being or Life itself<sup>7</sup>.

As educational researchers, as already noted, we use the concept of *phronesis* to capture the notion of practical knowledge and the values incarnated in *professional practice* as well as in the *given society and culture* surrounding this professional practice.

But when we are dealing with the concept of authenticity, we focus on another dimension in which this practical knowledge is illuminated from an existential perspective. A question like “What are my values in life?” is, of course, connected to more philosophical questions like “What is the Meaning of life?”, “What is a Human Being?” and “What *is* the Good Life?” To develop a greater consciousness about one's lived philosophy and one's philosophical self-understanding, that is, one's ontological relation to Being itself—is not necessarily identical with the process of reflecting on the ethics and values of tacit and practical knowledge in professional actions and in the culture in which this profession is embodied. This, I find, is an important difference to notice.

I would say that to create room for existential reflection is not a question of *episteme*, *techne* or *phronesis* but a question of ‘Socratic *Eros*’. That is, the ability to wonder over fundamental issues and to long for knowledge or, better yet, *wisdom* about what the Good Life is. And this search might indeed transcend the values and knowledge of the given society and culture (*sensus communis*) and professional practice. Here the focus is not—as in the concept of *phronesis*—on the person's relationship to *polis*, but on the person's relationship to *cosmos*. In contrast to the concept of *phronesis*, where there is a conservative element, the concept of *Eros* has a utopian and transcendent element (Garrison, 1997; Eggert Olsen, 2003). This does not mean, as some educational researchers seem to think, that we are then going from a ‘practical wisdom’ (*phronesis*) to a ‘theoretical wisdom’ (*sophia*). The *philo Sophia*, which Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were talking about, was neither a wisdom connected only to the cleverness of *polis* or to an abstract, theoretical, epistemic interest in *cosmos*. It was a way of living—an existential reflection or contemplation—what Hannah Arendt (1978) calls ‘thinking’ and Socrates calls “Ethical Care of the Soul.”

Indeed, Aristotle was very conscious about the limitations of *phronesis* when he wrote that the concept of *phronesis* was of a lower kind than the concept of *wisdom* (*Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 6). *Phronesis*, he said, was only dealing with the human condition. *Wisdom* was dealing with the divine condition. And in every human being, he said, there is a divine spark, which the contemplative life is

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<sup>7</sup> This kind of ‘existential reflection’ is – as I mentioned in the beginning of this essay not to be confused with ‘existentialistic reflection’ à la Sartre or with ‘critical reflection’ à la Habermas Critical Theory or critical educational researchers like the Norwegian philosopher of education, Erling Lars Dale, who speaks only for a critical form of reflection and didactic. (Dale, 1999, 2000)

occupied with in its search for wisdom and happiness (*Nicomachean Ethics*, book 10). To strive for this kind of life was the highest level a human being could achieve, Aristotle tells us. Or as Reeve (1992) explains, "...*Phronesis* prescribes for the sake of [*sophia*] and aims to bring it into being... Study expressing [*sophia*] is primary eudaimonica; practical activity expressing phronesis is secondary eudaimonica; and the latter is for the sake of the former" (p. 96-97).

Aristotle puts *Phronesis* on the level of political science, that is, the science and prudence that has to do with only the human condition and with *polis*. But reality and life are not just constituted by the human condition and through *polis*. Human beings are also embodied in a universe and *cosmos*, which has a great impact on the human beings' ability to reach *eudaimonica* (that is happiness). When the Stoics—such as, for example, Seneca—centuries later talked about philosophy as a practical and spiritual exercise to "tune into the universe," to become one with the Logos (Hadot, 1995), they were talking about wisdom and truth seeking, which went beyond human-created reality. Aristotle (and Plato and Seneca) believed that we had a "spark of divine lightening" in our souls, and through contemplation and by living, in practice, a life in close resonance with this inner light, we lived the highest form of life—the philosophical life. But only the Gods were wise, so human beings had to always be on their way to wisdom; they could not possess wisdom, but could, at best, be lovers of wisdom, that is, *philo-sophers*.

There is, I would say, a remarkable similarity between Socratic *Eros* and the concept of authenticity if we look at it through an existence philosophical perspective. Authenticity can also in some way be described as a concept that is dealing with a striving to bridge the gap between the human-created and the divine (or let's say ontological) dimension. Authenticity in its more Socratic and existential sense is not connected to a substantial self or to a conventional concept of reflection, truth and knowledge. Rather, it is related to a concept of wonder, mindfulness and wisdom (Kierkegaard, 1846; Marcel, 1950; Arendt, 1978; Hadot, 1995; Hansen, 2003, 2008a&b). It is closely connected to the here-and-now event, which transcends pragmatic consciousness and the "World of Appearance"<sup>8</sup> that the reflective ego perceives and describes. Or, as the American existence philosopher Bernard J. Boelen writes:

Man can only be authentically in this world by transcending this world, and this paradox is the mainspring of all philosophical reflection and moral activity.

Man's authentic way of "being-in-the-world" is not that of a "perfect adjustment" to his environment, to his fellow men or even to himself. But his "being-in" is an open relation, a creative participation, a dialogue. The original situation of man is to "ex-sist" in the etymological sense of the word (to stand out). This "ex-sistence" is multidimensional, for man finds-himself-being-together-with-other-in-the-world. And this original situation is a unity in multiplicity, a system of polar tensions or a "dialogical existence." (1961, p. 205).

To catch the very uniqueness of the particular situation, the person has to be out of himself in a radical openness made by wondering. Therefore, the concept of authenticity can be seen as important to qualify both our knowledge and sense of practical knowledge and intuition and our view on personal integrity.

In order to be authentic and to create an authentic learning process, therefore, the teacher must be able to "stand in the openness" and strive for a community of wonder with his students, and indeed dare to question his own philosophical assumptions and "personal philosophy" which underlie his professional knowledge, attitudes, and skills.

According to the Socratic *Eros*, this implies calling something into existence that was not there before. It is an artistic creation as well as an ethical experiment. It is a philosophizing, which makes

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<sup>8</sup> It is Hannah Arendt who makes this crucial distinction between "The World of Appearance" and "Being" in *Life of the Mind* (1978), which refer to Heidegger's distinction between the *ontic* and *ontological* dimension.

room for the possible, for that which has not yet found its own words or expression. Or, the Danish philosopher Ole Fogh Kirkeby has so wonderfully has described the goal as genuine “authentic teachers” or philosophizing practitioners, when they are working in organizations, “...must represent the Otherness of the organization. It is not its tacit dimension that must be brought to light—we are far more ambitious—but it’s shadow, the contours cast from the beams of a possible world.”<sup>9</sup>

The practical and tacit knowledge, with which so many educational researchers and reflective practitioners have been occupied, is not touching upon the ontological Being-dimension of the “teachable moment.” Having a functional and problem-solving attitude in the situation, they are determined to stick to the “World of Appearance” and do not open and have a sense of the “being-in-the-world” in which the practitioner is always also embodied. To experience the “felt presence,” or what Kirkeby calls “the contours cast from the beams of a possible world,” and to learn to think and act from this felt presence is one of the goals of the existence philosophical approach to education and guidance.

I have in another article (Hansen, forthcoming) given a more thorough description of the way Hannah Arendt, and especially Heidegger, thought about *phronesis*. What I will say here is, that *phronesis* and *Sophia* in their eyes is indeed two sides of the same coin. *Phronesis* is the place where the concrete human being (*Dasein*) senses Being (*Sein*) through the way this particular culture and time gestalts the ontological Being-dimension. Or said in another way, *phronesis* seen from this ontological approach is the ability to sense and make room for and act from, what Arendt so beautifully describes as this “small non-time space in the very heart of time” and still be very concrete. Excellence, one could say, comes from that movement and contact with Being as such.

But to be able to sense the eternal in temporal we must be in a state of, what Arendt calls an “admiring wonder.” To be in a state of *philo-sophia* is to follow the Eros of Wisdom. *Sophia* then is not the sensing but the *understanding* of this Being-dimension and the Socratic *Eros* is the human being’s eternal quest and longing to say and grasp what cannot be said and grasped directly but only indirectly about the wisdom, beauty, and meaning of life.

### Praxis of *Philo-Sophia* in Teacher Training

The question now is can we in teacher training create—or better call upon—a praxis of *philo-sophia*?

I would think so, and I have experienced as a trainer of college professors at teacher’s colleges that those moments can happen.

In a research project, which started in Spring 2007 and which will go on until the end of 2009, I have designed a course and a Action Research process, where ten college professors from different professions (some are teaching in pedagogy, others in history or aesthetics and others again in religion and more philosophical issues) first will learn and experience what it means to be in a Community of Wonder and then try it out in different educational and counselling settings with their teacher students and under my observation.

For many years I have been trained in and a trainer of a special philosophical discipline or approach, which is called *Philosophical Praxis* or Philosophical Counselling (*Philosophische Praxis*). I have also, on master courses at my university, been training consultants, nurses, teachers and educational leaders in the practices of philosophical counselling and “Socratic Dialogue Groups” (Hansen, 2000, 2002, 2004, 2006a, 2008a&b).

Let me present a very short overview of some of the main ideas that govern philosophical praxis. First of all, the movement of philosophical praxis must be understood as something very different from traditional, academic, theoretical and practical philosophy, and its little brother, Applied Philosophy.

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<sup>9</sup> See Introduction (Call for Papers) to “Conference on Organising Authenticity: A New Perspective on Artists in Residence”, Bramstrup, Denmark, June 6-9, 2004. ([www.cbs.dk/cal](http://www.cbs.dk/cal))

When professional philosophers are occupied with reflection and philosophical theories, they talk and think *about* practices and phenomenon, and applied philosophy is engaged in how to apply these theoretical insights to practice. All those approaches are typically governed by an epistemological perspective even though the subject might be about ethics or metaphysics. Or as Hannah Arendt explains

The question, when asked by the professional [philosopher], does not arise out of his own experiences while engaged in thinking. It is asked from outside—whether that outside is constituted by his professional interests as a thinker or by the common sense in himself that makes him question an activity that is out of order in ordinary living. (Arendt, 1978, p. 166)

Philosophical praxis, on the other hand, is occupied with the theories, ideas or “lived understandings” (Lahav & Tillmanns, 1995; Lahav, 1996) that are incarnated *in* life and practice of the student, visitor or even the philosophical practitioner himself. The questions he focuses on are asked from inside—the inner side of the concepts so to speak.

Thus, there is a huge difference between reflecting on and thinking *about* a phenomenon in a systematic and analytical way, and wondering and thinking *from* a lived experience—a difference the French philosopher Pierre Hadot has profoundly described in his book *Philosophy as a Way of Life – Spiritual exercises from Socrates to Foucault* (1995). This difference is also a philosophical insight and experience (*Erfahrung*), which the existential phenomenologists (Marcel, Heidegger, Løgstrup) and philosophical hermeneutics (Gadamer, Buber, Arendt) help us to see. Philosophical practitioners help us concretely to live this insight out in our ordinary lives. They help us to be aware of our self-relation to our inner and lived understanding in our being-in-the-world before we reflect about and on what we are doing and thinking. They help us to tune in on who and where we are in our understanding and being. The Danish existence philosopher Søren Kierkegaard has caught this nicely when he writes in his diary:

How true and how Socratic was this Socratic principle: to understand, truly to understand, is to be. For us more ordinary men this divides and becomes twofold: it is one thing to understand and another to be. Socrates is so elevated that he does away with this distinction. (JP, 4:4301, Kierkegaard, 1975)

In the educational system, and indeed in teacher training too, we are first of all focused on helping ourselves, and our students, to understand what we are saying and they are saying. But in line with Kierkegaard: it is one thing is to understand what we are saying; another thing is to understand ourselves *in* what we are saying! It is, in other words, this self-relation to our being-in-the-world and being in what we are saying and doing that demands not just an analytical and critical or personal (in a psychological sense) reflection but an *existential* reflection. This kind of existential reflection is not what we are used to doing in the educational system. We are used to an epistemological or technological approach. But as the philosopher Cornelius Verhoeven emphasizes: “Philosophy is not knowledge; as a form of desire (love) it is more a pathos, at state, than an actual knowing. Plato gives this pathos a name: wonder” (Verhoeven, 1972, 10).

Gerd Achenbach, one of the leading figures in modern philosophical praxis, argues in his article “On Wisdom in Philosophical Practice” (1997) and later in “Philosophical Practice opens up the Trace to Lebenskönnerschaft” (2001) that philosophical praxis is not a question of solving or treating an individual’s “personal problem.” It is first of all a dialogue between two people who want to philosophize and search for wisdom—not in an abstract and academic or pedagogical way—as the philosophical tutor would do with his student—but by taking the departure for the philosophizing from the personal and lived experience of the visitor *and* the wonder the philosophical practitioner meets in his impression of the visitor’s articulation of her experience. It is paramount that the

philosophical practitioner is guided by what the Norwegian philosopher Anders Lindseth calls a “touched not-knowing” (Fastvold, 2005). Only when he is led by his sense of wonder and shows this in his dialogue with his visitor can he hope to meet the other person in a Community of Wonder.

This also expresses a fundamental view by the philosophical practitioner that every person is a ‘mystery’ in Gabriel Marcel’s sense of that world (Marcel, 1950). He or she is a new unknown universe, where no theoretical model of the human being can be presupposed. What kind of theory, philosophy, ideas, methods or questions the philosophical practitioners uses, when he is having a dialogue with his visitor, depends completely on what the specific case brings the visitor to articulate of his or her life impression, what the visitor tries to express and then to philosophize from this impression. What they experience together then is a feeling of wonder and sense of greater horizons and excellence when the philosophical practitioner brings in the Grand Stories and Thinkers of humanity as a sounding board for their reflections and dialogue. Through this philosophical “Bildund-sounding-board,” they are helped to look upon this concrete life impression from a more universal point of view—to sense and better understand universality in the particularity.

Achenbach emphasizes that philosophical praxis is not just a tool (or paint brush) for “creating ourselves as an art of life.” The purpose of philosophizing or living the Philosophical Life is not to be your own life designer, the one who creates his or her own unique life form, values and happiness. This would be an extreme expression of subjectivism, aestheticism or anthropocentrism. The purpose of philosophizing is to ask—as Achenbach formulated it—“what originally or finally *matters*, or what life would be like if we understood it *seriously*. Only he whose life is shaped as an answer to this question reaches a serenity that owes itself to calmness, and an easiness that owes itself to well-considered understanding” (2001, p. 8).

Let me say it again—to philosophize is not a question of knowing the right method; it is a question of being in a fundamentally wondering attitude. If the dialogue is not guided by an philosophical ethos—a love for, and passionate interest in, talking about and practicing wisdom—then we are not talking about a philosophical praxis—but maybe an pedagogical-oriented or emphatic open-minded dialogue like the ones educators and psychologists normally like to have, or a problem-orientated, rational and pragmatic dialogue like coaches and constructivistic counsellors operate through in team building, career guidance or organizational development.

Although it is impossible to give a general model for how the philosophical practitioner works with his visitor, Ran Lahav (1996, 2001) nevertheless gives us an impression of how *he* typically works.<sup>10</sup> Lahav also makes it clear that he is not so much interested in the visitor’s philosophy *about* life but his philosophy *in* life. Therefore, he focuses on the visitor’s lived understanding—his lived philosophy that is incarnate in the daily practice of the visitor. The way he does this can be described in the following five dimensions.

First, he listens to the life expressions of the visitor. What kind of expression or perspective on life does this visitor in this case represent? The starting point is the visitor’s actual situation, often her predicament and those aspects of her life, which she wishes to discuss. This is what Ran Lahav calls *Dimension 1: Autobiographical material and its initial organization*—which I would describe as the *phenomenological* dimension.

The second dimension in Philosophical Praxis is, according to Lahav, *Raising the philosophical issue*. This happens when the philosophical practitioner looks upon the experiences and attitudes described

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<sup>10</sup> In my book *Den sokratiske dialoggruppe* [Socratic Dialogue Group] (2000), I also offer a way to work with people in groups of 7-10 in educational settings, and in my latest book, *At stå i det åbne. Dannelse gennem filosofisk undren og nærvær* [To stand in the Openness. *Bildund* through philosophical wonder and presence], I elaborate and develop practices for Communities of Wonder in different educational and counselling settings especially in the adult education system. The amount of people in a Socratic Dialogue Group can be expanded into a Community of Inquiry (Splitter & Sharp, 1995) or other forms of philosophical groups and companionships (Nelson, 1949/1922; Kessels et al. 2004; Saran & Neisser, 2004).

by the visitor as possible expressions of a specific conception of a more fundamental life-issue, e.g., a certain conception of the nature of freedom or the self, of the value of success or love, etc. What kind of philosophical assumptions does the visitor take for granted in her *lived philosophy*, and with the help of the visitor (as Socrates would have done) the philosophical practitioner, as Ran Lahav formulated it, "...tries to expose it, characterize it, and put it in question in a non-judgmental way." (2001, p. 7) From this dialogue, they will develop a philosophical issue, which the visitor wants to elaborate further. This dimension I would call the *hermeneutical* stage.

The third dimension *Philosophical elaboration of the issue* is a dimension where the philosophical practitioner and the visitor dwell a long time over the issue, not rushing trying to answer it. Here philosophical ideas, methods, distinctions, concepts and assumptions are allowed in as a sounding board *if* these ideas and methods are presented not as authorities but just as possible raw material for the visitor to examine, modify, criticize, develop and maybe go beyond in accordance with her unique way of being and thinking. Here the visitor also meets the universe of philosophy, as a new room for thinking, where one can learn how to promote careful precise and critical thinking and questioning through a slowness and a dwelling on, and a systematic approach as well as a playing, experimenting and wondering approach. This dimension could be referred to as the dimension for *critical reflection*.

The fourth dimension, *Examining the philosophical issue as it is expressed in the visitor's life*, is the dimension of *existential reflection* in the philosophical praxis. Where the discussion in the third dimension was moving on an abstract and general level, in this level the philosophical practitioner helps the visitor to bring the philosophical elaboration of the issue back to the visitor's concrete situation. Ran Lahav writes that in this dimension visitors examine whether and how their life constitutes a response to the philosophical life-issue at hand, what assumptions it takes for granted, and what alternative lines of thought it rejects.

Finally in the fifth dimension, *Developing a personal response to the issue*, the visitor starts to develop her own response to the issue—not just theoretically but first and foremost through involving her everyday attitudes, relation to herself and others and, indeed, to her entire stance in the world. This dimension is, of course, not something that can be done over some few hours or weeks. It's a philosophical exercise—a lifelong *Bildung*—she can continue to do throughout her life. It is to start living from the ideal of the Philosophical Life. This dimension I would describe as the "phronetic dimension" where we so to speak return to "the cave" and try to see how we can keep the "divine spark" (that is our admiring wonder) alive in the midst of our ordinary daily and busy enterprises.

## Conclusion

If we now move back to the teacher college, where my ten college professors now are trying to call upon a Community of Wonder in their classrooms and educational guidance, in what way does this philosophical practice add anything to what is currently being done by most reasonably conscientious educators? And—this might also be a question that is on the tip of the reader's tongue—how do we get teacher candidates to genuinely engage in the process in the first place?

From my experience teaching professors and educational counsellors from teacher colleges, I must say that it is not the existential and ontological approach that is normally being displayed in the classroom or counselling session. The college professors might think at first, when they, for example, hear *about* the phases of philosophical practice, that, well, this is what they do already when they invite their students to reflect on a personal experience and later make them reflect over this experience with more theoretical concepts, categories and ideas. The difference though, as I have experienced it, is in their concrete doings. That is, how they *are*—their state of being—when they invite the students to reflect on or over their personal experiences. Are the college professors and their teacher students talking from *outside* or *inside* the lived experience? Are the college professors talking and thinking from a "felt presence" and are they talking and thinking from a "felt wonder" which they want to share with

their students? Are they in fact in real life able to “stand in the openness” and participate in a genuine community of wonder? Or are they from the very beginning “professionals” in Arendt’s sense and primary occupied in a pedagogical project with the students where they *use* philosophical praxis and the wonder-approach as a means to point to some learning processes and learning targets they want the student to engage in? Are they from the beginning to the end so occupied by a process and result oriented attitude that they are not able to wonder *from* and “forget themselves” *in* the matter itself?

These are just some of the questions that I have discovered it is necessary to ask because we are as professional educators so used to thinking in line with an epistemological or methodological approach, that we do not become existentially aware enough of our understanding or lack of understanding of who and where we are in what is said and done.

To train educators in “felt presence” and “felt wonder” is not the same. As some might have observed, there is a growing interest in how training in “mindfulness” can make the teacher more ready to be *in* the particular situation and sense the uniqueness of each individual student (Solloway, 1999). Teachers on training courses in mindfulness learn how to focus on seeing “everything from a non-judgmental perspective”, letting the thing be what it is before they bring their own categories and labels to it (Miller, 1994, p. 151). The ideal is that the teacher is what he is doing, that the teacher *is* the teaching (Aoki, 1992). So in that way, one could say that a mindful teacher is an authentic teacher.

But, what in my perspective is missing in this meditative and deeply phenomenological approach is self-reflection of a more hermeneutical and critical nature. The philosophical wonder, and its following Socratic thinking, is in my eyes not the same. In the wonder, we do not just accept and observe the phenomenon as “clouds flying over the sky.” And in the Socratic reflection, we travel out in the unknown with our philosophical companions to horizons and to thought-experiments that we did not know could be imaginable or possible before we went on our travels.

One might say that the training in mindfulness and felt presence is a pre-stage before the ability to participate in a community of wonder and Socratic dialogue. But both the mindfulness-approach and this Socratic philosophical counselling approach are new in teacher training, as I see it. It is—to refer to my introduction in this essay—something, which can help us to create a better balance between the instrumental track of *competence* and the existential track of *Bildung*.

The last question, which was how do we get teacher candidate to genuinely engage in the process in the first place, seems not to be a big question to me. My experience tells me that teacher candidates are very interested in more existential and ethical questions. The art is to bring those questions in play without ending in a therapeutic atmosphere (which they do not like) or in a pedagogically steered atmosphere (which they quickly see through). There might be some teacher candidates who are determined to do only what is written in the Standards. They only ask for and expect to receive an exact number of bundles of knowledge and different how-to-do-it-tools. To those people, you might start the lesson by telling them about the importance of a new approach in educational thinking to create more integrity between the professional and personal knowledge of the teacher because this kind of “existential integrity” can help the teacher to maximize the learning processes in the classroom. Of course this is a means-end-argument, which is indeed not in the spirit of philosophical praxis, but one can in the beginning use this argument as a kind of Trojan Horse for those opponents.

I believe that if we are good at taking our departure in our curriculum and teachings *from* existential and ethical dilemmas, issues or questions, which our students have experienced themselves in their teaching practices or own life experiences as a student, and if we are able to hear or listen to those “lived experiences” in a wondering and Socratic way, then it will increase motivation to learn, although this of course must always be a matter of secondary importance. The important matter is the longing and love for wisdom, beauty and meaningfulness, by which all people—including teacher candidates and their professors—are fundamentally driven. To connect to this source of longing is in my eyes the most outstanding purpose of the good educator no matter what subject he or she is teaching.



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### About the Author

Finn T. Hansen is an associated professor, with a Ph.D. in philosophy of education, who works in the Research Unit on Guidance Counseling at the Danish School of Education, University of Aarhus, Denmark. He is also chair of the Danish Society of Philosophical Practice. He can be reached at fth@dpu.dk