

A Soul-searching assembly: Vignette



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Abstract

In this article, I develop a dialogic analysis of a democratic school's General Assembly meeting in the form of a vignette. As a qualitative method, a vignette is a suitable way of preparing evidence and constructing data for further analyses. It is also an ideal medium for a full-fledged dialogic analysis of the described events and dialogues that took place among the participants. I grounded this vignette on a transcript of an audio recording of a General Assembly meeting held in the first Norwegian democratic high school – the Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo (EGO) on November 2nd, 1967, shortly after it started to work in 1967. Using the students' voices raised in this meeting, I aimed to recreate the meeting's dramatic atmosphere. My approach follows the art of dialogic analysis (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Gradovski, 2019; Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg, & Curtis, 2019), as I attempt to dialogically join the students, adding my reactions and interpretations of the meeting's unfolding debates and dialogues. I also add my dialogic replies to the students and insert other comments judging their positions dialogically in an attempt to also create rich data for further conceptual analysis, which is published in another article in this special issue, "Paradigmatic dialogue-disagreement in a democratic school: A conceptual analysis" (see Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b).

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Acknowledgments

I want to thank my colleagues Ljubica Beljanski-Ristic, Mikhail Gradovski, Tina Kullenberg, and other participants of the Educationalist Club at the University of Students, for their creative and helpful comments that guided my writing. I especially want to thank my colleague, Eugene Matusov, for endless talks and critical readings of my previous drafts that helped me focus my attention on and sharpen my conceptualizations of crucial moments of this dramatic event.



Introductory Note

In this article, I develop a dialogic analysis of a General Assembly meeting in a democratic school in the first Norwegian democratic high school – the Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo (EGO), Norway. My dialogic analysis in the form of a vignette is based on transcript¹ of an audio recording of a General Assembly meeting held on Wednesday, November 2nd, 1967, shortly after the Experimental School was opened in 1967 (Jørgensen, 1971, p. 41). This particular analysis in the form of a vignette is a part of a quartet of articles about the Scandinavian experiments in democratic education starting in the second part of the 1960s (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c; Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg, & Gradovski, 2023). These four articles explore the first experiments in democratically run high schools founded by the students in Oslo (EGO) and its sister democratic high school in Gothenburg, Sweden (The Experimental Gymnasium in Gothenburg – EGG). And the whole quartet is a part of a larger project published in this Special Issue on Dialogic pedagogy and Democratic education. In addition to these three research articles, we published two parts of the book, “From a school rebellion to a rebel school” by Mosse Jørgensen (Jørgensen, 1971), the EGO’s first school leader².

Why a vignette? – A methodological approach

As a qualitative method, an actual or imaginary story – a vignette (Barter & Renold, 1999) is very suitable for preparing evidence and constructing data for further analyses. A vignette is also an ideal genre for a full-fledged dialogic polyphonic research art (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Gradovski, 2019; Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg, et al., 2019). In writing this vignette, I was trying to join the students' voices in a dialogic way, adding my reactions to their ideas and opinions. I wondered what they might have meant, whom they addressed, in what ways they have treated each other, and how they saw themselves in this meeting as they discussed pressing issues of their school’s educational experiment and its very existence.

I phrase my interpretations of their voices using “low modality” expressions (Latour, 1987), e.g., “it seems [to me],” “it appears [that],” “I suspect that,” etc. Through the “low modality” phrasing, I deliberately indicate my dialogic subjectivity in interpreting the speech of others, avoiding to “read their minds.” My purpose is to stir up further dialogues about this meeting by problematizing issues, leaving space for potentially different interpretations.

As much as possible, I try to base my opinions and interpretations on the ethnographic evidence provided in the Assembly meeting transcript³, rather than attempting to impose my pre-existing theories, models or views rooted in other sociological, philosophical and educational literature and research. In this way, I am trying to construct a foundation for developing what may be a type of research akin to grounded theory approaches (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Whiteley, 2004). Namely, I follow the art of dialogic polyphonic research (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Gradovski, 2019; Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, Kullenberg, et al., 2019), which “is aimed at generating dialogic provocations, grounded in a studied phenomenon, for critical dialogue” (Matusov, Marjanovic-Shane, & Gradovski, 2019, p. 254). Thus, I

¹ *Dialogic Pedagogy: An International Online Journal* was given gracious permission to publish extensive parts of this transcript, which is a part of the book by Hem & Remlov, “Forsøgsgymnas i praksis” [Experimental Gymnasium in Praxis], by the current owner of the estate of Pax Publishing house.

² I am using terminology used in many democratic schools to call Mosse Jørgensen the “school leader,” among the others with equal rights, instead of “the principal” a term that implies hierarchy. The term is descriptive, often used to indicate the person with administrative responsibilities toward the state, rather than their day-to-day functions inside the school.

³ The meeting and its transcript were held in Norwegian. I don’t speak Norwegian, but I was able to translate it to English using Google Translate, my knowledge of two other languages related to Norwegian (German and English), and the help of some friends from Norway.

attempt to dialogically join the students who originally participated in the General Assembly dialogues, revealing my reactions, positions and interpretations of what I thought they might have meant.

The vignette is simultaneously a dialogic research in itself and it serves as a preparation for further conceptual analysis of the students' ideas I presented in another two articles, "Paradigmatic dialogue-disagreement in a democratic school: A conceptual analysis" (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b) and "Four person-ideas in a soul-searching internally persuasive discourse" (2023a).

Context

At the very start of the Experimental Gymnasium of Oslo (EGO) in 1967, the students and teachers found themselves in a situation of growing tensions regarding the vision of their newly established school and the ways to democratically govern it. The tensions intensified in the day-to-day clashes and name-calling between two groups of students. One group of about 15-20 students were the school founders who worked hard to keep the school running in the way they had envisioned it and for which they obtained a permit from the Norwegian Department of education. The other group involved a large number of about 130 students who were admitted to the school in the short period between July 1967, when the school finally obtained a legal permit to open, and September, when it opened. In this group, "... there was a lot, [of students] [...] who were thrown out from other schools based on their academic failures... [...] [y]outh with other problems... even some who had drug-related convictions" (Jørgensen, 1977, p. 30). These students, who comprised the overall majority, were attracted to the school for diverse reasons. The most prominent reason involved the students' desire to liberate themselves from the oppression of the conventional schools to which they had been exposed in the previous nine to ten years of schooling. In the words of Mosse Jørgensen, "If we would want to summarize, [their most essential reason] would have to be [their] need for a place where they could recuperate and heal from the old [school system]" (Jørgensen, 1971, p. 96).

The tensions between the two groups of students grew around many issues. However, the strongest conflict concerned the principle of voluntary attendance of the classes, adopted as one of the fundamental principles of their school. Without mandatory attendance the attendance numbers dropped to less than 50%, which, it turned out, was not exactly what the founding students had in mind!

The founding students apparently began to urge, even nag everyone to abide by their preplanned and legitimized vision of the school.⁴ The dissatisfied others soon labeled the founding students and their followers "*Tantene*" - "[Nagging] Nannies," which they resented. In an interview with me in the fall of 2019, one of the founding students, Øystein Gullvåg Holter, described this group to which he belonged: "[We were from] more progressive and leftist kind of parents, intellectuals, for example. And people with often intellectual backgrounds, arts maybe? Yeah! Different kinds of people, but mainly, ... roughly [saying], a kind of cultural capital, [cultural] upper class..." (Interview with Øystein Gullvåg Holter, 2019).

The Nannies, on the other hand, called the students who resisted their daily pressures – the "*Avvikere*" - "Deviants."⁵ *Deviants*, in many ways, defied the *Nannies'* original educational vision through class non-attendance, class disturbance, and avoidance of other essential chores in running the school (Jørgensen, 1977, p. 47).

⁴ This vision included a preplanned curriculum, partially based on the Norwegian Department of Education requirements for the National high school graduation exam (*artium* in Norwegian) and delivered through teacher organized classes (Jørgensen, 1977). See more about this vision in Marjanovic-Shane et al. (2023).

⁵ "*Avvikere*," is a harsh word in Norwegian, meaning literally "rule or law breakers." I translated it as "Deviants," implying deviating from or breaking a norm in English. Øystein Gullvåg Holter, however, was actually slightly taken a-back when I reminded him of this name-calling. When I quoted it from the published transcript of the General Assembly meeting on November 2, 1967, he said, "Was it *that hard word* [we] used?" (Interview with Øystein Gullvåg Holter, 2019).

These tensions indicated to Jørgensen that their innovative approach to the new school still contained some traditional educational orientations, values, and beliefs that clashed with the ideas of a democratic school. But she was not able to actually put her finger on what exactly these traditional conceptualizations were. My goal is precisely to try to do that: to explore the students' (and their teachers') ontological⁶, conceptual, ideological, and political differences about education and schooling that lead to high tensions among the school participants (the students, the teachers, the staff and potentially the researchers from the University of Oslo who were frequently in school).

Let us return to the situation in these early days of school. The students and teachers felt that they needed to do something about the mounting internal and external tensions which were threatening to explode and potentially mean the end of their educational experiment. A General Assembly meeting was planned for November 2nd, 1967, only two months after the school was opened. Several students who were the school founders, the Nannies, decided to use this regular weekly General Assembly⁷ meeting to introduce difficult topics of their existence together (see more below). In one of those whims of fate, the Norwegian Department of Education had sent their representatives to inspect the school on this very day without any advance notice. Jørgensen wrote,

Then, just then, in the very moment when the school was exploding, as the sun, the moon and the stars were shooting and banging, and our tinderbox of a school was bursting at the seams, it was then that the Department of Education's representatives came for an inspection, to see whether the Creature was born, whether we had managed to make our school into a democracy in the [measly] eight weeks that had just passed.

They came down to us and found everything to be very bad.

It was November 2, Wednesday and the [most important] General Assembly meeting was just about to start (Jørgensen, 1971, p. 41).

And in the same whim of fate, this inspection was the real reason that the assembly meeting was audio-taped in the first place. Namely, Mosse, the school leader, and one of the teachers successfully diverted the Inspectors from attending the Assembly, knowing well that sensitive topics were going to be discussed. Under no circumstances would they want the inspectors from the Department of Education witness this "family broil." The inspectors agreed not to go to the Assembly but insisted on getting a tape-recording of it!

Later on, the transcript of this General Assembly recording was published in a book by Lars Hem and Tom Remlov⁸, "Experimental Gymnasium in Practice" (1969). The authors state that they "hope that the transition from the oral to the written word preserves the democratic atmosphere as much as possible so that it can also provide the reader with an educated insight into the realities of the expressions 'school democracy' and 'the experimental gymnasium.'" The minutes are a verbatim transcript of the tape recordings from the meeting, and the little editing we have done is minimal and guided by the consideration that this should be read and not heard. All names are changed..." (p. 22).

The meeting was remarkable and had a great significance for saving the school from breaking right then at the start (Jørgensen, 1971). Among the students, the meeting became colloquially known as the

⁶ "Ontological" here is used to refer to a personal sense of being and life important issues that matter to the person.

⁷ The General Assembly was the highest organ of the school governance. See more about the governance structure in (Marjanovic-Shane et al., 2023).

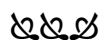
⁸ Tom Remlov was one of the founders and a student of EGO. He later became a renowned Norwegian "actor, dramaturg, film producer, theatre director, and opera manager" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_Remlov). Lars Hem was a graduate student at the University of Oslo who participated in the research projects focused on this experimental school. He later wrote a dissertation about EGO.

“Hell of an Assembly” or the “Soul-searching Assembly” (Hem & Remlov, 1969, p. 22).⁹ It was a great clash among the student as they reached into their souls in search of their deepest, most earnest, most heartfelt convictions, and beliefs. I hope that reading this story will give you, dear reader, an experience of the wrenching soul-searching the students lived through on that day. For four and a half hours, they debated, fought, and struggled with and against each other, putting on trial their beliefs, purposes, and desires, searching their souls, and testing their consciences in stormy confrontations.

The cast of characters¹⁰

Based on the order of appearance. The students are between 16 and 18 years old. There were a few teachers present. To make the story more vivid, I indicate each person’s gender and their status as a Nanny or a Deviant, where it was possible to infer from their discussions.

Rolf – a male student, the Chairman of the meeting	Tone – a female student, a Nanny
Per – a male student	Sverre – a male student, a Nanny
Inge – a female student, potentially a Deviant	Viggo – a male student, a Deviant
Åge – a male student, a Nanny	Inger – a female student
Dag – a male student, a Deviant	Thorleif – a male student, a Deviant
Arne – a male teacher	Anne – a female student, a Nanny
Roar – a male student, a Nanny	Olaf – a male teacher
Tom – a male student, a Nanny	Vivi – a female student
Ernst – a male student, potentially a Deviant	Finn – a male student, a Nanny
Øivind – a male teacher	Kåre – a male student, a Deviant
Reidar – a male student, a Nanny	Elisabeth – a female student, a Nanny
Lars – a male teacher	Liv – a female student
Erling – a male student, a Deviant	----
Egil – a male student, a Nanny	- Six students whose minor remarks appear in the transcript but are not in the vignette;
Anders – a male student, a Nanny	- Silent participants (about 40-45)



⁹ Note about translation: Hem and Remlov used Norwegian expressions “Kjempeallmanamøtte” and “Sjeleallmanamøtte.” I first translated them as “the Confrontation Assembly” and “the Conscience Assembly” respectively. However, my colleague, Tina Kullenberg from Sweden, was surprised by my translations. She wrote: “I am not sure these are the best translations. ... In my (bad) Norwegian understanding, “kjempe” does not have to do with confrontation and fights but could mean something big: a huge meeting, or? That also fits to how they refer to this event in the context: a super-length meeting of 4,5 hours... Next, the Norwegian term “sjele” means soul. Perhaps you translate it with “conscience” but for me it is a bit confusing and misleading. Conscience to me refers more to mental and cognitive states of mind” (Tina Kullenberg, personal correspondence, December 3, 2020). Tina’s surprise sent me to further investigate how to translate these expressions. I learned that both expressions come from the Norwegian youth slang. My colleague Mikhail Gradovski from Norway wrote: “The words are from a dialect and are neither Bokmal nor Nynorsk [the official Norwegian languages] [the official Norwegian languages]” (Mikhail Gradovski, personal correspondence, December 3, 2020). My other Norwegian colleague, Olga Dysthe wrote, “Kjempe means giant... [It is] easily understood. Children use ‘kjempe’ all the time instead of really big” (Olga Dysthe, personal correspondence, December 4th, 2020). Furthermore, “kjempe” as a verb can also mean to fight, to struggle, to wrestle. So, because I wanted to keep the colloquial tone of the slang used by the students, I finally settled on translating “Kjempeallmanamøtte” as a “Hell of an Assembly.”

I also learned that the second expression “Sjeleallmanamøtte,” is not much in use today. It was very strange to my Norwegian colleagues. “Sjele means soul: The connotation is probably that every soul (person) is there, or that it is particularly important, since soul is the core of the person, and they need to be there. But not obvious why they have chosen soul” wrote Olga. Taking that into account and knowing what transpired in the meeting, I decided to metaphorically translate “Sjeleallmanamøtte” as the “Soul-searching assembly”.

¹⁰ The names in the transcript are pseudonyms. The students’ actual names were changed by Lars Hem and Tom Remlov, who published the transcript (Hem & Remlov, 1969).

In the short introduction to the transcript¹¹, Tom Remlov and Lars Hem write:

This [...] meeting is the so-called “Hell of an Assembly” or the “Soul-Searching Assembly,” where within four and a half hours, they [the students] got through the crisis in which the school had found itself for some time after its start [in September 1967]. This [crisis] is the reason that the debate was planned in the first place. It may seem a bit strange that the debate came under “Other matters” on the [Assembly’s] agenda, but that is because the situation [in school] became so very tense in the days just before the meeting that we had to have a debate. Some people agreed to spark it up. At that time, we did not know each other well enough to be able to put on the agenda something like, for example, “Everyone’s nerves and our school’s existence.” The public meetings were held in a room where there was space for all the school members if they sat tight, which intensified feelings, either of belonging or of antagonism. The first three items on the agenda have been omitted [from the transcript]... Rolf is the chair (Hem & Remlov, 1969, p. 22).

The transcript starts with Per talking about possibilities for improving the class schedule “because I think it is the schedule that has a lot to be blamed for [the fact that] the attendance [of the scheduled classes] is being so very bad” (p. 23). But Åge abruptly changes the topic,

Åge: ... This with the schedule is... a very important thing to discuss. But I am absolutely sure that no matter what you do with the schedule - the attendance will not improve. It is not the fault of the schedule that 50% of the students are absent during the lessons. There is a completely different reason for that... When one is at a school where the highest [governing] body is the General Assembly – [but] where there are only 70 [out of 150 students] present, – one may well ask: what is it that does not work? Why doesn't it work? [...] I can't make a suggestion about what doesn't work and why not – I can't make a suggestion about what to do to improve it. But I can at least point out a few things that I think are – not as they should be. And... something that is very difficult to define: it is the school spirit or milieu - call it what you want. School milieu. It sounds a lot nicer. [...] What is not understood is the essential point here – that this is a student democracy and not student anarchy... (Long applause.) Yes, everyone claps, but it is not true that everyone agrees with me... But listen here: One must begin to realize that in a democracy, one must also have some rules that must be followed. It must be possible, for example, to meet up for a class... [...] It is the students [and not the teachers] who [are responsible for non-attendance]. Yes, they [i.e., those students who do not attend classes] are completely indifferent to how the school works. (In a sarcastic, parodying tone), [They boast,] “If I only get to play the guitar in the hallways, everything is fine.” [...] – Should those students be allowed to go here? ... Does our school have an interest in having students who are entirely unmotivated to our school? I don't know [...] – I don't want to come up with any such suggestions to expel them and stuff... - But at least 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 and not a place for... – I would not say what... – there is no place for people who can do what they want. This is a school and not a playroom, indeed. Thanks. (pp. 24-25).

Åge's speech at first seems to be ignored as Per and some other students try to return the discussion to the issue of class schedules. It might be that they are too perplexed with Åge's provocation,

¹¹ A note about the transcript conventions in this article: The square brackets with an ellipsis (three dots) indicate that I have cut some parts of the speech, as opposed to a simple ellipsis inside or after some sentences but without brackets, which indicate that the speaker is making a pause. I have cut some parts of the speeches that seemed to be a digression from the main point the speaker is making, or repetitions that do not add to the overall point of the speaker, nor our understanding of the atmosphere. When the square brackets contain words, this indicates my addition to the speech to make it more understandable. The regular round parentheses are part of the original text and usually contain comments about nonverbal reactions, like “applause.”

we don't know. However, Roar quickly takes the floor and returns to Åge's argument that "[the school spirit] is beginning to slip out of our hands." He says,

Roar: You can sit quietly and say: "It is a transitional period – when the first glowing enthusiasm is still high." [But] we have to be careful not to let this [spirit] completely slip away – while we just sit there. I noticed it in myself... – Very well, I noticed it on others, too. People sit in the hallways when they should be in classes... – as if they should not have classes. We must point out to the others – we must point out to ourselves and ask - what do I really want at this school. We should not be allowed to just sit on our asses – not give a fuck, – excuse the expression.

<< Mikhail Gradovski, 2020-07-16: It is important to understand that Norwegian culture is in no way an elitist culture so the number of vulgarities in the language use is higher compared with other Germanic language cultures.>>

Roar (continues): We call ourselves "adults," – we've been adults enough to form a school – we've been adults enough to form our own rules – we've been adults enough to hire teachers – to plan our own teaching. We should also show ourselves as adults who can bring this [school] forward to success. [But] it's starting to dangerously slip out of our hands - and we have to do something *now* - we can't wait. Thanks. (Applause)

Dag: The point is that we *are* allowed to sit on our asses - that is what voluntary attendance is. So, that's what they [the students] do.

Roar: Of course, one is allowed. This is a free school. You can work at home. You can do anything. If a student prefers to sit in the library to work, instead in a class, - of course - that's fine. But there is not just one thing called *freedom* – there also exists another term, it is called *freedom with responsibility*. I repeat, *with responsibility*. We are responsible for our fellow students. We are responsible for our own schooling. [...] we can manage to get [the school] to become a good school - we are all aware that what is going on now should not go any further. Thanks (pp. 26-27).

Roar introduces the distinction between "one thing called *freedom*" and "another term – *freedom with responsibility*." This distinction quickly became pivotal, indicating the existence of two conflicting, paradigmatically different approaches to their school, as I discuss in another article in this trilogy - "A paradigmatic dialogue-disagreement in a democratic school: A conceptual analysis of the soul-searching assembly" (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b). The concept of "freedom with responsibility" will echo in many other students' speeches in this meeting, and in the subsequent books¹² and other writings about the school.

Åge tosses a snide comment out of turn, "What Dag says there - that's the typical attitude here at school." But Rolf, who is the chair of the meeting, lets Åge know that only one direct reply to a speaker is allowed, and if he wants to talk again, he has to request to be put on the speaker list¹³. The next speaker, Tom, starts with describing the tension he feels about whether the students should have unlimited voluntary attendance, or should their freedoms be limited by particular obligations. He points out two obligations he thinks they have: a) to the society – i.e., the taxpayers – who financed the school for the students "to work" on their education; and b) to the school's proclaimed mission to further advance Norwegian public education.

¹² For instance, in her book about the school, Mosse Jørgensen (1977) the first school leader, wrote in discussing this same situation complaining that the Department of Education was using old criteria to judge the work of the school: "... if the school does not work 'normally,' it will be proven that freedom imbued with responsibility is not possible" (Jørgensen, 1977, p. 48).

¹³ For the most part I have deleted various procedural discussions about who is on the list, or how much time should the speakers be allowed, and Rolf's moderating remarks. It should be mentioned that Rolf kept the procedural aspect of the meeting with a tight control, managing the list of speakers and moderating their order. In most cases, no one spoke unless Rolf gave them the floor. Because of that some speakers replied to an issue after several others have spoken in between.

Tom: ... [with some unease] – I personally would allow all people to do what they want, [...]. If they just want to sit and play guitar – that’s fine with me. It’s just that, the goal of this school... We are in a completely different situation, different from when we can say that we can sit and do what we want because we are paid for by the public, and it is a very expensive school. [...] There is a consideration of the taxpayers, ... There are, after all, very many people who sacrifice part of their income, who work all day, and have to sacrifice part of their income for us to be here today. And I mean that there is nowhere else in society where anyone can sit down to do as little as we can, indeed. In all other kinds of work, you have to do something. And being in school is being in the same situation. And secondly, we are also undertaking an educational endeavor to try to change the current school system, the current high school. That’s what the goal was, namely. And if it is to have any relevance at all, then one must think about: what is a school - what is the Norwegian school?

Here, Tom highlights two facts about their school: that it was approved by the Department of Education based on a particular vision and particular plans to realize it. Thus, that is what society expects from them, and they have an obligation to fulfill this expectation. Secondly, the legitimization of their school also included a provision that the school be an educational experiment that is, in part, conducted by the researchers from the University of Oslo (Jørgensen, 1977). Being an experiment in “improving the current Norwegian high school,” Tom seems to think the school needs to proceed based on the approved plans. Another idea might be on Tom’s mind, as suspected by my colleague Eugene Matusov, “Behind the notion of an ‘experiment’ is the idea of finding the ‘best practice’ that can be scaled up to mass education.”¹⁴ In other words, this predefined practice in itself obliges its participants to conduct themselves in particular ways. Tom strengthens his argument by adding that what they agreed to do is already somewhat different from the common understanding of education and that,

Tom: If we step out [of the common conventional understanding of education] completely - and we somehow create a whole new spiritual direction... Although, I am very much in favor of it... So... (laughter)... - But that’s just what I mean, that one cannot transition to this [kind of] school so abruptly. One cannot convince “Aftenposten” and “Morgenbladet”¹⁵ directly - quite so directly by saying that we live to have fun. That [the fun] is incidentally what we also have (pp. 27-28).

Almost as an afterthought, Tom seems to hint that there might exist another vision of education (“if we somehow create a whole new spiritual direction”), education “where we live to have fun.” And this vision is very different from the common sense one and even the one their school was committed to developing. It seems that many others understand what he is talking about, and some perhaps approve of it, judging by their laughter.

Ernst undermines Tom’s argument about wasting taxpayers’ money with a sarcastic comment that, in that case, “all Norwegian school work is a waste of money [...] when [the students] sleep through 5 years or 7 years of school” (Applause) (p. 28). It appears that the students liked Ernst’s sarcasm, based on the applause, but there was no verbal reply to it, and Rolf gave the floor to Øivind (a teacher).

Øivind (a teacher apparently supporting the “Nannies” group) rejects Tom’s hint that the school could have a different educational approach, “where we live to have fun,” or possibly something else. Øivind says, “... To avoid misunderstandings – [...] we’re not a youth psychiatric clinic - we’re a school.” Øivind suggests that everyone writes a new, mock application to EGO, focusing on why they want to go to this school. “And those who then find out that they are here because they think this must be a youth psychiatric clinic - they should think of something else” (p. 28). But Reidar disagrees with Øivind that the students who

¹⁴ I am thankful to Eugene Matusov who pointed out this implication of Tom’s discussion (Matusov, 2022, in press)

¹⁵ Local Oslo newspapers.

don't hold a "common goal" to pass the *artium* (National Graduation Exam),¹⁶ should not be tolerated in school (p. 28). Although Reidar does not explicitly say so, it seems that he feels uneasy at the thought of expelling anyone. With some puzzlement, he realizes there is a diversity of educational goals among them. He is, however, not sure what to do if this diversity might not be legitimate.

Åge is also firmly against the diversity of students' personal goals and desires, although not without ambivalence (see the beginning of his utterance). Nevertheless, he passionately speaks against legitimizing student diversity of school goals.

Åge: ... [Sarcastically] Of course, you should be able to do what you want! – But when 150 people do what they want, or 100 people do what they want, they each go in their own direction - in 100 directions. Then, this will be no school - there will be a place where 100 people meet and do what they want. So... you can't do that at this school. That is *just whining*. This school leads up to the *artium* [graduation exam] - and I will strongly oppose what you say - that we should tolerate deviants. [cynically] Of course, we should tolerate "Deviants" (laughter and applause)! Of course, we should do it. But, my God, you have to start wondering... One should tolerate that some people – yes, call them "deviants" or call them whatever you want – that they only go here because... They do not go here with the aim of taking the *artium*. It may be that nonconformity is not accepted in our society. And we just can't accept [this nonconformity] either. Because when you go here, then the school may expect to have a failure rate of 50 – yes! One cannot tolerate that. You can't have students who go here and just don't care about how the school is doing, only that they personally have fun. This is just regrettable. One cannot tolerate this (p. 29).

I suspect that for Åge, following one's own desires and interests may be a dangerous nonconformity defined as a lack of accountability to the rules and norms of a pre-defined educational practice with its preset quality, shape, tasks, roles, and goals. Åge denigrates the very claims to have the right to be free and choose what to do – as "just whining."

In concordance with Åge's point regarding the lack of accountability, the next speaker Lars (a teacher who also apparently supports the "Nannies") raises what he calls a "sensitive issue" of the "appalling" lack of trustworthiness in "quite ordinary human agreements." According to Lars, "there are certain things that are quite elementary like trustworthiness, for example, - and attendance at the classes..." (p. 29). In Lars' opinion, although voluntary attendance is fine, "if you choose ... [a class] in the first place - then you have to meet up from such and such an hour and to such and such an hour, [...] and not flounder..." (pp. 29-30).

Egil returns to the central issue of their tensions – that some students don't conform to the school. "So, I'm very interested in what... is the criterion for a deviant? [...] We are 150 deviants at this school" (p. 31). His remark apparently produces a strong positive reaction among the students as one hears sounds of laughter, approval, turmoil (recorded on tape, and in the transcription). It seems that his remark somehow deflated a little the growing tensions of blaming and shaming anyone who thinks differently from some named or unnamed, but omnipresent norm. Åge begins to reply, trying to speak through the continuing laughter and turmoil, attempting to delineate some major ideas of their educational vision

Åge: So - there are many... There is a lot to wonder... in a deviant, so ... (laughter). No, for real! Don't laugh! It's no-nonsense!

¹⁶ *Artium*, is Norwegian national high school graduation exam. The high schoolers take that exam in order to officially graduate. *Artium* is also a necessary requirement for applying to college, functioning somewhat as the SAT in the USA.

What I would call “a deviant” at this school here, in contrast to what, I hope, is the majority [of students] in this particular school are people who walk around with an indifferent, indifferent attitude towards the school and only recognize themselves. They just holler... [paraphrasing] “If only I get to do what I want to do.” – “If only I get to go to the pastry shop.” – “It only matters that I don’t have to attend [classes] – that I have my personal freedom.” This is all they say, yes, there you have it! But the school must also work, and it can’t work with a whole lot of such deviants that are only detrimental to our school (p. 31).

At that point, Rolf indicates that he wants to limit the length of time each speaker may take and the number of direct responses to the speaker. Still, Erling stops him, saying that they are discussing “the matters of fundamental importance to the whole school” (p. 31) and that he would oppose such limits. Rolf agrees not to limit the time and gives the word to Roar, who now seems to be developing an uneasiness, potentially even a repulsion against casting off the “deviants.” Hesitantly, he starts considering the legitimacy of the plurality of attitudes toward the school, at least initially. He says,

Roar: ... I think it's a bit drastic that Øivind [teacher] suggests that we make a new application. [Hedging] It was a damn' good suggestion, absolutely. But I think many people will have a feeling of being cast off. Some others may argue, “let’s cast off the deviants,” ... But I think we are a school of 150 individualists¹⁷. We cannot expect everyone to have the same attitude [towards the school]. - But then we, who hopefully have in part, that attitude, without emphasizing myself in any way... So, I would like us to, together... We start with ourselves... We start embracing people who have a slightly different attitude to this school - we bring them *in* instead of casting them *off*. This [casting them off] would cause great dissatisfaction, I think (p. 32).

When he says “we,” Roar seems to identify himself with the “Nannies,” appealing to the “Nannies” to be tolerant of other people’s diversity and to make an effort to “bring the others in.” What this “bringing in” means is not clear. Potentially it may refer to bringing everyone on board to work on the project of this school in the same way that “we who have the same attitude” do. Roar continues, repeating his earlier argument about freedom under responsibility,

Roar: ... Regarding personal freedom: of course - personal freedom! - It is to do what one wants. But personal freedom, it is freedom under [with] responsibility. We are responsible for the education of others in a way. We are all under obligation to the social milieu here because we’re all human, and that milieu consists of people. Thanks (sounds of laughter and turmoil) (p. 32).

It is more apparent now that for Roar, “responsibility” means fulfilling an obligation, having accountability to predefined expectations of the practice.

At that point, Åge and Egil, two of the Nannies, try to open the floor for the others to express their opinions. In his more hawkish way, Åge says, “Why don’t the remaining 145 speak? Are you afraid to say your opinion about the school?... I just ask.” But Egil speaks in what appears to be a friendlier and a more inviting tone,

Egil: I should say exactly the same, but I will go further. I want to confess that we are a group of 15-20 “Nannies” at this school, and Åge and I are some of them. And it has turned out that there is quite extensive dissatisfaction with the “Nannies,” because we became a little too fond of our school. But then, I think that those who are dissatisfied with us, they can stand up and tell why they are disappointed; otherwise, we can never get clarification... at all (p. 33).

¹⁷ Roar uses the Norwegian word “individualister” – “individualists” in English. This term has often been used in the sense of a unique person – someone who is distinct and different from the others. In the vernacular speech it usually did not have a connection to the concept of “individualism” – which in some politically left ideologies has a negative value – as a person who is selfish and not community oriented.

Since no one has a direct reply, Rolf gives voice to the next speaker on the list, Arne (a teacher). Like some others, Arne begins by stressing the importance of having voluntary attendance in school. But in his view, if class attendance is voluntary, then what needs to be accounted for and placed under some kind of “production control” should be some kind of “duty to learn” (p. 33).

The next speaker, Anders, says that “nobody is interested in having too much accountability, to the taxpayers and things like that” (p. 33). For Anders, the responsibility apparently lies in fulfilling the school's mission to improve Norwegian schooling. He thinks that people “simply have to come together and then agree on some of the ideas we have” (p. 33). This vital school mission is worth controlling one's impulse “to go down the hall to play guitar.” It is worth renouncing something, it's worth a sacrifice in order “to go in to get this idea worked out...” He gets applause (pp. 33-34).

At that moment, Tone switches the focus back to attacking the deviants as she pours out her bitter feelings of resentment. She feels hurt by the deviants, who, in her view, lack respect and appreciation for the Nannies' hard work in planning and creating the school in the first place.

Tone: Yeah, excuse me for picking up this about deviants again.... Arne said ... [something about] not having fun. - But I would say that the deviants here at school - let's call them that. Anyway, - they are having fun. So... - But should they have fun at our expense? Who created this school? Who is it who was sitting and working all summer vacation and really put a lot of work into this school? And who has not done that? Who is sitting in the hallway and playing music? And who is not sitting and playing? Who is going to school here to have an education? And who is going here [just] to swim? Who is going here to take the graduation exam? Are they the ones who have helped build the school? Are they looking at this as a serious enterprise? They are the ones who - who - who want something from this school. I do not think you who do not know what work is behind this school would be sitting in the hallway and not meeting up in classes. - As soon as anyone talks to you – you scream about how you are now being deprived of personal freedom. – Because... – Well, well - personal freedom and personal freedom. - You can't just go for your own personal freedom. We have to have something called the personal freedom of the school. - And then we all together have to agree on something - so that not everyone keeps following their own head - and constantly shoving personal freedom – and continuously repeating “If you tell us [to come to classes], aren't you being tyrants in this school?” (pp. 34-35).

Tone's speech creates an uproar. Hands shoot up, and soon 10 people are signed up on the speaker's list. Rolf suggests again limiting each speaker to 3 minutes. He points out that even with this limit, it will take them until 2:30 p.m. But Tor counters: “Yes, but this is so important that we should spend the rest of the day - if necessary” (p. 35).

Amidst loud agreement and big applause, Rolf gives the floor to Roar.

It was maybe Tone's bitter tone that made Roar even more uneasy. We don't know why, but now, Roar seems to try to push back against the Nannies' accusations. His words give us a glimpse of what was going on in the hallways in the last two months, between the “Nannies” and the students they call “Deviants.”

Roar: I think the reason we're sitting in the hallway... so often, it's not the reason that the Nannies [invoke when] messing up with us. It simply is *not hopelessness*, [nor a] *lack of initiative*, the third thing for which the Nannies' blame us. I think that that [charge] is somewhat hasty, right there. Anyway, I don't feel like that [being hopeless and lacking initiative]. And I know others just don't feel that way. Of course, some students come telling us: ‘You, now you should go to a class, and don't object.’ [But] I do not think so. At least I don't feel bitter when I sit in the hallway. On the contrary, I have a pretty bad conscience when I see the others disappear [presumably to go to a class]. Thanks (p. 35).

It is remarkable that this time, Roar's "we" includes the Deviants rather than the Nannies like in his earlier turns! This seems to puzzle Reidar, who says: "... we must, damn it, know who it is we should tolerate, and what it is we should tolerate." Reidar again invites others to "Come to the floor!" Sverre replies, trying to strengthen the argument against tolerating diversity of the students' interests. For him, it is not OK to tolerate everything people want to do by "just flying around saying: 'this is good, and that is good, and it is allowed to do that.' And so... back and forth. It helps nothing! One has to show solidarity and responsibility" (p. 35). It seems that for Sverre, the students should unite and align their interests to responsibly sustain the school.

However, the next speaker, Inge, has a profound disagreement with Sverre and other Nannies regarding the legitimacy of the diversity of students' interests and goals. Inge speaks hesitantly, she¹⁸ almost seems to be thinking aloud, trying to express her thoughts clearly, and testing her ideas in the very moment of speaking.

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

I think that Inge is saying not only that it is all right to tolerate the radical plurality of students' ontological interests and goals but that this should be legitimate and even welcomed. I also wonder if Inge might suspect that not having "a big goal" could potentially be a good thing.

Inge continues,

Inge: Then the question is: What we should not tolerate? It is antisocial behavior. We shall not accept it if... Well, yes... (pause) Anyway we should not tolerate any anti-social behavior, including... So we have come to this: that it should not be just freedom - but freedom under [with] responsibility - and it is this freedom under the responsibility that is the basis for us to be able *to develop and establish a fruitful contact and engage in useful cooperation with other people*. That is why I think that antisocial behavior is the greatest - and so is the anarchy - one of the biggest threats to personality here in school, I think (p.36).

I wonder if Inge defines "freedom under the responsibility" in terms of how one treats the others: in a respectful (not antisocial) way. She claims that responsibility "is the basis for us to be able to *develop and establish a fruitful contact and engage in useful cooperation with other people*." In this case, her idea of responsibility is different from responsibility as accountability, an obligation to subordinate oneself to a particular pre-established vision and practice of education. It might be that in her view, "responsibility" is a way one relates to the others and the self respectfully and kindly. However, we don't know if, for Inge, the respectful and kind relationships with others are an ethical principle in itself, or merely an instrument of cooperation to fulfill other purposes like a "fruitful contact" and "useful cooperation." If she defines responsibility in terms of an ethical principle of personal development, her overall perspective might be that

¹⁸ I assumed that Inge was a female. But this name can be used both as a masculine and a feminine name in Norwegian.

the learner should be a legitimate author of her/his education. It would mean that a learner needs full freedom to define and develop such critical responsibility. It may be that Inge's position is similar to what Berlin (2006) called *negative freedom*, which "is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others" (Berlin, 2006, p. 34).

On the other hand, if Inge's view is more instrumental, and she sees personal responsibility as something that is "useful [for] cooperation with other people," then her idea is more akin to Berlin's notion of *positive freedom* with a well-defined purpose to serve some (higher) goal. Berlin wrote that "it is possible, and at times justifiable, to coerce men in the name of some goal (let us say, justice or public health) which they would, if they were more enlightened, themselves pursue, but do not because they are blind or ignorant or corrupt" (Berlin, 1969, p. 45). I am not sure if Inge's views lean more toward negative or positive freedom.

The reply to Inge comes from teacher Øivind, who seems to try to defuse the growing tensions among the students. He focuses on the positive value of the process of critiquing, as "each one of us – now should really try to be able to make a critique - and [...] in the longer term we might learn to take a critique" (p. 36). He adds that he has a little teaching unit in his social studies about the process of criticism. But his remarks stay without response.

The next speaker is Tom. He tries to conceptualize two different, even opposite ways to understand responsibility: as accountability in terms of obligations to fulfill the school's preset academic requirements, vs. freely becoming a self-responsible person on one's own terms, someone who understands on their own what is good and just and what to do for the betterment of the society.

Tom: I just want to talk a little bit about this thing with the Deviants. – That is that you talk about cutting out [expelling] the Deviants, etc. But 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 the freedom and free will, and to be radical. It certainly is not some [comfy] sleeping pillow, indeed, but one of the hardest [things to do]. That is exactly what one should try to find, one's own opinions in all matters. To work with the society and oneself, it's as tough as nails. Nothing is as easy as being conservative and just hanging under some authority. Great.

At the time I signed up [to this school], my motivation ... I had a completely different motivation [than now], indeed. After I started at this school, I have regretted so many times that I took on the responsibility of being a student at this school here. Because I think it was awful to have it hanging over me that ... not being able to do what I want. But the moment the school does not manage to convey *that* [other] sense of responsibility, the sense of that you are a world citizen, and a sense of having a will to try to fix [the world], then [the school] is unsuccessful.

We should not talk about expelling the Deviants, because then the Conservatives got it right: 'Some people are not mature enough for freedom.' As soon as the students begin to fail here at school, and are unable to learn something else than what is required for the graduation exam... [and everything else is considered] completely irrelevant...

But it's not! In fact, it is learning to become a responsible person what should be the most important. That motivation for learning, it should not be for passing the graduation exam. If you can't change that motivation - then the school has failed. [...]

I would [also] say that the school here should be both a psychiatric clinic and a school because I have... At least it changed me tremendously since I started this school (applause). What I mean: It [the school] has a huge responsibility to the world and society and knowledge. It is not that one should have freedom at all costs to do whatever... freedom to relax and hang out in the hallway. I mean, my God! –

then you have no sense of responsibility at all! - Because our society nowadays... it would then hang on the brink of chaos and horrible conditions...

It takes work, it takes toil. You don't solve the world's problems by saying: 'let the shit hit the fan' ... (laughter and applause) (pp. 37-38).

Tom seems to have developed rather strong arguments against the Conservatives' views of responsibility as a duty to subordinate oneself to the authority of a more knowledgeable, more rational Other ("Nothing is as easy as being conservative and just hanging under some authority"). However, he seems to be developing an idea of another kind of authority that one should (passionately) serve – the idea of social justice. ("... 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...*").

<<Comment by Eugene Matusov, June 9, 2020: "Notice that Tom is against privacy and freedom of a person to mind their own business. He is for [Berlin's (2006)] positive freedom, not negative freedom, which includes [lying on] a "sleeping pillow," [or even] being conservative.">>

Although he seems to conceptualize responsibility as developing one's own views and one's own agency ("to have a will"), this agency must be used for an important cause, like being an engaged person trying to make the world better. Tom's last remarks about not having the freedom "to relax and hang out in the hallway" when "solving the world's problems" seem not to be strong enough for Erling, who replies,

Erling: I believe that if one is to be educated for responsibility - then one must be given this responsibility! – This must not be violated. One has to have this responsibility for oneself. - So, [personal responsibility] must not be shattered by [going around and] telling [people], "You must come [to the class] now." Instead, the classes should be advertised, the attempt should be to try to sell them to us. – [After all,] sales techniques are something important in this world, too (laughter) (p. 38).

Erling's reply seems not to be an outright plea for the legitimacy of each person's freedom to decide whether to participate in classes or not. His remark might be interpreted as a Progressivist view of education in which the teacher (or other educational authority) persuades or even manipulates students to believe that they want to learn exactly what the teacher (authority) wants them to learn (Matusov, 2020 submitted; Rousseau, 1979).¹⁹

Rolf: [To Tom] Should you reply something?

Tom: I just wanted to point out that I have absolutely no intention of depriving people of the responsibility by setting up such an attendance thing... or anything. That would be absolutely ridiculous. But the thing is that - I don't want to hear criticism when I try to make people aware of their responsibilities. In other words, they must be allowed to [take their own responsibility]. But I just mean: I will continue - as long as I can breathe (laughter) – to try to make myself and others aware of the responsibility we have - because it is so, so easy to forget it (pp. 38-39).

It seems to me here that Tom agrees with Erling that brutal coercion is destructive for the sense of personal responsibility. However, Tom simultaneously claims that his own responsibility is to remind himself and others that they potentially have the responsibility to the school mission, to make the world better, and to promote social justice. As Tom struggles to distance himself from the conservative notion of responsibility as accountability sustained through work ethic, Tom nevertheless develops a view of responsibility as pursuit of a higher cause – social justice. In other words, it is he who now defines what responsibility is for the others, instead of promoting the right of each person to examine and test their own ideas, desires, and their implications, and to make decisions for oneself in a critical dialogue with others and their alternative views. In my opinion, this is why Tom feels that "as long as he can breathe," he must

¹⁹ See more below in discussion of Thorleif's beliefs.

keep reminding the others (and himself) that they have this “responsibility,” despite his agreement that each person needs to own their sense of responsibility.

The next speaker is Reidar, who claims that “the goal of the experimental gymnasium [...] must be [to take the graduation exam] - [...] Otherwise [the students] would not go here at all” (p. 39). Another student, Viggo, on the other hand, supports having multiple goals. In contrast to Reidar and “Tone, who said that she was ... angry at those who want to just do things such as bodybuilding or swimming,” Viggo, a swimmer himself, thinks that “it's somewhat dangerous when the gymnastics [athletics] is almost ignored. Thus... - A combination of the physical and psychological [curriculum] is absolutely necessary, indeed” (p. 39). However, Tone replies that she disagrees and that just coming “for the bodybuilding - or just coming to guitar lessons” is “not why we go here [...] We go here because we have to first and foremost go to school, indeed. - We should have the other [extracurricular] activities as secondary [priority]” (p. 39).

Rolf then gives the floor to Inger, who says that “it's good that people are starting to do something. Body-building all day or whatever. - Just that they do something - not just plop down and sit there.” Inger gets applause for her next remark, “There are a lot of people, I think, - who came to this school - because they wanted to get away from the old school - and nothing more” (p. 39-40). Here, I suspect, Inger may have noticed the phenomenon of “school toxification” (Llewellyn, 1998), also described by A.S. Neill, that students who come to “Summerhill” (a democratic school) from the traditional schools need time to recover from the alienation they experienced in conventional schools. Neill wrote that “The recovery time is proportionate to the hatred their last school gave them” (Neill, 1960, p. 2). Matusov and Brobst (2013) called this phenomenon “alienation vacation,” a period of suspended student’s agency to restore it from the prolonged regime of traditional school oppression, which usually denies students of their authorial agency.

After a short break, Åge retakes the floor, picking up on Inger’s remark. For him, “These [are the] people - who attend this school - not because they want to create something new - but because they want to tear down the old - and without creating something new again...” (p. 41). Even more, Åge criticizes them for “not only [wanting to] destroy the school itself, but they - yes! - kill spiritually a number of less self-conscious and noisy people who go here - and who really have good motivation to go here.” Åge seems to begin to realize that it is hard for many people in the meeting to express their opinions. He potentially refers to those “less self-conscious and noisy people” rather than any of the Nannies or Deviants. He thinks that these people “feel intimidated.” He says, “You have to be tough to a degree - or you should not open your mouth at all. When such [negative] arguments can be thrown at you in a congregation, then it is clear – you do not open your mouth anymore for the rest of your life. You stop talking – as we find now this to be the case. The environment is like that” (p. 41). However, Åge blames the Deviants for this situation, “I want to place this responsibility [for putting down the less self-conscious people] on these people who walk around and just brawl and use big words” (p. 41).

Sverre then tries to develop a slightly different point, that for many people, it would be easier to talk in smaller groups rather than in a large public gathering. He thinks that in smaller groups, class councils, “you get closer contact with the people who have other opinions. And then I also think these people in a slightly smaller congregation have it easier to express their opinion - because I think many people are a little scared to jump and say, [...] exactly what they mean at a public meeting” (p. 42).

After Sverre’s remarks, there is a short discussion between two teachers, Olaf and Øivind, about what is legitimate and what not in terms of the legal status of the school. Olaf wonders, “to what extent EGO is a legislative institution.” He says that it is “good to know where we stand right there [...] it's absolutely crucial for my attitude to just about everything we talk about.” He wonders if, in EGO, they can take a whole year to develop a new path, as “we are one of the utmost educational outposts in all of the world history.”

He asks, "Do we have the authority to do that? Or is ... [what we can do] limited to [...] loosening up some of the well-worn tracks in the old school - or have it been extended to a larger area. It is absolutely crucial for what I want to stand and vote for in all these things here" (p. 43).

It is worth noticing that Olaf as a teacher seems to be completely ready to submit to the authority (Department of Education), accepting the authority's bonds hindering the sovereignty of this particular school that had been founded on the premise of being free from the external authority.

Øivind's answer is not reassuring. He just came from a meeting with the Department of Education inspectors. They have pressed the school staff about the educational issues using rather conventional education criteria to judge their work (cf. in Jørgensen, 1977). So Øivind says that "We know nothing. We have no idea about where the Department [of education] stands - We have no idea regarding the status of any rules - other than [the fact that] we have received positive support from the Research Council ... [...] Obviously, we are afraid that they will suddenly withdraw all permissions and such. We may be afraid, for [...] we have no idea where the terrain lies" (pp. 43-44).

It is not clear whether these teachers' anxiety regarding the school's legal status had an immediate effect on the students because when Thorleif takes the floor, he directly addresses Åge's points about intimidation of the people who disagree with the Nannies.

Thorleif: Yeah, I don't know. I'll say something that's not so very easy to say. Reidar said it twice, and there are others also who said, "You who disagree with us, get up and say something." But you snap at those who don't agree with you! You can't count on anyone to be able to come here and say something if you just bite them. It has so disappointed me. I started here at school because I thought this was going to be a school where people love each other, where people are a bit neighborly with each other... and can feel glad to be [together] in school! But then, you just snap! Everyone bites here. It's so creepy. [...] That's what we do. We snap, bite, and crush everyone. We fight. That's the status here at this school, too. We must not imagine that there is something else. I think it's so... it is so disappointing somehow... You say it is antisocial to not come with criticism! But [then] one can't avoid hearing how "you are a fucking stupid idiot" and lots of [other] weird... We kind of stand up here and talk now. Maybe it applies to me, too. We might be... – we who are strong here at school – we hardly think of those not so strong, those who dare not rise up and say anything. Those who may have to say [what they believe] in the hallways instead of here. How many are these? 100? 150? How many people dare to get up and say something really serious here, ah? They are afraid of being thrashed. If they say something that they really need to say - then they will be swept away... [They will be told], 'This has nothing to do with the matter,' [or] 'After all, this says nothing, - it is absolutely *immaterial*' – (stammering) It... - it... – Nothing draws us together! There is no love left here. It was really what I hoped for at this school. That we should be able to love each other. But we are not. It's so awful... We... It's just fighting all the time. (Applause) (p. 45).

Rolf: Reply!

Åge: Yes, Thorleif is disappointed that we do not have enough love at this school here, and probably many of us are disappointed, too. But I just want to say... that they are not the ones sitting in the hallways. They [people sitting in the hallways] are not the same as people who feel weak here. This is what I think. Those who feel weak are those who are afraid to say anything because they fear those sitting in the hallways... I think it's just baloney that you go here and that you are disappointed... and that people snap at each other..., and that people do not get enough love. – My God! This is not some kind of "love school." Just look yourself in the eyes! (Laughter) This is a school where you should go and feel like a human [being] and it's obvious that love belongs in there... But that does not mean that we can start making a *hippie school* or whatever you want... Excuse me now if I'm being damn stupid,

but it annoys me that you talk about love when it comes to school. The school is first and foremost a school where one has to develop oneself as a person, and love comes under that. But we should not have that kind of talk and nonsense like that. Nonsense. (Laughter) (p. 45).

Rolf tries to limit replies to 30 seconds, but the rest shout, “no, no, no!” He gives the word to Reidar, who seems to be angered by Thorleif and, in what appears to be a sarcastic tone, accuses him of being closeminded.

Reidar: I have to thank Thorleif... I think it was very nice to hear a speech from the other party like we have been asking for so long. It turns out now... Now we begin to get to the problem. It now turns out that what Thorleif counts as “biting” [snapping], we would call this – “love.” What Thorleif counts as “biting” we call an attempt to help other people. But those people are so close-minded. They don’t want to have their self-perception disturbed. They gaze at their own navels, and they will not be perturbed. Therefore, they call what we do – biting, while we just simply try to help them ... and give them moral support... and provide support for their work leading up to the graduation exam (p. 46).

In what maybe sounds very patronizing²⁰, Reidar here describes the Nannies’ constant nagging as an “attempt to help” and to “give moral support” to those they call Deviants. He does not acknowledge others’ right to differ in what they want to do in school. Instead, he reiterates a deeply scornful judgment that anyone who does not subordinate themselves to the preestablished vision of the school may have some kind of deficit. In this case, potentially a deficit of the will, or self-confidence, or potentially the “moral compass” that would help them recognize what it means to do the right thing – since he describes what the Nannies do as giving “moral support.”

Egil: I have to ask Thorleif. You say you came here and thought this would be a school built on love. - But was it not one of your presumptions to attend a school made just like this one? (p. 46).

Rolf: Yes, Thorleif will answer.

Thorleif: First to Egil: I read the guiding materials I received - and thought it was [about] love. To Åge: “Hippie school” – if Hippies are the ones who love – if Hippies are the ones who love each other, then we should have a *Hippie* school. [...] It is really one of the things fundamental for this school – [that] you only act with love... To Reidar: It’s possible that you, you... you mean it well and... and you think what you give is love. It is quite possible. But you must make people experience it as love, too... and not as biting. Besides, I don’t want to be called either one or the other party... I... I don’t understand any of it. It is so far from me... I don’t understand anything anymore... But [...] if you want to give love, then you have to make people know it is love you want to give. If people experience your love as biting, then you are wrong. Then you have to try to do it differently. Thanks. (p. 46).

Thorleif appears to solidify his position about love, and his passionate tone seems to raise the emotional charge of the meeting. So, when Tone starts to speak, she soon breaks down crying. “I don’t want to be lambasted as I walk down the hallways here [...] that I’m Mosse’s fan or Anne’s fan or Anders’ fan... because I really admire Mosse²¹... and you Anne, the same” (p. 47). Tone then praises Anne and Anders for the hard work they put in creating the school. She again strongly protests that she is being scorned for admiring them, especially when it “comes from the party who would like to have love... who makes arguments based on love” (p. 47). With that, she chides Thorleif, potentially implying that he is a hypocrite, talking about “love,” but berating her for admiring the Nannies.

²⁰ I want to thank Eugene Matusov for pointing out the patronizing aspect of Reidar’s speech.

²¹ Mosse Jørgensen, their “principal”.

Egil also seems exasperated and perplexed now, as he pushes Thorleif's arguments potentially to absurdity,

Egil: Yes, it is a little difficult to know what to say after such a vivid demonstration of what love is... but... (pause) I just want to ask Thorleif, what... What should we do? What to do... we who are nevertheless very fond of Thorleif? What should we do to show Thorleif how we love him? (p. 47).

Egil's moving reply drives Thorleif almost to a meltdown as he cries through his speech.

Thorleif: I'm not saying that Egil is not fond of anyone... and I am not saying that Tone is not fond of anyone. Maybe you guys are sitting and not saying anything about what I'm talking about. I don't know if you know how much I admire these people who started... I also don't want to be scolded that I don't like you (his voice cracks with crying) ... that's about the cruelest thing you can do... I... (pause)... I don't want to be perceived anymore just as "someone who is sitting in the hallway." I don't know... I just want to tell them one thing now [...]: End of school! Because those who are sitting in the hallway are going to destroy our school. End of school! (pp. 47-48).

As Thorleif starts to fall apart, Tom addresses the manner of their debate, pleading for a change in tone so that their heated verbal confrontations and meltdowns could potentially turn into a dialogue. So that their voices may lose their contemptuous and derisive edge. Above all, he pleads for a change where the participants could begin to take one another with more consideration and seriousness.

Tom: I have spoken today, and many others have spoken today – at least initially, it was not very... [it was] very... authoritarian and aggressive. One sits and thinks to oneself...like, 'I am sooo wonderful, and I work! You, others, do not work!' I mean, this [whole idea] here ... [of having] tolerance and being human... it is to be able to start talking to each other like we have done the last part of the General Assembly now. [...] We have to be... We have to be able to talk to each other without constantly being aggressive... And, [...] to be able to give and take criticism and not... [...] But we have to be able to solve the problems that are here at school by *talking to each other* and not by arguing... And if we can learn that... then we have come a very long way (p. 48).

It seems that Tom calls for having a genuine dialogue rather than sustaining an open conflict. When he continues, he says something that, in my view, is very important.

Tom (continues): ... [There is] one thing I have experienced just lately, and that is that I cannot judge other people based on myself. I don't really know what other people think. So... how do you really think? If I consider the way you act based on myself, it will be disturbing, indeed. - *That is, we cannot know what someone really thinks.* We have to put ourselves in the situation that here is an entirely different human being... A very special human being... and not the one like myself, indeed – who cannot be judged based on the same moments [of my life]... and then just discarded and shitted on, and such... That's basically it (p. 48).

To me, what Tom said seems like an important insight. It was important for the immediate situation, as he tries to turn their conflicts into a dialogue. However, this was potentially crucial in the long run, as he seems to attempt to reframe the ways they understand what their education is about. He makes a point about being able to take seriously those who differ from himself, as legitimately having equally important ideas and positions that should not be just discarded and devalued. Tom's insight that people's minds are opaque and not fully transparent (Matusov, 2015) and that one has to try to understand them and not to (pre)judge them, is a call for turning their conflictual debate into a dialogue. If they could change their relationships to respecting each other and not discarding each other's opinions as worthless, they might be able to deal with their conflicts.

Tom (continues): - I think, what's been the most important thing in this school... it's that one does not have to be scared into dumbing oneself down, as it has been the case in other schools. I have felt that as a great liberation, to be able to go to jazz ballet, have fun and be clumsy, without a single person turning and laughing or doing anything. In any case, there is much less of it than in other schools. We can say that we bite all the time, and we do, but maybe less than in other schools. But if we can learn to bite [each other] even less, then we are well on our way, indeed. Thanks. (Applause) (pp. 48-49).

After Tom's speech, there is a short exchange between Egil and Vivi, who try to figure out the main differences in the existing points of view. Then, Finn tries to summarize the debate, abstracting two opposing positions: one position that prioritizes the importance of academic work as the guiding value and the other that stresses personal development based on the diversity of interests and critical personal responsibility as the highest value.

Finn: You can say what you want about us not being split - and in our case, there is a split in 150 directions - but at least it seems that some people want personal development to be the most important thing about EGO. And that the non-compulsory subjects should play a more significant role than the [prescribed] syllabus subjects, etc. It seemed to point that way. That is the impression one is left with. And others who believe that the graduation exam and the academic part of the work should be the most important. I do not think it is right to make such a priority - such a prioritization. - Because I think - this trivial school - as we have begun to call it - has obviously totally failed in the area of personal development - and has only focused on an academic, knowledge-based approach to the case. But just like work is utterly central to one's life later - the life for which one is being prepared for in the school - the academic work must be just as central in the EGO. And equally important is the responsibility. *Responsibility - the ability to take a stand, - the ability to get involved, - ability to take a stand on the things that are going on in the society...* This is [also] very important in the life that comes later - and therefore, the preparation for it must be just as crucial in EGO. So, I don't think you can do that [prioritize one over the other, the academic knowledge-based approach over the development of responsibility approach]. The academic side of the matter: if society were a fully automated society according to the best cybernetic models we have - then we could cut out the academic side and just sit, read philosophy and talk, and do just that. But since there are certain realities in the life that follows, I think they must be taken into the equation too. Thanks (pp. 49-50).

Finn defines the guiding principles of each of the two positions that have started to clearly emerge: on the one hand, "academic work ethic" and on the other "critical responsibility for personally defined development." Interestingly, Finn thinks that both are important, but for different reasons. Because of that, neither one should be prioritized. It seems that Finn is more attracted to personal development, but at the same time, he might also see it as potentially a frivolous luxury²². The academic work, according to Finn, is important because it is a necessity since life is based on people's need to work, having no luxury of spending time just "reading philosophy" and engaging in personal self-improvement. At the same time, Finn seems to see as ideal a world where the life necessities would be all taken care of in a "fully automated" way.

At this point, teacher Øivind and a few other students have a short interchange about Øivind's previous idea to have the students write a mock application to the school, about the suggestion to have a discussion in smaller groups that could be more relaxed about criticism. Many others want to speak too, but Rolf is concerned about the time nearing dinner. However, Anne wants to say something important before dinner and gets the floor. She talks directly to Thorleif, as she emphatically claims that,

²² I want to thank Eugene Matusov for this fine-grained point.

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

Thorleif agrees with Anne, feeling resignation and defeat,

Thorleif: I just want to say that Anne is absolutely right. This school here cannot exist without people who can work. I can't work – so I quit. Those who do not work can stop [going to this school] because we have no right to ruin the school for others. You ask who's in the hallways hanging around. They may not be sitting in the hallways, but they don't work. They are not interested in school. We who are not... We have no right to destroy the school for others. That is why we must quit. Otherwise, this school will not be what we hoped it would be (p. 52).

It is important to notice that both Anne and Thorleif define education in their school as “work.” It could be argued that the definition of “work” here is an activity in which one has to fulfill someone else's preplanned and predefined tasks. Thorleif concedes that this might be important and that it is he who cannot do that kind of work for his own education. He acknowledges that if this is the way education is defined in this school, he should not be in the school – in order not to “destroy the school for the others.” In a way, Thorleif stays on his radical position that, for him, the school must be defined by “love” (humanness, kindness). Otherwise, it would not be a place for him. And if he cannot change the school, he will withdraw from it. We should notice that Thorleif's view is as extremely monistic as Åge's but around a different guiding principle.

The time has come for a dinner break. Although Åge asks people to stay for another quarter-hour before dinner, Rolf closes the meeting and encourages everyone to come back after they finish eating.

<<Eugene Matusov, 2020-06-09: I wonder if Thorleif was also a monist, like the Nannies – a different, nonconventional monist rather than a radical pluralist. Like Tom, probably. The Nannies defined education as rigorous *work* toward some particular well-defined goals: passing the state exam, getting employable skills, or even self-actualization in socially desirable, reputable practices. For Thorleif, the goal was to promote love among the school participants. For Tom, it was a combination of instrumental and intrinsic goals. However, what unites the Nannies, Thorleif and Tom, is that their vision of the goals of education and the school must be accepted by the rest of the school. In my view, they did not accept other visions, with which they might disagree, as legitimate. Monism is defined by the notion of “positive freedom” (Berlin, 2002) as the legitimacy of the participants' actions only conforming to the well-defined and preset unity of goals. Of course, since monism does not know true diversity (i.e., outside of the preset unity), it cannot tolerate it – that is why, in my view, the personal-ideological fights (cf. Bakhtin's notion of “person-idea,” 1999) were unavoidable there.

Tom apparently came closer to the pluralism by stating that it is impossible to fully know what other people think and thus, fully judge them, “I cannot judge other people based on myself. I don't really know how other people think... we cannot know how someone really thinks.” Still, I do not think he fully realized the pluralistic consequences of his ideas but rather broadened his positive definition of freedom to include learning “jazz” and other “fun” activities. He seemed to propose to tolerate unavoidable wasteful activities (wasteful from his point of view) for a purely pragmatic reason – because they still were less common in their innovative school than in conventional school, “In any case, there is much less of it than in other schools.” Alternatively, he

might be struggling with and alternating between his engraved monism and emerging pluralism.>>

<<Ana's reply to Eugene's remarks, 2020-06-11: In my view, Tom realizes that participation in the fun activities at school make their school much less oppressive than the conventional schools because "one does not have to be scared into dumbing oneself down, as it has been the case in other schools. I have felt that as a great liberation to be able to go to jazz ballet, have fun and be clumsy, without a single person turning and laughing or doing anything. In any case, there is much less of it [ridiculing the others] than in other schools. We can say that we bite all the time, and we do, but maybe less than in other schools ..." (pp. 48-49). This is why here I agree with Eugene that Tom is "struggling with and alternating between his engraved monism and emerging pluralism." In my view, Tom may be just starting to discover that a pluralistic approach may be liberating and necessary for them as a democratic school. In addition, I think that Tom might have wanted to develop his point about respecting people's unknown ideas and desires in order to be able to enter into a real dialogue among each other rather than snap or ridicule other's ideas.>>

– Dinner break –

After the break, the first to speak is Kåre, who talks about not being able to do much academic work, as he is constantly feeling restless and attracted to sit in the hallways. But even the hallways are not really inspiring for him. "We need more inspiration - but by sitting in the hallway, no one gives anything – and no one gets anything. I've found that for me - the source of inspiration is - it's when I do things outside of the [regular] curriculum - things like drama – bodybuilding - jazz ballet, etc." (p. 53). Kåre also adds that "many at the school here are hampered by the fact that they have no rest in themselves to sit and work. Something is stopping them - I don't know what it is. I think it is important to figure out what it is. I do not know" (pp. 53-54). He then makes a suggestion to move the library to the floor above, and a short conversation ensues between a few students and a teacher about the pros and cons of moving the library and rearranging some reading rooms.

However, Åge wants to turn the discussion back to the critical issues they left off before the break. Rolf insists that they keep the protocol of calling speakers in the order in which they are signed up to speak and calls Elisabeth as the next speaker. But she is not in the room, and Rolf gives the floor to two teachers, Olaf and Øivind, as the next speakers. They again discuss the issues regarding what the Department of Education would allow the school to do and what not. However, this topic seems of no interest to the students as there is no reaction.

In the meantime, Elisabeth has arrived, and Rolf gives her the floor. Elisabeth returns to several hot topics that were raised before: personal freedoms, coercion, responsibility, and diversity of students' goals and opinions.

Elisabeth: I belong to those who have an excruciating fear of standing in large congregations and talking - so I don't know if I can express myself clearly and say what I mean, but I hope you can try to hear what I mean. I don't know in which category to put myself. Here we talk about those who waste time and people who show up for classes. When I show up for a class, I can no longer concentrate on the work because all the time... I keep thinking about the ones I have tried to bring with me [to the class]. When I sit in the hallway and get up to go to a class, I ask people if they were not going to get up and come to the class. And then I hear, "It's none of your business." Then I feel... well, like – I don't know what to call it – I feel like I'm criticizing them... and I get a very bad conscience. I can't work because I think about these people. They look down on me... because I try to take away their personal freedom. But that's not what I mean when I ask them to come to classes (p. 56).

Elisabeth seems aware of the way her peers might perceive her as coercive, even if she does not mean to coerce them. Nevertheless, she apparently feels that there is something very wrong in the way she treats others, something that gives her a bad conscience. She seems to be afraid that perhaps her peers feel that she does not respect them. However, she does not develop her thoughts further. Instead, she switches the topic and continues,

Elisabeth (continues): And another thing... I think that the school here takes too much into account its external responsibilities. [Like], what the press will say? And whether we will get grants... or will not get grants? What will happen to the school, will it be shut down, or will it not be shut down? How will this go? I think there's been a lot of pressure on many of us, almost all of us, that we have this hanging over us all the time: What if we don't get grants, what will happen to the school? (p. 56).

Again, Elisabeth raises a critical issue of responsibility, pointing out the fact that there is too much external pressure, the pressure to be accountable to someone or something else: the press, the public, the funding, etc. It seems that she does not approve of it, but she does not develop this thread fully. If she thinks that "external responsibility" is somehow the wrong direction to go, what other kinds of responsibility should there be instead, if any? Does she imply that having too much of this particular external responsibility is potentially detrimental to them?

Elisabeth (continues): And I've also got a sense that the humanness is being put out!! We don't have the ability – we have the ability, but we don't use it, to understand each other... tolerate each other. Understand each other's opinions... without laughing at each other. [...] When I started here, I hoped to find a very creative environment... where I would not be ridiculed, where no one would laugh at the opinions I had. Where I should be tolerated as another human being... I have been frozen out before in several schools because of my opinions, and I have the feeling that I'm being frozen out here, too. [I am being told] that I can't believe what I mean because some people think it's weird... think it's weird. And I have the feeling that I'm not being tolerated. And I wonder: are we not fond of each other as human beings anymore? We don't have any feelings for each other... when we have to sit there laughing and saying that "you do not understand anything" and "no, that fool is stupid." I have the feeling that humanness slides more and more away. We are no longer human. We work like machines.

And then it is also said that *artium* is the most important thing for this school - that everyone goes to *artium*. But what do we do with *artium* when everyone becomes a machine, as you do in many other schools? I believe that ...well, many of us will study and we will become some of the country's most prominent people... But what can we do for this country if we are all computers? Operating without thinking about emotions, not owning emotions... or if we have emotions: we can't show them to each other. I think that no matter how things go with the *artium*, still, the most important thing is to be human. And then let the *artium* and exams come under the second line - but first and foremost, be people and show each other that we love each other - that we tolerate each other. Thanks - that's all I should say. (Applause). (pp. 56-57).

Elisabeth's concept of humanness seems to be somewhat similar to Thorleif's "love." For her, humanness means being kind to each other, tolerating and accepting each other by showing love to each other, although not necessarily being cooperative with each other. For Elisabeth, listening to and understanding each other is what counts for humanness – which is similar to Inge's views. Here she highlights one of the important principles of dialogicity, listening and providing an affirming response to the other's offer. This does not necessarily include agreement but acknowledgment and interest in the other. Elisabeth's ideas are in some ways similar to Thorleif's view on humanness as the guiding principle. However, unlike Thorleif, Elisabeth does not reject the possibility of "working" for the graduation exam. In her opinion, humanness, as an appreciation of others, and academic study for passing the graduation exam can coexist. However, humanness should be the highest value, and the guiding principle, while working to

pass the final exam (*artium*), should be the second concern. She sees the danger if working to pass the graduation exam becomes the only legitimate cause, it can then eradicate humanness. Although we don't know for sure, Elisabeth's ideas appear to be leaning toward a pluralist worldview.

These arguments potentially give urgency to Åge, who immediately wants to reply to Elisabeth. He takes the floor.

Åge: So, I'm sorry to go against Elisabeth, it was very good what she said... I just want to address what she said about the press and all that. Obviously, this school must, of course, first and foremost be a human school. A school that conveys love to put it that way. But *we can't just live on love*. It is regrettable - but you can't do this in the world, and that's why we are a little dependent on what the press writes about us - and so many newspapers write just shit. - So, it doesn't... - Excuse the phrase... - We can't... - we have to take into consideration... - And even if we are to promote understanding and tolerance and be a school full of love, it must not come at the expense of *artium*. You can get to the *artium* and still be a good person... and still be able to keep your human and sensitive feelings. It is not necessary to let it come at the expense of each other (pp. 57-58).

It seems to me that this is the first time that Åge apparently tries to take the idea of humanness seriously and without ridiculing it as he did when Thorleif spoke earlier. Åge now starts to agree that humanness, kindness, and love are important guiding principles. Still, he argues that this should not come at the expense of pursuing the national exam (*artium*). However, Åge's tone seems to have changed now, from direct confrontation to potentially dialogic testing of ideas, as he seems to sincerely try to give merit to the importance of humanness and love in the school. Åge's change of tone may be influencing others too. Both Reidar and Thorleif want to reply. Rolf gives the floor to Reidar, who somehow tries to reformulate Åge's apparent attempt to take humanness seriously as a somewhat awkward compromise between the unlimited personal freedom and the [Nannies] dictatorial rights. He says,

Reidar: ... if a compromise is to be made, it means, if we deny the others their total freedom, then it also means - that we [the Nannies] should deny ourselves a dictatorial power, the one we would like to have. O.K., if anyone can submit such a proposal - then I am willing to agree (p. 58).

Thorleif, in his turn, replies directly to Åge, returning to his [Thorleif's] own definition of humanness as love, where love is an unconditional acceptance of and by the other.

Thorleif: There's a word much better than tolerance, and it's love. What I want... what I think Elisabeth²³ wants... is love. It's not about being allowed to sit in the hallway... It's about simply *being able to be yourself* without constantly having to be [in a rat race] on a treadmill. There are people here who are trampled on... Some people have been trampled on in all schools. Then they come here... and they look for something that is love, but then they are trampled on here, too. You talk about compromise... There is no compromise on love. Either it is love, or it is not love. If you can... if you can simply live or be yourself without always playing someone [else]... without having to knock yourself down to be great. There is no compromise. If you have to say hippie, say hippie... or whatever, or... - What the fuck are you, if you do not have love - then you are damned. (Tempestuous applause and shouting) (pp. 58-59).

Thorleif's passionate and uncompromising vision of the school as a communion where everyone can be what they want to be and be loved for it, might be too radical for several other students, who reply with admonition. Viggo retorts somewhat sarcastically that he wonders if people who couldn't find love in other schools expect to "somehow step into a paradise - and so we are all happy. But one has to earn love

²³ In the published transcript, the name Thorleif mentions is "Anne" - however, it seems to me that the refers to "Elisabeth" who just spoke, and whose views seem to be similar to Thorleif's. So I took a liberty to change his reference as a mistake of the transcript.

for oneself. There is nothing here that can be given out like a ticket. Like, when you come in through the school doors here, you get a ticket on which it says: "Heaven." (Laughter). So, you have to go in and create love yourself... [you have] to generate love that you receive from others. Yes, please." (p. 59). Liv also replies, reminding Thorleif that he should not demonize those who work hard to sustain the school they created,

Liv: ... After all, there are different ways of showing love - and I think that those who are "[in a rat race] on a treadmill" have as much love for the school and as much need for love..., but it is perhaps a little more mixed with fear of losing the school (Applause) (p. 59).

In my view, Liv potentially exposes Thorleif's monistic, almost rigid proclamation of love as an exclusive principle while seemingly being blind to the feelings of others.

The next speaker is Reidar. He returns to the tension between having personal freedom and obeying the rules and norms. He argues that "personal freedom implies tolerance and devotion to norms. [...] Personal freedom is to pay attention to other people as well." (p. 59). Reidar's claim that personal freedom implies "devotion to norms" may strike us as a contradiction in terms. Still, it is not an altogether unusual way of understanding freedom as it may appear at first sight. According to Berlin (2002), Hegel, for example, argued that "liberty is recognition of necessity" (p. 172) and "subordination to a pattern" (p. 194). Even more, it is not only a recognition of the rules and norms but even an active desire that these rules and norms be there.²⁴

Reidar continues adding, "All right - we may be acting in a somewhat brutal way when we try to correct what we think is wrong with EGO, but it is clear - we can also empathize. But then we will also demand that other people chime in" (59-60). By "brutal way," he seems to allude to the Nannies' coercing the people in the hallways to get in the classes or snapping at people with different opinions. This really disturbs Inge. As she starts her reply, Inge focuses on the Nannies' repeated acts of coercion,

Inge: Reidar said something that upsets me [...] - I find in it a germ of a conflict that can get bigger here at school. If he says he's going around trying to get people to come to a class, then there's something very dangerous about this. [Although] this may be reminiscent of an ordinary pep talk in general debates - but what Reidar says and what is dangerous - is that he tries *to control people*. - And those present when J. Israel²⁵ was here know that in a school that is run by the students, we cannot exert control over each other in this old way. We have to try to find new ways to agree (p. 60).

Here, Inge seems to argue that the problem lies in the attempt of one group (the Nannies?) to dominate the others. Instead, they should be developing democratic relationships among people with equal rights, where all students can be respected, and their opinions, ideas, and desires should be listened to and taken into account. These attempts of one small group of students to dominate could be felt throughout this whole meeting. However, it seems to me that the tone of their debate, and especially the tone of several very vocal Nannies (Åge, Egil, Reidar, Roar), started to change in this last part of the meeting. It may be this change that made it possible for Inge to address this issue of their relationships more directly.

²⁴ I discuss the issue of Berlin's concept of "positive freedom" (Berlin, 2006) in more detail in another place, in the analysis of the issues discussed in this meeting, (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b)

²⁵ It seems that Inge refers to Joachim Israel, a Swedish social scientist who worked on a theory of participation together with his Norwegian colleagues. He was inspired by the work of K. Lewin, especially Lewin's study of the styles of leadership and social climate (Lewin, Lippitt, & White, 1953/1939). According to Lewin et al., democratic governance, where all members have equal rights of participation in the decisions, leads to a qualitatively superior and more engaged educational practice and its outcomes, compared to either autocratic or laissez-faire governance. In Inge's reference to J. Israel, we can glimpse the ways that the social scientists from the University of Oslo, who were involved in research of this new experimental school, influenced the students and probably the teachers in the school.

Inge continues with her second point about the guiding principles that the school should adopt

Inge: And another thing, it seems that people pit against each other hard work and love—tolerance. But that's not what the debate is about. The debate is about... not about whether we should have a school of love instead of a school of work, but a place where we can expand the concept of the school... where we can have love included. And good schoolwork cannot exist, at least not for me, except when I get satisfying human fulfillment. And at the same time, it is very difficult to show love without somewhat thoughtful mind work. We simply can't sit day-in and day-out, and just be loving and kind. And it is in the synthesis of these two concepts that one finds true humanity that Elisabeth spoke of (p. 60).

Inge, like a few others, attempts to put the two guiding values together, rather than against each other. The important question for many of them is whether that is possible or not. No one before her was able to do that. As Åge said just a moment ago: "And even if we are to promote understanding and tolerance - and be a school full of love - it must not come at the expense of *artium*" (pp. 57-58). It may be that Inge has something else in mind, rather than what guiding principle should predominate in school. This is true, especially in cases when decisions would differ depending on what principle predominated.

Inge then proceeds with her third important point, that concerns the ways how the Deviants, like Thorleif, perceive the Nannies.

Inge: Something else I wanted to talk about was Thorleif's first speech, which was important to you. Not because he represented a special wing, I don't think. I think there are 150 different sides to this case - and I think that what he had to be clear above was that not only those sitting in the hallways feel depressed. Also, those who advocate for rigor and such. They also feel equally depressed (p. 60).

It is interesting that Inge now returns back to the issue of their intersubjective relationships, but this time, addressing Thorleif (as one of the Deviants). She (again) points out to Thorleif that the Deviants are not the only ones who have feelings and that frustrations and depression are equally shared among the Nannies. However, Thorleif replies to Inge, disagreeing with her attempt to erase the tension between the two guiding principles - work ethic vs. love and kindness. This time, he seems to make a great effort to develop his argument and make his thoughts more conceptualized.

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

It seems to me that Thorleif is grappling with his own critical responsibility for what he thinks and how he feels. At the same time, he laid down the situation as he sees it in a rather black-and-white dichotomy: either making the school a special place based on love and "humanity" vs. following the Department of Education values and becoming just another regular high school. And, if the situation is painted like that, Thorleif cannot compromise. In this way, Thorleif seems to be as exclusive and rigid in his own monistic views about love as the exclusive guiding principle, as Åge is about the work ethic and responsibility to the existing preestablished vision of the school. Thorleif continues,

Thorleif: While I may not get you to understand now, I think it's right, we can't constantly agree with each other, we can't always be happy with ourselves. So, [paraphrasing the Nannies]

"It is these people who are sitting around in hallways. Are we entitled to demand that they come in [the class] at all? Of course, we are! Why do we do that? That's because we want them to have a good *artium* – it is because they should be connected to the class. - They need the graduation exam, right? (That's why they go to school after all)" (Loud drumming sounds). [Continuing to quote] "That's why they go to school!"

[Thorleif now changes his tone to directly address the Nannies] But you, [Nannies,] must not talk to those people [who sit in the hallways] so that they perceive it as something other than what you want it to be. You have to try to speak the language of the people. There is nothing as important as speaking the same language. [...] [Frustrated] Oh, it is *no* use! You can't speak - you have to learn to speak their language (p. 61).

I think that by saying that it is "important to speak the same language," Thorleif tries to tell the Nannies that they should have in mind the others' possible points of view and try to anticipate how the others might potentially react to what is said. He clarifies,

Thorleif (continues): You *must not* order them to come [to classes] - *They* must understand why they should come [to classes]. It is very important. You must motivate them to attend classes. I think we forgot that. So - those people must then understand why they should take the graduation exam – why they should go to a class – why should they sit there and learn. And before they get it, - they should never [be made] to go there [to the classes]. - And if they are [forced], - they will go with great reluctance and will not learn a single thing. They will be detrimental to the class and to the school, and to themselves. (Applause) (60-62).

It seems that Thorleif is trying to develop a point similar to Erling's: that people should under no circumstances be forced to come to classes but that they should develop their own will and decide whether to go to classes or not. Thus, according to Erling, "the classes should be advertised" (Erling on p.38). Thorleif also claims that "if [the students] are forced" to go to classes, the students will lose their personal authorship of education, "they will not learn a single thing" – which will only "be detrimental for the school and for themselves." What is not entirely clear is what Thorleif actually had in mind when he made a Progressive Education point to the Nannies that they "must motivate the students to attend the classes." Perhaps, this can be seen as an argument for the value of developing what Bakhtin called the Internally Persuasive Discourse (IPD) (Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 1991; Matusov & von Duyke, 2010).

Did he (and Erling) mean that instead of brute force, the Nannies should use softer and maybe more manipulative methods to get the students to actually attend classes, as Progressive Education usually argue (cf. Rousseau, 1979)? Or did he mean that going to classes may not be the ultimate goal for every student? And that this needs to be recognized as legitimate as well. Therefore, the school should support the development of each individual student's authorial agency in making personal decisions. If what Thorleif thought implied that getting students to think they want to go to classes is what the Nannies should do, then this could be interpreted as a Progressive idea of education, initially developed by Jean Jacques Rousseau (1979). One of the foundational tenets of progressive education is Rousseau's claim that "a progressive teacher wants the student to want what the teacher wants the student to want without the student noticing that" (Matusov, 2020 submitted). The progressive education approach carries a monistic worldview based on understanding education as a predefined practice, i.e., a *poiësis* (Aristotle, 2000), where all the participants must subject themselves to its rules, norms, and values preset by the society (via the expert or democratic politicians).

Thorleif advocates against Åge's and other Nannies' PARTICULAR monistic vision (spirit) of the school, which was also approved by the Department of Education. In claims that if they continue to give in to the Department's educational demands, they will become just a regular high school and not a school of humanness and love. However, Thorleif's insistence on "love" as the only guiding principle for the school is apparently no less exclusive than the Nannies' principle of responsibility as work ethic.

<<Eugene Matusov, 2020-06-09: It seems to me that some Deviants were non-conventional monists. For example, Thorleif was a hippy monist, as I discussed above. His monist intolerance, demanding "love" from everybody, is not a surprise to me. I think that Elizabeth and, maybe, Inge came closer to the paradigm of the radical pluralism promoted by Berlin (Kelly, 1978, p. xv). Radical pluralism is based on a belief in the impossibility and undesirability of uniting competing goals, values, and virtues and on the notion of "negative freedom," setting limits to people's actions without setting any positive goals for them. >>

Thorleif's adamant insistence on "love" seems to have exasperated several other students who tried to push it back as being equally uncompromising, hardcore, and potentially as aggressive as Åge's insistence on upholding rules and norms of the agreed-upon school vision. (See students' earlier replies to Thorleif, but also a bit further toward the end of the meeting).

Åge can now reply calmly and apparently without anger while still with strong disagreement. He makes his point very firmly,

Åge: Yes, this was brief... After all, it is not a matter of doing a favor to any of the parties here, and it is not a matter of doing a favor to the Department [of Education]. We have been allowed most graciously to run a school outlined in the framework plan - outlined in the statutes and adopted at a number of public meetings before the summer holidays. And that is what we must follow. And this with love – no one is against love. That's not what we're arguing about. There are questions about following the school's rules - and democracy means organizing oneself under the rules as well. [Sarcastically] Unfortunately, there is no anarchy - very sorry (Applause) (p. 62).

It seems that for Åge, personal ownership and authorship of education, having the liberty to decide for oneself about academic matters, falls out of the already agreed upon school's framework. What is interesting is that he does not question the fact that Thorleif (and most of the other students) were not participating in authoring "this framework," like probably Åge and some of the other Nannies did. Åge does not find this as a problem of their democratic governance. Moreover, Åge sees personal freedoms to own and author one's own education as anarchy – where there is nothing to govern the many personally authored education paths.

Viggo is still in shock at what Thorleif implied and checks with him if he really thinks that they would have to close the school. When Thorleif confirms that he does think so, Viggo replies that he believes that they "still have a chance. We can do it anyway. And I mean, there's no need to shut down the school. Of course, we have to give ourselves up if we prefer to let it go, but that is the only way to get started" (p. 62).

The next speaker is Arne (teacher). He says he is worried about "setting this as a contradiction, that is - between love and working." However, he, too, weighs in on the side of the academic work, saying that "After all, we haven't established ourselves as a youth club - but as a school" (pp. 62-63).

Thorleif tries one more time to push back, saying, "but the thing is that [...] We are constantly willing to commit ourselves. More and more and more - and finally, there is no experimental gymnasium" (p. 63). Tone answers back, reiterating that pursuing the *artium* is the main reason they go to school in the first place. And "if one can't put this together with having a love for one another; if the two things do not go

together – well, well, then I think one has to miserably fail in absolutely everything. Because then, there is no experimental gym anymore.” (p. 63). She also points out to Thorleif that,

Tone: ... you can't just demand love - you also have to give love. Well - there are maybe many ways to perceive love – indeed. But I think that if you demand a little less and give a little more – [...] – then I think there should be no danger of this becoming an ordinary high school. Thanks (p. 63-64).

Fredrick now restates the same point that although talking about love “sounds very nice, [...] [we should keep] in mind that we depend on money. Money and Department of Education. ... [After all,] Rome was not built in a day. Thanks” (p. 64).

It seems now that the dialogue has stalled and that everyone just keeps repeating the same arguments. Thorleif continues with his monistic view, “If we can't love each other, we have nothing to spend money on (64).” Olaf disagrees and repeats that “I know perfectly well that it is possible to do good to artium and to love each other” (p. 64). Inge notices that “we're not making such a huge effort to speak each other's languages, as you say.” She asks, “But what would we do if we spoke – if I spoke your language, or you spoke mine - and still didn't agree?” And she adds, seemingly exasperated,

Inge: Now, I think I heard something that I understood from you today – [...], but then you outdid yourself by saying you could quit school itself. [This is] a failure to show a slight tolerance. It is possible that I do not understand you, but do you want to tear down the school today, deep down? (Voices of people talking at the same time) (p. 64).

Thorleif: I want to clear an obvious misconception: I never said I would close the school. I say that if the Department closes our school because there is too much humanity here, so I see it as a blow (p. 64).

Reidar: Yes, now I think there will be a personal debate between Thorleif and the rest of the assembly here. (Many voices over each other - Banging on the desks.) (p. 64)

Thorleif tries to call others who did not speak to say something, but there is only noisy and powerful banging. When Rolf gives the floor to Per, the next speaker, Per proposes that they end the debate “not because this is not an important issue, but because it is such an important matter that we need a little more clarity to talk about it. [But by] now, we have talked about [all of] this here for three hours, at least.” However, Roar wants to continue because “this is such an important matter that we must be allowed to speak out. It is one of the few ways adult people have to connect with each other - it is talking to each other. By talking to each other, we can come to an understanding. We must continue. We are not allowed to just push it away and just say that now we have had enough, i.e., We must be able to talk about it openly” (p. 65).

Many people want to speak, but it seems that everyone is exhausted. Rolf suggests that only a few more can be on the speaker's list and names them. However, Anders, the next speaker, proposes that they close the meeting.

Anders: There has been a lot of damn talk about love here now - and I want to put it on a slightly different level. What we do now reminds me of a love affair that we keep talking about to death. I believe that we should shut down as soon as possible and get out of this room, and not take this discussion into plenary until quite a long time. Now we still try to use the impulses that linger - either to quit school or to go in and work with renewed vigor. - But shut up now - I can't do it anymore! (Big applause)

Rolf: Does anyone insist that we keep going? (Pause) So we do not. (pp. 65-66)

End of the recording/transcript.

* * *

And so, the meeting adjourned without reaching any decisions about how to proceed. In my view, and probably in the opinion of many participants, the Assembly meeting was unforgettable as an event of soul-searching and profound, passionate dialogue. The event itself seemed to change them and was potentially more important as a dramatic milestone than any potential resolutions or resulting decisions. Jørgensen wrote that “the conflict was not resolved then, nor it is completely resolved now [a few years later when she was writing the book]. However, the problems were clarified, and the feelings could be expressed and aired out” (Jørgensen, 1971, p. 40). If it “produced” anything, this Soul-searching Assembly succeeded in opening a dialogic space for the EGO participants, transforming their antagonistic conflicts and clashes into “agonistic” dialogues among friendly enemies. (Matusov & Marjanovic-Shane, 2015). It created that dialogic space in which people can search for the truth together while knowing well that when the truth “become(s) dialogically tested [... it is] forever testable” (Morson, 2004, p. 319), inviting for more dialogue, rather than closing it. Paraphrasing the famous statement (about art) attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, it is possible to say that dialogue is never finished, only temporarily abandoned²⁶. We had just joined the EGO students’ passionate dialogue of disagreement now, giving it a new life after so many years. And inviting you to join in, too.

In the next article (Marjanovic-Shane, 2023b), I explore and reconstruct conceptual approaches to life and education that were expressed and/or implied by the EGO students in this meeting. There I try to abstract their person-ideas (M. M. Bakhtin, 1999) from this event and create a conceptual map showing their philosophical, educational, ethical, and educational positions.

Appendix

*Flyer-invitation to create a democratic school in Oslo, by Jon Lund Hansen, Knut Boe Kielland and Ingrid Kviberg, April/May 1966*²⁷

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.

The previous generation has, in its time, been in the same position as the youth of our time, and this youth will, in a few years, become “the previous generation.”

The gymnasium has a crucial position in this vicious circle. The high school is a school where youth are forced to adapt to an outdated system of authority, with its dictatorial structure, its grading system where the teachers are the sole judges, its mandatory attendance, and its deadening teaching methods. There the students’ personalities, development, and independence come only in second place. (cf. “The high school in the spotlight I,” The Afterword).

The consequences of the authoritarian system in the school are that the relationship between students and teachers is impersonal and often filled with hate. There exist almost no examples of friendships between them. The students are in solidarity against the teachers and vice versa. The dissatisfaction and unfreedom in this relationship have a detrimental effect on the work on both sides.

²⁶ Cole Schafer - <https://medium.com/@austincoleschafer/art-is-never-finished-only-abandoned-86657a05c16b>

²⁷ Translation of the original flyer published in Mosse Jørgensen’s book “From a school rebellion to a rebel school” (Jørgensen, 1971, pp. 16-18).

The teachers are constrained by having to be in a dominant position in the classroom. Achieving prestige makes it difficult to tolerate students' opinions and suggestions. As soon as they accept the students as persons, the teachers' authoritarian position comes under threat.

These issues are the focus of several groups. The Research Council for the School Administration works through experiments in schools. The Norwegian Senior Lecturer Association has set up a high school committee, and the Norwegian High School Students' Association has held a national meeting, about which the reports were published in many newspapers and magazines. This is a positive trend, and it is in the spirit of democracy. But the high schoolers and their professors have not been given - nor given themselves - any real chance to participate in building a democratic high school. The purpose of this flyer is to provide them with that opportunity.

Concretely that means that we want to work on establishing a new gymnasium in Oslo as soon as possible. In that school, the teachers and the students would have equal rights; together, they would 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 curriculum. Freedom will be limited only by the students' desire to obtain a high school diploma through *artium* (a formal graduation exam) and by the teachers' knowledge of and competencies in teaching non-traditional subjects desired by some students. The students and the teachers will together create and plan the syllabi. We hope that in such a school, there will be more room for individuality, development, tolerance and more place for working constructively.

After gathering the interest among the students and teachers, our first concrete tasks must be to create study groups to investigate the following:

- The aims of the syllabus for the new high school,
- The school hours and the organization of the school day,
- Teaching methods and materials in each subject,
- The issue of the homework,
- Activities outside the curriculum,
- The practical organizational work.

The purpose of this flyer is to instigate radical changes in the traditional school system. Its authors are unknown people. We know that in the eyes of many, these are two negative factors. Furthermore, the scope of the flyer has prevented a more thorough examination of each issue.

But we know that there are teachers in our schools who work to improve their relationship with students, precisely through striving to achieve mutual equality. We also positively know that many young people have the same thoughts as the undersigned. Our main goal, besides the traditional one, to start a debate, is to bring these people together to create a decisive action.

This flyer will be distributed to as many high schools as possible in the Oslo area. It will be sent to the school newsletters and the leading newspapers in Oslo, to the Department for Churches and Education, to the committees that work with the school administration, as well as to some individuals and groups.

If you are interested in this, please submit the coupon below to

Jon Lund Hansen
Skjalgssonsgt 26
Oslo 2

I am interested in actively helping to start a new high school

Oslo:

NAME:

ADDRESS:

SCHOOL:

Expected School Grade: TEL .: TEACHER / STUDENT

March / April 1966

Jon Lund Hansen, Ingrid Kviberg, Knut Boe Kielland

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