The existential dimension in training and vocational guidance - when guidance counselling becomes a philosophical practice

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With the individualisation and multiculturalisation of the world of education and training and the world of work, a new need has arisen to develop a more value-based and existentially oriented approach to guidance theory and vocational training courses. The pluralisation of ways of life and the late-modern confrontation with the authorities have created changed conditions for understanding the relationship between theory and practice, guidance and training, guidance and profession. To a greater degree than previously, guidance has become a question of creating greater integrity between a person's professional specialisation and the life values of the person concerned. Key terms in this connection may be *authenticity* and *formation* (Bildung), concepts and an approach that necessitate a philosophical framework of understanding and guidance practice. This article describes the background to a research cooperation initiated with the aim of studying these changed conditions for guidance and whether and how the theory and practice of philosophical counselling could be a possible way of qualifying the ability of the counsellor to handle the more value-related and existential dimension of the counselling situation and vocational training.

Learning to Be - a lacking competency in Lifelong Learning

It is not the value-related and existential dimensions of the approach to guidance counselling and professional training courses that have been at the top of the agenda when one has wished to study and develop the fields of work within what is broadly referred to as Vocational Training and Lifelong Learning. Most of the training and vocational guidance research and policy-making in this area has been focused on a more pragmatic and benefit-oriented approach to guidance counselling and vocational training courses with the aim of strengthening the formal training competencies of and qualifications of the student or employee on the labour market ([1]).

But this primarily utilitarian approach to guidance counselling now appears increasingly to have been problematised. This can be illustrated by two examples.

The following quotation from Serge Blanchard appeared in the foreword of the agenda for the conference held by Cedefop in 2000 in connection with the Memorandum on Lifelong Learning: 'The fundamental question of guidance counselling is what it aims at. Should we aim to help certain individuals to create themselves within, well-defined, forms of identification? Or should we help them question the identities on the basis of which the person creates him/herself and perceives others? These question are linked to whether we retain or transform the structure of social relations. The question of guid-ance counselling leads us therefore inevitably to ask questions of a political, philosophical and ethical nature' (*AGORA X: Social and vocational guidance, Thessaloniki, 19-20 October, 2000,* p. 1). One topic at this conference was how greater focus can be put on the totality of the individual's working life and private life, as it appears increasingly to be the aim of many knowledge-based enterprises in western knowledge society to create such a context. Terms such as 'commitment', 'innovative and personal competencies' and 'teambuilding and mentoring' are thus linked in management and human resource development theories to value management and to an enterprise culture where the employee, to a greater degree, is urged to join in the attempt to develop creative forums and working environments where there is greater integrity between the person's own life values and ideals and professional attitudes and identity (Kirkeby, 2000; Thyssen, 2002; Gørtz, 2003). Only when this 'specialist integrity' has taken place, according to the message, will it be possible to experience the deeply committed and creative employee who also dares to take personal responsibility and enter into compelling communities for matters which are not controlled just by the motive of higher pay or the possibility of advancement on the career ladder but by values which the person concerned fundamentally cherishes.

Another aspect, also touched on at the conference, was that the individualised employee and this person's self-managed and lifelong learning also requires a more holistically oriented approach with the focus on the val-

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This research approach is, however, primarily oriented on the basis of a social constructivist and cultural-sociological point of view, which does not look at the more existential and philosophical aspects of the value clarification dimension. In the following, an existential philosophical, primarily hermeneutic (Gadamer, 1960), and existential psychological access to training and vocational guidance will be established. Clarification of differences and similarities between the systemic and existential approach to guidance will not be dealt with in the framework of this article.

(²) For some readers - particularly within the Anglo-Saxon and utilitarian tradition - the term 'existential' will perhaps appear diffuse or either be understood as another expression of 'personal development' or narrowly linked to the philosophical direction represented by the French philosopher J.-P. Sartre. The term 'existential' is not to be understood in that way in the present article. In using the term existential I wish, following philosophers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Jaspers, Gabriel Marcel, Martin Buber and Martin Heidegger and existential psychologists such as Emmy van Deurzen-Smith, Irvind Yallom, Rollo May and Victor E. Frankl, to point to the ethical and ontological dimension of existence which the rationalistic and social-constructivist as well as functionalist and instrumental-pragmatic approach to the world does not have an eye for. This dimension - or existential experience - arises in the borderline situations of existence. That is to say in the encounter with something which fundamentally is experienced as larger than oneself and which has absolute character and decisive significance for one's life. Such as for example when a person is born or dies, falls in love, encounters depths of sorrow or great joy. In brief, where one's existence for a while is shaken or fundamentally put in a new perspective, so that the question of the meaning of life becomes central and insistent. As the Danish historian of ideas Hans-Jørgen Schanz describes the existential experience, it is in those moments 'where man encounters something which is beyond what can be humanly calculated or produced; where man experiences that something is given - or something is taken away - which has the character of something absolute.' (Schanz, 1999, p. 24). The term 'the existential' is therefore not linked to concepts of 'personal development' and self-realisation, as these concepts remain in a psychological understanding of the human being and the world which does not reach beyond the subjectivism and anthropocentrism which existential philosophers wish to problematise.

ue dimension, *because* such an approach could be a way for the individual of creating greater continuity, meaning and integrity in the many and perhaps differing training and career progressions which the individual experiences over the course of time. And here we are thinking not just about a *professional continuity* and progression but also context and meaning in a more *existential* sense (²). Many shifts in training and vocation for adults in the 35-50 age group can thus be seen as an expression of an existential change of track and process of searching for a new orientation and meaning in existence. This is sometimes described as the result of a midlife crisis and sometimes as a decisive turning point in life. As the Danish professor Johan Fjord Jensen writes in *Frirum - Voksenpædagogiske problemer og analyser* (= Free spaces - problems and analyses of adult education) (1998): 'Adult education is accordingly not just education aimed at the acquisition of further vocational experiences, possibly as an element in lifelong learning, nor is it merely education for temporarily filling spare time with all the opportunities and interests loosely belonging to it. It is a form of education that takes man's second change of track seriously as a basic existential problem, which affects all people when they are set free to develop as adults. Understanding adulthood existentially is understanding the processes that take place in the middle of adulthood, as processes of the same fundamental significance as those that take place during childhood and during the development of the young person into an adult at the first change of course.' (Ibid., p. 65).

It was in this connection that the phenomenon of *Philosophical Counselling* was presented and discussed at Cedefop's conference as a possible new way of developing guidance geared towards handling this value-related and existential dimension in the learning processes for lifelong learning in both a holistic and critical manner. This is to ensure that the person seeking guidance counselling does not just relate narrowly to that person's current profession but also to his or her life as a whole and the life values on the basis of which the person currently thinks and acts. I shall return later to what philosophical counselling is, and why it may be important to incorporate a critical dimension into the approach to guidance counselling in relation to those enterprises which encourage (or indirectly force) their em-

ployees to create greater integrity between their professional attitudes and life values.

The second example of how one in current research and education and training policy wishes to bring a value-related and existential dimension into the discourse on lifelong learning is found in a report by the OECD and SFSO from 2000 (*Definition and Selection of Competencies: Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations (DeSeCo)*, 2000). In this report, twelve western countries were asked which ten core competencies they considered most essential for the development of lifelong learning. In this connection, it is worth mentioning the criticism which the whole project as such encountered. Two major items were criticised, in particular in the Norwegian sub-report (Knain, 2001). Firstly, the authors claim that there is a need for a far more differentiated approach to the concept of competency. As they write: 'You cannot speak of key competencies without at the same time explaining the cultural, ideological and value-related context in which competency functions. If this is not done, the concepts of competence may result in imperialism by the strong over the less strong.' (Knain, 2001, p. 11). Secondly the Norwegian expert group felt that the OECD's approach to promoting lifelong learning was constructed too instrumentally. The only purpose of lifelong learning seems to be 'mastery' and 'usefulness'. In their own words: 'The intrinsic value and formative nature of learning are placed in the background. Moreover, there is little emphasis on values and ethical reflection as a basis for action. This underscores the technocratically-influenced usefulness perspective.'(Ibid., p. 18).

A recurrent criticism of the OECD's procedure with regard to the determination of key competencies for lifelong learning was thus that the educational ideals and broad key competencies were reduced to empirically measurable indicators and thus to a far too positivistic view of knowledge and science. This point of view seems to open the way to a more general critique of the dominance which empirical experience-based science (including in particular psychology and sociology) has had for educational research and policy in this area. The OECD was thus urged to develop some clearer distinctions in the future between when one was dealing with a general philosophical/scientific discourse *or* a discussion on conditions for social and educational policy. However, I

would like to add that a distinction ought also to be made between when we are dealing with a philosophical, a psychological *or* a sociological approach. For just as it may be regarded as a form of imperialism if only one culturally determined understanding of the concept of competence prevails, similarly there will be an obvious risk of imperialism if, for example, only the psychological and sociological approach is adopted in relation to research and education policy on lifelong learning.

The OECD seems to have considered these criticisms and taken them into account in, a later synthesis report from 2001, covering the whole project (Trier, 2001). This is most clearly expressed in the final conclusion, which is entitled: 'Where is the good life?' Here the author of the report, Uri Peter Trier, reminds the reader of the famous *Delors Report by UNESCO in 1996*, which says that education is built on four basic pillars: Learning to Know, Learning to Do, Learning to live together and live with others and Learning to Be.

The first three pillars or competencies, the author claims, are well covered today in terms of both research and education policy, but the fourth pillar (Learning to Be) seems to be lacking. As he concludes: "... the 'To be' competencies have some difficulty holding their own against the 'To do' and the 'To know' competencies. The imbalance is very apparent. (...) 'Joy of Life' may seem like a rather indefinite quality. However, at the end of a text on key competencies the question: 'What is it all about?' is not irrelevant. To reflect further on this question would be challenging and exciting."(p. 54).

In 1999, the OECD tried to avoid a chiefly functional approach to the definition and identification of competencies by inviting a number of philosophers to contribute [3]. But this philosophical approach and dimension in competency thinking appears to be lacking in the majority of the reports and papers that have been produced since then on lifelong learning, particularly if one is aiming to look for competencies in lifelong learning which can promote greater attention to ethical and aesthetic topics.

The UNESCO report Learning to Be: *The World of Education Today and Tomorrow* by Edgar Faure (1973) chose to focus on the dimension in the world of education concerned with 'the person's complete development - mind and body, intelligence, sensitivity, aesthetic appreciation and spirituality'. This dimension was later taken up by the Delors Report in 1996, but supplemented with the three other core competencies. The idea of 'the whole person' is an idea which is generally acknowledged to go back to the Greek concept of *Paideia*. In Ancient Greece, school meant a free space for free people to pursue their desire for gaining understanding so as to learn about the world, humanity and want the good. And teaching at that time was seen as a creative calling, a vocation, to arouse the pupil to admiration and to 'existential attention' and a desire to do what the pupil, after critical reflection, considered to be what was true, good and beautiful. This is what Socrates also described as ethical self-care.

In modern times this approach to teaching has tended to be described through terms such as formation *(Bildung)* or *Liberal Education and Self-formation*. Concepts which, in contrast to the concept of competency, are oriented towards the ethical and existential dimension (the contemplative side) of human life and thoughts. Within this concept of education, philosophy and art are understood as ways of approaching human life and thoughts in a non-instrumental manner. Or, as the French historian of philosophy Pierre Hadot writes, a fundamental distinction can be made between a habitual and benefit-oriented perception of the world and humanity, which is necessary for the establishment of human life, and a non-pragmatic perception, which is represented by the philosopher and the artist: 'In order to live, mankind must "humanise" the world; in other words, transform it, by action as by his perception, into an ensemble of "things" useful for life' (1995, p. 258). But if we only live in the functional and 'man-made world', we never learn what it means to *be*. Because being a human - a whole person embedded in the world - requires us to understand that we are in a world and a nature which is different from 'our world'. Philosophy and art can, Hadot says with reference to Bergson and Merleau-Ponty, help us to be more fully present in the world, in existence as such. 'The utilitarian perception we have of the world, in everyday life, in fact hides from us the world qua world. Aesthetic and philosophical perceptions of the world are only possible by means of a complete transfor-

[3] This contribution can now be found in Canto-Sperber Monique, Dupuy Jean-Pierre, 'Competencies for the Good Life and the Good Society', 2001, reproduced in Rychen Dominique S.; Salganik Laura H. (eds.), 2003.

mation of our relationship to the world: we have to perceive it for itself, and no longer for ourselves.'(Ibid., p. 254).

According to Hadot, this means learning to be, learning to live in astonishment and in the present moment, and thereby the possibility of experiencing fullness of life and a deeper meaning, something which Rousseau also called 'le sentiment de l'existence' and which the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor uses to determine what 'authenticity' is (Taylor, 1991).

If this point of departure is adopted and if 'joy of life' is associated with such a contemplative and 'authentic' approach to the world and other people (cf. Buber, M., 1996, and Taylor, 1991), a different and more philosophical approach must presumably also be required to clarify key competencies for lifelong learning than the one we find used in the OECD approach. But can the fourth competency, *Learning to Be*, be described through a particular set of specific competencies at all? Hadot gives us the following answer: 'Everything which is "technical" in the broad sense of the term, whether we are talking about the exact science or the humanistic science, is perfectly able to be communicated by teaching or conversation. But everything that touches the domain of the existential - which is what is most important for human beings - for instance, our feeling of existence, our impressions when faced by death, our perception of nature, our sensations, and a fortiori the mystical experience, is not directly communicable." (ibid., p. 285).

If this lived existential experience is important to our ability to be, how can we as teachers and counsellors work with this dimension without destroying it?

Is such an existential experience by definition outside the range of education? Is it possible to guide to authentic choices?

Phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophy will, like Hadot, say that it can be done. But then education and guidance counselling must be re-thought, so that this fundamental community of wonder, which presupposes an orientation towards an open space, from where the idea can come (Gadamer, 2004/1960, p. 347) become possible in the encounter between the guidance counsellor and the person seeking counselling.

Research project: 'Philosophical counselling and practical knowledge in vocational training'
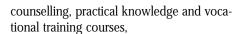
This is the background against which the Guidance Research Unit at the Danish University of Education has planned a four-year research project, the aim of which is to study whether it is possible to develop a *philosophically oriented* theory and practice of guidance counselling which will be better able to work with and understand the value-related and existential dimension in guidance and teaching. This research project has been established in co-operation with the Centre for Practical Knowledge at Bodø Regional University in Norway, where researchers are also in the process of defining possible research approaches for the understanding of the value-related aspects of the relationship between theory and practice (Nergård, 2003). What these two research units have in common is that they are also responsible for two university training courses. In Denmark, a Master's degree course in guidance counselling was established in the autumn of 2004 where the philosophical approach is at the heart of the course, and where one of the Master's degree modules is exclusively concerned with philosophical counselling, which from an international point of view is an innovation. In Norway, a major university course has been organised in the Centre for Practical Knowledge since 2000, in Practical knowledge for professions such as teachers, social workers and nurses.

The joint research project 'Philosophical counselling and practical knowledge in professional training courses' uses two approaches:

❑ a theoretical (philosophy and history of ideas) study of philosophical (counselling) practice viewed in relation to key concepts linked to the theories of practical knowledge, and

❑ a practical phenomenological-hermeneutic study of the philosophical counselling practice undertaken in specific professional Bachelor's degree courses and professional contexts.

The overall aim is thus to develop

❑ some (introductory) analytical strategies for the relationship between philosophical

counselling, practical knowledge and vocational training courses,

❑ an empirical basis for how philosophical counselling in practice reveals itself and what experience the guidance counsellor and person seeking counselling acquire along the way, in order to finally

❑ develop a framework of understanding and a knowledge base for philosophical counselling in professional training courses.

Practical knowledge and authenticity

The focus at the Centre for Practical Knowledge in Bodø, to which seven professors in philosophy, psychology and education are attached, is on analysing which research approaches can be adopted with regard to the tacit knowledge involved in the professional work of the educationalist and counsellor. A key research question in this context is what forms of instruction and counselling can be developed so that this form of knowledge is articulated and reflected. By practical knowledge, the researchers understand the unique entrenched experiences the professional practitioner has acquired over a period of years in the practical field and which over the course of time has crystallised into a certainty, expertise and intuition for what is the appropriate thing to do both from a technical and from a human point of view at the moment concerned. As Aristotle says, it is not knowledge in the sense of *episteme* but knowledge in the sense of *phronesis* that is placed at the centre (MacIntyre, 1981; Dunne, 1993; Gustavsson, 2001). This knowledge is mostly tacit and closely associated with the specific actions in the specialist's profession and professional environment.

Their research interest is directed towards how this tacit practical knowledge can be articulated or 'released' through practice-based theory and research. This is partly done by using the students' narratives on their profession and by means of a hermeneutic process of reflection, where, through the interpretation of these 'texts' - narrative and ethnographic descriptions of the concrete practice - greater clarification is attained on the underlying understanding which seems to be incarnate both in the approach of the researcher (and counsellor) and in the specific practice of the practitioner of the profession.

What is essential to the success of the counsellor (and the practice-oriented researcher) is that they have gained their *own* experience in the field - i.e. they have themselves noted what it means to be in this specific professional situation. When, for example, concepts are developed for research purposes, this is generally done at the epistemological level - i.e. the researcher wishes to develop concepts which are common to all the specific practices he or she studies. But one can and should also develop concepts which are unique to the specific and singular practical experience that constitutes the object of one's guidance and research. The aim of the practice-oriented researcher as well as the guidance counsellor must therefore be to help the person seeking counselling to *articulate* the insight and concepts that lie in the practice. The individual practices have to be illuminated from within - through their own concepts. The task of the counsellor (and the practice-oriented researcher) is therefore to find his or her way into the *underlying understanding* of the person seeking counselling as expressed in both words and actions in the practice of the person concerned.

At the Centre for Practical Knowledge, one is also concerned with and interested in the ethical dimension when dealing with 're-leasing' an insight into the moral dilemmas and problems and experiences which might lie in the specific practice of the practitioner of the profession. The same approach applies here: one is concerned with the underlying and lived understanding in practice in order to then develop concepts and theories which can release each individual's unique perspective on and experiences of the ethical dilemmas and problems so as to become a reflected understanding as well. When they speak about the ethical dimension of practical knowledge, it is either

❑ in connection with the integrity imposed on the practice-oriented researcher or the professional practitioner by the agreed professional ethics and ideals of the profession,

❑ in relation to the specific moral challenges, peculiar to this professional practice,

❑ more generally linked to the corporate culture of this profession (e.g. the occupational environment and forms of behaviour in a school), or

❑ the general moral horizon of meaning, which is incarnate in the culture and lifestyles of society (cf. MacIntyre, 1981).

As mentioned earlier, some have chosen to describe these ethical aspects in vocational training courses using Aristotle's concept of *phronesis*. This refers to the practical wisdom that lies *within* the given professional practice, and that contrasts on the one hand with the abstract theory *(episteme)* on the professional practice and the instrumental technique or didactic method/approach *(techne, poiesis)* for this professional practice.

In contrast to the Centre for Practical Knowledge, the Guidance Research Unit has chosen to take as its point of departure the diagnosed individualisation of the world of education and training and the world of work (and in particular vocational training courses (Fibæk et al., 2003)), where concepts such as *self-formation* (Schmidt, 1999; Hansen, 2003; Hammershøj 2003) and *authenticity* (Taylor, 1991; Fibæk, 2004; Nyeng, 2004) are of central importance. For an increasing number of people, work is experienced as a path to self-realisation and as an element in their personal development. Questions such as: 'How can this work give me deeper meaning? Why, fundamentally, do I want to be a teacher? How can I once again become enthusiastic about what I do?' are often questions which occupy a person in middle adulthood, who has long worked in a particular profession, or questions on which a young person wants to be guided in his or her choice of educational course or occupation. With the idea of Lifelong Learning and Guidance, there appears to be a growing need to find 'one's own leitmotif' in the process of education and formation one goes through during many years of education, training and work.

Where the Bodø researchers thus look primarily at the exercise of the profession, we in the Guidance Research Unit are occupied with the *attitude to life* which the practitioner of the profession shows in his or her training or profession, that is to say how the person concerned from an existential point of view sees a totality and meaning between his education and training/work and his life and existence as such.

Within recent Danish vocational research, attempts have been made to capture this more existential search process and trend towards individualisation in the world of education and training and the world of work through the concept of *authenticity* (Fibæk, 2003). Authenticity is understood to mean a particular form of professionalism in which great integrity is developed between a person's professional attitudes and the person's own life values. It is only when there is agreement between these that the professional practitioner will experience commitment to and deeper meaning in his work. Acquiring such integrity and authenticity through practice necessitates new forms of education and training.

Per Schultz Jørgensen, a professor of social psychology, writes that a new type of teacher must be created in the future. The teacher must not just possess solid professionalism and educational insight, he or she also has to take on personal responsibility for his or her professionalism and put him or herself and his or her attitudes at stake when teaching. 'The teacher today has responsibility for the authentic nature of the learning process. The teacher has to be engaged with his person in the process of creating credibility'. (Ibid., p. 102). Such an authentic learning process can be acquired through practice, he claims, through 'individual training' based on the 'Socratic know-thyself', where the student teacher strives to develop an 'individual philosophy which can function as a strengthening of the individual professionalism towards greater coherence and individual authenticity'. (Ibid., p. 105).

This is followed up by the professor of education Per Fibæk Laursen, who regards the concept of authenticity as a continuation of the general individualisation and relativisation of values and the late-modern confrontation with the authorities. In late modernity, the teacher and the educationalist have to a greater degree become their own authority. Instead of just letting their pedagogic thinking and practice be governed by a corpus of abstract and universal theories and models for good pedagogy, the teacher and the educationalist have to learn to a greater degree to take as their starting point their own unique experiences and practical knowledge and from there pursue their pedagogy with their own authority (Fibæk, 2003).

Taking as his basis findings such as Charles Taylor's (1991) and some empirical studies

of Danish *folkeskoler* (primary and lower-secondary schools), Per Fibæk Laursen later in his book *Den autentiske lærer* (= The authentic teacher) (2004), develops an ideal conception of the authentic teacher with the following characteristics. The authentic teacher is

❏   driven by a 'sense of calling' (he or she has to have enthusiasm for his or her job and feel the occupation and the teaching profession to be personally meaningful),

❏   he or she *lives* his or her ideals, is

❏   open-minded and respectful towards the ideas and behaviour of fellow human beings,

❏   takes his or her own intentions seriously and therefore works for an everyday life and an environment which can favour the attainment of these intentions. In order to be able to develop this scope for authenticity,

❏   the teacher must be in dialogue with his or her colleagues and

❏   patiently retain his or her dreams and goals. But the test of authenticity according to Fibæk stands in practice when

❏   one has to find one's *own* individual style for what instruction best suits one's abilities and means. This decision, Fibæk writes, is often made at a non-rational and intuitive level. As he quotes one of the interviewees as saying: 'You have to try and see what it feels like in your stomach.' In other words, the authentic choice also depends on whether one fundamentally feels good about it, and whether it feels to be the right thing for *me*. In conclusion, he writes about authenticity: 'Authenticity is acting in accordance with one's life values. One thus has to have gained clarity about one's values and attitudes to be authentic.' (2004, p. 107).

It is our hypothesis in the Guidance Research Unit that individualisation and the consequent focus on the value-related and 'authentic' has created a need to rethink the relationship between academic theory and pedagogic practice (as considered among others by Polanyi, the Dreyfus brothers, Ryle and Schön) in a more ethical and existential direction.

Concepts such as 'tacit knowledge', 'reflection-in-action' and 'practical knowledge', as used in present-day literature on the subject, are primarily conceived in relation to the limited and specific professional context the professional practitioner is in. When, in recent years, it seems to have become important to the professional practitioner for professional practice also to be experienced as authentic and meaningful, not just in the professional sense, but in the existential sense too, there are two new relationships which also need to be considered in vocational research. These are the *self-relationship* of the professional practitioner and his or her meaning-searching relationship to the profession and his or her life *as a whole*. This is what the French philosopher Michel Foucault in his later works also describes by the concept of *rapport* de soi and the Greek concept of 'ethical self-care', respectively [4].

It is our assumption that whereas practical knowledge for example in Polanyi's and Schön's sense is linked to specialist knowledge *in* practice, knowledge which, as it were, has emerged out of specialist practice, it is a different form of *existential practice* and *wisdom* (not knowledge) which is at stake when it comes to the professional practitioner's experience of authenticity, integrity and meaningfulness in relation to work and life viewed in a holistic perspective.

A possible way of defining this more existential dimension of the professional practitioner and practical knowledge could theoretically be to study whether the widely used concept of *phronesis* fundamentally covers this dimension. In any case, when the interpretation of the concept of *phronesis* is only linked to the relationship of the individual to *polis* and not to *kosmos*. That is to say, when the concept is only understood in relation to the societal, political and cultural knowledge horizon and the everyday activities demanded within this context, and is not considered in relation to the individual's meaning-seeking relationship to existence as such. [5]

Working on the basis of such an existential and holistic approach to the world of education and training and the world of work in terms of guidance and instruction necessitates different forms of reflection and dialogue than one has been accustomed to. Instead of the concept of *phronesis*, it might be useful to include the Socratic concept of *eros* in our thinking, because this concept

[4] Foucault's concept of self-relationship and ethical self-care has recently been applied by the Norwegian professor of health-care science Kari Martinsen in her description of the existential relationship of the nurse to her own profession and to the experiences of care, anxiety, hope, loneliness, enjoyment of life, meaninglessness which nurses can encounter on a daily basis (Martinsen et al., 2003). See also my analyses of Foucault's concepts of ethical self-care and practices of freedom in (Hansen, 2003, chapter 1.)

[5] The Danish historian of ideas Dorthe Jørgensen has critically confronted the instrumentalisation of the university world and the turning of it into a market by distinguishing between the way of life of the wage-earner, the career person and the self-employed (including also the intellectual). While the first two are governed by an instrumental consciousness, where the profession is turned into a means for something else (*poiesis*), the self-employed person is governed by a searching, creating and playing consciousness, where the profession is a value in itself (*praxis*). The ideal according to Dorthe Jørgensen must be to live one's profession as a *praxis* in the Aristotelian sense. But this means also viewing one's profession as part of a larger and not necessarily professional totality, and as part of what one is. This in turn will require the professional practitioner to see a deeper meaning with the profession in relation to life as such and his or her own life values. While the first two ways of life are primarily linked to the concept of knowledge - the measurable and controllable, the third way of life according to Dorthe Jørgensen is linked more to the concept of wisdom. What is decisive is therefore the fundamental attitude the professional practitioner has to his or her profession. (See Jørgensen, 2002, 2003).

entails a constant transcendence of the given frameworks and a constant striving to viewing one's life in a larger and more meaningful perspective. In this respect, I share the preoccupation of Søren Kierkegaard and Hannah Arendt, among others, with Socrates' maieutic form of dialogue and his search for wisdom (the concepts of *eros* and *tò kálon*), because this searching and constant striving verges on wonder and fundamental openness and listening to what is not yet said and has not yet been made possible. This 'standing in the open' liberated from considerations of practical utility *(techne)* without fading into abstraction *(episteme)* was something which, also preoccupied the German philosopher and hermeneutist Hans-Georg Gadamer (Gadamer, 2004/1960). He describes - also with reference to Socrates - this ability to stand in the open through the concept of formation *(Bildung)*. Using this concept of formation he finds a way of defining the process and thinking needed to provide space for this existential searching and striving. Gadamer too refers to the concept of *phronesis* to describe the individual's particular and lived relationship with the world. However, the *eros* concept, one could say, is the individual's reflected *act of relating* on the one hand to this lived relationship with the world and on the other to the great narratives of humanity about the true, the good and the beautiful. It is in the attempt to create a totality from this that existential practice arises. A practice and a totality which can always only be 'on the way'. Or, to put it differently, the way one looks at and includes 'the lived understanding' in one's thinking and practice differs according to whether one looks at it from an Aristotelian or existential philosophical point of view (cf. *Kierkegaard After Macintyre*, ed. J. Davenport & A. Rudd, 2001).

By including the aspect of authenticity, a new meaning is thus added to the concept of vocational training and guidance, as the term *vocation* etymologically means 'calling' or 'letting oneself be called'. In other words, only when the guidance counsellor encourages the person seeking counselling to 'listen to his calling', that is to say what one deep down considers to be meaningful training or a meaningful occupation, only then can the person seeking counselling make an actual (authentic) and qualified choice. And thus, in the eyes of education and training policy-makers, also a more efficient choice, since the young person will not be as likely to drop out due to lack of motivation (Bjerg, 2000; Simonsen, 2000).

Pitfalls of authenticity

Nevertheless, one should, in my opinion, also take a critical attitude to this interest in authenticity and 'the authentic teacher'. After all, can this striving for authenticity not all too readily end up in the direct opposite - i.e. in narcissism, self-aggrandisement and attempts to 'make oneself interesting' - in brief, non-authenticity? And can this individualisation of the world of education and training and the world of work, with its demands for commitment and authenticity in everyday activity, not lead to the indirect exploitation and disciplining and ultimately instrumentalisation of the students' and employees' thoughts and actions, so as to ensure that they meet the requirements of the late-capitalist labour market in the best possible manner? Is the endeavour to create greater agreement between private life and working life a subtle form of control and exploitation of the last free space of the employees - their spiritual life and what they fundamentally consider to be valuable in existence (cf. Foucault's concept of *subjectivation* and *gouvernementalité*)? And is Per Fibæk Laursen right in saying that authenticity is the same thing as personal integrity?

The answer to the last question here must be no. Authenticity is not (just) a question of personal integrity. It is a question of existence. Authenticity is not related to a subject, but to existence, to *Dasein* (Heidegger). Existential philosophy, which makes use of the concept of authenticity, is in fact a radical critique of subjectivity. Authenticity is therefore not a question of the integrity and self-awareness of the subject. It is merely a prerequisite, a first phase before there can be talk of authenticity. Authenticity is primarily related to a radical openness to the world and what man is. The existential psychologist and professor Emmy van Deurzen-Smith writes very aptly (1995) that authenticity is not in itself a sufficient virtue. Viewed in isolation, authenticity may be synonymous with madness. As a decisive sounding board for authenticity, a different striving of a more philosophical nature is required, an existential and ontological searching process where one not only tries to live in accordance with one's fundamental life values, but also and persistently problematises and asks what man, the world and the good life

are, not just for me, but for mankind as such. Or, as van Deurzen-Smith writes: 'at the moment one becomes capable of living authentically, one will need to find new criteria to be able to decide what is right and wrong.' (Ibid., p. 89).

If authenticity is only considered within a traditional psychological framework of understanding, where authenticity is only understood as a question of personal integrity and social relations, we have not escaped from the *subjectivism* and *anthropocentrism* (i.e. centredness around what is created by man) and self-realisation culture, which Charles Taylor and existential philosophy and psychology wish to stem.

Striving for authenticity can only be qualified if it is also and simultaneously understood and practised as a *process of formation (Bildung)*. That is to say an aesthetic and philosophical searching process where one reaches out beyond the 'psychological space' and the 'man-made world' and into the 'philosophical space' in an encounter with 'the world in itself', where there is a substantive relating to what the true, the good and the beautiful *are* in general that is central (cf. Pierre Hardot's previous description of the utilitarian and existential approach to the world).

Thus, when the individual philosophy and life values of the professional practitioner are to be dealt with at the *substantive* and *normative* level, a psychological and process-oriented supervisory approach does not appear to be sufficient.

Philosophical guidance practice as a space for the formation of authenticity

It is against this background that the Guidance Research Unit has set itself the research task of studying whether philosophical guidance practice (Philosophical Counselling, Philosophische Praxis) could be a possible way of qualifying the professional practitioner's striving for authenticity and ability to work on and have a perception of the existential dimension of their work. It is thus our basic assumption that philosophical guidance practice provides us with a specific idea of how it is possible to work with the existential dimension in vocational education and training in general without being trapped into the three pitfalls of striving for au-

thenticity: psychologism, instrumentalism and moralism.

More specifically, I (Hansen, 2004) have proposed a search model for philosophical guidance practice, which is to be seen in the field of tension between the philosophical concepts of *authenticity, formation* and *existence*, or as Søren Kierkegaard would say in the interplay between aesthetics, dialectics and ethics (Kierkegaard, 1846; Hansen, 2003). Only by taking these philosophical concepts seriously will it be possible to free oneself of the psychological, social constructivist and utilitarian vocabulary which primarily has lain and lies in the therapeutic tradition and craftsman tradition, and which has formed the background to a large part of guidance philosophy in the 20th century.

Philosophical counselling practice has roots in the history of ideas going back to the understanding of philosophy as a way of life and life art in antiquity (Hadot, 1995; Nussbaum, 1994; Shusterman, 1997). But the first modern philosophical counselling practice *(Philosophische Praxis)* was proposed in 1981 by the German philosopher Gerd Achenbach (1984). Today, philosophical counselling practice is an internationally known phenomenon both in the area of education, in the social and health-care sector and in the business world and within Human Resource Development [6] (Lahav & Tillmanns, 1995; Zdrenka, 1997; Schuster, 1999; Raabe, 2001, Herrestad, 2002, Hansen, 2003).

Firstly, philosophical guidance is characterised by the focus being put on content, what the counsellee says and not on the underlying psychological factors, forces and motivations which may lie behind what is said. As the Canadian philosopher and philosophical counsellor Ran Lahav expresses it: 'First, in order to count as philosophical, an investigation must deal primarily with ideas in the public realm - that is, concepts, conceptions, assumptions, theories, etc. - rather than exposing concrete events or processes (cognitive, emotional, etc.) hidden inside the person's head (which is the task of psychology).' (1996, p. 262).

This immediately raises the question whether philosophical counselling may thus be condemned to remain an area of abstractions and general ideas, far away from practical life. The answer to this must be no. The specific nature of philosophical guidance prac-

tice is that it is neither theoretical nor practical philosophy in the academic sense (hence only a specific philosophical - theoretical-academic - discourse on ethics, aesthetics, politics, religion and existential topics) or applied philosophy. Philosophical guidance practice is a philosophical and maieutic practice, which primarily starts out from the life expressions and relationships with the world the counsellee is in and not least the lived philosophy which is incarnate in the concrete practice of the person concerned. '... Our way of being expresses a certain conception of reality, although not necessarily a coherent and unitary theory (our life is often inconsistent). In other words, a person's way of life expresses various ideas about the world, and as such is subject matter for philosophising. To examine a person's life philosophically is to examine the understanding which he or she lives (not just thinks): to examine how coherent it is, expose its hidden presuppositions, analyse its basic conceptions and values, and so on. This suggests that the aim of philosophical self-investigation, in the context of philosophical counselling, is to explore the counsellee's 'lived understanding', namely, the world as 'understood' by the person's emotions, behaviour, thoughts, hopes, desires, and entire way of being.' (Ibid., p. 265).

The philosophical practice is a *praxis* in the Aristotelian meaning of the word, i.e. an activity which is not a means for something else, but which has value in itself. In addition, this *practice* is philosophical. And the specific nature of 'the philosophical' is not just familiarity with and skills in particular philosophical theories and methods. What distinguishes the philosophical practitioner from the academic specialist philosopher, the philosophical educationalist, the psychotherapist or the constructivist and goal- and function-oriented training and vocational counsellor is the way in which the philosophical practitioner tackles a topic, a dialogue or a problem. The philosophical practitioner does not - like the educationalist, the counsellor or the therapist - use philosophy to solve or treat or merely 'reflect' a problem. This would be an instrumentalisation and vulgarisation of philosophical practice. As Ran Lahav (1996) says, problem solutions may perhaps be side-effects of a philosophical guidance practice, but the overall purpose is and remains to create an investigative community directed towards a striving for wisdom. And that means a con-

stant asking about one's own basic assumptions and those of others and about a world *outside* the person's constructed image of the world, so that the counsellor and the person seeking counselling experience moments of genuine wonder. What Gadamer would describe as 'laying something open and placing it in the open' (Gadamer, 2004/1960, p. 348), Martin Buber an 'encounter' and I will describe as the actual authentic learning, where for a short while one loses the specialist and personal foothold and is cast out in a process where one is seriously challenged in the encounter with the Different or the Other to take a position on what one knows again and whether it continues to provide meaning in the existential sense (cf. Bollnow, 1969; Buber, 1966).

This form of wisdom - in contrast to the traditional academic specialist philosophy - is, as has been said, not something which is sought independently of the lived life and the concrete dialogue which takes place between the philosophical counsellor and his dialogue partner. For the philosophical practitioner it is, as has been said, decisive that a point of departure is taken in the counsellee's *lived* relationship with the world and the philosophical assumptions which appear to be taken for granted in order to then critically examine these assumptions together with the counsellee. For example, problems with one's family, one's own personality or one's career often involve *conceptual* issues (e.g. the significance of the concepts of friendship, love or self-respect), *ethical* issues (moral obligations towards one's children or the moral correctness of staying with or leaving one's partner), *existential* issues (what is a valuable or authentic way to live?) and similar topics. In contrast to a process of dialogue and reflection, where one endeavours to place what is said within the framework of a system of abstract *theoretical knowledge*, e.g. of a medical, sociological, psychological or specialist philosophical nature, and where one is preoccupied with what causes and structures might lie *behind* a given life expression or life experience, the aim here conversely is to create a space for a philosophical examination of what is said, starting out from the counsellee's own life experiences and the expression which lies *before* the counsellee, in the person's concrete relationship with the world and being-in-the-world. As the Norwegian philosopher and professor Anders Lindseth, who has

worked theoretically as well as practically with philosophical counselling for more than 20 years, writes: 'Philosophy is not a science which attempts to gain an overview of the world as an object or collection of objects that are to be ordered in a systematic manner, but an attempt to capture life experience as a continuing project, as something which proceeds in time, which is expressed in time and which requires philosophical reflection in order to find its expression.' (Lindseth, 2002, p. 3).

The unique feature of the philosophical counselling approach, in contrast, for example, to the constructivist approach (Peavy, 1998) is thus that one does not merely attempt to reflect the other person's system of values so that the person becomes more aware and reflective on this. One also takes a critical questioning attitude to the person's 'construct' and brings in other fundamental philosophical ideas, which can put the relationship with the world in perspective and engage the person concerned in a fundamental wonder. This is done precisely in order to reach beyond the knowledge horizon and construction of the reality which the person is currently thinking and living within. 'While psychotherapy aims mostly at modifying the person's current psychic forces and processes, Philosophical Counselling attempts to take him to new ideational landscapes outside himself. In this sense, philosophising in Philosophical Counselling is not a solipsistic endeavour, it does not limit itself to the domain of human generated ideas, but rather a dialogue between human life and the broader horizons in which it is embedded.' (Lahav, 1996b, p. 261).

The philosophical counsellor, in contrast to the psychotherapist and the constructivist counsellor, is particularly sensitive to the topics in philosophy which relate to man's life experiences. He/she has developed a special philosophical sounding board and ability to bring what the counsellee says up to a level where it becomes generally interesting and can be linked to topics in philosophy, literature and religion. In this way, the counsellee is encouraged to look at a problem or a life expression not merely from a personal or professional point of view, but from a general human and philosophical point of view, which often results in the connection between what the person considers to be valuable and meaningful in existence being linked to a greater degree to the personal or occupational problem or attitude under discussion.

Briefly and far too schematically - because ultimately it is not possible to present one method for what philosophical counselling is other than a constant questioning of one's own basic assumptions and those of others - the philosophical counselling process can be described as consisting typically of five dimensions or phases (Lahav, 2001).

Initially, and entirely in line with the therapeutic tradition, the philosophical counsellor will attempt to adopt a fundamentally open attitude to the 'universe', the life expression he/she encounters in the counsellee's 'narrative' on the topic, which the counsellee wishes to philosophise on. Here and first and foremost a *phenomenological approach* is used.

The second dimension of philosophical counselling consists in a *philosophical-hermeneutic approach*, where the counsellor listens out for the philosophical basic assumptions in the counsellee's both imagined and lived approach to this subject. What fundamental life topics and meanings (e.g. the nature of the self or of freedom, the value of love or success, etc.) can be linked to the counsellee's concrete experiences and narrative. In this context, it is important that the philosophical counsellor does not impose a topic on the counsellee's life, but allows it to emerge from the dialogue at its own pace in a way which is true to the counsellee's own experiences and attitudes. It is the counsellee's sovereign decision what philosophical topic or question to continue working with.

The third dimension is linked to *critical reflection*. Here, the complexity of the chosen philosophical question is dwelt upon for a long time, without rushing to a rapid answer. The role of the philosophical counsellor is to help - as a Socratic birth helper - in examining and deepening the 'individual philosophy' in the counsellee's *conceived approach* to the topic. He/she does this among other ways through the Socratic forms of questioning (Hansen, 2000) and by presenting to the counsellee other fundamental and alternative philosophical ideas about and approaches to the subject. These philosophical ideas and approaches must never, however, be presented as authorities but

as raw material, which the counsellee can choose to examine, modify, criticise or go beyond, depending on whether these ideas are felt to be an aid in illuminating the counsellee's unique way of living.

It is also important here that the philosophical counsellor always presents many different and mutually contradictory philosophical ideas and approaches to the subject, in order to urge the counsellee him- or herself to adopt a position and develop his/her own independent standpoint in constant relation to the person's own life and practice. The language in which the philosophical dialogue is conducted should not be abstract, hypothetical or academic, but take as its point of departure the counsellee's everyday language and life.

In the fourth dimension, the philosophical counsellor returns to the counsellee's concrete situation to examine how the chosen philosophical topic is expressed in the counsellee's own life. What basic assumptions on the topic are in the counsellee's *lived understanding*, and in what way could the counsellee's concrete way of life be seen as a response to the chosen question. The new understanding, which was developed in the previous examination, will be used as a sounding board for reflection, but the focus is on the basic philosophical assumptions which appear to be taken for granted in the counsellee's everyday life and practical approach to the subject. This fourth dimension is primarily characterised by an *existential form of reflection*.

The last phase of the philosophical guidance process is concerned with how the counsellee can develop a personal response to the philosophical question which was chosen from the start. At this point in time, the counsellee has ideally acquired a broader understanding of

❑ the topic,

❑ some alternative approaches to it, and

❑ the way in which the question is expressed and becomes relevant to the counsellee's life. The time has now come for the counsellee to develop his/her own personal response and approach to the question.

This is not just a theoretical matter, because it must involve his or her everyday attitudes

and way of relating to others and to the whole of his or her attitude to life as such. And this is naturally a process, a *life-long act of formation*, which cannot be concluded within any given courses of guidance counselling. It is rather an attitude, of learning and wonder, which can be taken out into further life and work and which some philosophical counselling theoreticians simply call living a present-minded and philosophical life, or, as Socrates puts it, living a life with ethical self-care.

Professor Anders Lindseth, who is also attached to the Centre for Practical Knowledge at Bodø Regional University, and I will introduce the approaches to philosophical counselling mentioned above in the research project 'Philosophical counselling and practical knowledge in vocational training', but shall also attempt to develop new forms and approaches which are better suited to the conditions and learning and work situations encountered in Danish and Norwegian vocational training (⁷). The practical approach of this research project will be aimed at trying out the practice of philosophical counselling in various professional contexts. This is currently planned to take place at selected training colleges for teachers and educationalists and nursing schools in Denmark and Norway.

The focus of counselling practice here will be on the values which

❑ the course of studies demands from the students,

❑ which the periods of practical training create and

❑ how the students (and the teachers in the teacher training college) view the relationship between their professional specialisation and their personal life values (the authenticity aspect). The method which will be used to collect experiences will be partly based on action and field research and partly on a new phenomenological-hermeneutic method, which Anders Lindseth and Professor A. Norberg (2004) from Umeå University in Sweden have developed.

We hope that this research will enable us, both in theoretical and practical terms, to contribute to the question which introduced this article, namely how can one work with the more existential dimension (Learning to

(⁷) I have, for example against the background of the Neo-Socratic form of dialogue (Nelson, 1965; Boele, 1998) and in connection with a development project on competency development at folk high schools and independent boarding schools, initiated by the Danish Ministry of Education in 1999-2001, developed a special form of 'Socratic dialogue group', which today is used as a value clarification tool at many different types of schools in Denmark (Hansen, 2000; Heidemann, 2001).

Be) of educational and vocational guidance and under the perspective of Lifelong Learning and Guidance.

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