Thinking Folk: Praxis and Phronesis in Action in Adult and Community Education–an International Comparison

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Thinking Folk: *Praxis* and *Phronesis* in Action in Adult and Community Education- an International Comparison

Garry Nicholson

A thesis/doctoral report submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Sunderland for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

June 2023

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Abstract

The first revolution is when you change your mind about how you look at things and see there might be another way to look at it that you have not been shown.

Gil Scott-Heron (1949-2011)

This research explores how the German concept of *Bildung*, in which philosophy and education are linked in a process of lifelong personal, cultural and social maturation, finds form within the global folk school tradition. Building upon the work of Aristotle (384-322BC), the 'practical wisdom' (*phronesis*) of nine educators working within this tradition is discussed through analysis of data collected in informal conversations exploring the educational beliefs and practices of this group of practitioners. Comparisons are made between a number of Folk Schools set in culturally diverse settings. Analysis of these contexts, reveal the differing emphasis that is placed on the *Bildung* stages of individual growth, community contribution and citizenship.

The conceptual framework developed by Biesta (2015) is used to consider the historical evolution of both the Danish Folk High School system and the English Adult and Community Learning sector in relation to how they have developed in the light of the three clear educational functions that Biesta proposes: *qualification*, *socialisation* and *subjectification*.

With many of the person-centred principles of andragogy becoming less prevalent in a neo-liberal adult education landscape that increasingly focuses on the need to develop human economic capital, consideration is given to the subjectivity of what makes an education 'good'. In doing so, an alternative educational paradigm is presented to reveal 'another way', that whilst still promoting employability, has also traditionally emphasised the role that dialogue and community participation play in education.

Recommendations are made that suggest that dialogue, philosophy and community placemaking should be become more central to adult education *praxis* in the United Kingdom. A further recommendation is that in response to the question of, 'What is a good education?', instead of considering this to be a question that can be answered with an absolute truth, it is a question that should be continually asked as part of developing professional *phronesis* not only in Adult and Community Learning educational contexts but in educational contexts in general.

Key Words: *Bildung*; Folk Schools; *Phronesis, Praxis*

Tænkende folk: *Praxis* og *Phronesis* i aktion inden for voksenuddannelse og folkelig oplysning - en international sammenligning

Dansk Abstract

Den første revolution er, når du ændrer din holdning til hvordan du ser på ting og erkender, at der måske er en anden måde at se det på, som du ikke er blevet vist.

Gil Scott-Heron (1949-2011)

Denne ph.d. undersøger, hvordan det tyske koncept *Bildung*, hvor filosofi og uddannelse er forbundet i en proces af livslang personlig, kulturel og social dannelse, giver sig til udtryk inden for den globale højskoletradition. Med udgangspunkt i Aristoteles' arbejde (384-322 f.Kr.) diskuteres den 'praktiske visdom' (*phronesis*) hos ni undervisere, som arbejder inden for denne tradition, med henblik på at udforske deres pædagogiske overbevisninger og praksis. Diskussionen muliggøres gennem analyse af data, der blev indsamlet i uformelle samtaler med de ni undervisere. Derfra blev der sammenlignet mellem en række folkehøjskoler der opererer indenfor forskellige kulturelle rammer. Analyse af disse forskellige kulturelle rammer afdækker den forskellige vægt, der lægges på dannelsen af individet, dets samfundsbidrag og dets rolle som borger forstået ud fra *Bildung*-begrebet.

Den konceptuelle ramme som Biesta (2015) har udviklet, bruges til at diskutere den historiske udvikling af både det danske højskolesystem og den engelske voksenuddannelse og folkeoplysningssektor i forhold til, hvordan de har udviklet sig i lyset af de tre klare uddannelsesfunktioner, som Biesta foreslår: *kvalifikation, socialisering* og *subjektivering*.

Da mange af de personcentrerede principper i *andragogi* er mindre udbredte i et neoliberalt voksenuddannelseslandskab, der i stigende grad fokuserer på behovet for at udvikle menneskelig økonomisk kapital, diskuteres subjektiviteten af, hvad der gør en uddannelse 'god'. Dermed præsenteres et alternativt uddannelsesparadigme, der peger mod 'en anden måde', der, samtidig med at den fremmer beskæftigelsesegnethed, også prioriterer den rolle, som dialog og samfundsdeltagelse spiller i uddannelse.

Der fremsættes anbefalinger, som peger på, at dialog, filosofi og *placemaking* i lokalsamfundet bør gøres mere centralt for voksenuddannelsespraksis i Storbritannien. Derudover anbefales det, at man ikke ser spørgsmålet 'Hvad er en god uddannelse?' som et spørgsmål, der kan gives et endegyldigt svar, men mere som et spørgsmål der kan stilles igen og igen som led i at udvikle professionel *phronesis,* ikke blot i voksenuddannelse og folkeoplysnings kontekst, men i uddannelsessektoren som helhed.

Nøgleord: Bildung; Folkehøjskoler; *Phronesis, Praxis*

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Chapter One: Problem and Context

Certification from one source or another seems to be the most important thing to people all over the world. A piece of paper from a school that says you're smart, a pat on the head from your parents that says you're good or some reinforcement from your peers that makes you think what you're doing is worthwhile. People are just waiting around to get certified.

(Frank Zappa, 1979, pp.70-74)

Preoccupations with qualifications and credentialism as markers of intellect, badges of personal value and social status are (as Zappa notes above) pervasive across continents and cultures. The reasons behind the existence of this global phenomenon are complex and profound and serve as a backdrop to the focus of the study. The aim of this research is to consider what a 'good' adult education system might look like by comparing two contrasting approaches. Firstly, the English system that puts an emphasis on adults gaining qualifications to increase their employability. Secondly, the Danish Folk High School system that has no formal qualifications and instead states self-enlightenment, public enlightenment and democracy as its primary aims. Both systems have the intention of increasing human capital, yet each has taken contrasting approaches. Using the concept map developed by Biesta (2015), I consider the trajectories that both adult education systems have taken within public policy and how they have developed in the light of the three clear educational functions that Biesta proposes: qualification, socialisation and subjectification. By the use of the term *qualification* Biesta is referring to the role played by education systems in training people to enter the labour market as well as maximising the human capital of a nation. *Socialisation* concerns education's role in preparing and teaching people the skills and values needed to be successful in society. Finally, *subjectification* describes how education should also seek to develop autonomous and self-aware individuals who are able to realise their full potential, whilst being critically reflective of themselves and their place in society.

By giving examples from my own experiences of working in adult education and the findings of some preliminary discussions with colleagues, I highlight some of the issues that arise when greater emphasis is placed on gaining qualifications than on the other two domains or purposes of education. Through a comparative research project, I investigate possible teaching strategies and approaches that might be adopted by the English FE Sector to make *socialisation* and *subjectification* more central in the educational process. This research also explores the extent to which the differences between the two systems are philosophical rather than functional, considering the Folk School's roots in the concept of *Dannelse* or *Bildung,* which refers to the German tradition of self-cultivation, a concept in which philosophy and education are linked in a process of both personal and cultural maturation.

The term 'individual learning journey' has now become popular in adult education and there is to some extent a romanticism about using this term to describe a document that has a primary function of mapping learners' progress towards achieving a qualification. Its content and purpose provide a good example of the extent to which the English system has evolved into one that is qualification driven. Previously known as an individual learning plan, these documents vary between establishments, but most will contain SMART targets and assessments related to qualification criteria and employability skills. In contrast, within the Danish Folk High School system no equivalent documentation exists.

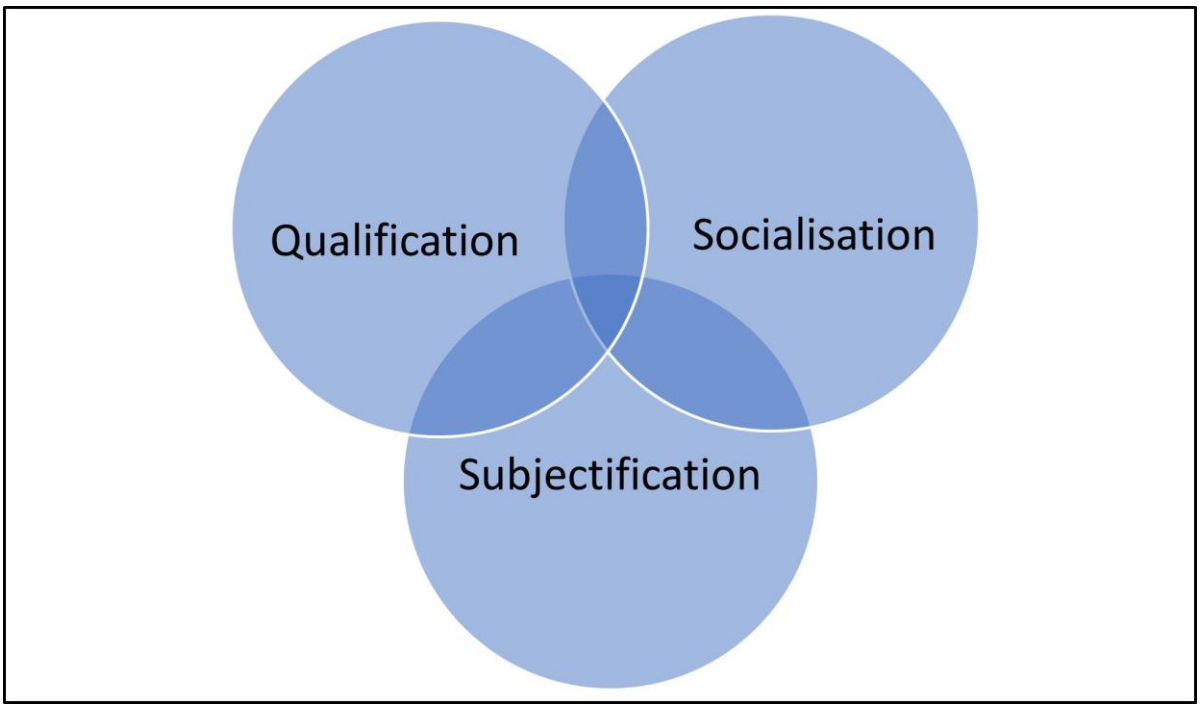


Illustration 1: Domains of Purpose (Biesta, 2015)

Motivations for engaging in adult learning are diverse (Knowles, 2011). For many, it is a desire to transform themselves or their situation in some way. For some it is a desire to gain new skills for employment; others want to unleash the inner artist they have always wanted to be, whilst for many it is simpler motivations such as wanting to learn some phrases that they can use on their next holiday to Spain. Whatever their motivations, most learners come with a headful of questions and a good idea of what they want to learn and where they want to get to. The problem here is that more often than not, the course will have been written already, designed to meet the specific qualification criteria attached to it, resulting in the learning process being directed by a necessity to meet them. The important point to note here is that what the learner wants to know ceases to be as important as meeting the requirements of the qualification.

That is all well and good if the learner has signed up to achieve a qualification. But what about if they haven't? What if they just want to learn for learning's sake or for some other reason? It might appear that the simple answer is to not work towards a qualification at all. However, the reality is that out of financial necessity most Adult and Community Learning courses do have a qualification attached to them. Funding in Adult Education is such that qualification courses draw down significantly more funding than those that don't - usually at least 50% more. For instance, a twenty-hour course in ICT with a non-regulated learning aim attached will draw down £150 in funding whereas a similar course that gains a qualification can draw down as much as £296 (GOV.UK, 2022). This has led to even simple upholstery courses having qualifications attached to them with vague titles that mention 'personal development' and 'employability'.

The importance of having learning attached to a qualification is why it isn't good enough in the current system to turn up and learn to simply decorate a cake. Even though a person might believe that a course about cake decorating will be about just that, it will also be about developing their employability and gaining a qualification. There is no escaping the fact that large numbers of the adult population benefit from this approach and certainly if an individual is seeking work in a specific profession such as accountancy, then the industry will have specific competencies and practices that are standard and rightly so. The problem is that adult education has a broad demographic and the motivations for engaging in learning are, as I have already highlighted, diverse. And yet, the sector appears to find it difficult to differentiate its approach in relation to a learner's wants and needs, because of the importance that is put on gaining qualifications. Qualifications by design require consistency, conformity and control, and by creating an Adult Education system so weighted towards their achievement, the danger is that the whole system takes on these features. Initial research into the Danish Folk High School system has shown greater freedom and individuality in approach and this is perhaps because their focus is on the *socialisation* and *subjectification* domains or purposes of education that lend themselves to greater fluidity. A particularly good example can be found in the fact that they are free to create their own curriculum and it is written into Danish law that they cannot be told what to teach.

We have now reached a point where non-formal or non-regulated community learning is very much the poor relation in Adult Education as the measure of how successful an adult learner is has become dependent on how many qualifications they can obtain. We increasingly value what we can measure, and qualifications make for easy measurement. But as Kohn (McNeil, 1986) points out "We can't value only what is easy to measure; measurable outcomes may be the least important results of learning." By making learning about achieving qualifications, we inevitably need to make the learning measurable in some way. But what about if the learners' main aims are hard to measure, such as growing in confidence or building new relationships? Both are difficult to measure yet are arguably worth more than any qualification certificate.

The shift towards education being seen in terms of an industry that needs to be tightly controlled and managed has been a gradual process since Schultz (1961) and Becker (1962)

introduced human capital theory. The simple principle is that the human capital of a nation corresponds to the stock of knowledge or characteristics that workers have and thus can contribute to a nation's productivity through their employability and citizenship. A particularly good example of human capital theory can be seen in the weight that is now given to the sciences at GCSE. When I was at grammar school in the 1980s, the requirement was to take at least one science subject whereas now the norm is to take three. The reason for this change is simply because recent governments have identified a lack of potential workers with the required science knowledge needed to service the United Kingdom's science-based industries. Even though it may seem logical that a nation wants to be as productive as possible, it leads to nations using education as a production line. This is far removed from the romantic notion of an individual learning journey. Education has also come to be seen as a productivity competition, as evidenced in the global PISA scores where many nations compete to gain a place in the top rankings. In viewing education in such a mechanistic and business-like way, it is inevitable that data reports, metrics and accountability will grow in importance and the measurement of qualifications create numbers that lend themselves perfectly to this end.

The notion that education should primarily be a productivity assembly line is one that has troubled many contemporary educational thinkers and there is a huge body of writing that considers the argument for a liberal approach to education as opposed to a vocational one. Opinions that support this view have been put forward by Scheffler (1973, p.134): "The notion that education is an instrument for the realisation of social ends, no matter how worthy they are thought to be, harbours the greatest conceivable danger to the ideal of a free and rational society." And a quarter of a century later, the same point was being argued by Pring (1999, p.112): "The development of the mind, in accordance with developed forms of thinking and of feeling, is a value in its own right. The value in no way depends on usefulness; and education is quite distinct from being trained for a job." Many would say that theirs is an argument that is being lost and can be evidenced in the gradual reduction in the numbers of people studying social sciences and arts (Ward, 2018).

The result of viewing education as a production line for the labour market is that many ideas that have been developed in the world of business and vocational training and the workplace have spread across to what might be called non-formal education. Whereas some of these ideas have influenced thinking positively, such as the concept of holistic assessment, others such as developing attitudes and competencies travel less well.

Employability and lists of work attitudes are concepts that seem in principle a good idea, but these can also become limiting rather than liberating and in some cases pointless. You almost certainly need certain attitudes to decorate a cake or write a story. But does anybody really care what they are? It is questionable whether knowing the attitudes needed to do both activities is going to have any impact on how successful the learner will be. There is certainly a value to our wellbeing and employment prospects in knowing ourselves, being aware of the strengths and

weaknesses we have. The problem is that if you define them in a list then the expectation is that learners will work towards achieving what is on the list and no more. The list becomes the focus. One such list is called 'Fusion Skills', created from a research survey of 101 employers in Greater London (Nesta, 2018); much of what is listed will be familiar and there is no doubt they are skills to be aspired towards. There is however no escaping the fact that the list has come from industry not education and has the specific aim of highlighting the attitudes and competencies needed for the performance of a particular job in the labour market. Most of the time lists of attitudes and competencies find their way into learning journey documents and once the list is defined it is largely irrelevant if you have attitudes and competencies that are not on the list. The list is designed for the purposes of seeing how well you match up to its contents rather than a statement of the attitudes and competencies that you already have or wish to develop. Often the tutor will have selected list of particular competencies that they believe are linked to criteria within the qualification attached to the course.

The top 12 transferable skills rated by employers were:

1. Oral communication/presentation skills	2. Collaboration and teamwork
3. Initiative	4. Problem solving
5. Organisational skills	6. Adaptability/flexibility
7. Independent working/autonomy	8. Written communication
9. Critical thinking	10. Resilience
11. Creativity	12. Analysis and evaluation skills

Table 1: Transferable Skills for the Workplace (Nesta, 2018)

Another section of the individual learner journey document is likely to be the obligatory SMART targets. These will almost always be about achieving course qualification criteria or developing attitudes or competencies. Not that there is anything wrong in setting targets, but it is questionable whether when learning to paint, for example, a learner will benefit from a timebound target. It is unlikely that Antoni Gaudi set himself SMART targets when he decided to build *The Basílica de la Sagrada Família* in 1882*.* If he had, he would probably have been told that it was unrealistic and not achievable, considering that it still is not complete. What about those learners who want to take a detour in their learning and as a result won't get to the destination on time? What about those learners who have goals, but they are broad, such as wanting to find out what they are capable of, or to develop their creativity? What if their goals and targets aren't clear but emerge over time? What

if their goals and targets are initially unrealistic but just might be feasible in the future? This is a point made well by Murphy (2015) "Think about it for a second; the late Steve Jobs exhorted his people to greatness with rallying cries like 'We're here to put a dent in the universe.' But SMART goals tell us we're supposed to tell our employees, 'Make your goals achievable and realistic'."

Unsurprisingly, the origins of SMART targets can be traced back to origins in the business world; in 1981, George T. Doran published a work in the November issue of Management Review entitled "There's a S.M.A.R.T. way to write management's goals and objectives" (Doran, G. T., 1981). SMART targets are now deemed to be an essential part of learning despite limited evidence that they make any tangible difference to successful learning. In fact, in Hattie's (2008) well-known work 'Visible Learning', which lists innovations by effect size, i.e., how much they improved student performance, individualisation is placed in the bottom 10 with an effect size of 0.14, goal commitment achieves a more credible 0.4 and performance goals an alarming -0.01. To add a little perspective, an effect size of 1 is the same as a 100% improvement which one can only surmise makes all three not particularly fruitful approaches. A similar, yet less established, target setting framework inherited from the business world is the use of 'Must, Could, Should' targets which are an abridged version of the MoSCoW method which is a prioritization technique used in management (Clegg, 1994). Education is littered with examples of ideas that have been inherited from the business world yet have very little robust, peer-reviewed empirical evidence to support their introduction.

Such targets, in my own experience, tend to be focused on tangible, measurable, short-term gains. John Dunne (1993) challenges this notion, whilst also suggesting that education should be fundamentally about so much more when writing that "Atomistic objectives may seem worthwhile, however, only if the aggregate over time into qualities of mind and character, such as an ability for independent thought and reflection, a habit of truthfulness, a sense of justice, a care for clarity and expressiveness in writing and speech" (p.6).

A recent and lengthy discussion with a group of colleagues where I posed the question "What do you think about the ILJ document?" led to some interesting comments. One experienced colleague raised the point that "When you have documents full of boxes it often feels like that is what we are literally doing, putting the learners in boxes. I'd rather help them out of the box. Mind you that goes for me too. I just want to enjoy teaching and escape the forms and spreadsheets. Sometimes they feel like boomerangs that keep on coming back!" The general consensus was not that goals, targets and reflective journals are wrong, in fact they are useful, but as one colleague explained "It all ends up being very token. They have to be written because you need evidence, and they only get looked at every half term when really all of these things are part of everyday life." Perhaps one of the most telling comments came from a younger colleague who seemed to hit the nail on the head when she said that "Most of my learners hate filling them out because they don't see them as something that helps them, and have you ever tried to get a pre-entry learner to write a SMART target!" It was clear to me from these discussions that the tutors were frustrated by the systems and processes that come with education placing too much emphasis on the *qualification* domain and a desire for greater freedom for both them and the learners.

The problems caused by gearing all learning towards qualifications and employment was made apparent to me during one of my early experiences of teaching English in a community setting. It was during this time that I was to realise that education can transform the lives of adults in ways that it would be impossible to fit into the neat boxes of a learner journey document or within the neat specifications of a qualifications criteria. I was asked to teach English at a community centre situated in an inner-city housing development which supports children under four and their families. Only a mile or so from the centre of the city, the area regularly makes the top ten poorest wards in the North-East. I was forewarned that the learners could prove to be challenging and that I had to set down firm boundaries from the start or my experience could be very short-lived. The aim was to teach them Functional English and preferably get them through a qualification within six months. I gained the impression from my new colleagues that they either pitied me or were vaguely amused that the new boy had been allocated the class that no one wanted. It would be an understatement to say that being told that it 'wouldn't be that bad' and receiving pats on the back didn't exactly fill me with confidence.

Having no idea how many learners would turn up to the first session, I arrived armed with bundles of enrolment forms, assessment materials and learner journey documents. I would never normally dream of starting a new class by bombarding the learners with paperwork but because I was new to the service, I had decided that I needed to do something that I would never normally dream of doing and that is to conform.

The learners arrived in dribs and drabs, having deposited their babies and toddlers in the creche next door, until about eight young women sat eyeing me nervously and suspiciously. Having completed the dreaded, but necessary, enrolment forms with the usual scepticism about why they had to give personal details and signatures, I moved on to the individual learner journey documents resplendent with colourful literacy themed clip art. Now for some learners a good four pages of boxes and lists might not be off putting but the disdain that this group showed for the document was clear from the start. Questions about past qualifications, school experiences, preferred learning styles and the like were either left blank or received single word answers such as 'none' and 'crap'. Asking them to rate their competencies, the general responses were to rate themselves as either 0 or 10 regardless. After a bit of discussion most learners then decided that 5 was the safest score to give because then you weren't saying that you were too bad but not being big headed at the same time. Next came the SMART targets chosen from the functional skills descriptors. I suspect that the majority of these were chosen on the basis that they could be understood, the giveaway being the number of learners who loudly exclaimed "I haven't got a fucking clue what that means." Having spent a painful first hour or so I then moved onto a reading assessment that I had taken straight from the functional skills resources entitled 'Planning a holiday'. A few muttered that it would be great to actually have some money to go on holiday and half an hour of muttered expletives later the last person had finished, and I was about as bored as I have ever been in teaching. Only an hour and a half had passed and besides the numerous requests for 'fag' breaks to break up the monotony, I had learned very little about them as a group and they about me. More importantly, none of the previous ninety minutes had touched on the learning journeys they had in mind. Without even

asking them what they wanted to learn, I had decided that they were to become 'functional' and effectively hijack their learning journeys.

I am aware that this description probably paints me in a poor light as an educator but in my defence, I would say that the desire to conform on my first assignment somewhat clouded my judgement as I would never normally start with any new class in this way. Luckily my person-centred instincts kicked in and after the fifth request for a fag break, I decided to apologise to them for how deadly dull the first part of the session had been. So far, any worries about being eaten alive had not materialised. Yes, they were loud and swore a lot, but as I was to find out over the next two years all of them had overcome multiple challenges in their lives and the fact that they were sitting in a room hoping to learn was testimony to their desire to do so.

Once the conversation got going about why they had come, I soon found that their motivations were much more creative than the functional English that I had planned. The consensus was that they wanted to write stories and poems and read books together. And that is what we did. From that point on each week was planned around what we had agreed the week before. Two lessons particularly stand out, neither of which would ever find their way into a functional skills curriculum. The first was when I asked them to write the story of a time when life had been difficult. You could have heard a pin drop as they wrote with real enthusiasm and emotion about their experiences. This writing proved cathartic for many of them, something that writing a functional letter requesting a refund is certainly less likely to achieve. The second activity was a group read of 'Lamb to the Slaughter' by Roald Dahl (1953). The slightly macabre story about how a police detective's wife murders him and feeds him to his bemused colleagues nearly caused a riot in the room and led to a huge debate about whether or not the crime could be justified. I know that afterwards copies of the story were being shared all over the local neighbourhood. Both activities connected with their real lives and captured their imaginations in a way that functional English that is geared to employment can never do. What was so powerful about both activities was that they allowed the learners to reflect on their own lives and experiences. Not only did they look inwards at who they were but also outwards at where they were with other people close to them and society in general. They did achieve the qualifications that they needed and some of them gained employment afterwards, but we had forged our own path and undoubtedly, we were happier and more motivated because of it. Over time they also swore less and asked for less fag breaks. After nearly two years with them they had bonded, settled and even established accepted behaviours that were explained when new people joined. They had gone from nerves and antipathy to being relaxed and cheeky in a good way, frequently telling me that I was "alright because you're not stuck up". A parting shot from one learner on the last day summed up the humour when, pushing her buggy off, she turned back and shouted, "I've quite liked coming to English with you, but you do know I only ever came so I could put my kids in the creche and have a break!"

It is interesting to take Biesta's model and apply it to the learning journey of one of the learners. Covered in tattoos, overweight and with peroxide hair, Lily was a learner who arrived several months after the group started. She had just turned twenty and was mum to an eighteen-month-old

daughter. From the start Lily was disruptive, loud and had to be a part of every conversation. Lily had not completed school and had no qualifications. She claimed to have ADHD and her usual response to requests to stop swearing was a further claim that she had Tourette Syndrome. Her ambition was to become a counsellor because someone had told her that after the trauma, she had experienced in her life she would be able to help other people. On first impressions that seemed like the most unrealistic of targets and definitely not a candidate for a potential SMART target. By the end of her time at the centre though Lily was quite literally transformed as a learner and had gained a place studying a L3 course in Counselling. To reach this point I had to initially put any ambitions to achieve qualifications in the back seat and instead work with her within the other two domains. Firstly, within the domain of *subjectification* I used strategies to develop her independence and autonomy as initially she constantly wanted support and attention. Within the domain of *socialisation*, I had to make time and space to talk to her about her reactions and the impact on those around her. Neither was easy or straightforward, but week by week she seemed to calm and focus. I knew that she had really moved on when a new learner started displaying many of the same behaviours and Lily stayed back to quietly say that she would watch out for the new learner because "I used to be a nightmare like that." Lily did not achieve her first qualification in a short space of time but what she had learned allowed her to move into that domain of learning. Stacey was more self and socially aware, and what she had learned are not things we can or even should measure.

I have tried to demonstrate some of the issues and problems that can affect Adult Education if the key driver is to gain qualifications and prepare learners for the labour market, also giving some examples of why this shouldn't always be the case. In some ways the individual learner journey document is a symbol of how the best of educational intentions can end up as being nothing more than a business contract or performance report.

In contrast the Danish Folk High School system has no formal systems for tracking progress or equivalent paperwork. In the several exploratory conversations conducted at the beginning of this research, teachers explained that "they are trusted" and that "our impact can be seen in the nation we are". The lack of tracking and paperwork can partly be attributed to the fact that learning is not working towards qualifications. It is also of note that the sixty-nine schools within the system fall under the authority of the Danish Ministry of Culture rather than Education. This shows that at a governmental level the system is perceived to have a broader purpose than providing a traditional education and why the system provides such an interesting contrast to the English qualification driven approach.

The anthropologist Steven Borish (1991), writing in one of the only English language books to explore the Danish Folk School system, summed up their approach as follows:

> The institution of the folk high school was built on a deep faith in people and in their ability to intelligently alter and improve their situation as result of their education. It is of critical

> importance that the type of education offered in these schools was not conceived of as any positivistic set of data points to be learned by rote and committed to memory for an examination. On the contrary, the inner core of meaning of this type of education involved a deep transformation of character and self-identity. The goal of this transformation was to facilitate the growth of a new set of positive attitudes towards self and society. (Borish, 1991, p.414)

The notion of self-enlightenment or *Dannelse* (a word that is equivalent to the German term *Bildung* and roughly translates as 'formation') that leads to the transformation of self and society is particularly striking, as you would be unlikely to find any educator in the English education system who would state this as one of their educational goals for the classes that they teach, no matter how true it might be. Yet during initial conversations with Danish Folk High School teachers, all articulated this as one of their primary aims.

The ideas of self-enlightenment and personal transformation are not unfamiliar educational concepts outside of Denmark, being closely aligned with the Transformative Learning Theory developed by Jack Mezirow (1991) that encourages learning which transforms problematic frames of reference to make people more inclusive, discriminating, reflective, open and emotionally able to transform. Most adult education systems would say that personal transformation is part of what they are trying to achieve but what makes the Danish Folk High School system unique is how central to their mission the concept is.

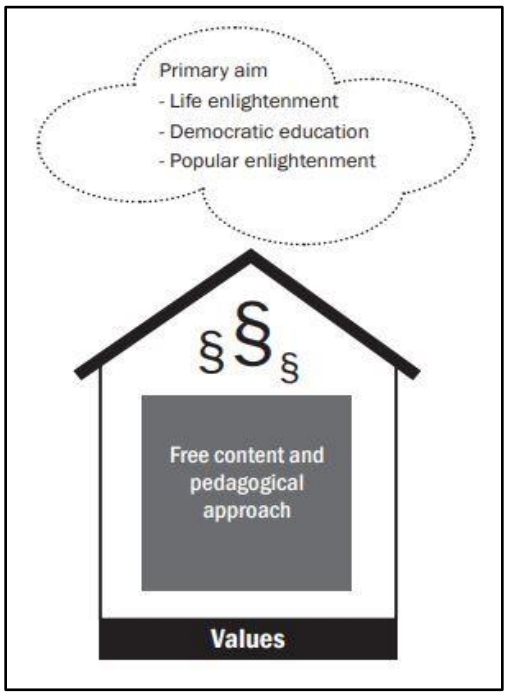


Illustration 2: Danish folk High Schools Aims and Purpose (FFD,2020)

Inspired by the Danish writer, poet, philosopher and pastor N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), the Danish Folk Schools were founded as an antithesis to formal education with the aim of providing a 'popular' education based on the spoken word. The reasons for doing this are complex but a common theme is that because of historical events during the nineteenth century, Denmark's identity as a nation was threatened. Since the first school was founded in Rødding in 1844, they have remained largely undocumented outside Denmark, despite generally being acknowledged as the Free School Movement that made a significant contribution to Denmark's transformation from being one of Europe's poorest nations to the prosperous nation it is today (Anderson & Bjorkman, 2017). It is this perception that the Folk Schools have directly influenced the prosperity of a nation by focusing on *socialisation* and *subjectification*, rather than a more formal and qualification driven approach, that makes the system so interesting for a comparative study.

This research adopts an interpretive epistemic paradigm by conducting nine semi-structured conversations with folk schoolteachers from four continents about their approach to teaching, curriculum design and the mission the school they work in has adopted. The Association of Danish Folk High Schools has requested that a separate report be written that summarises the research project for publication in Denmark.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

It's a shame that often both in Denmark and around the world the term of adult education is reduced to the question of employability. I think there is more to life than employability. I think society benefits greatly from having people who think about and discuss what makes a good life. Because then they will be better employees, better parents, better friends, better citizens.

Ole Buch Rahbek (2019)

Introduction

The Commission of European Communities report: *Adult learning: It is never too late to learn* (2006) describes lifelong learning as the "ongoing, voluntary, and self-motivated pursuit of knowledge for either personal or professional reasons." It goes on to explain that "it not only enhances social inclusion, active citizenship, and personal development, but also self-sustainability, as well as competitiveness and employability." Conveniently this definition encompasses educational motives that are both liberal and vocational, despite the long discussed and uneasy relationship between the two (Brown, 2002; Pring, 1999; Russell, 1932; Scheffler, 1973). It would be a huge undertaking to analyse the debate surrounding which is considered the superior reason for educating adults and even though at points I discuss both views, my intention is to suggest that lifelong learning and a 'good' education should transcend both. I do this by comparing two systems that are situated at either end of this Adult Educational spectrum, both of whom lay claims to having originated as movements that could be described as 'popular' education. Firstly, the Danish folk high schools where the focus is unashamedly on social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development and in comparison, the English Adult Community Education system that has increasingly focused on employability since the idea of the 'Learning Age' and the required future workforce skills, was first introduced by the Labour government of the 1990's (DFEE, 1998). In doing so I explore other educational philosophies and movements that they have either inspired or been inspired by.

This literature review starts with an exploration into the concept of *Bildung,* a Germanic term that loosely translates as 'self-formation' or 'self-enlightenment'. However, it would be naïve to simply label this term as being the equivalent of 'personal development'. Although popularised by the great German philosophers of the Enlightenment such as Herder (1744-1803), Kant (1724-1804), Fichte (1762-1814) and Schiller (1759-1805), it is a concept largely unexplored by English language academics and researchers with the notable exception of Gert Biesta (2002). Most existing literature focuses on the philosophy of *Bildung* rather than the role it might have in the lifelong learning discourse (Horlacher, 2004; Nordenbo, 2002) and it this aspect of *Bildung* that I explore further where I consider if the concept should have a more prominent role in any current arguments about what the nature of lifelong learning should be.

In the second section I discuss the Danish folk high school system inspired by the ideas of N.F.S Grundtvig (1783-1872) who was undoubtedly influenced by the concept of *Bildung* and saw a growing democratic need in Danish society to enlighten the uneducated and poor (Korsgaard, 2019). Unlike much of the English language literature about these schools, which largely documents their history, I focus on the unique humanistic pedagogy that they have adopted and refined since the first school was opened in 1844. I consider how their pedagogic approach has influenced educational philosophers and movements outside of Denmark and the way in which they have consistently adopted and influenced a range of learning theories that align with their educational philosophy.

The third section discusses Adult Community Education in England. It takes as its starting point the Ministry of Reconstruction Report (1919) that, in response to the global catastrophe of World War 1, called for an adult population that could "rise to the conception of great issues and face the difficulties of fundamental problems" (Edwards, 1961, p.87), charging local authorities with providing Adult Education (Jones, 2011). In this section the discussion is upon government and academic perceptions of the purpose of Adult Community Education in the light of the liberal versus vocational education debate that has continually dominated provision in the sector and continues to do so. Here, I focus attention on what were historically called the 'Evening Institutes' and which now go under the general title of 'Local Education Adult Education Providers.' The Adult Community Education provision that they provide is distinct from that which is offered by Further Education Colleges where historically the emphasis has been on technical and vocational qualifications only. Although both types of provision have evolved in parallel, much of the history of Adult Community Education is hidden or lost and research into its history has declined in recent decades (Coles, 2006). Focusing on this sector can be of great value in acknowledging the impact it has had on local communities and it is for this reason I explore this literature alone at a local and national level.

The English literature on the topic of Danish Folk High Schools is overwhelmingly positive and very little is critical of their approach. This is in contrast to the literature on Adult Community Education in England which is consistently critical of the way in which it has either been ignored or controlled by successive by governments (Tuckett, 2019). Although attempts have been made in the past to transplant the Folk School concept in England, with the notable exception of Fircroft College, Birmingham (founded 1909) it has never proved a popular educational model. Despite my own enthusiasm for humanistic approaches to education, I attempt to draw out differences and similarities between the pedagogy underpinning favoured learning theories and the historical contexts of the English and Danish systems. I present an analysis that acknowledges that education systems evolve due to a set of unique social and political realities that make it too simplistic to simply transplant them and expect them to thrive out of context (Davies, 1970). From this discussion I highlight common ground between the two systems and the contrasting approaches taken to the 'question of employability' which Rahbek (2019) highlights at the start of this chapter.

Bildung

One ought, every day at least, to hear a little song, read a good poem, see a fine picture, and, if it were possible, to speak a few reasonable words.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship (1795-6)

One thing that you could be sure of is if you were to ask a learner or tutor in Adult Community Education what the word *Bildung* means, they would more than likely look at you blankly, even in a German language class, unless of course the tutor was German, or perhaps Scandinavian. Literally translated this Germanic word means 'self-cultivation' or 'self-formation', even though this definition hardly does the word justice. A more comprehensive definition is given by Anderson & Bjorkman (2017, p.5) in their book *The Nordic Secret*:

> *Bildung* is the way that the individual matures and takes upon him- or herself ever bigger personal responsibility towards family, friends, fellow citizens, society, humanity, our globe and the global heritage of our species, while enjoying ever bigger personal, moral and existential freedoms. It is the enculturation and life-long learning that forces us to grow and change, it is existential and emotional depth, it is life-long interaction and struggles with new knowledge, culture, art, science, new perspectives, new people and new truths and it is being an active citizen in adulthood. *Bildung* is a constant process that never ends.

The basic principle of *Bildung* is that if a person continually self-cultivates and self-forms, they will begin to fully understand themselves, and in turn have a better understanding of their role within society and the contribution they can make to it. Parallels can be drawn with the ancient Greek term *Paideia* which refers to training of the physical and mental faculties to produce a broad enlightened outlook that is harmoniously combined with cultural development (Bohlin, 2008). More recently, comparisons can be drawn with the existentialist philosophical theories that emphasize the existence of the individual person as a free and responsible agent who can determine their own development through acts of the will (Kierkegaard, 1990; Sartre, 1943). Little has been written in the English language about the concept of *Bildung* other than texts that attempt to explain the historical evolution of the concept (Horlacher, 2004; Nordenbo, 2002) or those that discuss the concept philosophically (Biesta, 2002). The exception to this is perhaps Lene Rachel Anderson, who in her most recent book *Bildung Keep Growing (*2020) has attempted to make the concept relevant and accessible.

One other exception is that a whole issue of *The Journal of Philosophy of Education* is devoted to the theme. Within this issue the suggestion that the development of *Bildung* in education should be orientated towards "transformational *praxis* in crisis-prone situations" (Peukert, 2003, p.115) is particularly compelling in light of the Socratic dialogues conducted because of this research (Appendix 3).

The use of such dialogues was first formally outlined by Leonard Nelson in a 1922 lecture entitled 'The Socratic Method' (Nelson, 1949, pp. 1–43). First, a topic or question is chosen, preferably a philosophical term (for example, an ethical value such as honesty), but it can also be an open question which allows the participants an opportunity to reflect on life. Next, the dialogue participants are invited to relate a personal narrative, about a time when they experienced something relating to the topic. In the next phase they reflect on and investigate these narratives in order to come up with definitions about what the topic means according to each narrative. Finally, the group tries to come up with a more general, mutually agreed upon definition from the different narratives that have been shared (Krohn, 2004, pp. 17–20).

Peukert's view is that such ethical conversations are a form of transformational *praxis* which can act as a catalyst to bringing about "justice in large anonymous modern societies" (p.114) and the "self-transformation of society" (Habermas, 1999, p.228). Models of transformative *praxis* are often used by educators influenced by the work of Mezirow (1991), as discussed in Chapter 1, who are seeking to develop critical consciousness and social equality, particularly amongst people in disadvantaged and marginalized groups (Pewewardy, Lees, & Clark-Shim, 2018).

Also of interest is the argument that the transcendental nature of *Bildung* is "at the very heart of literary fiction" (Mortensen, 2003, p.140). The suggestion here is that the development of *Bildung* allows an individual to develop so as not to just relate "to themselves and given culture" but transcend this world view and be able to relate to "the larger cultural dialectics and the way in which human beings in general perceive themselves and their world" (ibid, p.140). The Latin root word *transcendere* which means 'climb over or beyond' gives us a simple visual metaphor for this idea that developing *Bildung* involves a process of moving beyond our individual world view to seeing it from a new position. Certainly, in comparison with those written for academic journals, there are very few texts written in the English language that discuss its pedagogical application and have been written specifically for education practitioners.

To add to the challenges of understanding the concept of *Bildung*, it is also considered to be one of the most ambiguous and vague concepts of German pedagogy (Dohmen, 1965). There is however something enticing for the educator when the concept is presented as one that "allows us to say something different about education, or at least it allows us to explore the ways in which education might be about something more than simply the transmission of our facts and values to the next generation.'' (Biesta, 2002, p.344). This is of particular interest because, within an education system in which knowledge is increasingly orientated towards employability factors alone (Liessmann, 2003), it offers an idea that is much closer to the idea of lifelong learning in Adult Education as it focuses on learning as a continuous and holistic process rather than merely the attainment of a pre-specified end product (Varkoy, 2014).

To fully understand the concept and how it relates to Adult Community Education in the United Kingdom, it is necessary to look first at its origins with the philosophers of the European Enlightenment.

A glimmer of a concept

For many, the Enlightenment roots of *Bildung* can be traced back to the influence of Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury, who is held to be the founder of the concept of "innere *Bildung*" on the grounds that Shaftesbury's concept of 'to form' was translated into German as *Bildung*. Shaftsbury's essay, *Soliloquy: Or, Advice to an author* written in 1710, introduced the idea of self-knowledge, "Tis the hardest thing in the world to be a good thinker, without being a strong self-examiner, and thorrow-pac'd dialogist, in this solitary way'' (Shaftesbury, 1710, p.58). Although not translated into German until 1742, and long after Shaftesbury's death in 1713, this paper would go on to have a significant impact on the thinking of later German Philosophers such as Goethe, Herder, Humboldt and Kant. Macintyre (2002, p.162) summarised Shaftesbury's key idea as follows, "The virtuous man is he who has harmonized his own inclinations and affectations in a way that renders them also harmonious with the inclinations and affections of his fellow creatures.'' As Horlacher (2004, p.412) points out, "What is common to all these activities is that literature and language are never seen as independent of, but as bound to, character, moral sense, and taste.'' Such ideas helped establish the idea that cultural interests and pursuits are essential to self-formation. It is therefore no coincidence that Shaftesbury's ideas were so attractive to members of the early German enlightenment at a time when German was trying to establish itself as a standard language. In some ways the *Bildung* concept gave wings to German romantic nationalism and became the core of the class consciousness of the bourgeoisie (Schäfer,2009).

Later in the 18th Century, the book Emile, or On Education, a treatise on the nature of education and on the nature of man written by the French Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, would contribute further to the fledgling concept of *Bildung*:

> The natural man lives for himself; he is the unit, the whole, dependent only on himself and on his like. The citizen is but the numerator of a fraction, whose value depends on its denominator; his value depends upon the whole, that is, on the community. Good social institutions are those best fitted to make a man unnatural, to exchange his independence for dependence, to merge the unit in the group, so that he no longer regards himself as one, but as a part of the whole, and is only conscious of the common life. (Rousseau, 1762, p.2)

Here Rousseau is not saying that man should not be an active member of society, but that man should be independent in thought rather than conditioned to think by society to the extent that he has no identity of his own. The task of natural education can therefore be perceived as a path of freedom which demands from the learner cultivation of his nature (Kontio, 2012). This idea of self-authoring was named the *gebildet* person by Schiller (1793-4), who saw it as the final stage of human development at which point people are able to handle political freedom (Anderson, 2020). It is important to note that Schiller and many of his contemporaries had been appalled at the atrocities carried out during and after the French Revolution once a form of political freedom had

been achieved. The developmental psychologist Robert Kegan (1982) would develop Schiller's ideas further in the twentieth century when introducing his five stages of human development model which includes the self-authoring and self-transforming minds as the final stages. Both Shaftesbury's and Rousseau's views are particularly relevant in the current educational climate where increasingly the education system is expected to "help build responsible character in people" (Cameron, 2010). The conclusion at this point is that free thinking individuals will create a civilised and free-thinking society. These early ideas on *Bildung* would go on to capture the imagination of the emerging German nation.

Bildung of the German Enlightenment

It would be with the philosophers of the German enlightenment that the concept of *Bildung* would be defined and become considered as the way that humanity can achieve "complete harmony with itself" (Fichte as cited in Kivela, 2012, p.69). Much of the academic literature written concerns itself with the development of the *Bildung* theory in this period (Nordenbo,2002; Alves,2019), and how it is from this period that many of the key ideas of *Bildung* originate, namely that it is a life-long learning process that is separate from formal *Erziehung* (education) (Horlacher, 2012); the process is one of continual realisation and self-discovery rather than training and that by achieving harmony with ourselves we can achieve harmony with the world and the community that we live in (Biesta, 2002). It is worth considering these ideas through three key contributions to the discourse from the period.

One of the most influential figures in the development of the German education system was the Prussian philosopher, linguist and diplomat Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767-1835) who amongst many ideas introduced the concept that *Bildung* is about continuous discovery and experience:

> Freedom is the first and essential condition for *Bildung*. Besides freedom the development of human powers requires one thing, which is closely associated with freedom, a great manifoldness of situations. Even a free and highly independent person, when restricted to monotonous situations cannot develop fully. (Humboldt as cited in Konrad,2012, p.110)

Konrad (2012) summarises Humboldt's view as one that considers life to be there to be experienced and every opportunity should be taken to do so if humans are to develop their *Bildung*. Humboldt is perhaps best known for his role in reforming the German higher schools and universities at the start of the nineteenth century and orienting them towards an ideal of *Bildung*.

In the following quote by the influential philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), there is a strong emphasis on the idea that developing inner *Bildung* is also about being a part of society as a whole:

> It is not enough that a man shall be fitted for any end, but his disposition must be so trained that he shall choose none but good ends -good ends being those which are necessarily approved by everyone. (Kant as cited in Kivela, 2012, p.68)

As Kivela (2012) points out, *Bildung* is more than an individual enterprise, but also a collective attempt to perfect humanity. This is a view expressed by Kant's contemporary (Herder as cited in Kivela, 2012, p.65) who expressed the view that "The natural condition of the human is the state of the society; because he is born into it and educated by it.'' This relationship between developing an individual's inner form is however not about conformity or becoming an object of the market or society, but more about making a positive contribution to society and being in harmony with the world" (Konrad, 2012).

Finally, the German philosopher, theologian and poet Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803) tried to summarise what the *Bildung* person is trying to achieve when writing "What man should be…. the enlightened, learned, fine, reasonable, cultured, virtuous, enjoying man whom God demands at the level of our culture" (Herder as cited in Horlacher, 2012, p139). Herder is introducing here the idea that *Bildung* is about so much more than knowledge and culture, being just as much about the character and disposition of the individual (Horlacher, 2012).

Perhaps the best way to understand how *Bildung* is attained is through the metaphor of the journey. MacIntyre (2003) refers to this journey as a 'medieval quest' where the destinations and goals are reached along the way rather than at the end. It is through such narrative journeys, which explore the key themes of individual freedom, society, culture and character, that the concept of *Bildung* would take form in the general publics' consciousness and find popular appeal (Varkoy, 2010).

*Bildung*sroman

There is a certain amount of romanticism attached to the word 'journey' and it is the very concept of a learning journey that so appealed to the philosophers of the German enlightenment and gave rise to the literary genre known as '*Bildungsroman*', which are novels that deal with a person's formative years or spiritual education. In *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (Rowling, 2000, p.37), when Albus Dumbledore tells Harry that "Differences of habit and language are nothing at all if our aims are identical and our hearts are open" he is helping Harry to understand the world and his relationship with others.

*Wilhem Meister's Travels and Apprenticeship (*Goethe, 1795-6*)* is considered to be the first such novel and gave inspiration to later Victorian classics such as *David Copperfield* by Charles Dickens. The story centres on Wilhelm's attempt to escape what he views as the empty life of a bourgeois

businessman by going on a journey of discovery with various troops of actors and other colourful characters that he meets, whilst experiencing love and taking any opportunity to discuss literature and the dramatic arts along the way. The book concludes with Wilhelm committing himself to the mysterious Tower Society that recognises the journey of personal *Bildung* that he has been travelling. Whilst the book gives simple advice such as "One ought, every day at least, to hear a little song, read a good poem, see a fine picture, and, if it were possible, to speak a few reasonable words"(Goethe, 1795-6, Bk V, Ch1) that celebrates the simplicity of the activities that can develop *Bildung,* it also works on a deeper level and gives examples of the type of thinking that develops Wilhelm's understanding of human relationships, "'When we take people, thou wouldst say, merely as they are, we make them worse; when we treat them as if they were what they should be, we improve them as far as they can be improved''(Goethe, 1795-6, p.194). It is through such narratives that the concept of *Bildung* was made explicit and brought into the consciousness of a wider audience.

The idea of narrative, and particularly biographical narrative, are powerful ones in the identity of *Bildung* as will be evidenced in later discussions. The American philosopher Richard Rorty (1931–2007) argues that in late modern society *Bildung* must be considered as a narrative (Rorty, 1989). He suggests that the three parts of *Bildung* are to develop our own identity, develop an understanding of the contingency of identity and cultivate an empathy for the identity of others. All three are arguably present in the *Bildung*sroman genre. Hyland (2021) frames this process as one of 'unselfing' when discussing Emma's development in Jane Austin's classic novel of the same name when writing that she had undergone "an unselfing process within which a compassionate regard for the needs and interests of others comes to temper her quest for self-aggrandisement" (p.26).

Bildung in the modern age

Since the Enlightenment *Bildung* has frequently entered the German educational debate, most notably in the thinking of the Frankfurt School philosopher Theodor. W. Adorno (1903-1969) and his contemporary Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). Whilst neither were educators, their thinking helped define the concept in the twentieth century and partly contributed to the word *Bildung* being used as a fighting word against measurability in the German education system (Hentig, 1996; Horlacher, 2012; Schwanitz, 1999). Adorno (as cited in Hoffman, 2012, p.42) wrote that ''*Bildung* is not available-because *Bildung* is that for which there are no customs, it cannot be acquired through courses, not even through studies''. The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that *Bildung* is realised, rather than acquired, through experience and development rather than formal education (Hoffman, 2012). Adorno (1959) went on to suggest that *Bildung* that is defined by educational aims neglects individual interests and freedom, leading to what might be called Halb*Bildung* (half *Bildung*). This rejection of educational aims was also supported by Gadamer (2004) who believed that *Bildung* has no aim other than itself because it is continuous, lifelong and individual.

Whilst the trend in education shifted from the 1950s onwards towards a more liberal and humanistic educational paradigm (Tenorth, 1986), this is certainly not the case in recent history where the application of human capital theory to education (Schultz,1961; Becker,1962) has led to it being viewed as a cost-efficient investment in economic growth (Bohlin, 2008). Evidence of how this has influenced the *Bildung* discussion can be seen in the shift towards considering the concept in terms of measurable competencies (Weinert, 2001; Klieme et al, 2003), which has seen institutions such as the *Bildung* Academie in Amsterdam adopt specific competency criteria based on Bloom's Taxonomy (1956). One can only wonder where Nietzche's belief that it is necessary to experience uselessness as part of developing *Bildung* might fit into such a list of criteria (Varkoy, 2010). In many ways the contrast in this paragraph has been present since *Bildung*'s conception. Should we try to control and measure a process that is by definition concerned with freedom and individuality?

Historically *Bildung* has swung between being considered an individual and a collective process (Gustavsson, 1996). This is due to the fact that it is a highly normative concept that lends itself to continued debate. This can be seen in much of the Danish literature on *Bildung*. Schmidt (1999) and Hammershøj (2003) consider *Bildung* in modern society as 'self-formation' and that the objective is to develop individualism. Kemp (2013) conversely argues that the objective of *Bildung* is global citizenship. Meanwhile Korsgaard (2004) sees *Bildung* as a process of democratisation that promotes active citizenship. Such debate has strengthened rather than weakened the concept and it is these three *Bildung* strands of self-formation, citizenship and democracy that now underpin the humanistic social pedagogical approach adopted by the Scandinavian nations.

Having discussed some of the key ideas and debates that have emerged about *Bildung* over the last three centuries, our attention now turns to the Danish Folk High Schools. Whereas many of us are familiar with the *Bildung* inspired 'Head, Heart and Hand' theories of humanistic pedagogy developed by the Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1827) and less so the similarly humanistic approach taken by the German educator John Bernhard Basedow (1724–1790), the Danish Folk High schools have received less attention, yet they are perhaps the best example of an educational system existing today that has the development of *Bildung* as its core purpose.

The Danish Folk High Schools

Most important a folk high school teacher must be able to create dreams. A folk high school at its best is a dreamer's paradise. When it is remembered like this by students even decades later it is because they learned how to dream.

Erik Lindsø (2016)

Denmark's population was recently recorded as 5,790,888 (UN, June 2020). This is not a remarkable statistic in itself, as Denmark has a relatively small land mass, but what is remarkable is that according to the Danish Ministry for Children and Education website (2020), "There are approximately 700,000 participants each year in non-formal adult education." In comparison, according to equivalent statistics in England, Adult Community Learning has 535, 800 participants (DFE, 2018) with a population of 55,977,178 (UN, June 2020). The total numbers since 2017 are now likely to be much lower as the funding situation has not improved and provision in areas such as family learning have seen steady decline. Bluntly put, an adult in Denmark is almost thirteen times more likely to take part in non-formal learning than their English equivalent. In contrast to the United Kingdom's focus on achieving qualifications and increasing employability within Community Education, the same website has a clear statement about the purpose of non-formal adult education which very much sums up the essence of *Bildung*, or '*Dannelse*' in Danish, in a modern Scandinavian country, "The objective of non-formal adult education is, by taking a point of departure in the courses and activities, to increase the individual's general and academic insight and skills and enhance the ability and desire to take responsibility for their own life, as well as taking an active and engaged part in society''(DMCE, 2020). The question of why participation is so high in Denmark, and why the purpose is so clearly defined, can be traced back to the 19th Century and the vision of one man who was undoubtedly inspired by the concept of *Bildung* when he proposed that Denmark should create a network of Adult Folk High Schools.

N.F.S Grundtvig

The Danish educator, theologian, historian and writer N.F.S Grundtvig is for most English educators an unfamiliar figure yet his vision for education has had a profound effect on many adult education systems and to this day the *European Association for the Education of Adults* has a yearly award bearing his name that aims to celebrate innovation and excellence (EAEA, 2020). It is only when one becomes familiar with his ideas that it becomes apparent that if, Freire, Horton and Lindeman represent an educational philosophical tradition that falls squarely into the radical liberal school (Liechtenstein, 1985), then Grundtvig may well be considered to be one of the original radical liberal educational philosophers along with his predecessors Pestalozzi and Rousseau. By writing *Education for the State* (1834) and later works, he introduced ideas that appear in the thinking of all

three (Westerman, 2005) and of other key educators, philosophers, sociologists and anthropologists who have made important contributions to the discourse in this field of study including John Dewey (1859-1952) and Basil Bernstein (1924-2000). Before explaining how the key tenets of Grundtvig's philosophy were applied in practical terms it is necessary to understand what he considered to be the main aims of education. Firstly, that he believed that ''Truly to understand oneself is the great goal of human reason, the apex of human education'' (Grundtvig as cited in Korsgaard, 2012, p.20). He further believed that we must take as its starting point the fact that as individuals we only exist by virtue of our community and by extension the entire world (Lawson, 1993). He praises "such an enlightenment – which by extending itself to the whole of human life and showing the deep connection between the life of the individual, the nation, and the whole human race, develops a way of thinking that is desirable for all social relations" (Grundtvig as cited in Korsgaard, 2012, p.13). Connecting these aims together he believed that a true and deep understanding of oneself and life leads to a more connected and effective community, both national and global (Kulich, 1963). From this thinking three clear aims emerged that are now written into Danish Folk High School law, which is that 50% of what they teach has to cover what they now call life-enlightenment, popular-enlightenment and democracy (FFD, 2020). Grundtvig believed that all three should be delivered in what he called 'Schools for Life' through the 'Living Word' (Warren, 1989).

The question at this point is why Grundtvig thought that all three should be the fundamental aims of education and why the terms 'School for Life' and 'The Living Word' were so central to his thinking? It is important to see the historical context in which his thinking emerged and why he considered 19th century Denmark's popular and human life to be in such a state of crisis (Rasmussen,2013), because it is from these events that the Folk High School movement has gone on to be viewed as the catalyst for the Scandinavian nations developing societies which are based on liberty and fraternity (Bron, 2007). Two significant events that occurred during what Anderson (2020) calls 'The fateful year' of 1848 give some insight into why he is considered to be one of the founding fathers of the modern Danish state and from where his educational philosophy is derived.

The first was the speech he gave on 14th March 1848 where he outlined his vision of Denmark extending only as far as the Danish language was spoken (Davies, 1931; Korsgaard, 2002). This was particularly relevant to Denmark at this time because of the ongoing issues within the Duchy of Schleswig where both Danish and German were spoken leading to wars and territorial claims by both Denmark and Prussia (Borish, 1991; Rordam, 1980). It was Grundtvig's belief that education should be taught through the 'living word' of the nation and in Denmark it is Danish. This way anyone could be enlightened and educated via the language of the people (Korsgaard,2002; Rasmussen, 2006). He was also anti the elitism of teaching through Latin in the grammar schools because this led inevitably to a distinction between the 'educated' who ruled Denmark and the common 'folk'. Grundtvig could see that genuine rule 'by the people' required that they had access to education (Korsgaard, 2002).

The second key event was on 21st March 1848 when Frederick VII was forced to step down as an absolutist monarch and the process of forming a constitutional assembly began. Grundtvig saw

that if the new nation was to be truly democratic then the Folk High Schools should have the declared purpose of teaching the rural population character traits, based on spiritual values and national respect, which would make them competent citizens (Andresén, 1991; Korsgaard, 2004). It was his belief that if Denmark was to be a successful democracy it would need to be anchored in the 'folk' and through his form of 'popular' education (Borish, 1991; Korsgaard, 2004). In many ways this was an early form of the citizenship and British Values curriculum so familiar in English schools and colleges today.

The influence of Grundtvig

Before elaborating further on some of the key philosophical ideas that Grundtvig proposed as fundamental, it is interesting to see how his ideas went on to influence the thinking of the previously mentioned later educational thinkers who all made them central to their philosophies.

First of all, compare his thinking with one of the most important American adult education theorists of the 20th Century, Eduard. C. Lindeman (1885-1954) for whom adult education was "individual growth through learning in social medium for social end" (p. 146). Prior to writing *The Meaning of Adult Education* (1926), Lindeman had visited Denmark in 1920 and according to Stewart (1987), Lindeman's biographer, he was greatly influenced by Grundtvig's educational ideas. His admiration is in no doubt when Lindeman (1926) writes, "Since the days of Grundtvig... Danish adults have striven to close the yawning abyss between life and enlightenment by laying the foundations for a system of education which continues so long as life lasts." Lindeman, whose main motivation was a democratic society built on informed social action (Nixon-Ponder, 1995), considered four key principles as fundamental to any adult education system aiming to achieve this, which were 1) Education is a life-long process, 2) It should be non-vocational, 3) It should be about situations rather than subjects and 4) It should emphasise lived experience (Rachal, 2015). All four are key principles within the Folk High School system. Warren (1989) makes an interesting point about the importance of both men when he writes that "If Lindeman can be called the father of American adult education, could Grundtvig be called the father of adult education in the Western World?"

A second educator inspired by Grundtvig was Myles Horton (1905-1990). One of the founders of the Highlander Folk School (1932-61), Horton spent a year in Denmark visiting folk high schools during 1931. As a political activist Horton had been inspired by the enthusiasm shown for the schools by other North American educators (Campbell, 1928; Foght, 1914; Hart, 1926; Knight, 1927) all of whom had admiration for the way that they considered them to have reduced common injustice and increased well-being by emphasizing "the importance of an experience in the common life and labour of the everyday man" (Campbell 1928, p.58). Horton and the Highlander Folk School's mission was concerned with training emerging and existing labour movement leaders at a

time when North America was in the grips of the Great Depression and many tenant farmers were trapped in a cycle of poverty and enforced homelessness (Knight, 1927). The North American educators during the inter-war years could see striking parallels between the way that Grundtvig had set out to enlighten and empower the rural 'folk' of Denmark and their own ambitions to tackle social injustice (Kulich, 1964; Bugge,1999). Horton wrote about Grundtvig admiringly when writing that he had struck out, "almost single handed, against the economic and spiritual poverty that enslaved the people" (Horton 1944, pp. 23-24). The Highlander Folk School would go on to train leaders such as civil rights activists Rosa Parks (1913-2005) and James Bevel (1936-2008) before it was closed in 1961 as a backlash against its role in the civil rights movement. Horton was to apply many pedagogical methods, that I will discuss later, from what he saw during his year in Denmark, namely the importance of learning being experiential and based on real-life (Westerman, 2005).

Finally, Paulo Freire (1921–1997) who was a Brazilian educator and philosopher and a leading advocate of critical pedagogy. He is best known for his influential work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970). Although Freire is unlikely to have ever visited Denmark, and certainly never wrote about Grundtvig and the Folk High Schools, the similarities between their ideas are striking. Bugge (2001) discusses Freire's work as the natural outgrowth of Grundtvig's ideas in the economic context of developing countries finding many similarities in both men's outlook. Both were concerned with empowerment, emancipation from oppression, equity, and most of all, freedom (Bugge 2001). Both men sought education that would lead to social transformation and saw the link between our personal lives, community and society as a whole (Hope and Timmel, 1984). Freire is well-known for his extensive critique of what he calls the 'banking' concept of education, in which teachers 'deposit' information into students (Freire, 2014, p.73). In contrast, the pedagogy of the oppressed must be interactive and based on lived experience and dialogue. These two key pedagogical methods that Grundtvig named 'The School for Life' and 'The Living Word' tie the two educators thinking together even further (Westerman, 2002).

Folk school pedagogy

Having looked at Grundtvig's educational philosophy and its influence on later influential educators, our focus now turns to the pedagogical practices adopted by the Folk High Schools and how they have subsequently adapted these as part of their evolution.

Almost every book written by and about the Folk High Schools mentions the importance of the spoken word. A report written by one of the early folk school educators, Christian Flor, about life at the first folk high school in Rødding stresses that formal education deals "not at all with speech" as if it were an "irrelevance". Much of the early folk high school pedagogy relied upon the historical storytelling abilities of the teachers (Rordam, 1980) as their belief was that young people could learn with ease through narrative and dialogue (Skubbeltrang, 1947). Although some schools would

go on to have libraries, many believed that books should be used sparingly and others, such as Askov, were adamant that they should not be used at all (Foght, 1914; Rordam, 1980).

Although the curriculum offered has largely moved away from history and literature, storytelling is still considered an important pedagogical tool as can be seen in the words of Lindsø (2016, p.113), "Find 25 good stories, accounts of life, learn them – by heart – and tell the stories. After that your students will revolutionize the world! If a teacher can tell such stories he can act in a Folk High School." Throughout their history the schools have stayed close to Grundtvig's belief in the importance of the 'Living Word' and many writers have highlighted the importance of oral narration, discussion and lecturing as pedagogical tools to realise this (Davies, 1931; Davies, 1970; Rasmussen, 2013). Segerstrom (1936, p.20) went as far as describing speech as "the highest expression of the human personality". The importance of free discussion and dialogue also plays an important part in school life away from lessons and many anthropological researchers have commented on how important a role they play at mealtimes and during recreational time, with an expectation that teachers and pupils will engage in conversation and discussion at every opportunity to discuss life's big issues (Borish, 1991; Davies, 1970; Borsch et al, 2019).

A second consistent pedagogical theme in the Folk High Schools is the importance of all learning being focused on real-life experience and the problems life poses (Rordam, 1980; Skrubbetrang, 1947; Warren, 1989). This situated approach to education is inspired by Grundtvig's view that "life always comes before the light with human beings" (Grundtvig as cited in Davies, 1931, p.89). This was a view shared by many nineteenth century humanist writers, "Every instruction ought to be only an answer to the questions put by life" (Tolstoy 1862, p14-15), whilst also being fundamental to twentieth century thinking on andragogy, "as the person matures, the orientation towards learning becomes less subject-centred and increasingly problem centred" (Knowles, 1970, p.39). Flor (1846, p14) writes about the "circle of phenomena which the farmer is familiar with" when detailing the experiments carried out when planting forty-five varieties of potato. Although the schools have evolved a long way from their original mission to educate the rural communities, the importance of staying grounded in real-life has stayed the same. Schools such as Tvind and Kolding were among the first in the world to offer ecology and wind power as course options, and Krogerup at present has a course called 'The World is Burning' that is concerned with the opportunities and challenges posed by globalisation. The impact of the folk high schools' early experimentation with wind power can be seen today in the fact that Denmark is heralded as the world leader in wind energy from which it sources 47% of its energy needs (Ng, 2020). The opening quote to this section suggests that folk high schools are a place to 'dream' in an almost whimsical way yet such concern for the environment suggests powerful 'dreams' of tackling global issues and making 'dreams' possible (Lindsø, 2016).

A third pedagogical approach that is distinctive to the Folk High Schools is the absence of any form of grades or examinations (Corl, 1981; Foght, 1914; Kenworthy, 1946; Rasmussen, 2013). Grundtvig's view was that exams became an end in themselves, and that learning should be a lifelong pursuit (Kulich, 1963). The belief that exams and grades are detrimental to the learning process is a well-established one and several influential Folk High School educators have re-

enforced this point, most notably the founder of Borup folk high school, Johan Borup (1853-1946), who commented that "examinations are luxuries to be dearly paid for" (Borup as cited in Moller & Watson, 1944, p.75). Perhaps the person to sum up this stance best was the head teacher at Askov Folk High School, Jens Therkelsen Arnfred (1882-1977), who explained to a departing American student in 1948 that "Whatever you have learned here you can take away in your head, or in your heart perhaps, but not on a piece of paper" (Arnfred as cited in Borish, 1991, p387).

Although these three pedagogical themes appear in almost all literature about Grundtvig and the Folk High Schools, other themes also emerge less frequently that further highlight their uniqueness. One is that the schools are free to design their own curriculum free of interference by the Danish government, to the extent that they come under the Danish Department for Culture rather than Education. This freedom even extends to each school being independent from the others, as Moller& Watson (1944) commented "The thing that is most deeply feared by all who have the success of the schools at heart is standardisation." The importance of self-determination can also be evidenced in the pride that folk schoolteachers take in having the autonomy to neither follow a syllabus or fixed plan if they choose not to; instead following the learning opportunities and tangents that naturally occur in lessons (Milana& Sorenson, 2009). Another clear theme is that of reciprocal teaching. It is a long-held tradition that teachers and learners are equals in the learning process and that enlightenment emerges from a 'common confusion' (Milana& Sorenson, 2009, p.140). It is this humanistic interpretation of the role of teachers that sees them frequently referred to as partners, helpers and guides (Bugge, 2001; Davies, 1970; Hedegaard& Hugo, 2020).

A widely adopted pedagogical tool is that of Socratic maieutic, a method that encourages a respondent to formulate latent concepts through a dialectic or logical sequence of questions, and philosophical discussion in general. Foght (1914) writes admiringly about the Socratic questioning skills of one of the early Folk High School teaching pioneers, Christen Kold (1816-1870), and more recently Weiss & Ohrem (2016) have written extensively on the folk high schools' use of these techniques. The philosophical theme even extends to simple phrases that the schools have adopted to explain their purpose, such as learners being 'rapt in wonder'.

Grundtvig's belief that life, popular and democratic enlightenment can be achieved though the commonality and conversation promoted in 'Schools for life' has parallels with Dewey's suggestion that truth is an experienced relation, particularly one which is socially shared. In *How We Think*, he wrote:

> Truth, in final analysis, is the statement of things "as they are," not as they are in the inane and desolate void of isolation from human concern, but as they are in a shared and progressive experience…Truth, truthfulness, transparent and brave publicity of intercourse, are the source and the reward of friendship. Truth is having things in common. (1910, p.67)

Much of the Folk High Schools' approach to education goes against the fundamental principles of many state education systems. Certainly, it would be hard to imagine the current United Kingdom government accepting that examinations are not the best way to assess competence, and this can be seen in their insistence that examinations for GCSEs and A Levels will go ahead regardless of any disruption caused by the current global pandemic (Sleigh, 2020). Perhaps because they are so seemingly anti-establishment is why the Folk High School concept has never gained a foothold in the United Kingdom education system. Norbeck (1991, p.14) observes that it is this very point "which almost by definition makes them, in a way, independent from, not to say – opposed to anything official: the educational system, the ruling political class, etc. This certainly provokes distrust among the decision-makers".

All Scandinavian countries now have Folk High Schools and Denmark has seventy which are attended by more than 40,000 people each year (FFD, 2020). Danes from the age of seventeen and a half can attend folk high schools for on average two terms and the central aim of the schools, according to The Association of Folk High Schools in Denmark website (2020), is that:

> Courses should be of a broad, general nature. This means that, while students of course should acquire knowledge and skills in certain subjects, the main purpose of the teaching is not to acquire a particular skill set, but to open the eyes, minds and hearts of students and teachers alike to aspects of the human existence and to shed light on the lives they are living, both individually and collectively.

English Adult Education

> *We must rebalance taxpayers' money towards the subjects where there is greatest need - so more plumbing, less Pilates; subsidised precision engineering, not over-subsidised flower arranging, except of course where flower arranging is necessary for a vocational purpose. Tai chi may be hugely valuable to people studying it, but it's of little value to the economy.*
>
> (Macleod, Guardian, 7 June 2006)

When Janet Coles (2006) presented her paper entitled *Whatever happened to the history of adult education?* at the 36TH Annual SCUTREA Conference in Leeds, the answer might well have been that academics gave up making sense of a sector that the existing literature describes as sporadic, haphazard, fragmented, unstable, bureaucratic, unintegrated and lacking vision (Bynner, 2017; Fieldhouse, 1998; Kelly, 1992; Ben Rees, 1982; Tuckett, 2015). This is true not just in terms of

policy but also in the multifariousness of the organisations that seek to educate adults. When glancing through the pages of any history of the subject, it immediately becomes apparent that chapters stand-alone from each other and that organisations such as the LEA evening institutes, WEA and technical colleges have historically operated and evolved in isolation from each other (Fieldhouse, 1998; Kelly, 1992). What emerges from the literature (much of which comes from musty and tobacco smoke infused books) reveals brief periods of boom and humanistic vision, followed by considerably longer periods of financial restraint and a focus on the economic usefulness of education. As O'Hare (1981, p.64) observes, adult education has historically "waxed and waned on a financial tide". Often the key battleground in English Adult Education literature is presented as that between liberal and vocational learning, but more accurately the debate has been about what can be deemed as 'useful' education.

Some organisations, such as the WEA, have been robust in the documentation of their history and mission, whilst without doubt the 'Cinderella' of the sector is the work of the local authorities and what were commonly known as 'The Evening Institutes'. It may seem surprising that a branch of Adult Learning provision that at its height in the 1940s and 50s enrolled over a million learners in a single year (Edwards, 1961), should have attracted so little academic interest, but their unglamorous image may have partly contributed to this. Certainly, when Edwards (1961, p.120) describes the reputation of the institutes as being "inseparably linked with the old elementary schools in dingy premises, with niggling regulations about fees and registers" and twenty years later Ben Rees (1980, p.53) highlights "glaring deficiencies" in accommodation and commented that "the classes are expected by the caretakers to vacate the premises- which are usually schools-at the moment the clock struck nine", they would find many people who still have the same perception of local authority provision today. Although at points in this section I will refer to both the WEA and other providers of Adult Education, I have for the most part chosen examples that highlight the work of the LEAs. This is mainly because it is logistically easier to focus on one area of provision, but more importantly because their historical importance and contribution to the sector is so often overlooked.

The great vision

The report on the future of Adult Education published by a Committee of the Ministry of Reconstruction in 1919 is considered by many to be the most important contribution to the literature on the sector (Edwards, 1961). Having recently gained a renaissance in public interest because of the work done by the Centenary Commission, it provides a perfect example of the type of vision that so often goes unrealised. Predominately liberal and humanistic in its outlook, it was written in the latter years of World War 1 at a time when the tide of the war had turned in the Allies' favour and the focus was on creating a new democratic order where citizenship rather than vocationalism was considered to be the nation's highest priority. The following quote from the

report is perhaps the most well-known because it so clearly encapsulates the importance of Adult Education:

> Adult education must not be regarded as a luxury for a few exceptional persons here and there, nor as a thing which concerns only a short span of early manhood, but adult education is a permanent national necessity, an inseparable aspect of citizenship, and therefore should be both universal and lifelong. (MRAEC Report, 1919, p.5)

Less documented but giving similar insight into how the future of education was imagined are the words of the English educator and Liberal politician H.A.L. Fisher (1865-1940), after whom the Fisher Education Act (1918) is named. In a speech to parliament, he proclaims that "The province of popular education is to equip the men and women of this country for the tasks of citizenship...to know and enjoy all the best that life can offer in the sphere of knowledge, emotion, and hope." (Dean, 1970).

The importance of education being an integral part of democracy and citizenship is clearly demonstrated by both the Ministry of Reconstruction's report and Fisher's speech and clear parallels can be drawn with Denmark's similar belief that developing citizenship through education is essential for developing a stable democracy. It is particularly interesting to read further recommendations in the report that clearly align with the ideology developed by the Danish Folk High Schools. Suggestions include: equality between teachers and learners; a focus on real life rather than 'lifeless facts'; and of particular interest the following extract that so succinctly outlines the importance of focusing learning on the big issues that need to be addressed by society and which the Folk Schools have made so central to their curriculum:

> There is latent in the mass of the people a capacity far beyond what was recognised, a capacity to rise to the conception of great issues and face the difficulties of fundamental problems when these can be visualised in a familiar form. (MRAEC Report, 1919, p.5)

Although there is very little literature documenting this period of Adult Education, beyond that which can be found in local authority archives, it appears that much LEA provision was recreational in nature and as before the war, classes in sewing, cookery, swimming and gymnastics were popular (Edwards, 1961). Government statistics show initially high numbers of adult enrolments of 751,327 in 1919-20 which decreased significantly once fees were gradually increased and by 1927-28, they were just 599,921 (Edwards, 1961). The same reports show that 4,454 evening institutes were offering classes in 1919-20. Later descriptions of a low paid workforce of moonlighting schoolteachers and unqualified subject enthusiasts can only be presumed to have been the same

during this period (O'Hare, 1981; Raybould, 1959). Although teaching qualification requirements are now necessary, they are still relatively low as all that is required to teach is the L3 Award in Education and Training, which can be achieved in as little as thirty hours. An interesting parallel can be drawn here with the Danish Folk High schools who still require no teaching qualifications other than a passion for, and expertise in, the subject area that is being taught.

Although Marxism was a significant influence on Adult Education in this period, particularly within the WEA, it is much harder to comment on the ideology of those tutors working within the LEA provision (Steele and Taylor, 2004). It is hard to believe that a teacher of cookery at the time would have had any other thought than a desire to pass on their love of the subject and earn a wage, despite the urgings of the politicians to develop citizenship and democracy. Many institutes of the time were also home to clubs, choirs and bands and it is likely that the communal nature of the institutes was a means to this end (Fieldhouse, 1998, Kelly, 1992).

One of the main contributors to the Ministry of Reconstruction report was the educator and activist Richard Henry Tawney (1880-1962), whose description of education indirectly sums up the *Bildung* philosophy and the belief that enlightenment is partly achieved through culture and relationships, whilst also highlighting the importance of focusing on fellowship and dialogue about the big ideas and issues in society through historical narrative, an approach that was distinctive of that which was adopted by the early Folk High Schools:

> Education… though it is much else as well, is partly, at least, the process by which we transcend the barriers of our isolated personalities and become partners in a universe of interests which we share with our fellowmen, living and dead alike. No one can be fully at home in the world unless, through some acquaintance with literature and art, the history of society and the revelations of science, he has seen enough of the triumphs and tragedies of mankind to realize the heights to which human nature can rise and the depths to which it can sink. (Tawney, 1966, pp.87-8)

September 1921 brought the first request for economy from the Education Board when it requested that money should only be spent on "work which is of approved value and assured prospects" (Circular 1231) and local authorities were to "eliminate whatever is either of little importance in itself or unlikely to justify expenditure by an adequate return in the form of reasonably large and regular attendance through the course". A government committee on expenditure, more commonly known as the 'The Geddes Super-Axe', noticed that the adult evening schools' instruction in some subjects "was not connected with any future occupation" and recommended that activities of this kind should be curtailed, unless they could be made self-supporting (Edwards, 1961, p64).

This initial vision of this period would be short lived as the world sunk into a post war global recession and recreational adult education would be considered an extra rather than a necessity. Here would start what would become an all too familiar pattern.

Post war boom

It wouldn't be until the Education Act of 1944 more than twenty years later that local authorities would be for the first-time legally obliged to provide Adult Education by making it "the duty of every local education authority to secure the provision for their area of adequate facilities for further education" (Education Act, 1944, C8 (41)). What is most interesting when considering the debate about what is considered 'useful' education is the second clause that clearly states that the education to be provided should be "leisure-time occupation, in such organized cultural training and recreative activities as are suited to their requirements". Although the emphasis on 'cultural training' may seem alien to us as a nation that has not had its nationhood threatened in over seventy-five years, when a nation feels threatened, like Denmark during the 19th Century, issues of freedom, citizenship and democracy come to the forefront of the educational debate on what is 'useful' education.

One of the most influential educational voices during this period was Sir Richard Winn Livingstone (1880-1960), whose pioneering work on the need for continuing education, is outlined in the classic, *The Future in Education* (1941), which sold 50,000 copies. This was a significant number at the time, and the Times Education Supplement pointed out in the same year that it "may well reorient all our thought". Livingstone was in no doubt that continuing adult education was the only way that 'true' democracy could be achieved. One of his most interesting observations comes in his discussion on why liberal education would always be superior to vocational education when writing that "technical education simply enables us to earn our bread but does not make us complete human beings" (Livingston, 1941, p.69).

Similar sentiments were also echoed by John Dewey (1859–1952), one of American pragmatism's early founders and arguably one of the most prominent educational philosophers of the first half of the twentieth century, when writing about education's role in developing democratic attitudes and habits in an address entitled *Between Two Worlds* delivered at the University of Miami in 1944:

> There will be almost a revolution in school education when study and learning are treated not as acquisition of what others know but as development of capital to be invested in eager alertness in observing and judging the conditions under which one lives. Yet until this happens, we shall be ill-prepared to deal with a world whose outstanding trait is change. (Dewey, 1986, p.463)

For Dewey democracy was more than government and he proposed that democratic participation emerges from an education system which encourages creativity and experiential experimentation, and in turn develops the attitudes and habits necessary to become active citizens in a world in which democracy is "the idea of community life itself" (ibid, p.328). Such ideas draw clear parallels with both the philosophy of *Bildung* and the interconnectedness of self, community and democratic formation.

Although the concept of *Bildung* does not appear in the literature of the period, the idea of Adult Education being a part of cultivating human 'completeness' also appears more than a decade later in the writing of Shaw (1959) who describes the purpose of Adult Education as "cultivation of the individual" (Shaw, 1959, p.221). Shaw also concurs with Livingstone where he believes that it should lead to "the development of a firmer foundation for our experiment in democracy" (Shaw, 1959, p.221). A contemporary of Livingstone and pioneer of continuing adult education was Albert Mansbridge (1876-1952). In some ways Mansbridge's view of the working classes could be considered to be overly romantic (Rees, 1980), but despite this he was another educator who expressed ideas that fit with the *Bildung* philosophy and the following quote bears striking similarities with the sentiments on cultural development shared by Goethe in *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795-6):

> Tired men and women are made better citizens, if they are taken as they often are to picture galleries and museums, to places of historic interest and of scenic beauty, and are helped to understand them by the power of a sympathetic guide. It is by the extension of work of this sort, which can be carried out almost to a limitless extent, that the true purpose of social reform will be best served. (Mansbridge, 1946, p.61)

Livingstone also wrote enthusiastically about the Danish Folk High Schools' movement, commenting that "It has transformed the country economically, given it a spiritual unity and produced perhaps the only educated democracy in the world." (Livingston 1941 p.44.) Livingstone's views on the importance of adult education were shared by many and it would be almost impossible to find any literature on the subject that does not mention Winston Churchill's (1874-1965) support for the importance of Adult Education which would be reproduced in the Ashby Report on adult education (1954):

> There is, perhaps, no branch of our vast educational system which should more attract within its particular sphere the aid and encouragement of the State than adult education. How many must there be in Britain after the disturbance of two destructive wars, who thirst in later life to learn about the humanities, the history of their country, the philosophies of the human race, and the arts and letters which sustain and are borne forward by the ever-conquering English language? … The appetite of adults to be shown the foundations and processes of thought will never be denied by a British Administration cherishing the continuity of our Island life. (Ashby Report, 1954, pp.66-7)

It is worth noting a further educational belief that Livingstone shared with the Danish Folk High Schools, that examinations are detrimental to the learning process. He believed that learning was a 'useful' activity in itself and that examinations should not become the reason for learning, rather than any desire for knowledge. His forthright view was that "the examination system is a poison which slows down education in most cases and in some paralyses it, and no one wholly escapes its bad effects" (Livingstone,1941, p.204).

The introduction of the Education Act (1944) would lead to a raft publications, reports, pamphlets and discussions, few of which would mention the evening institutes. Perhaps this was because their poor reputation was not part of the new image needed for Adult Education in the post-war period (Edwards, 1961). Despite this, the LEA evening institutes would enter a short period of significant growth which would see attendance figures increase. By 1947-8 attendance would return to the pre-war figure of 910,000 and thereafter it shot up rapidly to reach 1,260,000 during 1949-50 (Kelly, 1992). Some idea of how significant the LEA 'evening institute' provision was can be appreciated by comparing it to the overall figure of 2,023,796 for all Adult Education that was achieved in the same year (Edwards, 1963). The increase in attendance was accompanied by a similar growth in the number of learning venues and the first five years after the war would see the number of institutes rise from just over 5000 in 1947 to almost 11,000 in 1950 (Raybould, 1959). The courses offered were almost always classes that involved 'doing and making' in crafts such as dressmaking, needlework, woodwork, pottery and basketwork; physical activities such as dance; drama, music and art, as well as a small proportion of classes in languages and cultural subjects (Edwards, 1961; Kelly, 1992; Raybould, 1959; Ben Rees, 1980). A glimpse into the types of learners attending classes in this period come in the comments of a principle of an evening institute in the Yorkshire West Riding who explained that "in the women's practical classes, the students are in the main decent working-class people" and in the cultural classes "they are more professional people such as bank managers, university lecturers, solicitors, doctors and their wives." (Edwards,1961, p.139).

By 1950 economic crisis meant that schools and colleges were again considered to be the priority and by 1951 local authorities were being advised to raise fees and make recreational courses self-supporting as such activities were "not the kind for which public funds should be disbursed; and people should provide their own leisure time activities at their own cost" (Kelly, 1992, p.123). A dividing line had again been drawn between vocational and recreational classes, with vocational classes largely remaining grant aided, whereas recreational courses would need to be paid for by the learners. In effect the dividing line was between courses that could be considered worthy of taxpayers' money and those considered to be vocationally meretricious (Edwards, 1961). Almost overnight, classes such as ballroom dancing either became fee paying or were dropped completely from institute course offers. A government memorandum at the time clearly states that "Classes in modern ballroom dancing are perhaps the clearest example of the type of recreational class for which the fee should be raised until the class becomes self-supporting" (Ministry of Education, 1954). Increases in fees would see more than a decade of decline in attendance numbers, from the high of 1950 to just 877,000 in 1961. It would also set a pattern that still exists today where recreational courses are often charged at a higher cost because they are not AEB funded. Edwards (1961, p.130) summarised this period in Adult Education by commenting that

"The wartime enthusiasm for new forms of adult education has died down and traditional priorities of further education have been re-established."

Hopes and dreams

Adult Education rarely finds its way into literary fiction, but a rare example appears in Malcolm Bradbury's short story 'The Adult Education Class' set in what he describes as a "large, grimy building". Whilst being a satire based around a Socratic questioning session during a weekly poetry appreciation class, it gives us an amusing glimpse of the type of learners that would have been typical of Adult Education classes during the 1970s:

> There were about fifteen of them: fat motherly ladies who counted how many pullovers Treece was wearing, and worried about him; little men with small Grimsby moustaches, who were furniture salesman, bus inspectors, newsagents; two nuns; a few bearded local Bohemians, who, after the fashion of these radical times, smoked black cigarettes; and, baldish, nodding, smiling, Louis Bates, that strange man, one of Treece's students from the university. (Bradbury, 1976 p.58)

It would take until 1970 before the number of learners engaging in Adult Education would surpass the high of 1949-50. Records from this year show a new high of 1,320,000 and this number would steadily increase to 1,453,000 by the end of the decade (Bolton, 2012). A key point in the historical timeline of Adult Education is the Russell Report (1973). The first major report since the Ashby Report (1954), its recommendations were wide ranging and covered facilities, tutor wages and most importantly raised major concerns about the impact of fees on less privileged social groups, who as a result were greatly under-represented (O'Hare, 1981). This was a point made by the Labour politician and journalist Baroness White (1909-1999) when discussing The Russell Report (1973) in the House of Lords (23 May 1973), "At present, community activities are far too much the prerogative of the middle classes." The report would also acknowledge the importance of the LEAs in adult learning provision by stating that "they provide the greatest part of the finance, they attract the largest number of students, they retain the largest number of staff" (Russell Report, p.50). Many of the courses offered were still practical and non-award bearing in nature in this period and evening institute advertisements of the time can still be seen to be offering a familiar range of subjects that included cookery, dressmaking, elocution, pottery and yoga (Newcastle Evening Chronicle, 5 Jan 1973). Significantly the courses offered in this advertisement also included a solitary course in 'Basic English' and another entitled 'Learning to Read'.

Although documents show that many LEA institutes offered small numbers of reading and writing courses prior to the 1970s, with some even having provided courses since the 1950s (Reading University, 1974), their focus was still very much on practical leisure subjects. This would

change in the coming years as a volunteer driven 'popular education' reading initiative gained momentum and would eventually become part of the standard LEA provision. By 1972 more than 230 literacy schemes in England and Wales served about five thousand learners (Hamilton & Merryfield, 1999). With momentum building, a national literacy campaign *Right to Read* was launched in 1973. It was the first adult literacy campaign to take place in a Western European country and was accompanied by a BBC organised public awareness campaign and referral service. The campaign grew out of a political climate that was still committed to expanding welfare and equal educational opportunities. (Hamilton & Merryfield, 1999). The following description of the approach taken has all the hallmarks of the popular education approach that can still be found in Danish Folk High Schools, particularly a commitment to equality:

> In the process, some distinctive styles of provision were created, including an emphasis on writing as a way to develop reading ability and self-empowerment, a commitment to equality between students and teachers (or tutors), and informal approaches to working with adults in small groups and community settings.' (Hamilton & Merryfield, 1999).

Many of the educators who took part in this initiative were inspired by Paulo Freire's emancipatory adult literacy ideology and his belief that traditional education 'domesticated' rather than 'liberated' (Freire, 2014). Tuckett & Lavender (2020, p.31) wrote that "The mid-1970s *Right to Read* campaign in the UK rejected this approach... the use by tutors of the language and the experience of learners led in part to the publication of student writing, creating reading materials and approaches that were different, and challenging to existing power structures."

Besides Freire, it is from this period in Adult Education that many of the seminal thinkers and works of Adult Education literature would emerge. Although the following decades would see an ever-increasing bias towards award bearing courses, '*The Diploma Disease*' by the British sociologist Ronald Dore (1976) made the point that when the education process becomes preoccupied with passing examinations in order to gain qualifications they become increasingly devalued as competition for top jobs in the labour market intensifies (Ben Rees, 1980). Another influential thinker of the time was the French author and educator Paul Lengrand (1910-2003) who was also opposed to educational success being measured in diplomas and examination results. He instead theorised on the importance of 'Learning to Learn' and how education should focus on the lifelong intellectual, aesthetic and spiritual development of the individual rather than discrete subjects (Lengrand, 1975). When summarising Lengrand's approach to lifelong learning, Ben Rees (1980, p.36) was probably unaware of how well he was describing the philosophy of *Bildung* by writing that, "In lifelong education every man will find his own road to development since it will offer him a series of different kinds of education and training which caters for each one's individuality, originality and calling." Other notable contributions to our thinking on adult education that cannot go unmentioned because of their lasting legacy in the adult learning sector are *The Modern Practice of Adult Education* (1970) and *The Adult Learner* (1973) written by the American educator and academic, Malcolm Knowles (1913-1997), who would popularise the term

'andragogy', and the 1972 report by Edgar Faure *Learning to Be* that would go on to be the inspiration for the concept of the 'Four Pillars' introduced by Jacque Delors (1996) more than twenty years later.

A significant contributor to the Adult Education debate both before and after this period was the socialist writer and educator Raymond Williams (1921-1988), who sold more than 750,000 books in his lifetime, including the widely successful *Long Revolution* (1961). Without mentioning them directly, many of his ideas about education are also consistent with those of the Danish Folk High Schools and the *Bildung* philosophy. His approach to Adult Education was very much based on the importance of dialogue and tackling interdisciplinary themes such as 'culture and society', rather than being subject based (MclIRoy and Westwood, 1993). He considers standards in education to be a 'bullying' term and questioned 'How could one capture statistically the quality of living educational growth?' (Williams as cited in Mcllroy, 1993, p.310). The following quote succinctly outlines Williams social democratic ideology whilst also encapsulating that of the Danish Folk High Schools:

> If man is essentially a learning, creating and communicating being the only social organization adequate to his nature is a participating democracy, in which all of us as unique individuals learn, communicate and control. (Williams as cited in McIIroy, 1993, p.305)

Williams would prove to be an inspiration to many educators and not least a young Alan Tuckett, the British Adult Education specialist and campaigner, who would go on to be the chief executive of the National Institute of Adult Continuing Education and president of the International Council for Adult Education from 2011 to 2015 (Tuckett, 2007).

Perhaps the person most aligned with the educational philosophy of both *Bildung* and the folk school movement during this period was the sociologist Basil Bernstein (1924-2000) whose normative model of 'pedagogic rights' for evaluating democracy in education, proposed in his final book *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity* (1996, 2000), suggests that the three functions of education for a democratic society should be individual enhancement, social inclusion and political participation. Considering the earlier discussion regarding Grundtvig's influence on popular education movements, Bernstein's belief that education 'individualises failure in order to legitimize inequalities' (Alvayay & Ruiz, 1988, p.206) appears to align him with this tradition's concern with social justice and its desire to change structural relations between social groups (Apple, 1992; Leite, 2021). Although each category is to a certain extent self-explanatory, one condition of the 'social inclusion' function is interesting in relation to the Finnish research participant's anarchist ontology of 'free will', that is discussed in chapter five, in that Bernstein stipulates that 'to be included does not necessarily mean to be absorbed but may require to be separate, to be autonomous' (Bernstein, 2000, p.20).

Many educators look back at this period warmly as a time when the sector had great social purpose and freedom before years of accountability, cuts, standardisation and an ever-increasing focus on the development of economic capital.

Economic capital prevails

The number of adult learners enrolling on local authority courses would stay above a million through until 2000/2001 when the figure stood at 1,042,000. Statistics now are divided into AEB enrolments that are mostly on award bearing vocational and functional skills classes, and community learning classes that "aim to offer a range of non-formal courses to promote civic engagement and community development" (National Statistics, 2021). This is traditionally the type of course offered by local authority education centres. In 2019/2020 enrolments on community learning classes were 358,500, 26.9% lower than the year before. Although this decrease will undoubtedly have been because of the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, it is still a shockingly low number. The rapid decline in numbers has prompted leading voices in adult education such as Sir Alan Tuckett (2019) to ask, 'Why has England seemingly set out to destroy adult learning opportunities?'.

What is most surprising is that at the turn of the century the vision for Adult Education was, as so often before, bold, inclusive and humanistic in its scope. Building on the concepts in Edgar Faure's 1972 report *Learning to Be,* Jacque Delors, the former president of the European Union and chair of the UNESCO Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, proposed four 'pillars' of lifelong learning:

Learning to know (knowledge and understanding)

Learning to do (skills and capabilities)

Learning to live together (social cohesion)

Learning to be (self-realisation and fulfilment) (Delors, 1996 p69)

Two years later the then secretary for education and employment, David Blunkett, would deliver perhaps the last great statement regarding Adult Education by a British politician, when presenting an all-encompassing vision of why life-long learning is so important:

> To achieve stable and sustainable growth, we will need a well-educated, well-equipped and adaptable labour force. To cope with rapid change, we must ensure that people can return to learning throughout their lives, we cannot rely on a small elite. We will need creativity, enterprise and scholarship for all our people … Learning enables people to play a full part in the

> community and strengthens the family, the neighbourhood and consequently the nation. It helps us to fulfil our potential and open doors to a love of music, art and literature. That is why we value learning for its own sake and are encouraging adults to enter and re-enter learning at every point of their lives as parents at work and as citizens. (Blunkett 1998: 2–3, p.68)

Whilst the *Bildung* tradition is evident in Delors' final pillar of self-realisation, the second part of Blunkett's statement is in agreement with the Folk High Schools' belief that education is just as much about learning how to play a full part in our local communities and building a successful and democratic nation. Blunkett is clear on the economic need for an educated workforce, yet he also acknowledges the importance of "learning for its own sake". Eight years later his vision for adult education would be a distant memory as is evidenced in Alan Johnson's dismissal of education, quoted at the beginning of this section, that had "no economic worth" (MacLeod, 2006).

Although the years post and prior to Blunkett's statement would see a plethora of reports which would shift opinion about what is considered 'useful' learning, one of the most influential was the 2005 Leitch Report, *Skills in the UK* (Leitch, 2006), which reported that one third of adults did not have the equivalent of a basic school leaving qualification, that almost half had difficulty with numbers and one seventh were not functionally literate. The Leitch Report's emphasis on the importance of developing vocational skills swayed the argument of what is deemed 'useful' firmly towards vocationalism, yet despite this many academics and educators have continued to voice concerns about the shift towards adult education being about developing economic capital (Bynner, 2017; Derrick, 2010; Tuckett, 2015). Writers such as John Field (2005) have argued against the downgrading of social cohesion and well-being goals in favour of economic priorities. It has also been argued that government policies fail to foster a culture of learning communities because they are too narrowly focused on utilitarianism and on auditable, short-term outcomes (Unwin and Fuller, 2003).

A consistent voice of reason has been the arguments but forward by Alan Tuckett, who rather than simply opposing the shift to vocationalism has argued that "we do indeed need skills focused life-long learning, but even more importantly we need life-wide learning" (Tuckett, 2015). His inaugural professorial lecture at University of Wolverhampton entitled '*Jesus and History, and Thunder and Lightning'* is a reference to an adult learner with special educational needs who declared that they were the things that he would most like to learn. The point that Tuckett (2015) makes is that we now have an Adult Education system that doesn't allow for choice, breadth in learning or the possibility of following tangents because we are so busy working our way through the standardized levels that are now attached to almost all adult learning. Perhaps one of his most well-known ideas is that of 'seriously useless learning' in which he argues that no learning can be "entirely useless, in so far as it is congruent with the fostering of a broadly open, exploring and resilient orientation towards the world" (Field, 2011).

Perhaps one of the fiercest critics of the current 'audit' culture in learning is the academic Frank Coffield (2011) describes it as the "death knell of good learning". He has consistently argued that education should not teach people to jump through hoops to pass exams, but instead the priority should be to prepare people to understand democracy and to become engaged citizens.

Another prominent academic Gert Biesta is similarly critical of our current system. He has not only written extensively on the concept of *Bildung* but is also a well-known speaker at Nordic folk education conferences. He proposes that education has three key functions: *qualification, socialisation* and *subjectification* and that a good education system should be able to achieve all three (Biesta, 2015).

What is clearly demonstrated by these four periods in the history of adult education in England is that many illustrious academics and politicians have called for a broad and humanistic approach to Adult Education yet, despite the popularity of their vision, financial considerations always prevail. Adult Education that has no tangible and measurable economic outcomes is consistently considered by governments to be a luxury. Unlike the Danish Folk Schools, citizenship is seen as an add-on rather than an essential aim of education. *Bildung* and its emphasis on developing self and broadening of horizons is a pursuit for the middle classes who can afford the learning that achieves these aims but is considered of little value to the economy. One of the clearest examples of how far we have drifted from the vision of the Ministry of Reconstruction's 1919 Report came in the renaming of the National Institute of Continuing Education, which for so many years championed the value of learning for citizenship and social well-being. Founded in 1921, it was renamed as the Learning and Work Institute in 2016 and a brief look at its website leaves the viewer in no doubt that its mission is almost exclusively to promote learning for work purposes.

Chapter Three: Methodology and Methods

When I disclose what I have seen, my results invite other researchers to look where I did and see what I saw. My ideas are candidates for others to entertain, not necessarily as truth, let alone Truth, but as positions about the nature and meaning of a phenomenon that may fit their sensibility and shape their thinking about their own inquiries.

(Peshkin, 1985, p.280)

In this chapter, an outline of the research methodology and methods is presented. In the course of this thesis, following Peskin (above) I extend the same invitation to you, the reader, As stated in chapter one, the objective of this study is to explore how Folk Schools globally approach adult education and ask - Does their *Bildung* inspired pedagogy have a place in English Adult Education? The research approach adopted is grounded in a hermeneutic/interpretive epistemology because it is essentially a study into the culturally conditioned educational beliefs and practices which Gadamer (2004) refers to as 'traditions', with the intention of achieving what he described as a 'fusion of horizons'. This study involves a series of nine semi-structured conversations with Folk Schoolteachers. Both research activities have been specifically chosen because they align firstly with the hermeneutic tradition that Gadamer describes as conducting a real dialogue or 'true conversation' (p.387), whilst also recognising the value of one of the fundamental beliefs of the Danish High Schools which emphasises the importance of the 'living word' (Korsgaard, 2012). At points in this thesis I visit my autobiography to offer insight into my own beliefs and practices, assumptions and presuppositions, acknowledging the fact that my own historical and cultural context defines my interpretive framework (Scott & Usher, 1996). Methodological considerations are discussed through the four distinct, yet interconnected, themes of *Bildung*, *Bildungs*roman literature, professional *phronesis* and cross- cultural conversations. Rather than discussing Gadamerian Hermeneutics in isolation, reference to his philosophy acts as the thread that connects all three.

Bildung is research and research is *Bildung*

Any human being who does not wish to be part of the masses need only stop making things easy for himself. Let him follow his conscience, which calls out to him: "Be yourself! All that you are now doing, thinking, desiring, all that is not you.

(Friedrich Nietzsche, 1874, p.1)

The purpose of this section this chapter is to consider and justify how and why the concept of *Bildung* is central to the approach that I have taken to methodology and methods. And indeed, why it is essential for any researcher working within the constructivist interpretive research paradigm using hermeneutic methodologies. I will also discuss how my own *Bildung* journey has shaped me as an educator and the ways in which my own *Bildung* has developed during the course of the conduct of this research.

Openness and otherness

Gadamer (1960, p.7) dedicates nine pages of his classic book *Truth and Method* to the importance of *Bildung* in hermeneutic philosophy and described it as being the "greatest idea of the eighteenth century" and "the atmosphere breathed by the human sciences". Although most researchers are familiar with key Gadamer phrases such as 'fusion of horizons' and 'the hermeneutic circle', their centrality to *Bildung* is little mentioned in research literature, even though Gadamer considered it as one of the guiding concepts of humanism and fundamental to both because they are activities that require and develop *Bildung*. From a methodological point of view, perhaps one of his clearest statements on the importance of *Bildung* in research is when he explains the role it has in understanding 'otherness', by writing ''Theoretical *Bildung* leads beyond what man knows and experiences immediately. It consists in learning to affirm what is different from oneself and to find universal viewpoints from which one can grasp the thing, the objective thing and its freedom, without selfish interest.'' (Gadamer, 2004, p.12). He also makes an interesting point about what might be considered the *Bildung* potential of any research phenomenon by referencing Hegel's belief that developing *Bildung* through studying antiquity was especially suitable because ''it contains at the same time all the exit points and threads of the return to oneself, for becoming acquainted with it and for finding oneself again".

For Gadamer this appreciation of 'otherness' and the importance of 'openness' to it are central to understanding. As Weinsheimer (1985, p.70) explains, in developing *Bildung*, one "leaves the all-too-familiar and learns to allow for what is different from oneself, and that means not only to tolerate it but to live in it". Gadamer (2004) explains further that *Bildung* is about keeping oneself open to what is other and embracing more universal points of view. This openness to meaning is essential to understanding the phenomenon being explored because "Working our appropriate projections, anticipatory in nature, to be confirmed 'by the things' themselves, is the constant task of understanding" (Gadamer, 2004, p.267).

Gadamer also briefly explores another idea that is particularly relevant to this research which relates directly to the role of *Bildung* in developing professional epistemologies. Gadamer (2004,

p.12) describes this as a form of 'practical' *Bildung* that ''is seen in one's fulfilling one's profession wholly, in all its aspects. But this includes overcoming the element in it that is alien to the particularity, which is oneself, and making it wholly one's own.'' As I discuss in later chapters this idea is powerfully evidenced in the way that Danish Folk High School teachers have such a consistent shared professional epistemology whilst still being able to safeguard their individuality as educators.

Bildung, beliefs and biases

Although I was unaware of it when I originally started to consider 'What makes a good education?', *Bildung* has been a part of this study from the start. Despite only discovering the concept six months into my reading, it quickly became the focal point of the whole research project. Before I turn to why this is the case in relation to my own journey of *Bildung* in education, I will first discuss how the concept applies to the methodology I have chosen in two ways.

Firstly, and prior to meeting my participants, I dwelt extensively on the topic of *Bildung* and what my own beliefs about how and why we should educate. This enabled me to develop a clear, yet evolving, understanding of what I knew about *Bildung,* whilst acknowledging my own beliefs about education and my accompanying biases. This movement towards identifying my own initial understanding of *Bildung* and 'self' was crucial, as I could not know if I was moving towards an understanding of my participant's views on education unless I understood my own position. It was also important in enabling me to shift my thinking from viewing my educational biases as a negative to regarding them as a positive part of my identity as an educator and an authentic reflection of my beliefs. Gadamer suggests that recognising your prejudices is what gives hermeneutics its ''real thrust'' and the ''first, last and constant task of understanding" (Gadamer, 2004, pp.269-272). With this, also came the realisation that rather than being an impartial and distant researcher, I am one that is seeking to shine a light on an educational ideology that I share. In this process, I was essentially reflecting on my own *Bildung*, beliefs and biases and in so doing preparing myself to be 'open' to the 'otherness' of the Folk School teachers. The search for understanding is, therefore, the working out of pre-conceptions, the openness of the hermeneutic process overcoming the limitations of bias (Gadamer, 2004, p.269).

The second way *Bildung* is manifest in this study was in my decision to undertake reflexive dyadic conversations as my primary research method. This was as a result of an initial conversation with a Danish Folk High School teacher in which they asked as much as I did, leaving me with more questions than answers. What I was acutely aware of was the sense that what had occurred was an exercise in meaning-making. To that end the purpose of future conversations, for both the participants and I, became to understand each other's educational beliefs. In other words, "The object of the conversation is what both want to understand, and it is by reference to this object that

they reach a mutual understanding. This joint object, not the partners, conducts the conversation" (Weinsheimer, 1985, p.209).

At the heart of these conversations, the 'fusion of horizons' is almost a form of solidarity through sharing beliefs about the 'object' that we wanted to understand, which was how and why we should educate. On a practical level, although I certainly thought about prior questions based on my own understandings, and my review of the literature, these questions did not serve as some rigid guide. Instead, they were ideas to stimulate a deep and rich exploration of the phenomenon, in which to a large extent we took the Socratic approach of 'following the argument wherever it led'. However, describing them as conversational is not to suggest that the conversations were without intent, for the intent — understanding the phenomenon of the Folk Schools and the *Bildung* inspired pedagogical approaches they have adopted— was clear from the outset. The key 'otherness' that I wanted to research through these conversations was cultural as much as philosophical and ideological. I already shared their humanistic principles and educational beliefs and from the literature could recognise much of their pedagogy within my own. For me, the 'otherness' was about how we had developed similar thinking, despite developing as educators in dramatically different educational systems. This idea of cultural understanding is an area of research methodology that I return to in the next section on comparative education.

Searching for the hows and whys?

One of the most profound ways in which *Bildung* is evident in this research project is in my shift in thinking from being a researcher with a question and an unformed research identity to one with a clear sense of how much this research reflects my own educational ideology. The extent to which my educational ideology is reflected can be found in asking how and why certain themes have developed.

Why *Bildung*? Because I value freedom and individuality. Growing up in a disciplined armed forces family was either going to make me regimented or a non-conformist in my approach to life. In my case it has always been the latter. Often to the amusement and frustration of my colleagues and family. This makes the individuality of *Bildung* highly attractive to me as it is a learning journey of choice and individual control. Its only agenda is the one that the individual sets and the concept feeds into my belief that in learning the best questions are, more often than not, your own questions.

Why dialogue? Because it is surprising that 'talk' in the classroom is still considered by some to be underused (Alexander, 2008). The truth of this is of course subjective but if Hattie's (2012) synthesis of studies which finds that teachers talk for on average 70 to 80 percent of class time is correct, there may well be a case for less teacher talk, and more of the dialogic talk that this paper

describes, and which values the views of the learners whilst helping them to share and build meaning collaboratively (Bakhtin, 1935/1981).

Why Danish Folk High Schools? Because I've lived in twenty-four houses, in four countries and taught or been educated in over fifteen educational establishments. I've taught countless nationalities and learners from the age of four to eighty-four. All these changes and accompanying challenges have provided me with many new perspectives. Part of my *Bildung* is a mental wanderlust for new perspectives.

The conclusion to this section is that research is a *Bildung* developing activity because it requires 'openness' in the pursuit of understanding 'otherness'. In essence the methodology of *Bildung* and Gadamerian hermeneutics are one and the same. I have also introduced the idea that research is an intensely personal process that, regardless of the audience, will always become ''wholly one's own'' and part of the researcher's *Bildung*.

The Methodological Wisdom of *Bildungsroman*

Everyone who tells a story tells it differently, just to remind us that everybody sees it differently. Some people say there are true things to be found, some people say all kinds of things can be proved. I don't believe them. The only thing for certain is how complicated it all is, like string full of knots. It's all there but hard to find the beginning and impossible to fathom the end. The best you can do is admire the cat's cradle, and maybe knot it up a bit more.

(Jeanette Winterson, *Oranges Are Not the Only Fruit*, 1985, p.93)

This section highlights some examples of *Bildungsroman* novels that offer ideas and thoughts which are highly relevant to research methodology. I offer some accompanying narrative to situate my thinking, whilst continuing to link the chosen methodologies with the philosophy of *Bildung* and Gadamer's hermeneutics. The central philosophical concepts in this section are that of Aristotle's concept of *phronesis (*practical wisdom), and *aletheia* (disclosure). Consideration is also given to the subjectivity of truth, and I argue that ''we should emphasize a contextual notion of truth that is pluralistic and culture-bound'' (Schram, 2012, p.20).

My grammar school mathematics teacher, Mr Holdsworth, was a man of bad jokes and, looking back, considerable practical teaching wisdom. Every new topic would start with an explanation of how to find answers using a variety of methods, after which he would always use one of the

following pithy sayings – "ye pays ye money ye makes ye choice", "it's horses for courses really" or "what suits one dun't always suit t'other". Having seen a succession of teaching methods be labelled 'best' practice during my own teaching career, I can see that the wisdom in his approach to differentiation was to see that what is 'best' for one person isn't always 'best' for the person sitting next to them. He is a good example of a teacher's *phronesis* in the action of practice. Looking back, my early teaching career was full of such teachers sharing wise sayings that have stayed with me and served me well since- "you are only as good as the relationships that you develop with learners" and "start with their questions and not yours", being just two examples. Increasingly I hear less of this wisdom as education has moved towards the increasingly technical-rational world views that are preoccupied with the outcomes of education measured through the data driven, highly standardised paradigm which is current reality of the Adult and Community Education landscape in England. In such a technical-rational world the wisdom of practice is judged by the numerical outcome and educational practitioners ''are rewarded for efficiency, technical skill, and measurable results'' (Phillips, 1994, p.1). The result is as Pring argues (1996), that ''practitioners no longer deliberate about the aims of education as part of their professional responsibility; instead, they deliberate about the means to achieve externally imposed ends as part of their craft'' (p.110). There is no doubt that Mr Holdsworth wanted his students to achieve good grades, but he also wanted to give us choice. He recognised us as individuals. He incorporated humour into his practice knowing that it was a powerful engagement tool, and as the British comedian John Cleese once said, "If I can get you to laugh with me, you like me better, which makes you more open to my ideas" (Tebbe, 2007).

Initially, I set out to understand the *praxis* of the folk schoolteachers with an idea that I might be able to create some kind of pedagogical checklist that others might follow. However, this aim was to be short-lived as, during initial interviews, it dawned on me that each person I spoke to expressed their thoughts and ideas on teaching in a highly reflective and philosophical manner. Despite being from different Folk Schools, and as far as I am aware, being unknown to each other, I could see that they were all immersed in a "culture and conditions wherein thinking, reflection, and ideas thrive and are modelled by all members in the profession" (Hibbert, 2012, p.69). As with my maths teacher, they as insiders in the practice, had developed *phronesis*. With this came a realisation that the key to understanding wasn't just with the *praxis* or 'how?' of their teaching and more the navigating wisdom or 'why?'.

Eduard Lindeman expressed the view that many educators are involved with *praxis* but that it is often not part of their vocabulary (Smith, 1994). This is perhaps not surprising as one does not have to look far to find references to education being a 'production line' (Brink, 1933; Dorling, 2015; Toffler, 1970). It is necessary to understand the Aristotelian root of the word *praxis* to understand why it is a term much more akin to an emancipatory view of education than that of a production line (as discussed on p.4). As explained, the term *praxis* can be translated as the act of 'doing' but it is important to note that Aristotle was explicit in his reasons for distinguishing the term *praxis* from the act of *poesis*, or 'making', when writing that ''... doing and making are generically different ... since making aims at an end distinct from the act of making, whereas in doing, the end cannot be

other than the act itself'' (Aristotle as cited in Balaban, 1986). It is important to note that Aristotle makes this distinction because 'doing' activities are those which most demonstrate humanity's freedom, in comparison to 'making' activities which he considered to be ignoble or simply a means to an end (Balaban, 1986). Aristotle went further in differentiating between the two by explaining that although both are processes that involve motion, *poesis* is the motion *per se,* whereas *praxis* is an inward motion or actualisation *(ibid*, 1986). It is the latter that draws such strong parallels with the *Bildung* philosophy.

One of the earliest philosophers in the modern era to use the term *praxis* to mean action oriented towards changing society was the Young Hegelian August Cieszkowski in his 1838 work *Prolegomena zur Historiosophie* (McClellan, 1970). Shortly after it is an idea that also appears in the writings of Karl Marx who uses the term *praxis* to refer to the free, universal and self-creative activity through which man creates and changes both himself and his historical world [Petrovic, 1991]. In the twentieth century the concept that *praxis* is a mode of human togetherness or participatory democracy was further developed in the work of Hannah Arendt (d'Etreves, 1993), whilst Paulo Freire defines *praxis* in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as "reflection and action directed at the structures to be transformed."(p.126). Joseph Dunne explores a similar theme of *praxis* being actions that have community worth when writing that it is realised when a person "acts in such a way as to realize excellences that he has come to appreciate in his community as constitutive of a worthwhile way of life" (Dunne, 1993, p.10).

Themes of community, continual motion and transformation also appear when Peukert (2003) writes that:

> This concept has to do with intersubjective action for which neither the structure of the subject nor the structure of society constitutes an unquestioned and stable given; on the contrary, the self and society present tasks that require decision in a situation of crisis-prone instability (p.115).

An essential part of developing *Bildung* is the acquisition of *phronesis* and becoming part of what Aristotle called the *phronemoi,* or practically wise human beings*.* Aristotle discussed the idea of practical wisdom in, *Nicomachian Ethics*, explaining it as less of an abstract discourse on what is 'good' or 'right' and more the wisdom to "perform a particular social practice well" and "what we need to learn in order to succeed at our practice" (Schwartz, 2010, p.118). Essentially if *praxis* is the 'act' then *phronesis* is to carry out that act 'well' and with wisdom. For Gadamer *phronesis* constituted a mode of self-knowledge and, along with dialogue, provided the starting point for the development of his philosophical hermeneutics (Malpas, 2018).

War and Peace shows us *phronesis*

Perhaps one of the greatest *Bildungsroman* novels of Russian literature is Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1868-9), which follows Nikolay Rostov's development from youth to maturity. Near the end of the novel, Tolstoy's description of Nikolay's endeavours to learn more about farming on his estates is recounted in the following passage that shows *phronesis* as an everyday practice:

> When Nikolay took up farming, and began to investigate its different branches, it was the peasant that claimed most of his attention. He saw the peasant as something more than a useful tool; he was an end in himself and a source of good judgement. He began by closely observing the peasants in an attempt to understand what they wanted, and what they considered good and bad practice. He went through the motions of making arrangements and giving out orders, but what he was really doing was learning from the peasants by following their methods, their language and their notions of what was good and bad. And it was only when he came to understand the peasants' appetites and aspirations, when he had learnt their way of speaking and the hidden meaning behind their words, when he felt a kind of kinship with them. (Tolstoy [1868-9] 2005, p.1277)

What Nikolay does in this extract is turn away from epistemological ideas, and the theory of farming, and depends instead on the observation of practice that can be trusted. He studies the peasants whose knowledge of the land is grounded in their daily labour (Frank, 2012). In this research, I have tried to take a similar approach and regard the Folk High School teachers not as subjects of research, but as research participants in the fullest sense: ''as something more than a useful tool'' and instead professional colleagues who are ''a source of good judgement''. In doing this my role has become both that of a researcher and an ethnographer of their judgements.

Catcher in the Rye and the subjectivity of truth

Towards the beginning of J.D. Sallinger's iconic American *Bildungsroman* about teenage rebellion, *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), the novel's protagonist Holden Caulfield explains the unfairness of his parents and teachers believing that he does not act his age to his old history teacher, Mr Spencer, by saying ''It's partly true, too, but it isn't all true. People always think something's all true'' (p.5). What this statement does is give a revealing insight into the subjectivity of 'truth' and the purpose of research. Holden is judged to be immature, yet in his opinion '' Sometimes I act a lot older than I am—I really do—but people never notice it. People never notice anything'' (p.5). The Ancient Greek

word *aletheia* translates as 'truth' or 'undisclosed'. This is not 'truth' in the absolute quantitative sense of the word but more in the sense of 'truth' as an occurrence, as something that happens. In the mid- 20th century, the German philosopher, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) was responsible for the renewal of interest in *aletheia,* believing that it could elucidate how the ontological "world" is disclosed, or opened up, and things made intelligible for human beings (Wheeler, 2020). Taking this approach in qualitative research means that the role of the researcher is to take notice rather than being one of those people who ''never notice anything''. As Noblit and Hare (1988, p.14) explain, research should ''make the obvious, obvious'' for us and disclose something that might have been there all along in our lives but has stayed unnoticed.

Undoubtedly Holden's frustration with how he is perceived is also due to the difference between his 'life-world' and the adults close to him. Kraus (2015) describes a 'life-world' as ''a person's subjective construction of reality, which he or she forms under the condition of his or her life circumstances'' (p.4). First introduced by the German philosopher Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), the phenomenological theory of 'life-world' proposes that our consciousness is embedded in and operating in a world of meanings and pre-judgements that are culturally, historically and socially constituted (Beyer, 2020). Although Holden is situated in the same context as those adults around him, his 'life-world' is both subjective and intersubjective. His is the world of teenager at a different point in history from that of his parents and teachers. Therefore, his experience of being a teenager is different to theirs because culturally, historically and socially the world has changed since they were a similar age. How often do we hear adults comment that they were harder working, politer or more resourceful than younger generations? Understanding that research participants may have different 'life-worlds' is an important consideration, particularly in international comparative education, and an area of research methodology I will return to towards the end of this chapter.

Orwell the researcher

As a young child I lived for a short while in a small Shropshire village. Among my many childhood memories of wandering in the village and surrounding countryside is one of a tramp that I saw. I remember watching him in fascination, and some fear, as he spoke to the parish vicar at the church gate. He was the very epitome of the storybook tramp with ragged, dirty clothes and old worn-out boots. I recount this memory because tramps or today's homeless are perfect examples of people who we typically make judgements about, which are usually based on our biases and assumptions. This thought in turn led me to another significant book that has influenced my methodology.

The English writer and Socialist George Orwell described his first publication, *Down and out in Paris and London (*1933), as a ''fairly trivial story''. Partly autobiographical and partly sociological, it is in fact a fascinating work of research, in which Orwell offers many insights into his hermeneutic methodology. It is also an early example of comparative research. Although not a novel that could

be described as a *Bildungroman,* it is however one in which Orwell learns much about himself and those around him and is therefore a particularly good example of how *Bildung* grows in the process of research. The book recounts the time he spends living the impoverished life of a Parisian hotel *plonguer (*dish washer) and then as a London tramp, with the aim of trying to gain a better understanding of poverty and vagrancy.

Orwell sums up his methodological thinking and research conclusions in the space of just a dozen pages (pp.343-355). First, he wonders ''It is queer that a tribe of men, tens of thousands in number, should be marching up and down England'' and in so doing formulates the question ''Why do tramps exist?''. His reason for taking this line of inquiry is simply that ''It is a curious thing, but very few people know what makes a tramp take to the road.'' What he wants to do is 'disclose' why this is the case. Before concluding why tramps exist, he makes several remarks, one of which is that ''the quite obvious cause of vagrancy is staring one in the face.'' To Orwell he had made the 'obvious, obvious'. He also reflects on the importance of recognising culturally derived judgements by commenting ''But though the case obviously wants considering, one cannot even consider it until one has got rid of certain prejudices. These prejudices are rooted in the idea that every tramp, ipso facto, is a blackguard.''. Such a judgement he believes ''obscures the real questions of vagrancy'' and as explained in the previous section, recognising our prejudices is central to being 'open to otherness' in Gadamerian hermeneutics. One of his many conclusions and accompanying suggestions is that ''A destitute man, if he is not supported by the parish, can only get relief at the casual wards, and as each casual ward will only admit him for one night, he is automatically kept moving. He is a vagrant because, in the state of the law, it is that or starve.'' Perhaps one of his most methodologically revealing comments comes towards the end of this passage when he remarks that ''When one has realized that, one begins to put oneself in a tramp's place and understand what his life is like.'' Again, Orwell's methodology aligns perfectly with Gadamerian hermeneutics in that he believes that the researcher should 'leave the all-too-familiar' and instead 'live in' the research context (Weinsheimer,1985, p.70).

Besides outlining his research methodology, Orwell also draws our attention to differing cultural perspectives on obscenities in the following extract:

> In England you can print 'Je m'en fous' without protest from anybody. In France you have to print it 'Je m'en f__' . Or, as another example, take the word 'barnshoot'__ a corruption of the Hindustani word 'bahinchut'. A vile and unforgiveable insult in India, this word is a piece of gentle badinage in England. (p.304)

This extract provides a note of caution for any comparative researcher in highlighting the potential perils of assuming that using a common language means participants will also have common 'life-worlds'.

What is most striking is that as interpretive research, *Down and out in Paris and London* was written in an "age in which behaviourism was sweeping aside 'non-scientific' explanations of behaviour; with hard numerical data, generated through empirical research striving for natural-science status, subjected to a battery of statistical tests" (Bailey, 2014, p.177). For many Paul Felix Lazarsfeld, the social psychologist and market researcher, is considered to be the 'father of qualitative research' (Bailey, 2014). There is no doubt he has had a profound and lasting impact on qualitative research methodology, and this can be evidenced in statements from his early research that still hold true today- ''We never get useful explanations merely by 'collecting the facts'. Interpretations are indispensable in addition – interpretations in terms of the motives and the mental mechanisms which determine conduct in given situations'' (Kornhauser & Lazarsfeld 1935, p.7). He is also considered to be the first researcher to identify the importance of 'why?' questions (Bailey, 2014). Interpreting the 'motives' and "mental mechanisms which determine conduct in given situations" is exactly what Orwell did and is also central in my own interview research methodology. In Gadamerian hermeneutics ''the object of the conversation is what both want to understand'' (Weinsheimer, 1985, p.209) and what are 'motives' if not the 'why?' of professional practice.

Orwell finishes the novel with evidence of how his *Bildung* developed in the course of his experiences by pointing out all that he would never do again, including ''expect a beggar to be grateful when I give him a penny, nor be surprised if men out of work lack energy'' (p.365). In many ways Orwell, similarly to Lazarsfeld, was a social researcher ahead of his time.

Everybody sees it differently

The concluding *Bildungsroman* extract comes from Jeanette Winterson's *Oranges are not the Only Fruit (1985),* a coming-of-age novel about a teenage girl growing up in an English Pentecostal community. It has been argued that it is in fact a *Künstlerroman*, which is a narrative about an artist's growth to maturity and could be classified as a sub-category of *Bildungsroman (*Mullan, 2007*)*. The opening extract to this section provides a helpful conduit from this discussion about 'truth' and 'practical wisdom' to the following section that expands on conversation methodology, *phronesis* and introduces the ethics of research having political motives. Just as Jeanette questions whether "things can be proved" and Holden's similar sentiments of "it isn't all true", this research is not seeking to provide 'proof' or any type of absolute 'truth'. Certainly, I am attracted to the *phronesis* of the folk schoolteachers and can see many parallels with what I believe to be a 'wise' way to educate. There is no doubt that in all of the research conversations there is ample evidence of mutual agreement and a shared view of 'how?' and 'why?' we should educate. However, I also recognise that it is overly simplistic to assume that contextually situated *phronesis* can be transplanted or that to others it is in any way the 'truth' of how to educate wisely. The aim is instead to 'disclose' or make others aware of an alternative educational paradigm and its

underlying philosophical and political concepts. It is to show that away from the neo-liberal, positivist, technical-rational view of education that is dominant in England there are others that can and do "see it differently".

Creating Sparks

> *Conversation is a meeting of minds with different memories and habits. When minds meet, they don't just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought. Conversation doesn't just reshuffle the cards: it creates new cards. That's the part that interests me. That's where I find the excitement. It's like a spark that two minds create. And what I really care about is what new conversational banquets one can create from those sparks.*
>
> (Theodore Zeldin, *How Talk Can Change Your Life CONVERSATION*, 1998, p.14)

The word conversation is derived from the Latin noun *conversare* ' to turn about with', formed from the prefix *con* 'with, together' and the suffix *versare* 'to turn'. Methodologically, the idea that participants in a conversation 'turn' is an interesting one. The suggestion is that conversations should change the direction of our thinking and fits well with Zeldin's (1998) claim that conversations 'transform' and 'reshape' minds. This idea of 'turning' is one that Rader (Cited hooks 2009, p.46) also highlights when writing that conversations "can turn us toward different definitions and different pathways. They help us look at complicated matters from different perspectives as we turn them this way and that while striving to construct a new understanding.'' In his essay *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind*, written in 1959, the English philosopher and political theorist Michael Oakeshott similarly described conversation in terms of motion when he wrote "Thoughts of different species take wing and play round one another, responding to each other's movements and provoking one another to fresh exertions'' (1981, p.198).

The conversation in this section aims to be deliberately contentious by touching on capitalism, neo-liberalism, oligarchy and totalitarianism. In doing so I further develop the themes of *phronesis* and dialogue, whilst making more explicit the underlying humanist and Socialist bias that underpins this research and introducing the idea of phronetic social science. With this comes a discussion about ethics and how all research is political if it is questioning what is for the greater good of society.

Twists and turns

Even with the best of intentions, I could never conduct a formal research interview successfully. Just as I struggle with rules I likewise struggle with formality. All it takes is a single thought or new idea and I have taken a 'turn' and headed off in a whole new direction. One of my favourite expressions of practical wisdom, or *phronesis*, in education is "you can write the best plans on the back of a fag packet", which is the opposite of its common usage as a term for poor planning (Duckling, 2013). I'm also drawn to Gadamer's (1960) argument that the process of understanding is not something that can be codified into methodological rules to be specified prior to the research process (Brinkmann, 2013, p.68).

These ideas fit very well with the inductive approach I have taken to decision making, by treating my research as an active enterprise of knowledge construction, which is 'bottom up' and characterized by flexibility in the research strategy (Swain and Spire, 2020). This has meant that I have needed to be continually reflexive, which has been an ongoing process that has saturated every stage of the research (Von Unger et al., 2016). Two clear examples can evidence this approach. The first can be seen in that prior to starting I was unfamiliar with the term *Bildung* and due to a chance suggestion, it has become the primary research focus. The second is that through being continually reflexive I realised that there is a clear underpinning humanistic and Socialist ideology that has gradually emerged as the research has progressed. Undoubtedly, by being reflexive, I have gained a much clearer understanding of my own beliefs and values.

It is because of my belief that overplanning can lead to missed sparks that I have adopted a similar approach to conversation with research participants. This is not to say that the research conversations conducted had no plan. As I have already explained, each conversation had clear intent. Rather, instead of a series of precise questions, I adopted, as I explain, several conversational sparks to give both purpose and space. Perhaps the best description would be to use the phrase 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess, 1988), as although I approached them as one professional colleague conversing with another, I'm aware that as the initiator of the conversations I always maintained some control of the proceedings (Burgess, 1988; Hamersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Understood as described, my research process has been intentionally dynamic, interactional and responsive, subject to continual moderation and critique, whereby I have assumed a situational relativist approach, and been reflexive and ready to respond appropriately as new ideas and opportunities have emerged (Robson, 2011; Von Unger et al., 2016).

Next, I further explore the relationship between *praxis* and *phronesis*, as well as that between ethics and politics. All four are important because they form the 'purpose' of the conversations held.

Believe in what you are doing

> *It was merely a brief announcement from the Ministry of Plenty. In the preceding quarter, it appeared, the Tenth Three-Year Plan's quota for bootlaces had been overfulfilled by 98 percent.*
>
> (George Orwell, *1984* p.266.)

A Socialist axiology is central to this research and the questions that it asks. A preliminary argument has already been presented that outlines how we perpetuate the class divide through our educational systems and particularly in Adult Education. It is, however, not simply an axiology concerned with levelling up, but one that offers a "vision of cooperation, free-expression and concern for the welfare of others" (Kitchener, 2016, p.7). In many ways this research is an exercise in free speech that seeks to not only highlight this problem but also offer an alternative paradigm for discussion. In a democratic society, alternative voices need to be heard. This is a point well made by hooks (2014) when claiming that "The future of democratic education will be determined by the extent to which democratic values can triumph over the spirit of oligarchy that seeks to silence diverse voices, prohibit free speech, and deny citizens access to education" (p25). In education those diverse voices should come from educators who have the freedom to develop their *praxis* by thinking critically and without just spending their time deliberating "about the means to achieve externally imposed ends as part of their craft" (Pring, 1996, p.110).

As previously discussed, the act of 'doing' *phronesis* is *praxis*. It is in other words, *phronesis* in action. *Praxis* that aims to deliver 'externally imposed ends' is unlikely to develop professional *phronesis* because, ideally, 'doing', as an aspect of wisdom, implies a purposeful aim for the benefit of the common social good (Staudinger & Gluck, 2011). What is crucially important is that educators 'believe' that they are educating for the 'common social good' and that those beliefs are based on ethical values, judgements and a sense of purpose. I argue that this is just as much true for researchers.

Another important aspect of developing *phronesis* is the ability to not just adopt values but to make judgements about what is 'good' for people so that they can flourish in society, part of which, in education, is to teach in a way that "overcomes injustice, irrationality and unsustainability in our societies" (Mahon et al, 2018). This is what Habermas (1972) named as critical emancipatory knowledge. A requirement of making wise judgements, and in doing so developing *phronesis*, is to think critically and "pursue global responsibility and support the well-being of others rather than focusing on pure epistemic, technical or economic aspects in their work" (Tynjala et al, 2020, p.20).

The closing paragraph of the previous section concluded that "everybody sees it differently'' (Winterson, 1985, p.93). In believing this is true then the argument follows that *phronesis* is also subjective and opinions on what might be considered professional *phronesis* is dependent on the

society and communities of practice in which it is inter-subjectively defined. This research compares definitions of *phronesis* through conversations with educators who 'believe' in how they are educating. As this research is intentionally critical, I have no illusions of being an impartial researcher and am instead trying to highlight an alternative educational paradigm for consideration. My standpoint is akin to that of the main protagonist, Winston, in George Orwell's bleakly dystopian novel about the dangers of totalitarianism, *1984*, when he writes "All that did was to keep alive in him the belief, or hope, that others besides himself were the enemies of the Party" (p.17). In this light, the methodology adopted is about fusing similar, rather than conflicting, ethical horizons through conversations that "strive to develop a community of vision" (Rader as cited in hooks 2009, p.50).

A continual revolution

Aristotle regarded ethics as examining the 'good' of the individual, whilst politics examines the 'good' of society. Research ethics is normally concerned with conducting the research process in what is perceived to be a 'good' way. The ethics of this research go beyond the *praxis* of the research process because it questions what is an ethical way to educate. As Freire (Departamento de Educação, 1997) commented shortly before his death "we are ethical beings, ethics pervades our entire existent". For this reason, ethics should not be viewed as a concept or set of rules, but rather as an ongoing dialogical social practice that is continuously and reflexively achieved (Canella & Lincoln, 2011; Roth, 2005, Swain & Spire, 2020). In this light each conversation conducted was an ethical one.

Tyjnala *et al*'s (2020) *Integrative Model of Wisdom in Professional Practice and Expertise suggests* that, along with integrative thinking and problem solving, a core process is "socially responsible action and interaction for the common good" (p.19). Following this line of thinking, it is reasonable to argue that in the context of education, ethical decisions are just as much political ones and that taking a political stance and applying it to your *praxis* is part of developing *phronesis.* It could also be argued that all research is political and that it is better to acknowledge that fact rather than claim an illusionary 'value-free' neutrality (Lather, 1991).

A particularly compelling argument that reminds us of our role in promoting the political construct of democracy comes from the American feminist educator bell hooks who wrote:

> Those of us who stay, who continue to work to educate for the practice of freedom, see first-hand the ways that democratic education is being undermined as the interests of big business and corporate capitalism encourage students to see education solely as a means to achieve

> material success. Such thinking makes acquiring information more important than gaining knowledge or learning how to think critically. (2014, p.24)

Indeed, (Griffin, 1982) goes even further with this sentiment in saying that "to keep the spirit of democracy alive requires a continual revolution" (p.25). Even the most 'value-free' neutral of educators would find it hard to argue that education has no place in developing ethical, democratic citizens. In contrast, the political theorist Hannah Arendt (1906-1975) presents the opposing political paradigm at work in education when democratic values are not a driving force, in the *Origins of Totalitarianism,* when writing "The aim of totalitarian education has never been to instill convictions but to destroy the capacity to form any" (1951, p.468).

This belief that education as a societal construct is also a political one is open to criticism by positivist researchers. For example, Hammersley (1992) expresses concerns that the politicization of research is founded on "arguments which are defective, and which serve to undermine research as a distinctive form of activity to the extent that they become widely accepted, they negate social researchers' attempts to preserve some autonomy from the state and other powerful social interests" (1995, p.7).

There is no doubt that in the current neo-liberal, technical-rational educational paradigm the accepted 'wisdom' is that increased employability equals emancipation. Likewise, the dominance of words such as 'efficiency' and 'accountability' in the educational discourse have led to a preponderance of data outputs and statistics which are seen as justifying questionable educational means towards the achievement of dubious educational ends. Replace, "bootlaces had been overfulfilled by 98 percent" with "76% of businesses believed a lack of digital skills would hit their profitability" (Elliott, 2021). These neo-liberal views and approaches to education are political and form the reality in which all educators teach. You either 'believe' in them or you don't. In reality many educators are too caught up in the 'hamster in a wheel' world of teaching to stop and think critically about what they 'believe', and often the 'truth' of education is whatever their school or college says it is.

The purpose of this research is to look beyond the narrow technical-rational, banking, 'acquiring information' view of the purpose of education and instead explore whether taking the *Bildung* approach, positioning human flourishing at the centre of our educational practice, can offer a broader, educational paradigm in which all members of society regardless of class can flourish and thrive equally in society. As previously discussed, this was part of the vision of the German Social Democrats of the 'Second International' who believed that "winning socialism meant winning *Bildung*-not just for the privileged classes" (Sacks, 2017).

Challenging power

"Phronetic social science is ultimately about producing knowledge that can challenge power, not in theory, but in ways that inform real efforts to produce change" (Schram, 2012, p.20). Phronetic social science, therefore, combines "an Aristotelian concern for *phronesis* with a Marxist concern for *praxis*'' (Schram, 2012, p.20). Through this approach my aim has been to help research participants explore their "own society and social practices and debate the goals and values that are important in their lives" (Flyvbjerg, 2012, p.49). It is for this reason that I would describe myself as a 'Phronetic researcher' because I have focused on the values of communities of practice by asking three value-rational questions: Where are we going? Is this desirable? What should be done? (Flyvbjerg, 2012, p.60). These are just as much political as they are research questions. Accompanying these three is one simple question- How do you achieve this in the classroom? It is about shining a spotlight on actions already taken rather than simply ideals to be actioned. The term 'community of practice' is discussed further on p.47, with particular reference to the work of Lave & Wenger (1991). However, John Dunne gives a particularly succinct definition of the term when explaining their evolution in regard to the development of *praxis*, when writing that they develop "cooperatively and cumulatively over time. It is alive in the community who are its insiders (its genuine insiders), and it stays alive only so long as they sustain a commitment to creatively develop and extend it sometimes by shifts which may at the time seem dramatic or even subversive" (Dunne in Carr, 2005, p.153-4).

Challenging power structures in society is surely one of the key purposes of educational research. Research should be approached not as a value-free process but as an act of democratic activity that gives a platform for diverse voices (Roose et al, 2013), otherwise, as Orwell in *1984* highlights, "if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed-if all records told the same tale-then the lie passed into history and became truth" (p.32). Although the idea that any educational paradigm may be considered to be a 'lie' is of course a completely subjective one, likewise the idea that only one educational paradigm is an absolute 'truth' is equally so, as well as being undemocratic.

Lost in Interpretation

Short and sweet? How very Japanese of you.

(Bill Murray, *Lost in Translation*, 2002)

The final section of chapter three offers a semi-autobiographical narrative that situates some of my methodological thinking on cross-cultural conversations. In doing so, I highlight my own assumptions and biases and introduce situatedness and reflexivity, whilst also further suggesting that ethics is a dynamic decision-making process concerned with doing the right thing, not simply a preconceived code to follow, but rather an ongoing part of research reflexivity.

Seven hundred and eighty-five miles East of Istanbul

In the summer of 1990, I found myself alone in a small budget hotel in the mostly Kurdish town of Van. Tucked away in the far south-east corner of Turkey, a short distance from the borders with Iran and Iraq, today it is the kind of place that most Western European travellers might think twice about visiting. It is however the setting for some conversations that I was fortunate enough to have with two fellow travellers. Their names are long forgotten to me but what we talked about has stayed with me ever since. One was a young Japanese student and the other a Belgian civil servant on a career break. Both had travelled by land from India at a time when this was still possible. I met them by chance as we passed on the hotel stairs and then spent thirty-six hours in their company. Rather than referring to them as the Belgian and Japanese traveller, I will call them Marc and Haruto for narrative purposes.

The Rock of Van

The Rock of Van is an impressive, fortified outcrop a short distance from Van, surrounded by pock marked plains from a long-fought battle between the forces of the Ottoman Empire and Armenia. Looking out from the walls in awe at the scale of the battlefield, the conversation inevitably turned to war. Having grown up on a diet of World War 2 inspired comic books with jingoistic names such

as 'Valiant' and 'Victor', I was impressed and if anything inspired. I had after all spent my whole life, up until starting at university, living on air force bases, courtesy of having a father who served in the RAF. I was standing with someone who in all my childhood comic books was either screaming 'Banzai' as they charged towards the brave Tommies or was busy treating them inhumanely as prisoners-of-war. In contrast, the same comic books portrayed the Belgians as European minnows in need of protection by their mightier British neighbours.

What I was not expecting was Haruto to be so neutral about war. He did not say that he was for or against it but just that he did not know. At the time I assumed that he was disinterested when in reality he had grown up in a society that does not discuss its imperialistic past. If anything, he was uncomfortable with the topic of conversation. Later on, I learned that after WW2 Japan was prohibited from having armed forces and article nine of their constitution declares that "the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes" (Library of Congress Law, 2020). Even later still I realised that Japanese schools "barely learn any 20th Century history" (Oi, 2013).

Marc, in contrast, was happy to talk about war and was particularly keen to stress the horrors of nuclear war. I had expected him to go on a tirade against German aggression during the two world wars, but instead he told me that the British needed to get over celebrating them because everyone else had moved on. In fact, he was much more concerned with the French considering Walloons to be just French people with funny accents and the Dutch thinking the same way about the Flemish. This was an obvious irritation and a recurrent theme in our conversations. For Marc it seemed that the most pressing threat was his national identity rather than any obvious concern with military war.

What this conversation highlights is the need to be "sensitive to historical and contemporary cultural contexts" (Crossley, 1992, p.104). Our conversation about war made me realise that history, although so often taught as fact, is more about interpretation and perspective. This presents researchers conducting conversations with research participants from unfamiliar cultures with challenges in terms of how much time they spend trying to gain background historical and cultural knowledge. It would be easy to assume that conversations about education would be less contentious than that of war, but this would be to underestimate its scope for leading into issues such as politics and morality. It also raises ethical considerations because "although respondents may be fluent in the language of the interviewer, there are different ways of saying things- or indeed, certain things that should not be said at all" (Fontana, 2007, p.43). The idea that conversations are full of unsaid thoughts is put well by the Dutch author Cees Nooteboom when writing "Conversations consist for the most part of things one does not say" (2014, p.56).

Was Haruto just being polite when I touched on an uncomfortable subject? This conversation shows that ethical research practice is dynamic as often the researcher "needs to make his or her decisions according to immediate, and sometimes unpredictable, contexts and arising issues, rather than strictly abiding by a set of pre-determined ethical principles" (Swain and Spire, 2020, p.14).

The ability to adapt and change questions and lines of enquiry makes informal conversations particularly appealing in this respect and essential to navigating conversations with research participants who have different historical and cultural narratives which can only be understood superficially even with extensive background reading. This conversation also highlights that recognising our biases and assumptions is an outcome of research conversations and not just a preparatory process.

The backstreet café

Turkey is full of smoky cafes populated by brown and grey suited men playing Turkish chequers and drinking instant chai out of small tulip shaped glasses. After our long day at the Rock of Van we decided to spend the evening in one of the numerous cafes close to the hotel. Settling down, the conversation soon turned to why we had all ended up in this remote region. Marc explained that Belgium had a scheme where someone unemployed could fill your job for up to a year so that you could take a sabbatical break. His sabbatical was to travel around the globe. He had set out ten months before and was now on the home leg. He saw this as a win-win situation and was particularly keen that the scheme gave opportunities to the unemployed. I remember asking him if he was worried about the person having done better than him and getting back to find out that his workplace did not want him anymore, but he seemed completely unconcerned. Worse things could happen seemed to be his general view. Having grown up in Yorkshire to a backdrop of mine closures and high unemployment, his lack of concern was baffling to me.

In contrast, Haruto was preparing for a life of corporate work. He explained in 'short' simple sentences that it was normal for Japanese students to take extended world trips prior to starting their career, after which the hours would be long and holidays few. I clearly remember Haruto saying, "I will work very hard for my company". I had a sense that he was almost living life before selling his soul. This of course was only my perception because he seemed very happy about the thought. We sat talking late into the night, a bit like a human Venn diagram. Conversational themes where we overlapped, yet whole life worlds that we could only ever partly understand because they had developed on the 'inside' of our different cultures, whereas our interpretations were being formulated on the 'outside'.

In research the quest to be 'inside' is known as 'situatedness', which is a ''theoretical position that posits that the mind is ontologically and functionally intertwined within environmental, social, and cultural factors'' (Costello, 2014). It is important to point out that even though this research has elements of comparative education, the main focus is on the intersection of life worlds. I return to the metaphor of the Venn diagram to clarify this idea. If each circle in a Venn diagram is the equivalent of a lifeworld, then the intersecting area where the circles meet is the zone of common interest that each participant has. It is this zone of discussion that allows participants to be on the

'inside' together and shared horizons fused. Another term for the intersection of a Venn diagram is the 'lens' which leads us to the idea that the purpose of research is to not only ''disclose what I have seen'' as Peshkin (1985, p.280) wrote, but to also bring it into focus for others. The word focus is derived from the Latin word of the same spelling meaning 'fireplace', which provides us with an apt metaphor for the research process being truly a place from which conversational sparks can fly. It is this idea of focus that is put so well by Kristin Cashore in her fantasy book Graceling (2008, p.24) when writing, "It's as if when I open myself up to every perception, things create their own focus." It is also a further perfect example of Gadamerian Hermeneutics hidden away in a work of fictional literature.

Akdamer Island

The next day we took a short boat ride from Van to Akdamer Island which is renowned for its beautiful Armenian church and almond groves. Once on the island its tranquility seemed even more remarkable as we were in a region of Turkey that was highly militarised because of the ongoing conflict with the Kurds, who are the largest ethnic group in Southeast Turkey and have long aspired to their own nation state. Our conversation meandered from the plight of the Kurds to protest in our own countries. I thought that I had the monopoly on this conversation having been present at the Poll Tax Riots in London only months before.

My assumption was that, despite the warlike image I alluded to earlier in this section, Japanese people would be far too busy meditating to be concerned with civil disobedience. I was to find out this was certainly not the case. To my surprise the polite and subdued Haruto of previous conversations became very animated and in his broken English explained that his father had taken part in the Sanrizuka Struggle of 1985, a civil conflict involving the Japanese government and the agricultural community of Sanrizuka who were opposed to the construction of a new International Airport (Brasor, 2014).

The challenge with talking to Haruto was how limited his English could be and reflecting back I am unsure how well I really understood what he said and how much was the interpretation that I wanted to hear in each conversation. If he had been a research participant this would have posed an obvious ethical dilemma in that there is a significant risk that I would not be giving a true representation of his ideas. To deny this possibility would be naïve because misunderstanding is a risk even between native speakers. As the Italian psychologist Luigina Sgarro explains, "There is no communication that is so simple that it cannot be misunderstood" (Slatkin 2021, p.95 cited Sgarro, 2021). It is of course possible to mitigate this risk to a certain extent by sharing transcripts with research participants to check, although this is only as effective as the ability of the reader. It is also reliant on the research participant feeling empowered to give critical and honest feedback. Despite

my best attempts to build mutually trusting relationships through informal conversations, I still suspect that some participants gave positive feedback on transcripts just to please me.

Having got to know Marc a little I wasn't surprised to hear that he had been involved in squatters' protests in his youth. What I had begun to notice was his repeated use of the phrase "of course" whenever I asked him if he had done something. I'm not sure why but my English sensibilities found this irritating because to me this came across as immodest. I was to subsequently discover that it is a common phrase when speaking to people from Belgium and the Netherlands. Rather than being immodest it is just a statement of fact. This example of my misinterpretation of a two-word phrase highlights the scope for misunderstanding in an extended conversation. I also wonder how often I might have unknowingly irritated a research participant!

Much of this section demonstrates the role of reflexivity in research and how in many ways it can act as a safeguard against unrecognised assumptions and complacency, as well as a mechanism to facilitate dynamic ethical decisions. Reflexivity is generally understood as awareness of the influence the researcher has on the people or topic being studied, while simultaneously recognizing how the research experience is affecting the researcher (Gilgun, 2008). For some, reflexivity is considered to be a "swamp," with "endless narcissistic personal emoting or interminable deconstructions of deconstructions" (Finlay, 2002a, p.226) in which the researcher can become lost. It has also been pointed out that it is not a cure for the problem of representing someone else's reality (Finlay, 2002; Pillow, 2003). What it does do however is provide an ''important tool that enables the researcher to stay engaged in critical self-awareness throughout the research process'' (Turner, 2003, p.5), acting as a safeguard against the misrepresentation of research participants. Any research project that is concerned with *Bildung* is by nature going to involve a high degree of reflexivity as not doing so would negate the whole idea of research being a *Bildung* forming activity.

Just thirty-six hours after meeting Marc and Haruto, I boarded a bus for Sanurfa on the Syrian border. I would never see them again. No addresses were exchanged, and mobile phones and emails were very much in their infancy. I wonder if they remember our conversations as well as I do? Research conversations are much more than data gathering exercises. Unlike the conversations I had with Marc and Haruto, my research conversations had a clear agenda and expectation. I commenced in each conversation with a hope that it would not only inform my research but also that there would be a feeling of solidarity formed by one educator conversing with another. This is a sentiment put well by the American author Marilyn Chandler McEntyre who writes that "When we converse, we act together toward a common end, and we act upon one another. Indeed, conversation is a form of activism - a political enterprise in the largest and oldest sense - a way of building sustaining community" (2009, p.37). The idea that conversation can be a form of activism fits well with the overarching intent of this research project which is a belief that, "Phronetic social science is ultimately about producing knowledge that can challenge power'' (Schram, 2012, p.20).

Chapter Four: Data Collection and Analysis

I read the story and then read it again, translating it by sight as I scanned the lines, filling in the obvious gaps, shrinking the exaggerations, deducting the half-truths and the prejudices, correcting the misinformation about things I knew of and trying to imagine the truth of the things I didn't, the facts that were unstated, the events that were undescribed, the elements that were ignored or those taken out of context and slanted by clever wording to give a predetermined impression.

Cool Hand Luke by Donn Pearce (1965 p.34)

The Design

Trustworthiness of the study

A number of steps have been taken to ensure a high degree of rigour in this study. As this is a qualitative study that does not employ an experimental design, the conventional concepts of internal and external validity, reliability and neutrality are less helpful in assessing rigour (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). Instead, steps have been taken to address the credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the findings as they were more aligned with the methodological approach and design of the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this section, each of these points is addressed to help illustrate the steps that have been taken and any possible limitations of the study, whilst discussing the reasons for adopting qualitative research methodology, "noisy, fallible, and biased though it be". (Campbell, 1975, p.179)

Design credibility

One of the key aspects of credibility relates to the 'fit' between respondents' views and the researcher's representation of them (Tobin & Begley, 2004). This is a particularly important aspect of conversational or interview credibility which becomes more complex when the respondents are speaking in a second language. As discussed in the previous chapter, a methodological problem is highlighted in that memory is a cultural phenomenon and what is 'memorable' is dependent on what a culture considers to be valued or noteworthy (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003). Because of this, there is a danger that researchers can in turn, identify themes that have greater significance to

themselves than the respondents. As I explain later in this chapter, it is for this reason that I chose to write 'thick descriptions' for the conversation commentaries.

Further to this, it would have been easy to assume that because the research participants were working within the cross-cultural phenomenon that the Folk School movement is, they would have a shared understanding of key Folk School ideas on education. However, such an assumption does not allow for the added complexity of a phenomena spreading across cultures, and whilst preserving its linguistic labels, transforming their semantic meaning. This was undoubtedly the case as I reflected on the futility of my attempts to explain the meaning of the word *Bildung* to a Tanzanian teacher, having first interpreted its meaning for myself in conversation with Danish speakers. As Wierzbicka (1996) explains, "Looking into the meaning of a single word…. can give one the same feeling of dizziness that can come from thinking about the distance between galaxies or about the impenetrable empty spaces hidden in a single atom" (p.233). As I discuss in the next chapter, the value placed on developing as an 'individual' and the benefits of doing so differed when speaking to non-European participants.

To avoid this pitfall, I triangulate the data by taking steps to confirm the credibility of those themes that I identify. The first step was a set of nine conversations with teachers from different Folk Schools who were unfamiliar to each other, with each conversation being a minimum of sixty minutes in duration. Next the themes that emerged are presented and discussed with two other 'gateway' educators responsible for pedagogical development in the Danish Folk High Schools. They are able to confirm the significance of the themes that I identify in this thesis and from this I was able to further clarify my understanding. Finally, I sent each teacher a summary identifying the key phrases, sentences and paragraphs from our initial conversation and in some cases organised follow-ups where I was able to discuss the identified themes further and each tutor was able to confirm that they were being represented 'fairly'. I was also able to present participants with themes that emerge in other interviews to assess which were familiar across the interviewees and eliminate those that could be regarded as discrepant. In some ways I was the initiator of a fledgling community of practice because sharing emerging themes with participants involved "talking within" and "talking about" a community. "Talking within" because I was "exchanging information necessary to the progress of ongoing activities" and "talking about" entailed the sharing of stories and community lore (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.109). According to Lave and Wenger (1991), "both forms of talk fulfil specific functions: engaging, focusing and shifting attention, bringing about coordination etc., on the one hand and supporting communal forms of memory and reflection, as well as signaling membership on the other" (p. 109).

I was able to further triangulate the data by contrasting the conversation data themes with those that emerged from my literature review and by analysing the pedagogical literature that the Folk Schools had recently produced (DFHS, 2019). Because the Folk Schools have been traditionally averse to standardization, or the "imposition of fixed standards" (Moller& Watson, 1944, p.91), these materials provided a rich source of data which enabled me to further assess the credibility of my findings. Although collaboration within the folk school network today is encouraged and can be evidenced in a series of books entitled *10 Lessons from the Folk High School* (2019) which includes multiple contributions from schoolteachers, and more recently an environmental project known as *Peoples Future Lab* that partners schools in the international folk school community. Both ventures

could be argued to offer a form of standardization of 'thinking', but rather than standardization as a project in conformity and state control the intention is to "strengthen and develop the folk high schools' contribution to the sustainable transition of societies… By strengthening our pedagogical *praxis*'" (FFD, 2022). If anything, the approach taken is more that of a 'community of practice' than any form of autocratic control. The choice of the word *praxis* in their mission statement is noteworthy in light of the discussion on p.42-43. It would be interesting to analyse how often this word appears within the literature written by some of the organisations tasked with developing professional development in the United Kingdom FE sector.

Some sources on how to conduct qualitative conversation/interview research suggest that data analysis can and should begin at the interviewing stage (Kvale, 1996; Strauss and Corbin, 1998). From this starting point emergent themes progressively become the focus of interview questions. This makes sense from a constructionist perspective (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995) as the researcher begins to elicit words that refute or support their developing interpretation. Although in many ways it is unavoidable, there is a danger that new emerging themes can be missed and lost to the researcher. Because of this likelihood I found having transcripts or recordings of interviews was particularly helpful to identify what I had missed. A further danger is that the interviewer may well begin to hear what they want to hear and interpret meaning incorrectly. This was an observation made by Francis Bacon (1853) when writing "When any proposition has been laid down, the human understanding forces everything else to add fresh support and confirmation. It is the peculiar and perpetual error of the human understanding to be more moved and excited by affirmatives than negatives." (1853 p.46). More recently, Miles & Huberman (1994) observe that "of course the problem is one of bias. I see the patterns I learn to see. I may miss the significance of others and just not perceive some" (Diary, 28 October 1998). To avoid this tendency towards 'verification bias', the writing of field notes is intended to follow Charles Darwin's (1958) advice when noticing discrepant themes to, "make a memorandum of it without fail and at once; for I had found by experience that such facts and thoughts were far more apt to escape from the memory than favourable ones" (p.123).

The participants

In asking the question- How can you generalise based on such a small number of conversations? - there are several key considerations. The first of these is that although there are only nine educators in the sample, they represent eight distinct cultures. Also, as far as I am aware none of them have ever spoken to each other. Some were steeped in the Grundtvigian tradition whilst others claimed little knowledge of it. Some were relatively new to the Folk School tradition, whereas others had been active within Folk School for over twenty years. It is the diversity of the participants approached that gives the study its generalizability. This is a point made by Giddens (1984) who acknowledges that although one piece of small-scale community research may not be a generalizing study, "they can easily become so if carried out in some numbers, so that judgements of their typicality can justifiably be made" (p.328).

In viewing each conversation commentary as a case study, the sampling strategy taken was that of maximum variation, with the key variant being global location. To increase generalizability and achieve the greatest possible amount of information about the phenomenon, I included not only extremes of location, but those of Folk School teaching experience and tradition (Flyvberg, 2006).

Any questions about bias in terms of the participants chosen may well be underestimating the difficulty of finding willing participants in the first place. Rather than being a matter of whom to choose it was at times more a matter of desperate pleas to people within a research network to introduce me to people who might be willing to spare an hour to talk with me. In the end all but one participant either came through introductions from fellow members of the recently formed Folk High School Research Group, a collective which did not exist at the outset of this research project, or from an international consultant at the Association of Folk High Schools in Copenhagen. As both are integral to the success of this research and with a clear investment in any research findings, I also consider them as research participants and as outlined in BERA guideline 11, 'gatekeepers' to the Folk School movement and the teachers within it. Because of this it is important in securing the trustworthiness of this research that I also gained their ongoing consent as has already been discussed earlier in this chapter.

The conversations

Rather than using a specific set of questions, open-ended ones based on specific research themes are used to create, where possible, natural conversations. Questions are modified to suit each specific candidate; this increases confirmability because it gives the opportunity to probe for a deeper understanding, ask for clarification and in some cases for interviewees to steer the direction of the interview. This was particularly the case with Participant 1 who was just as interested in my thoughts and ideas, more than likely because we had spoken to each other previously and this familiarity had an impact on the dynamic of the conversation. Because of this there was a considerable degree of variation among the conversations, with comments sparking unanticipated questions and leading, at times, into lengthy digressions about politics, individual experiences, and more often than not the weather. There is also a reflective dimension to the interviews, as the participants and I often take advantage of brief moments to gather our thoughts and share insights and stories. As one participant comments, "I've never really stopped to consider that before", as we discussed why they had become a Folk Schoolteacher. On reflection the potential that semi-structured interviews have for eliciting deep responses from participants adds an additional ethical consideration, and as Husband (2020) argues, researchers "potentially have an ethical responsibility to ensure participants are aware of the potential for such outcomes" (p.7).

Before undertaking the conversations, I knew that there were two key research questions that I wanted to explore with participants. The first of these was, 'How is *Bildung* developed in Folk School *praxis*?' and the second, 'What can be learned from Folk Educators?' Prior reading for the research literature review and conversations with 'gatekeepers' within the folk school movement mean that I was able to ask these questions with some grasp of the Folk School context, admittedly small considering the added complexity of schools being located within a broad range of cultures. Besides researching the Folk School tradition itself, I prepared for each interview by visiting school websites and researching some of the geographical, historical and political background to each school. I also purposefully checked the current weather conditions for each location as an ice breaker to put participants at ease. Such background research gave me what Lynch (1993) called a "vulgar competence" of the language and routines of the research context.

Neither question was used directly with participants. On reflection a number of important considerations became apparent as to how questions were worded. The first of these was that the term *Bildung* was unfamiliar to many of the participants. The second was the reflective nature of the research process on myself. From each conversation new themes and questions emerged and as a result, new lines of inquiry were followed in subsequent conversations. Hence the question 'Which factors influence the foundation of Folk Schools?', which became a noticeable new line of inquiry in the commentaries. For this reason, each conversation commentary not only attempts to reveal the 'wisdom' of a Folk School educator but also documents my own research reflexivity during the process.

I had originally presumed that all participants would be equal actors within conversations. In many conversations this was the case, but two inhibitors became apparent. The first was that for those participants who were speaking in their second language it was noticeable that power relationships sometimes became more pronounced than with native English speakers because I was the 'dominant' English speaker. For this reason, the written commentaries became important as a way for participants to confirm that they felt my interpretations and understanding reflected their own, giving consideration to BERA (2018) guideline 11, which highlights, as discussed in the previous chapter, the need to consider how to mitigate for understanding being lost in translation. Another important consideration was that six of the participants were speaking in their second language and because of this, I tried to stay vigilant to interpretation weariness, being mindful of BERA (2018) guideline 34's advice to avoid making excessive demands. Although most conversations lasted a little over sixty minutes, on reflection it is at this point that the first signs of weariness often became evident.

The second inhibitor was that some research participants seemed happier to follow a simple question/response structure in which I took the lead. On reflection these two inhibitors resulted in four conversations being what might be called 'authentic' conversations, four became informal interviews and one, in which there was limited time, became more of a formal interview. This raises an ethical consideration, in that the nature of the conversation can only be guided to a certain extent because 'how' and 'how much' research participants give to a conversation is, rightly so, a

matter of personal choice. In considering BERA (2018) guideline 34's advice to avoid making excessive demands on them, each conversation required me to be actively reflexive and make a response to how formal or informal each conversation would be based on how each participant was choosing to engage in our conversation.

Assuming that the success of conversations was dependent on personal choice, or even English fluency is, however, overly simplistic and could be viewed as an excuse. Dialogized Heteroglossia is the term for how individuals participate in multiple languages when conversing, each with its own views and evaluations. For example, how I talk to my children is different from how I might speak to a professional colleague. In Bakhtin's view, language stratifies into many voices, or heteroglossia: "social dialects, characteristic group behaviour, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions"(Bakhtin, 1981, p.324). With this in mind, participants could fall back on any one of many heteroglossia. It was not merely a matter of encountering different vocabularies, but a combination of experiences, ideas, perspectives and attitudes that are 'knitted together'. On reflection some conversations may well have flowed because participants had a similar 'knit' to my own. Two participants certainly fell into this category. The first was the United Kingdom participant, which was not surprising as we were both familiar with the professional jargon that accompanies working in Further Education. We also shared common ground in that we are both responsible for curriculum development and staff development. The second participant to fall into the 'similar knit' category was the Danish participant, perhaps because we are both middle aged males who are interested in art, design and philosophy. The mitigation for this was, as already highlighted, to select a sample using a maximum variation strategy.

Ethical considerations and confidentiality

This research was submitted to the Sunderland University Ethics Committee for approval which was granted. It also adheres to the British Educational Research Association (2018) Guidelines. The ethical procedure required that all participant received an email explaining the purpose of the research (see Appendix 1) and rather than a signed form, consent was assumed when confirming agreement to interview via email reply. At the commencement of each recorded conversation, I also explained verbally what would happen to the information they provided, and how the information would be used and reported. Further to this I asked them to confirm that they were happy to proceed through a series of questions and asked if they had any questions they would like to ask (see Appendix 2). This adhered to BERA (2018) guidelines 8 &9 which stipulate that, in addition to the above, participants, "should be informed about the retention, sharing and any possible secondary uses of the research data." For 'ongoing consent' I understood the process as having multiple checkpoints rather than it being assumed after initial consent was given. An example of

this came during the proofing stage which involved asking each participant for feedback whilst writing the conversation commentaries. Such an approach also gave participants ongoing opportunities to withdraw, which was explained during initial conversations.

All interviews were conducted and recorded using conference call video recording technology. Only my academic supervisor and I viewed the interview recordings, and it was agreed that the recordings would be destroyed by December 2023. The choice to record interviews was to provide a secondary source of data and to enable my full engagement in the conversations without the need to take constant notes. Tuckett (2005, p.33) suggests that the use of a recorder is necessary to counter criticism that qualitative research is, "prone to systematic bias" (May, 1991, p.190). Whilst acknowledging this, I was also fully aware of the negative influence a recording device might have on an interview as an inhibitor of dialogue because participants might be concerned about who might have access to the recordings (Rapley, 2004). This is also a potential problem posed by Nordstrom (2015, p.389), who argues that "recording devices – social science tools or apparatuses – are not mute or innocent entities that simply record interviews" when questioning the influence on data. Although on reflection, I do not believe that this was the case in this study, I did reassure the participants that I would be following BERA (2018) guidelines for the storage and disposal of recordings.

Steps have been taken to lessen the likelihood of individual participants being identifiable in this report, with interview transcriptions and commentaries having been kept anonymous in line with BERA (2018) guideline 40. During analysis and reporting of the results, each research participant has been referred to by pseudonym. To protect the identity of the participants further, only general descriptions of their work settings have been given so that individual schools are less likely to be recognised. An ethical consideration emerged because some participants shared biographical stories of crisis in their lives that potentially implicated other people. BERA (2018) guideline 21 suggests that in some cases consent should be sought from these individuals. Having discussed this with the participants and my supervisor I decided not to do so because in both cases the individuals concerned were either dead or had been estranged from the participant for a considerable period of time and as such were unlikely to read the research.

Despite taking all steps to ensure anonymity, BERA (2018) guideline 41 acknowledges that it can only be ensured to a certain extent and in some circumstances. In the case of this research there were clear reasons why anonymity might unavoidably be compromised. Firstly, the Folk School teaching community is a small, close-knit community. Secondly, the nature of some of the institutions makes it easy to infer which ones they are despite the anonymisation of conversation commentaries. One example of this is apparent in there only being one Folk school in Nigeria and only one member of the teaching staff who is also a published author.

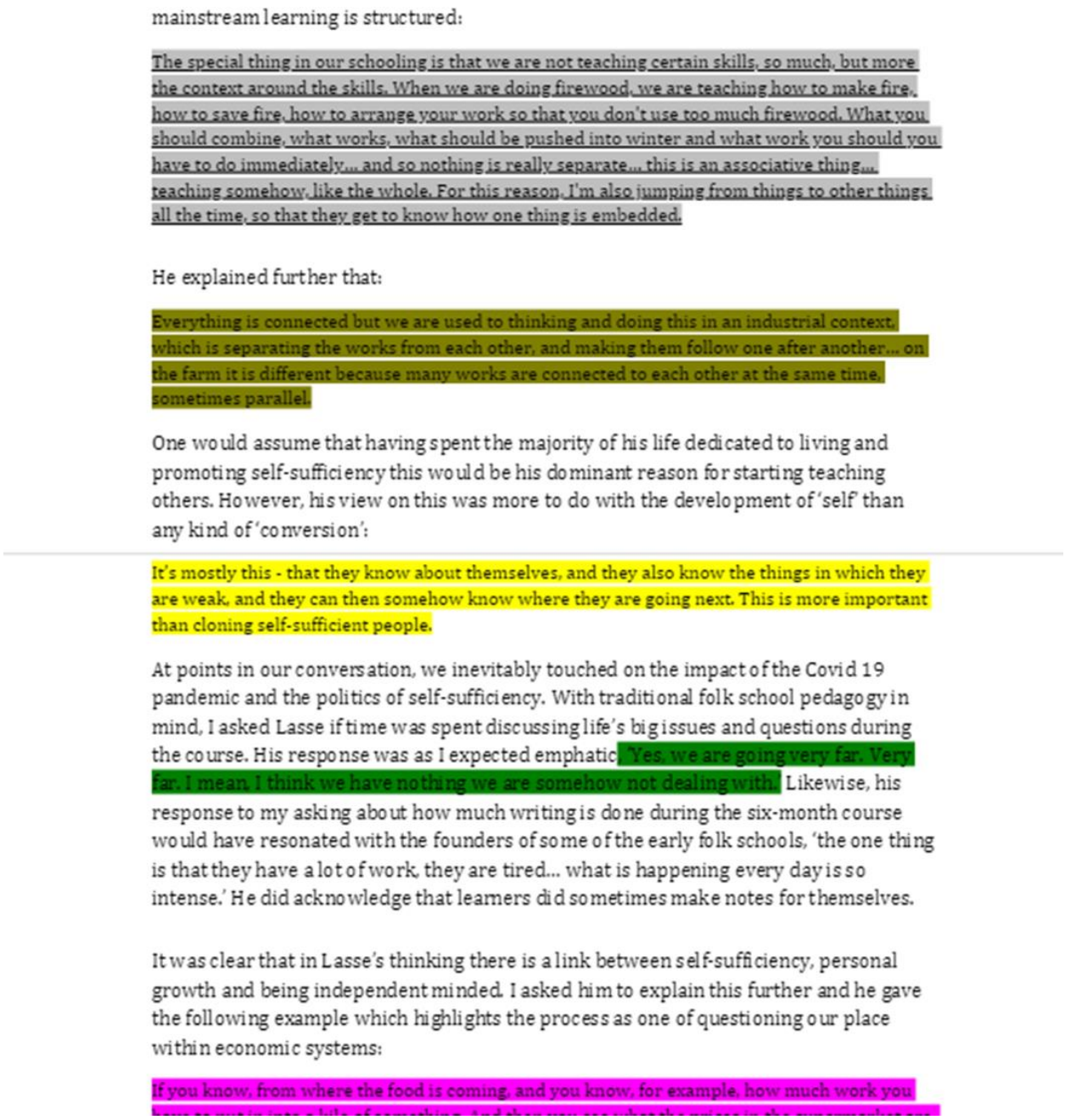
Analysing the Data

Transcription

Each of the preceding conversation commentaries were recorded using video meeting software and initially transcribed using artificial intelligence software between October 2021 and March 2022. From these transcripts verbatim quotations were highlighted and extracted to form the basis of the commentary. Despite most transcription service companies claiming that natural language processing is automatically removed, often the quotations chosen included numerous embolalia (i.e., hesitation forms in speech, meaningless filler words, phrases such as um, hmm, you know, like., etc.). These were edited out. Further to this, the accuracy of the artificial intelligence used was variable, and this necessitated cross-referencing between each transcript and video recording.

The process of coding

I attempted to approach the process of coding the conversation commentaries with an attitude of having 'fresh eyes'. Although my initial starting point of having two broad questions had led to further lines of questioning and emerging themes, this was the first time that I had read the commentaries as a whole data set. I decided that I wanted to go back to the original question I had asked myself whilst writing the literature review- Which education systems have made the *Bildung* philosophy central to their mission? It was asking this question that had led me to contact colleagues in the Danish Folk High Schools. I decided to take a two-step coding approach. The first step was to colour code the data into four *Bildung* themes, after which I then looked for subthemes within each, paying close attention to any themes that offered pedagogical insight into Folk School *praxis* (Illustration 3). The four *Bildung* themes chosen were: flourishing as an individual; contributing to local communities; acting as responsible national and global citizens; and defining *Bildung.*



mainstream learning is structured:

The special thing in our schooling is that we are not teaching certain skills, so much, but more the context around the skills. When we are doing firewood, we are teaching how to make fire, how to save fire, how to arrange your work so that you don't use too much firewood. What you should combine, what works, what should be pushed into winter and what work you should you have to do immediately... and so nothing is really separate... this is an associative thing... teaching somehow, like the whole. For this reason, I'm also jumping from things to other things all the time, so that they get to know how one thing is embedded.

He explained further that:

Everything is connected but we are used to thinking and doing this in an industrial context, which is separating the works from each other, and making them follow one after another... on the farm it is different because many works are connected to each other at the same time, sometimes parallel.

One would assume that having spent the majority of his life dedicated to living and promoting self-sufficiency this would be his dominant reason for starting teaching others. However, his view on this was more to do with the development of 'self' than any kind of 'conversion':

It's mostly this - that they know about themselves, and they also know the things in which they are weak, and they can then somehow know where they are going next. This is more important than cloning self-sufficient people.

At points in our conversation, we inevitably touched on the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and the politics of self-sufficiency. With traditional folk school pedagogy in mind, I asked Lasse if time was spent discussing life's big issues and questions during the course. His response was as I expected emphatic, 'Yes, we are going very far. Very far. I mean, I think we have nothing we are somehow not dealing with.' Likewise, his response to my asking about how much writing is done during the six-month course would have resonated with the founders of some of the early folk schools, 'the one thing is that they have a lot of work, they are tired... what is happening every day is so intense.' He did acknowledge that learners did sometimes make notes for themselves.

It was clear that in Lasse's thinking there is a link between self-sufficiency, personal growth and being independent minded. I asked him to explain this further and he gave the following example which highlights the process as one of questioning our place within economic systems:

If you know, from where the food is coming, and you know, for example, how much work you

Illustration 3: Colour coding of the conversation commentaries

This process led to the identification of thirteen subthemes within the data set which are presented in Chapter 6.

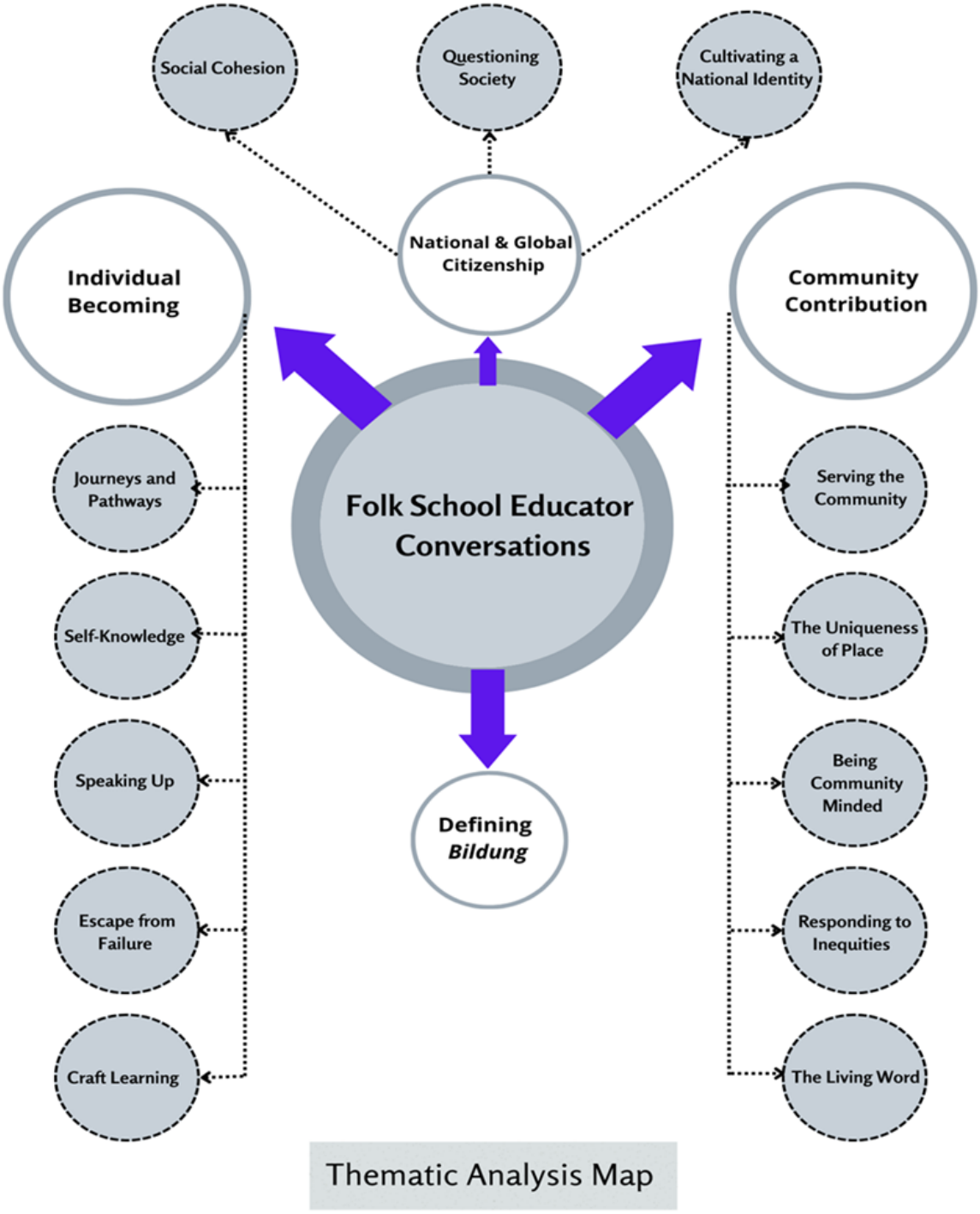


Diagram 1 –Analysis map of identified themes and subthemes

Participant proofing

A certain amount of quotation editing and re-wording for clarity was involved and to ensure research integrity was maintained each research participant was asked to proofread their conversation commentary to ensure that quotations accurately represented their thinking. Five participants asked for factual corrections. The first was a correction in the status of their workplace from local authority funded to charitable status. Two participants requested corrections to the yearly fees to attend their college. One participant actually helped to re-draft a section by reorganising a paragraph to fully represent what they wanted to say. Finally, a participant requested that further embolalia phrases be removed as, despite being Danish, they were concerned that they sounded North American.

This process of synthesis became integral to my research method because reducing conversations of approximately one hour duration and over ten thousand words down to between two and three thousand words of research relevant quotations can be metaphorically compared to 'panning for gold'. It is from this 'panning' process that the key themes emerged, and which Rapley (2011) described as, "an inherently ongoing accomplishment" (p.127).

Following a process that actively synthesised the conversations may well lead the reader to wonder what within each conversation was 'exaggerated', 'ignored', 'slanted' or left 'unstated'. Archiving and making available the video recordings, and transcripts, is intended to mitigate any doubts about the dependability and confirmability of the data in this study, and in line with BERA guideline 69's suggestion that ideally anonymised versions of data should be available for secondary analysis, an audit trail has been created via the recording and transcription of interviews, collection of interview and field notes, memos and notes accumulated throughout the coding process and conceptual diagrams created to analyse and interpret the data collected.

Justifying the analysis approach

The approach taken to conversation analysis can be considered as a hybrid of both 'discourse' and 'narrative' through a postmodernist lens that doubts that any form of 'absolute' truth exists, particularly in relation to what might be called 'practical wisdom'. Although initially I believed that the research approach taken could be categorised as 'conversation analysis', as I began to transcribe and write-up the conversations, I realised that I was taking more of a hybrid approach to my analysis. This was despite the central aim being what Harvey Sacks, one of the founders of conversational analysis, explained as follows, "Just try to come to terms with how it is that things come off…Look to see how it is that persons go about producing what they produce" (1995, 64:11).

It could be predominantly described as 'discourse analysis' because each conversation brought into play outside factors that needed to be incorporated to complete the picture and add "facts that were unstated". However, the approach taken cannot be described as purely discourse analysis based on the assertion that "discourse is use of language seen as a form of social practice, and discourse analysis is analysis of how texts work within sociocultural practice" (Fairclough, 1995, p.7).

Each research conversation commentary includes information that culturally, economically, geographically, historically and politically contextualises the participants and the educational setting in which they are employed. As Fairclough (1995) comments "what I think is an important principle for critical discourse analysis; that analysis of texts should not be artificially isolated from analysis of institutional and discoursal practices within which texts are embedded" (p.9). In some cases, this was offered by the participant during the conversation, but other information was researched post conversation. As discussed in the previous chapter, 'new cards' are created from conversational 'sparks' and for this reason each conversation led to further exploration. In some cases, this was simply researching unfamiliar political figures, in others it led to the reading of fiction works written by the participants. Where relevant these extra facts appear as footnotes. Presenting them as footnotes was purposeful because, as Richardson (1994) explains, knowledge in the social sciences is conventionally constituted as focused, hypothesis centered and linear. In contrast, footnotes create space for digressions and interesting asides. They were thus well suited to the epistemological underpinnings of my research as a journey of personal exploration and reflexivity. If anything, their inclusion is much more aligned to my personal experience of data analysis being a "a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative and fascinating process" (Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.111).

The approach taken could also be described as discourse analysis because the choice of additional explanatory facts was particularly reliant on my own insights and intuition (Denscombe, 2017, p.138). Those extra facts chosen were included on the premise of two assumptions. Firstly, that if I did not know something then there is a possibility that the reader may well be equally unaware. Secondly, part of my own responsibility as a researcher is to be actively 'filling the gaps' if they help to make sense of the research data. As each conversation commentary containing this additional information was participant reviewed, I took this as confirmation that the addition of post conversation facts met with their approval.

To a lesser degree I adopt narrative analysis because at multiple points in each conversation anecdotes and stories are shared. Within each conversation commentary I have attempted to weave verbatim quotations alongside factual information, analysis and biographical information. This has been done with a belief that incorporating elements of narrative inquiry would afford some insight into how each educator constructs meaning and develops practical wisdom from within their systems of belief - their attitudes, values and ideas that shape their sense of self (Etherington & Bridges, 2011). Underpinning this approach is the Constructionist view that reality is a product of one's own creation with each research participant interpreting the world and their experiences

through personal belief systems. Incorporating narrative analysis into the research design led to an important ethical consideration because many of the conversations touched on sensitive and personal issues that the research participants may not have, or expected to, reveal under normal conditions. This made it vital that I built rapport with the participants, listened with empathy and respected and explored their stories without making judgement (Clandinin, 2013).

Attempts to apply content analysis were discarded early in the research process because of its limitations dealing with "the meaning of the text in terms of its implied meanings, how the meaning draws on what has just been said, what follows or even what is left unsaid" (Denscombe, 2017, p.314). Having used text analysis software to identify frequent words and key phrases in the completed conversation commentaries, it quickly became apparent that the main limitation of trying to work with the data in a textual form was that it ignored its context (Graneheim, Lindgren and Lundman, 2017).

Writing the commentaries

From the outset of this study, I have tried to approach writing with an epistemological belief that it is a dynamic and creative process that is in itself a way of knowing (Richardson, 1994). As discussed in the previous chapter, rather than being committed to reason or achieving any absolute truth, such a post-structuralist approach is committed "to discourse, literally narratives about the world that are admittedly partial" (Aronowitz, 1987, p.103). Hence, the meaning and implications of terms like 'community' and 'identity' invite ongoing debate rather than being settled and simply requiring definition (Clark-Carter, 2010). It is with the belief that the writing of each commentary was a 'way of knowing' and central to the analysis process that I started their construction. Rather than assuming any explicit theoretical assumptions I instead approach them as a form of narrative inquiry with the intention of "developing descriptions and interpretations of the phenomenon from the perspective of participants, researchers and others" (Flyvberg, 2012, p.240).

Each conversation commentary is not ordered chronologically and instead involves a degree of narrative weaving in which quotations are grouped according to theme, and themes are positioned within each commentary to lead into each other. One participant comments that I had done well to "weave my random thoughts into something coherent". Just as the interpretation of each conversation involved separating and tracing key themes in the data, writing entailed distinguishing, organising and mulling over those themes that emerged. Within each narrative the form and content of my writing took shape at the same time. Richardson (1994) describes this as, "a method of discovery and analysis" (p. 516). This is consistent with an epistemological stance that posits that writing is, "an integral, extensive, and pervasive feature of the research process" (Lotz-Sisitka & Burt, 2002, p. 137).

The process of narrative weaving also had a dual process of trying to acknowledge each participant as a unique 'human being'. For this reason, I also added questions with the intention of positioning participants within a timeline. These questions explore each participants schooling, family and professional histories. Responses to these questions varied in detail, but when participants were 'open' in their responses the result was the added dimension of providing contextual insight into the source of each participant's practical wisdom.

In his autobiography *My ear at his heart: Reading my father* Hanif Kureishi (2004) writes: "I feel inhabited by others, composed of them. Writers, parents, older men, friends, girlfriends speak inside of me. If I took them away, what would be left?" (p. 255). It is with this sense of plurivocality that I approach the challenge of each conversation commentary (Hart, 2002). Unlike monologic writing, where the power to make meaning belongs to the author, polyphonic writing creates a narrative of several voices. In the words of Gómez-Pena (1995) "I have now decentred my voice and it has become multiple in its representation" (p.152).

Although aware that I could only achieve this to a limited degree, with this came a responsibility to balance the voice of each participant, my own analysis and the theorists in which that analysis is grounded. I was faced with decisions about interpretation and representation as I selected, deleted, framed, and re-interpreted the conversations as I worked towards a polyphonic representation of participants' beliefs, experiences and stories. In doing so I had to continually ask myself - How could I make sure that the theory helped to situate and clarify emerging themes? How could I ensure that the participants voices were central to the prose?

Further Reflections

Objectivity

In terms of objectivity, I have approached this research with a high degree of reflexivity and added many of my own individual experiences and details of my social background. This has been purposeful as my own values, identity and beliefs have played a role in the production and analysis of data and in shaping the research agenda (Denscombe, 2017, p329). Although the research agenda has been to shine a light on an education tradition largely unfamiliar to the United Kingdom, and one which I believe should be of interest, the focus of the preceding analysis has been to compare how nine educators have incorporated *Bildung* and key Grundtvigian ideas on education into their *praxis*. In analysing the research conversations, my own personal bias is limited to a belief that 'talk' is undervalued in the English educational system. By the nature of practitioner research, it would seem unlikely, if not dishonest, if a practitioner researcher approached their research agenda without any such acknowledgment.

Tangents

Initially I found myself diverted by some research tangents and overthinking who potential audiences might be. The first of these tangents was that I believed that ideally participants would be working with disadvantaged learners such as the unemployed or minority groups. Although many of the participants do exactly this, it was reductive to narrow down the pool of potential participants in this way. I was also interested in the parallels between Folk School and anarchist thinking at one point, and this was also unnecessarily reductive as I was giving centrality to what would become a minor theme. I also quickly found out that there is not a proliferation of anarchist Folk Educators. On reflection I was attempting to fit participants to themes that I found particularly interesting rather than letting the themes emerge from the research conversations with an open mind. Part of my own objectivity came from this process of acknowledging and eliminating deviant themes and tangents (Denscombe, 2017. p330).

Transferability

To allow outside researchers and readers to make transferability judgements themselves the conversation commentaries were, as already discussed, interwoven with supporting information about the participants surrounding social and cultural environment. This follows Lincoln and Guba's (1985) recommendation of providing a 'thick description' of the phenomenon, which is a technique that ethnographic researchers have also used extensively (Rosaldo, 1980). First introduced by Gilbert Ryle (1949) and later popularised as an approach by Clifford Geertz (1973), the concept of giving a 'thick description' can be defined as the descriptive interpretation of complex cultural situations.

Although it can be argued that taking such an approach increases the likelihood of fabrication, it could equally be argued, as Ponterotto (2006, p. 543) explained, "Thick description of social actions promotes thick interpretation of these actions, which lead to thick meaning of the findings that resonate with readers." Ponterotto called this step 'verisimilitude', which means 'the appearance of truthfulness' to the extent that the reader feels like they were present. In other words, by providing the finer details, the account gains credibility. Further to this Denzin explains verisimilitude in research as: "truthlike statements that produce for readers the feeling that they have experienced, or could experience, the events being described." (Denzin, 1989, pp. 83-84).

In chapter three I discuss at the length the subjectivity of truth and it is perhaps for this reason that I decided to present the research conversations as thick descriptions because as Geertz's explains, "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of

what they and their compatriots are up to" (1973, p. 318). His assertion that cultures are complex man-made concepts, or 'webs of significance', led to my acceptance that my interpretations of conversations would inevitability be subjective and rather than seeking to make broad generalisations about the practical wisdom of Folk Schoolteachers my task (following Peshkin above) was instead to encourage readers to, "look where I looked and see some of what I saw". As Geertz argues: "The notion that one can find the essence of national societies, civilizations, great religions, or whatever summed up in so-called 'typical' small towns and villages is palpable nonsense. What one finds in small towns and villages is (alas) small-town and village life" (1973, p. 320).

There is another dimension to the transferability of this study in that I have looked for opportunities to apply ideas that have emerged to my own setting within a local authority Adult Education service. In my role as a curriculum manager, I have continually asked myself- What might work in my own setting and what can I convince my colleagues to try? Outlined in Appendix 3 is a summary report of how the inspiration given by the subtheme of 'The Living Word' led to a service wide project entitled 'Thinking Folk' which engaged approximately four hundred and fifty adult learners in Socratic dialogue discussions. Having sent the summary report to a colleague in Norway responsible for the creation of the first university programme created to teach participants about Folk School pedagogy, it is significant that his feedback was that the project was "very much in keeping with the folk school spirit". Whilst acknowledging the 'fuzziness' of the *Bildung* concept (Roselius and Meyer, 2018), and Participant 3's reference to Folk Schools being 'fuzzy sets', there are no guarantees of transferability, but the success of such as project must surely be of interest to other similar adult learning providers.

Chapter Five: The Thinking Folk Conversations

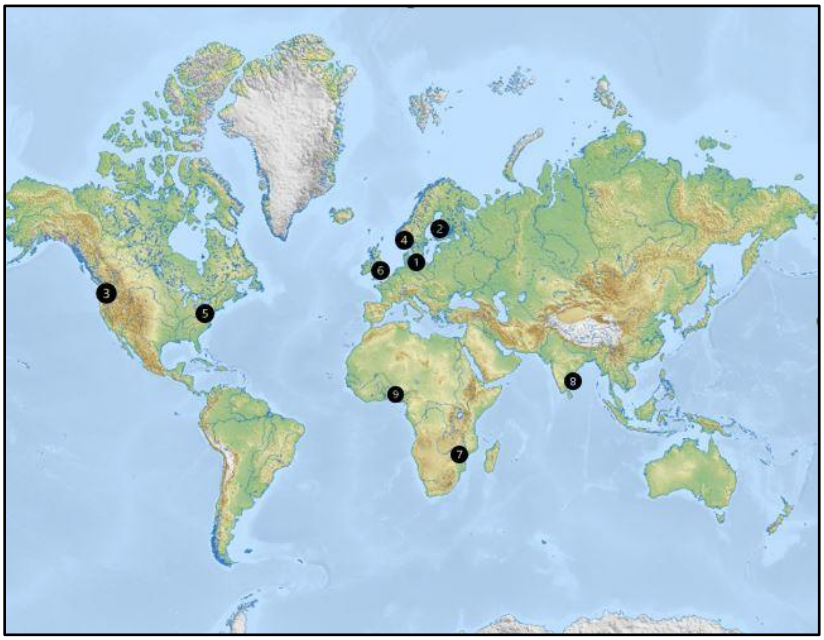


Illustration 4: Research participant locations map

	Country	Setting	Conversation Date
1	Denmark	Danish Folk High School	28 October 2021
2	Finland	Finnish Folk High School	25 November 2021
3	United States (Washington State)	Adult Community College	29 November 2021
4	Norway	Norwegian Folk High School	13 January 2022
5	United States (Maine)	Community Learning Institute	22 January 2022
6	United Kingdom	Adult Education College	2 February 2022
7	Tanzania	Folk Development College	17 February 2022
8	India	Peoples College	24 February 2022
9	Nigeria	Tertiary Vocational Institute	8 March 2022

Table 2: Participant setting and conversation dates

1. Jens - Denmark

As a teacher, we need to be more facilitating, like opening their eyes for possibilities, instead of just teaching them specific things.

I first spoke to Jens in the summer of 2020 as part of a series of conversations with Danish Folk High school teachers. Having read about the schools extensively, I decided that I should talk to some high school teachers to gain an insight into their lived experience of folk school teaching. As with any series of conversations in day-to-day life, sometimes you just click with someone, and Jens was one of those people. The conversation was easy, thought-provoking, philosophical and humorous. Because of this it was an obvious choice to ask Jens to share the first research conversation. My instincts proved correct when he remembered our initial conversation well and was keen to continue.

Jens teaches furniture, interior and product design at a Folk High school in Denmark's sixth largest city Randers, which is situated on the Jutland Peninsula. The school website is explicit about its aims and the following statement gives some insight into the approach to education taken "Excellent thoughts appear in our hands and grow into life in our heads – not the other way around." (SDS, 2021).

Growing up in "the middle of nowhere", and without a television, there was plenty of time for Jens to "do creative stuff", and as he said, "I've always been creative since my earliest memories". The first dream was to become a scenographer. As he explained, "…having these universes that you can build up, that do not really exist, and then having them for a while, and then they vanish forever. It is quite interesting, in my opinion, that you can build up a universe, like another reality." Although this ambition would remain unfulfilled, it did lead Jens to enrol at a school of architecture and afterwards to move into industrial design working with one of the biggest companies in the world on rehabilitation projects for children, designing "products that usually look crap with a child inside, to try to make them look decent." Like so many adult educators, Jens fell into the adult learning sector thirteen years ago after being asked to teach some sessions as a guest teacher. As he explained "I knew the former headmaster at the school that I'm at now. So, I just swapped into high school!".

Ironically Jens is a design teacher who is not really interested in final design products, and as he tells his students "It's super boring". Although such a view may seem surprising, Jens's reasoning may well be considered a statement of resistance against the meritocratic educational paradigm

that so prizes outcomes. As he explained, "It's the process, the process of getting there, like, how do you start with some kind of complex problem? …So, like creative minds, imagining things happening. That's what I find super interesting." Reflecting on his role as an educator, Jens explained that "my job is trying to tell people that the society as it is, is not a law of nature, that's people making it, we can change it, we can do it differently, we can build our cities differently, we can build our school systems differently. It's not like a set truth." Expanding on this, he elaborated further on the ideas presented about the importance of process over product and being open minded, "As a teacher, we need to be more facilitating, like opening their eyes for possibilities, instead of just teaching them specific things."

As the conversation progressed, more themes in Jens's teaching epistemology emerged, particularly through his reflections on how we learn. Having recently listened to a podcast about our earliest memories of learning he recounted that, "The first time they remember that they learned something was practical, like the first time I rode a bike without help… so it was a bodily feeling more than like, theoretically, I learned how to spell the word blah, blah, blah. Or I learned how to calculate this and that." He challenged me to also recall the first time that I remember learning something and it is actually a question that takes some thought. On reflection, I concluded that being stung in my endeavours to capture bees to make honey was an early, and somewhat painful, example of a learning memory.

Considering the widely acknowledged decline in the teaching of crafts in schools, his summary of our current situation will resonate with many, whilst building on the theme of "doing":

> And that just like made me think quite a lot about the way we teach because we teach only for the head. At the moment when we get our students at the high school, and they want to consider themselves creative people or they have a dream of becoming creative people, doing stuff with our hands… but young people nowadays…they can't use their hands anymore. They don't learn things with their hands anymore because there's so much in our heads. So, we had when I was in school, woodworking classes, and I learned how to knit and sew and stuff like that … I think there's a close connection between our hands and minds.

Although one would expect Jens to emphasise hands-on learning, it is the importance that he puts on the 'process' of learning and being creative in an ever-changing world that is most interesting.

Jens's first response when asked to define *Bildung* was, "I have an idea. I haven't read a lot of books about it. I've just used it more practically, like in my everyday work." This was interesting because the starting point for Jens was *Bildung* grounded in lived experience rather than pure theory:

> It's a lifelong search, or something like that, to know more and become a more complex human being… actually it's about all of these things, like teaching, learning, schooling, education, but

> also, like good behaviour, and being a nice person and being nice to the environment and stuff like that… you constantly are getting more and more bits and pieces for the complexity in yourself… like philosophising, as we do, is also *Bildung…* because every time you open your eyes and look into another subject or another person's opinion, you'll learn more. And then of course, the task is like, you could just reject it and say, I totally disagree. So, I'll just reject that and put it in the corner. But you can also take some of it in and say maybe they're right. And in my opinion, that's how *Bildung* starts, you're not like stone. How do you say? That everything is not carved in stone, you have always your eyes and mind open for other opportunities.

Expanding on this definition, Jens moved on to explain *Bildung* in the context of science:

> I think, for instance, in science, they're using creative thinking and design thinking constantly. Because we don't know, we just know that a lot of what they call black energy in the universe, we don't know what it is, we just assume it's there… and then in a few years, we'll discover something else, the Higgs particle[1] and stuff like that. We can't see it. It just needs to be there. If that's not creative thinking I don't know what is. I think that *Bildung* is to me being constantly in doubt.

We came back to a definition of *Bildung* at other points in our conversation one of which was a metaphor for the process of *Bildung* that Jens had discussed at a recent meeting:

> The Native Americans had a saying that your life goal or your purpose of life was to fill up your holy grail. Like your inner spirit[2]. That's the only thing you have to do in life. When young people are asking 'What's the purpose of my life? What do I need to do?' and stuff like that, the response would be- it's to become a better human. All through your life. You never stop learning and never stop getting better.

I know from past conversations that Jens is interested and motivated by the issue of sustainability:

> When you talk about sustainability, it's so complicated, because you can talk about it individually, you need to function well like being sustainable in yourself, before you maybe can start looking out and into the society in the world. And then you can also talk about sustainable societies. And then of course, the big hole, the society, the universe.

Listening to him it occurred to me that what I had just heard was a perfect example of the *Bildung* concept of self-actualisation leading to actively contributing to society. Jens agreed that this was exactly what it was.

Much of what Jens said was philosophical and profound, particularly when talking about hope, sustainability, and the young generation that he teaches. Jens inadvertently gave what may be

[1] The Higgs boson is the fundamental particle associated with the Higgs field, a field that gives mass to other fundamental particles such as electrons and quarks.

[2] The Inner Fire is a First Nations construct that rests in the belief that all people are born with special gifts that must be cultivated and nurtured throughout childhood into early adulthood. If this is done, the inner fire awakens and burns brightly, leading to the development of a strong learning spirit.

considered a compelling reason for developing as a *Bildung* person when reflecting on his role in encouraging hope in young students, by saying that it is about "Not necessarily hope or some promise that the problems will be solved, but almost like hope that you can develop in such a way that you can contribute to the solving of those problems."

As one would expect from a teacher in a Danish Folk High school, Jens's definition of *Bildung* clearly linked personal growth with societal contribution. What came across just as clearly in statements such as "not set in stone" and "being constantly in doubt" is the sense that *Bildung* is a continual and changing process of growth. This belief fits well with Jens's earlier statement about the world not being about "set truths".

On two occasions in our conversation Jens emphasised *Bildung* in *praxis*. The first was the role of the teacher in facilitating the development of *Bildung* as a critical thinking activity:

> When I teach for instance, then the students ask me, what do you think about this and that? And then what I do is constantly turn it around. So, you put to them, what do you think about it? I'm not giving any answers. I'm just questioning back, what do you think, then they have to start thinking and talking and telling me what they think. That's where *Bildung* starts happening. I think if I just said, 'I think it's a little bit too fat, and it needs it to be a little bit higher and green', that's not real *Bildung,* that's teaching. So as soon as I ask them back, and they have to start thinking and reflecting themselves, that's where *Bildung* is happening.

The second occasion demonstrated his belief that *Bildung* also develops through "doing":

> But I'm actually using most of my time to talk about what we're talking about, like that our teaching, and learning skills, of course, to cut with a saw, I can show you how to do it, but you need to experience it yourself. Try it out yourself. You have to make your own paint; you have to highlight your own highlights to actually get the *Bildung* going, to learn and do it your own way. I can show you what I do. But that's just demonstration or teaching or stuff like that. But that's not really *Bildung*. You have to grab, like you have to touch.

In highlighting these two ways to develop *Bildung,* I was struck not only again by the emphasis on being an active 'doing' learner rather than a passive one, but also by the distinction he made between teaching and the acquisition of *Bildung.* It was clear that he saw them as separate and that *Bildung* is not a taught process and more a process of actively working things out. This idea firmly positions teachers as facilitators of *Bildung* growth.

A sign of being fully immersed in a conversation is that the time passes too quickly. As with the previous conversation, this was the case with Jens. The intention of these conversations is to shine a light on the *phronesis* or 'practical wisdom' of educators. On reflection, three key themes emerged in relation to *Bildung* and how we should approach the craft of teaching. The first was that of learning being a hands-on 'doing' process. The second was the idea that learning is much more about the 'process' than the 'product'. The third is the need for educators to facilitate learning that allows learners to develop in such a way that they can flourish and contribute to an ever-changing and

uncertain world. As such, curriculum needs to put less emphasis on knowledge and more on those skills that allow learners to deal with and transcend change.

2. Matti - Finland

Service, this is about knowing yourself, and then choosing how you want to live your life, and then deciding where you fit in with society. And if you decide you want to be in the centre of it, or if you decide that you want to be on the edge of it, this kind of knowing yourself makes you know where you're going to be in that community.

Matti runs a school of self-sufficiency in collaboration with a Folk High school in Northern-Karelia, Finland. Teaching crop gardening, ecological building, handicrafts and more, the purpose of the school is to "provide a broad range of knowledge and guidance for people interested in living on their own terms and working with their hands. To learn and develop alternative models of living in harmony with the finite resources nature has to offer."

I was particularly interested in having a conversation with Matti because of his reputation for not only being someone who lives completely self-sufficiently, having done so successfully on between thirty and fifty euros per annum for many years, but also because of his reputation for being a radical social thinker. Having read his publication '*The Foundations of our Life*' prior to our conversation, I could recognise clear humanist[3] and transcendentalist anarchist[4] principles underpinning his personal philosophy and I was interested to know how these had influenced his approach to teaching. It was also apparent that his whole life so far has been a fiercely independent learning journey, very much in the spirit of *Bildung*.

If a fusion of horizons[5] involves a contrast of environment, then this was certainly it. Having lived a relatively conventional city life for the majority of my life here, I was in conversation with a man who has lived the majority of his in a log cabin deep in a Finnish forest. From the dark cabin

[3] Humanism is rooted in the idea that people have an ethical responsibility to lead lives that are personally fulfilling while at the same time contributing to the greater good for all people.

[4] Transcendentalism is a philosophical movement that developed in the late 1820s and 1830s in the eastern United States. Transcendentalists believe that society and its institutions—particularly organized religion and political parties—corrupt the purity of the individual.

[5] The term 'Fusion of Horizons' was coined by the German philosopher Hans-George Gadamer (1900-2002) and describes the merging of perspectives which in hermeneutics is seen as an essential feature of the understanding of an unfamiliar culture.

walls to the home spun jumper, I was in no doubt that Matti's is a different world from the busy suburban one just outside my door.

I was interested to know the catalyst for Matti's journey into self-sufficiency, as what is now considered an extremely topical theme in the light of global warming was a much more radical lifestyle choice thirty years ago. He told me that during his childhood in Germany, as the son of Finnish immigrants, "I was as a small child already quite far into electronics, and physics. And so that seemed to be the natural choice of my life." This early fascination with science seems to have led Matti to a point where he began to consider science in terms of moral ethics in his mid-teens:

> I started to think, what would it mean, if I later, for example, worked as a researcher, something in a laboratory. At the time I was also interested in the history of physics, for example, those guys who created the basics of nuclear physics naively thinking that they were doing something good for mankind…then I was, yeah, that was actually the kind of physics I was also interested in, and I thought, okay, I delegate all the results I'm working on to other people, and they are doing something with it. I thought maybe I'm not really fond of this. …in normal life, we give away the responsibility of what kind of food we are eating and almost everything …and then I came to the result that actually the only responsible life is to take back all these delegated things.

With this thought Matti originally intended "to migrate back to Finland and occupy some forests and build up my project illegally… like, you know, Rousseau[6] and Henry David Thoreau[7] . I had these thoughts about the law of nature that everybody has a place where he can stay and make his food and get shelter." He was however able to take a more legal route with the help of his parents to purchase the land which he has now occupied for over thirty years.

Initially Matti was unsure about the term *Bildung,* until I realised that the term, although familiar in Finland, is more commonly known as *Sivistys.* He explained to me that to him it meant 'culture' and "also about a good life, I mean, in a moral way…not selfish… you want to serve other people." I was interested that even though Matti has largely withdrawn from society, his definition was more to do with contributing to it. I asked him about this, and he expanded further:

> I'm not really living in a community because I prefer to live abroad from the community. But when I see something, or I have a thing that I should tell, then I go into the community, but after that I withdraw again. Thirty years ago, I didn't know if I should be in the community. Or where should I be. What is my role? It lasted for many years until I got a feeling that my position in the community is not really at the centre of community. It's at the border.

[6] In the 1753/4: *Discourse on Inequality* Jean Jacque Rousseau set out his views on the fundamental nature of man, and on the origin of society, private property and conflict.

[7] *Walden* or, *Life in the Woods*, is a series of 18 essays by Henry David Thoreau, published in 1854. The book was a record of Thoreau's experiment in simple living on the northern shore of Walden Pond in eastern Massachusetts (1845–47). Walden is viewed not only as a Transcendentalist treatise on labour, leisure, self-reliance, and individualism but also as an influential piece of nature writing.

I asked him what it meant to serve society and in his explanation he gave a fascinating interpretation of the *Bildung* process of self-enlightenment preceding public-enlightenment:

> Service, this is about knowing yourself, and then choosing how you want to live your life, and then deciding where you fit in with society. And if you decide you want to be in the centre of it, or if you decide that you want to be on the edge of it, this kind of knowing yourself makes you know where you're going to be in that community.

For a man who has largely kept himself "at the border" of society, I wondered if his decision to collaborate with a Folk School had been a problematic one and it was it clear that it had initially been a concern:

> The thing is that with this collaboration I was expecting, as an old anarchist, that collaboration with the mainstream might be difficult because I have kept myself very strongly out of dependencies. When we started this collaboration, I'm really wondering, how could we find creative, fantastic people from the mainstream to work with… but they give us freedom to arrange things… normally with many of these folk schools, they want to control the teaching somehow.

In many ways Matti's school is a wisdom sharing exercise. A sharing of over thirty years of self-sufficiency wisdom. I was interested in how Matti viewed the structuring of the knowledge and skills needed to live a self-sufficient existence and how this impacted on the learning process. His thoughts were in contrast to the linear way that much mainstream learning is structured:

> The special thing in our schooling is that we are not teaching certain skills, so much, but more the context around the skills. When we are doing firewood, we are teaching how to make fire, how to save fire, how to arrange your work so that you don't use too much firewood. What you should combine, what works, what should be pushed into winter and what work you should you have to do immediately… and so nothing is really separate… this is an associative thing… teaching somehow, like the whole. For this reason, I'm also jumping from things to other things all the time, so that they get to know how one thing is embedded.

He explains further that:

> Everything is connected but we are used to thinking and doing this in an industrial context, which is separating the works from each other, and making them follow one after another… on the farm it is different because many works are connected to each other at the same time, sometimes parallel.

One would assume that having spent the majority of his life dedicated to living and promoting self-sufficiency this would be his dominant reason for starting teaching others. However, his view on this was more to do with the development of 'self' than any kind of 'conversion':

> It's mostly this - that they know about themselves, and they also know the things in which they are weak, and they can then somehow know where they are going next. This is more important than cloning self-sufficient people.

At points in our conversation, we inevitably touched on the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic and the politics of self-sufficiency. With traditional Folk School pedagogy in mind, I asked Matti if time was spent discussing life's big issues and questions during the course. His response was as I expected emphatic, "Yes, we are going very far. Very far. I mean, I think we have nothing we are somehow not dealing with." Likewise, his response to my asking about how much writing is done during the six-month course would have resonated with the founders of some of the early Folk Schools, "the one thing is that they have a lot of work, they are tired… what is happening every day is so intense." He did acknowledge that learners did sometimes make notes for themselves.

It was clear that in Matti's thinking there is a link between self-sufficiency, personal growth and being independent minded. I asked him to explain this further and he gave the following example which highlights the process as one of questioning our place within economic systems:

> If you know, from where the food is coming, and you know, for example, how much work you have to put in into a kilo of something. And then you see what the prices in the supermarket are. Then you will realise that there's a contradiction you can't really solve. And then you start to think, why? How can it be? So, in our society this can't be done in an ethical, or in a responsible work way.

In many ways Matti's time has come in terms of interest in the wisdom that he has about self-sufficiency. He is a good example of a radical thinker whose ideas have become increasingly accepted as wise by mainstream society. This is something that he is aware of, as he showed in his reflections on how many years he had spent prior to being "at the border" of society:

> I started to get into touch with people who are activists working on ecological issues and also political alternatives. For many years I didn't find any person who really wanted to make the jump into a system like this. I think it was about 10-15 years until the first people were brave enough or got brave enough. I really realized that in many social changes, there is this time of fifteen years before people can face a new thought until something happens.

If every teacher should be a philosopher, then Matti would certainly meet that requirement. For him, self-knowledge or self-formation is not a process of preparation for contributing to organised society. Instead, it is a process that helps the person decide how, and to what extent, they might wish to. His interpretation of self-sufficiency moves beyond food and shelter and also encompasses mental self-sufficiency and freedom of thought. This gives us a uniquely anarchist perspective on *Bildung* and self-sufficiency. Too often the assumption is that anarchist pedagogy is about free learning and the absence of control. Learning how to be self-sufficient in a Finnish forest is quite literally a matter of life and death and certain knowledge is essential. If an individual chose not to grow crops and instead only chop wood, they would probably die of starvation! There is no doubt that Matti teaches with structure and a clear intent, but as a process of liberation rather than

indoctrination or control. His is a philosophy akin to that of the German philosopher Max Stirner[8] who wrote "Let the universal culture of schooling aim at an apprenticeship in freedom, and not submissiveness." In effect what Matti does is share his self-sufficiency knowledge to give people the tools needed to be independent in thought and action. Within this interpretation of *Bildung* and Folk School education there is no presumption that individuals will seek public enlightenment or democracy, merely that they will be independent minded enough to come to their own conclusions.

3. Linda - Washington, USA

You stick your finger in the ground and you smell where you are, that is where you find the needs of the people at a particular time and place. And that is where you find the folk school calling.

Linda works for the Folk Education Association of America whose mission is to "facilitate community-based, learner-led education as a strategic tool for community organizing" in a process that "entails participants, learners, or constituents being seen as leaders, collectively finding ways to use their voices and actions for social change in defiance of the weakening power of people's voices in the face of unaccountable politicians and corporations" (FEAA, 2021). I first met Linda at a Danish Folk High school research meeting and, having realised that prior to discovering Folk Education she had worked in community education, I thought it would be interesting to speak to someone else with experience in my own sector.

After thirty years working in education, I was interested in where her career began because this research is ultimately about learning journeys and these professional journeys say much about the types of educators who gravitate towards Folk Education:

> There was the opportunity for me to study Native American culture and to do student teaching in a native community. I went into this Native American immersion program where I studied Navajo culture in the Southwestern United States for a year. I was then placed in a Bureau of Indian Affairs boarding school, which of course, do not have a very good reputation.

So often it is the people that we meet as educators in our formative years who shape us professionally and from whom our practical wisdom comes:

[8] Johann Kaspar Schmidt (25 October 1806 – 26 June 1856), known professionally as Max Stirner, was a German post-Hegelian philosopher, dealing mainly with the Hegelian notion of social alienation and self-consciousness. Stirner is often seen as one of the forerunners of nihilism, existentialism, psychoanalytic theory, postmodernism and individualist anarchism.

> I ended up teaching there as a first and second grade teacher. And during my teaching experience, and in that school, we had a Navajo grandma, who would come to class. She didn't speak English, or she didn't speak English to me at least. In the classroom, the approaches that were most successful was the combination of culture and whatever topic area, math or language. We did a lot of storytelling and writing those stories down and then reading and acting them out. I remember one particular student called Freddie who had some pretty difficult mental health issues. But when we started to do string games, in the wintertime, when the snow hits the ground, then the Spider Woman goes to sleep and, and then the Spider Woman stories come out and the string games come out… I just remember, he could attend to nothing until we got to Spider Woman and string games. Then he was so focused on learning the string games and listening to the stories. There was no expectation that we would, that we would integrate Navajo culture into our classroom practice.

Sometimes it is only later that the impact of our teaching experiences becomes clear to us in our professional epistemology. This was a point acknowledged by Linda when she reflected on these early experiences:

> It really didn't hit me until later about the significance of culture, learning and identity, and becoming a person and becoming part of a group, a community.

It was also during this time that Linda found her passion for fibre crafts, sharing a particularly evocative memory of a time that would firmly set her on the Folk Education pathway:

> The grandma that came into our classroom was a weaver and a quilter. On the weekends, I was able to go and stay with the local weavers' guild and watch her weave… she gave me the job of picking the vegetable matter out of the fibre as she was spinning and then it ended up in a rug. I cannot now live without doing fibre arts. There was some of that in my upbringing too. I'm from a family of eight and from my mother we all learned to sew and to crochet. Now I spin my own yarn and that sort of thing. I do that as sort of a hobby on the side.

I asked Linda about her experience working in Adult Community Education and again found her recounting a time working with disadvantaged learners. This time those who did not have a high school diploma:

> In the US system, during the welfare reform days, the project that I did, when I first came back from Peace Corps[9], was a supported work program. During the time of Clinton people were being thrown off their public assistance, regardless of their barriers to success, being forced to work at whatever it was, no matter if you had three disabled children. No matter what, you had to put your kids in childcare, and you had to find yourself a job slinging hamburgers or cleaning hotels, whatever it was, in order to continue getting assistance.

Although I was not surprised to hear Linda talking about the familiar adult learning terms of 'competencies' and 'holistic assessment', I was particularly interested in how both had been

[9] The Peace Corps is an independent agency and volunteer program run by the United States Government providing international social and economic development assistance.

employed in a scheme that genuinely seemed to value learners' current and past skills and knowledge:

> There are many barriers for folks that don't have a high school diploma, they're paid miserably, that sort of thing. On the high school 21 program the way that we did it was we assumed if you're an adult, living your life, you probably have these competencies. So, one of the things that we did was when people came in and said, 'Hey, I want a GED[10], I need to take this test and get my high school diploma, because my job is requiring it, or I want a better job', I said, 'Well, you can do the GED, which is a test that if you're a good test taker, I'd recommend that route. But if you're not a good test taker, or have had some barriers in your background, then maybe look at high school 21'. They would meet with a counsellor and go through their work history and talk with them about their life and what they had done and how many kids they have. Trying to get the holistic picture of a person. Then we could give high school credit according to what evidence of competency was in their job descriptions, and evidence of competency that could be validated through their story… we'd award credit and say you've got this left to do in order to get your diploma. They could do these standard modules that we had or work with a faculty member to figure out how to demonstrate that competency. One of the examples that I that I like to give is that there was this guy who was learning how to do his own brewing and distilling.

In email exchanges with Linda, I had noticed that she referred to North American Folk Schools in terms of waves and I was interested in what she described as a 'new' Folk School:

> The way that I'm defining that is that late nineties to now is a sort of wave of new folk schools. And when I asked the founders of these folk schools why, they said the way that we are living lives that divide us from our immediate community, whether it's technology or work, the amount of work that we do, and that sort of thing…this desire to find connection with your immediate community. And because technology is not serving that, and then combine that with this DIY movement, doing for yourself self-sufficiency. It's sort of an echo of back to the Landers[11] from the seventies. I've found that some of the founders or staff from new folk schools are those that in their youth bought a plot of land and tried to make it work but then got to the point where they couldn't keep doing that because their body just could not turn out what they needed to turn out in order to make a living. And then they started teaching, and then thought - Okay, let's do folk schooling.

Face-to-face communication and sustainability are both key themes of modern living and are directly connected to the wellbeing and mental health agenda. Whichever wave a Folk School emerges in, the recurrent mission is the development of *Bildung* that counters the issues that

[10] The General Educational Development (GED) tests are a group of four subject tests which, when passed, provide certification that the test taker has United States or Canadian high school level academic skills. It is an alternative to the US high school diploma.

[11] Back-to-the-landers are people with no agrarian background who migrate from the city to the countryside to adopt a radically new agrarian or artisan lifestyle. Their motivations are linked to the search for a simpler, self-sufficient, autonomous, close-to-nature, and ecological way of life.

society is facing. Whether it is Grundtvig's vision of a popular education movement that would empower the rural population, or Horton's mission to educate and empower adults for social change, both were considered as educational activists who questioned the wisdom of the status quo. As Linda explains, Folk School educators see themselves as disruptors of this status quo:

> But the people who were setting up these schools are about creating a counterculture, because it's kicking against the state's system. What is the word? It wasn't counterculture that they said, it's a different word. But it's disruption of this trajectory and in our culture in North America. They're disruptors, that's how they saw themselves, although when I asked them if they saw themselves as activist, they were like, 'Oh, no.'

It's interesting that they did not consider themselves to be activists despite having an overarching mission statement that many external readers would interpret as a call to activism.

What was so illuminating was the global view that Linda was able to give of the North American folk schools. In her own research she has also been asking questions around what defines Folk Schools, and I was struck by three observations. The first was the importance of place:

> Well, here's the quote that I just love, and that I have shared with the Folk School Alliance … you stick your finger in the ground and you smell where you are, there is where you find the needs of the people at a particular time and place. And that is where you find the calling of the folk high school or folk school calling.

Another was the metaphor she used for Folk Schools being unique and not a process in identikit school creation or standardisation:

> People ask, what's a Folk School? And I say it could be a lot of things… there's this mathematical term about fuzzy sets[12] and that is what folk schools are like.

The final observation was perhaps the one that appears to challenge the least but is if anything the most direct challenge to the status quo in the light of the neo-liberal drive for increased individual economic capital which has done so much to push arts, crafts and humanities to the periphery of education:

> A folk school is what emerges from the people's need. And in North America, the need is this social cohesion around what might be called the historic poetic: the art, the dance, the culture that makes us tied to our place. It's also the way the historic poetic fits into the people's enlightenment.

When I asked Linda if she was familiar with the term *Bildung* she said that she was although not with any developed understanding. Despite this she was able to encapsulate the concept, without realising it, later in our conversation:

[12] Fuzzy set theory is a mathematical method that allows users to consider concepts that are subject to degree-vagueness between boundaries of full membership and non-membership.

> I really think that what the folk high schools are doing on a massive scale with their population is to create a population of philosophers. This is the process of finding out who you are, who you are in your society and in your small community, and then taking that out to the broader world global perspective. And doing it in a way in which you create and you're critical of yourself… Is this assumption still true here? Is this true for me? Is it true for my society? Is it true for everyone?

The key theme that emerged from our conversation was the importance of 'place' and I could recognise many parallels with the public space philosophy of 'placemaking'[13]. Although Folk Schools emerge to counter and disrupt social and political problems, they form their identity, as does 'placemaking', from a local community's assets, inspiration and potential. It is this uniqueness of place that gives us the fuzziness of defining a Folk School.

In this research I have purposefully spoken to educators in countries at different stages of folk school emergence. In Scandinavia, the founding of new Folk Schools slowed over a hundred years ago and they are fully assimilated into national identities, whereas in North America, despite a long tradition that notably includes the Highlander and John. C. Campbell Folk Schools, they are still in a period of significant growth and still considered to be more radical than mainstream education. Between 2010 and 2020, the number of new Folk Schools more than doubled from 48 to 112. Significantly less than half of them state Grundtvigian/Scandinavian folk philosophy as part of their mission statements or founding stories (Murphy, 2020). This implies that Folk Schools, no matter how much they may have in common, emerge less from a passed-on tradition and more as a response by educators who share certain political and philosophical beliefs: humanism, anarchism, anarcho-syndicalism and democratic socialism to name just three.

Understanding Folk School requires an understanding of politics, philosophy, people and place because it is from these four that folk schools emerge. My conversation with Linda, although it passed too quickly, opened up my thinking and highlighted new ideas that may not have appeared whilst talking with educators working within more established and traditional Folk Schools.

[13] With community-based participation at its centre, an effective placemaking process capitalizes on a local community's assets, inspiration, and potential, and it results in the creation of quality public spaces that contribute to people's health, happiness, and well-being.

4. Jan - Norway

It's respect and attitudes to other people. It's understanding your position in life. It's working for other goals than where we are right now and thinking how should we reach them? And it's also very focused on letting young people think positively about themselves.

Jan is a trained nurse and has a master's degree in English. He has taught travel and tourism at a Folk High School in Porsgrunn, South-east Norway for more than thirty years along with many years' experience teaching English and tourism at an upper secondary school. This gives Jan not only a longitudinal view of how Folk Schools have changed over time but also a unique insight into the differences and similarities between the two educational sectors. Jan was the first research participant to teach what is generally considered to be a vocational subject, being a staple of many further education colleges in the United Kingdom. This assumption was soon dispelled as he explained the title of the course to me:

> The new travel life', is the name of the course. But I tend to turn these words the other way around and say, 'to travel life'. I'm trying to prepare them for the rest of their life journey, not only traveling physically, but to give them different elements, different methods to try to integrate in their own lives.

He did acknowledge that when first starting to teach the course, it had been more common for students to carry on and pursue employment in the travel and tourism sector:

> When I started travel tourism thirty years ago, maybe if I had thirty students, maybe seven or eight would go on to study tourism, hotel, leadership, etc. But today, maybe one or two. So today it is more like expanding and experiencing… Fifty years ago, there were mostly people from the surrounding villages coming to stay for half a year. They were very different schools and a lot more practical with carpentry, welding, cooking, but it started changing in the late 70s and early 80s.

As he began to explain the purpose of the course, a clear epistemology began to emerge from its key aims that focus on the development of the individual. Jan is particularly interested in deep knowledge and explained that "International understanding is part of my focus…also understanding the background of a culture, like when we're in Australia, understanding the aborigine culture, not just trying to be open minded." I was interested in his belief that being open-minded is a relatively shallow level of understanding and he expanded on this when recounting school travel experiences:

> In New York, if we have the opportunity to talk to Native Americans, for instance, what is their story? That is so important, because people have so many different levels of stories, we have this

> surface story, who are you? What are you doing? These are surface things. And the deeper we get, the more interesting it is, what is the real story?

I asked him for an example of a conversation in which he had encountered such depth and he recounted a time in Edinburgh when he spoke with two Native Americans who were traveling the world, "We had a fantastic conversation about how it is possible to forgive …they were not bitter, but they had their stories. And that's part of my scheme, part of my plan to find a story and to go deep into the story." I was reminded of previous conversations with Folk Schoolteachers who similarly brought ethics into day-to-day conversation by using Socratic dialogue methodology.

Underpinning Jan's course aim of encouraging students to understand people's stories and look beyond the surface is a belief that they are fundamental to respecting others:

> I teach the root of the word respect[14]; I need to look again. What does that mean? It means never to judge anybody from the first impression, you have to go deeper and deeper and really see that person again. Of course, we can't do that all the time. But when we do it, when we have this opportunity, it's fascinating. It's a question of simply understanding people and respecting people, seeing them again for what they really are.

For Jan it is, however, about more than understanding stories and depth of conversation. It is also about the simple actions that he encourages his students to take to show respect. The importance of how we think, and act towards others was a common theme in our conversation. One example of this was when he explained how students were encouraged to treat people on a trip to one of the poorest countries in Europe, Moldova[15]:

> Say something about what are they proud of. Don't see that the walls are almost falling down and the dirt. If they have something, they have a picture of the wall, comment on that. If they have some flowers outside the house, comment on that, focus on something they're proud of instead of seeing all the negative things. People have the need to be appreciated.

It was clear that the habits and values that Jan promotes in his course are those that he practices in his own teaching with his approach to pastoral care. When asked about methods that transfer from Folk to State school, he stresses the importance of getting to know students because the focus on grades in state schools can create an environment where, "maybe they haven't been seen." He recounts a time when teaching a particularly disengaged teenager:

> A few years ago, I had a student who was away most of the time. He was not coming to school, and when he was there, I didn't see him. So, I asked him to come to my office…and he had a kind of shield in front of him. But my question to him was, 'Roger, I don't know you so much, you haven't been here so much, I want to know you as a person. Who are you?' After that he lost all

[14] The word respect comes from the Latin word "respectus" meaning attention, regard, consideration or to look again.

[15] Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Europe, with a GNI per capita of $4,570 in 2020.

> his defences and we had a lovely conversation…people are people first, and then they can learn English afterwards… everybody has the need to be seen, to be appreciated.

From previous conversations I had identified that, in comparison to state education, writing takes a low priority in folk high schools. I was interested to know Jan's view on this because for so long he has had a foot in both systems. His thoughts on this show an active intention to counterbalance the overuse of writing in state education:

> When I started in 1993, they were writing reports after each journey, and we were writing a lot. Today there is very little writing. I think secondary education has destroyed that in a way because they are so fed up with things when they come here… they want to experience something different…probably 80% of the students coming here are fed up, they're so tired.

Jan's beliefs were laden with the *Bildung* philosophy and its focus on individual growth and Gadamer's term 'Fusion of Horizons'. I was interested in his interpretation of the term *Bildung*:

> It's respect and attitudes to other people. It's understanding your position in life. It's working for other goals than where are right now and thinking how should we reach them? And it's also very focused on letting young people think positively about themselves.

Expanding on this further, Jan went on the explain his use of a concept that he called 'The Three Pillars'. He called the first of these 'Life Quality', which he explained through a series of questions that we should all ask ourselves, "What do you fill up your life with? With what kinds of events? How do you plan your life? What kind of qualities do you put into life? Because that's free choice, you have to know what you want to focus on." The second he described as, "how you master your life with positive thinking." Central to this is the 'yes, but' method. As I was unfamiliar with the term, he described it as follows:

> If you have something positive before the comma, like today there is a blue sky but tomorrow it's going to rain on the other, you have a negative focus. Tomorrow is going to rain, but the day after the sun will shine again is positive. And what does that do to a person to think that way? It's, a simple method to focus on positive things.

For Jan positive thinking is "also part of *Bildung"*. The third pillar he described as "The Joy of Life", which is the sum of the first two because "if you learn how to fill up your life with events that you really want, and if you learn how to think in a positive way, the result is often life joy". Expanding further, Jan described this approach as having an "open attitude to life". He again explained this through the types of questions we should ask ourselves, "How can you contribute as a person? …I asked life, what have you to offer me? The answer came, what have you to give? …the more you give, the more you're offering, the more you receive, the more joy you experience in life."

Jan had already referenced assemblies, church, and other Christian terminology during our conversation, and I was interested in how his explanations included phrases such as 'the answer came back to me', as if the individual is in conversation with some form of higher power. He teaches

at a Christian Folk School and explained to me that almost half of Norway's Folk High Schools[16] are either owned by, or are closely connected, with Christian organizations or denominations. I asked him how strong he feels his own faith is, and being a natural storyteller, he gave an insight into an event that made sense of much that we had discussed:

> I was walking towards Santiago de Compostela[17] a few years ago…and I had the kind of focus on God every day. And one day, I was really going to challenge God. Saying, okay, all these bad things happened in my childhood and breaking my neck in Peru and almost dying. Why did they happen? I really want an answer. He told me that I survived, and I'm not paralyzed. … and that taught me that if we decide the plan, then it often doesn't happen that way. But if we see all the alternatives, all the things that are happening that are good… we shouldn't be so focused on one narrow road because then we won't see all these sideways that are so important in our lives. And that was a real revelation.

In many ways the conversation progressed in a way that Jan had described as going "deep into the story". Often, clues to the later emergence of practical wisdom can be found in a teacher's story and I was interested to go deeper and find out more about his early life having listened to him refer to "bad things" in his childhood. It was particularly interesting that he could recognize their impact on the teacher he is today:

> I had a rather dramatic childhood because my parents divorced in the 1960s and that was quite uncommon. My mother was an alcoholic and my father kind of just ran away. Even though he was there, and he was living close by. I lived with my uncle and aunt for five years, in a village not very far away, about an hour from here. So that childhood experience was not very good. I never share that story with my students or pupils, but when they say something, they know intuitively that I know how they are, what they have experienced. And they can tell me their story.

A turning point for Jan came aged sixteen when he started at High School in Secondary Education, "learning all these things that I'd been longing for, like French, German and English. All these things that were a part of me, but it had never been realized". Rarely do I talk to teachers who describe their own education in terms of 'freedom', but this is exactly how Jan described his own feelings at this point in his life, "I experienced this kind of freedom, getting all the things that had been locked up in a way and that I had never had a chance to do. I was very interested in the world as such, but then I never travelled... but it was kind of inborn". Although he would initially study nursing at university, he knew that it was not the career path that he wanted to follow because "I love freedom. Freedom is the most important thing. And in the nursing system, you have a hierarchy of who you are. This is your place here, you should function. And I couldn't stand that." This freedom

[16] There are 80 folk high schools in Norway. Some schools build on a Christian foundation, while others –called liberal schools – are not based on one particular belief or faith. The first folk high school in Norway, Sagatun, was founded in 1864.

[17] The Camino de Santiago (the Way of St. James) is a large network of ancient pilgrim routes stretching across Europe and coming together at the tomb of St. James (Santiago in Spanish) in Santiago de Compostela in north-west Spain.

also extends into his approach to planning because, as he explained "I don't use very detailed plans. I don't do that because then it prevents me from going in the direction I feel is correct at the time."

Jan told me that he considered himself to be a non-conformist and his interpretation of this term was interesting because of the emphasis he put on individuality and rejection of meritocracy[18]:

> Because people mostly have one path or one education. It's realizing that individuals are individuals. It's a kind of a political view in Norway that everybody should be treated equally, everybody stood the same opportunity, etc. But they don't have this because there are so many different aspects, preventing them from reaching their goals. So non-conformity has to do with also seeing the individual and seeing the needs of the individual.

We continued with this theme of conformity and Jan reflects that he believes that politically in Norway there are differing views on the purpose of education:

> So, on the left side, politically, there is more conforming to the thought of conformity… you shouldn't have a school where there are no grades, where there's so much freedom. You should have a school that's kind of streamlined and everybody should go in the same direction. On the right side they are more open to individualism and to different systems.

Jan is the most experienced and longest serving teacher that agreed to be a research participant. In a profession that is generally considered to be a breeding ground for cynicism, it was heartening to hear him describe his career positively, "I think it was meant to be. It was an open road for me, and it's been amazing. I've always been a teacher at heart, and I have always known I wanted to be a teacher." I was particularly struck by how much I felt that Jan was sharing his 'Practical Wisdom' and wondered to what extent this has come from being enabled to be a non-conformist and freethinking individual.

5. Barbara - Maine, USA

After having one's basic needs met, in order to feel like you're thriving, you have to have ways to be connected that feed your soul in a community.

The Folk School institute which Barbara works at was founded in 1999 and was created to find ways of improving life in Washington County, Maine region, USA. Its mission is to "create responsive educational opportunities that strengthen personal, community, and global well-being",

[18] Meritocracy is a political system in which economic goods and/or political power are vested in individual people on the basis of talent, effort, and achievement, rather than wealth or social class.

whilst its vision is "of a community that respects people and planet, and inspires, supports, and sustains people to achieve their greatest potential." It does this through two divisions: the Institute's experiential programs that feature an 'exceptional' high school curriculum for students and the local centre that acts as a hub for community learning. I was particularly interested to find out more about Institute because of its work providing opportunities for disadvantaged learners on its experiential programs. The benefits of Folk School education are relatively easy to justify when the audience is affluent and motivated. I wondered about the impact of Folk School practice when the learners are disadvantaged and educated long-term at a Folk School, rather than being there as an interlude or for the occasional class?

Barbara has been with the Institute since 2004 and is now the director of Institute's experiential programs and Institute co-leader. Previous research participants had taught in schools that were long established; Barbara, however, has been at Institute for most of its relatively short history and I was interested in why it had been founded in the first place as part of what is known as the 'new' wave of Folk Schools:

> The organization started because there were a number of families in the region who were not happy with the way in which education was being delivered or offered. This is an economically under resourced area and to start a private school would only be accessible to those with access to some economic wealth[19]. That's not what the group was interested in. About twenty community members met monthly and they ultimately engaged in a research project of different forms of education, community education that could be leveraged for individual wellbeing and community health, for economic and social justice. And so, they were drawn to the storylines of Scandinavian folk education.

I had found that Scandinavian Folk Schools, whilst serving a community, were more often than not formed as part of a movement to safeguard a national identity, particularly in the case of Denmark which is bordered by culturally and economically powerful neighbours. The Institute's website makes no mention of a singular national identity, but instead "the three nations that we serve". I asked Barbara more about this:

> This is a three-nation region. I'm sitting in what's now Maine. This is the ancestral homeland for the Wabanaki [20]people, the indigenous folks of this region, for whom this has been their homeland since time immemorial, or since the glaciers receded. We also border New Brunswick, Canada[21]. So being a three-nation region, the original founders of the organization were Wabanaki folks, Euro Canadian folks and Euro American folks. In addition to being inspired by Scandinavian Folk School models, there was also an emphasis on indigenous forms of education,

[19] In 2019 14.1% of families and 19.8% of the population were below the poverty line, including 29.3% of those under age 18 and 12.4% of those age 65 or over. In the same year the U.S. poverty rate nationally was 13.4%.

[20] The four Maine Indian tribes are the Maliseet, Micmac, Penobscot, and Passamaquoddy, known collectively as the Wabanaki, 'People of the Lindaland.'

[21] The Cobscook Institute is 9.8 miles from the Canadian border at Campobello Island, New Brunswick.

> and experiential education. All of those do sort of have a common thread in that they are education that is locally relevant, intended to meet the needs and interests of people in a place and dynamic enough to be able to change over time to meet the needs and interests of a community.

My research to this point had led me to believe that Folk Schools offer an alternative educational paradigm that is either seen as an extra to public education or as a challenge to neo-liberal policies. I was interested to know more about the Institute's experiential programs because they seemed to be an example of Folk and Public education working in partnership to meet community needs. Barbara explained that:

> When we started in 2004 our primary work was non-formal community education very much in the tradition of lots of contemporary folk schools, with arts, music, hand crafts and sustainability programming. There was an interest in, and a call for, some formal education options. So, we worked with area partners, first to partner with a state-wide school to bring a high school degree program for pregnant and parenting teens, for whom trying to earn one's High School Diploma in a conventional setting doesn't really work if you have a baby and you don't have childcare.

Barbara explained further that the success of this program led the Institute to also start working with "teenagers who aren't thriving in a conventional setting" by 2008. She went on to explain that:

> As far as we know, we're the only program in the state of Maine where a non-profit organization, a community organization like ours, has partnered with a high school to offer an experiential option. It's an opportunity to blend a folk school environment and be a formal High School option. And that's pretty exciting!

She explained further that, "most of their public tuition dollars do come to my organization and that supports about 60% of my budget". I was interested to know why some learners were not thriving in a conventional setting. Barbara explained that:

> We have kids who experience social anxiety, or perhaps have experienced trauma. A more flexible family-like environment is conducive to kids who have experienced trauma, who have social anxiety, or even who have perhaps a diagnosis of like ADHD and just need greater flexibility to be able to learn outside, or get up and move, or be a little bit more hands-on in a smaller family-like setting.

I asked Barbara to explain more about how the program is taught because I was interested to know the pedagogical approach and underlying epistemology, particularly in terms of the learning process as she has already mentioned experiential learning. One of her key beliefs was that of the need for flexibility in the learning process and environment. As she explained:

> In many ways, it's the same kind of content. But the delivery modalities are able to be a lot more flexible. We're able to bring students out in the community and be able to learn directly with experts… we have a flexible setting, and because students don't have to go to one class for 15 minutes, and then a bell rings, and they go to another class for 15 minutes, or an hour, or

> whatever the schedule is, we can spend a whole entire day in a field. We have a greater opportunity to be hands on and I think students experience their learning as more relevant because they can make deeper connections to the community in which they live.

I was keen to hear examples of how this looks in practice and Barbara gave an example that reminded me of the yearly outward bound and residential courses that many schools and colleges try to offer each year:

> This part of the planet has some incredible, accessible wild rivers. Our school year does start each September and we have a weeklong wilderness canoe trip. It's intended to help the group to get to know one another and start to bond. Wilderness programming is also one avenue to increase leadership development and the skill attainment associated with that, there's often a boost in confidence, particularly with teens as they start to realize that they're doing something that most of their peers aren't: travelling for a week in a canoe with everything that they need travelling with them.

Barbara gave a second example in the classic tradition of 'topic' learning, and I was struck by her use of the word 'lens'. Her description presents a strong argument for themed interdisciplinary learning, an approach to learning that has become less prevalent in recent decades, certainly in state education in the United Kingdom:

> We tend to do an October trip also. Last year, it was focused on Maine history, so regional history, but through the lens of the history of a watershed. A learning experience like that by its nature is very interdisciplinary. I think that's one of the characteristics of non-formal education, or vocational education, that we are able to bring into a formal setting this strong interdisciplinary component… looking at a watershed or a geographic area, Maine has a strong logging history. And so being able to look at the economics, the logging economics, there's a whole strong colonizing history. One of the reasons that British people came to this region was to harvest white pine trees, for masts for Navy ships. And there's a whole history there. And of course, there's the inner interaction with indigenous people. The river that we studied is the Penobscot[22], which is the name of one of the five remaining Wabanaki tribes. So, there's a whole indigenous storyline to this watershed. And then there's the science of water quality and there's issues with fish passage. There's so much richness to be able to study, so our learning expeditions tend to take on that kind of vibe, trying to study something, a variety of things through a focusing lens, a theme.

Barbara's passion for experiential learning was evident and, in espousing this educational approach, she also revealed how her own personal ontology positions her as both a lifelong learner and a co-learner:

[22] The Penobscot River is a 109-mile-long river in the U.S. state of Maine. Including the river's West Branch and South Branch increases the Penobscot's length to 264 miles, making it the second-longest river system in Maine and the longest entirely in the state.

> Something else that that motivates me is being a teacher in a setting that's very interdisciplinary and dynamic, and it's not stagnant. Because at my core, I also identify as a lifelong learner. I truly do enjoy learning alongside and from my students.

The aims of Scandinavian Folk Education were apparent in Barbara's reflections on the mission of the institute's, particularly the focus she has on the interplay and relationship between individual, community and global wellbeing. I was struck by how well her ideas demonstrated the ideal of the *Bildung* philosophy and her use of the word 'productive' which is so often used in a neo-liberal, human capital context. Here Barbara offers a more holistic view of human and social capital and a belief that education is very much about a process of learning how to solve life's problems in a changing world:

> The mission of this organization is to create opportunities or to offer up education opportunities, to support individual, community and global wellbeing… create responsive educational opportunities, that word responsive is important to us. As an organization, we don't imagine ourselves being static. The needs of people in this area, the issues change. Our political landscape has been dynamic over the last six or so years… which results in increased polarization as people march into their camps and implant their flags and have a hard time listening to one another. So, one of the places that we think that we can focus in on is how can we as a community organization work to bring people together? To try to decrease that polarization by being in community together, not to say that people who live in communities need to agree, but how can we have our separate viewpoints and still be able to operate productively and civilly? And that we feel does come from the model of Scandinavian folk education of how we respond to economic or social or political issues, as local communities and do productive work in communities, and if we can do productive work in communities, that translates to being more productive and how we solve common problems across the globe.

My understanding was that new Folk Schools often consider themselves to be a movement of resistance to neo-liberal society and in some cases the political climate. I was interested if Barbara considered this to be the case with the Institute:

> I would agree that folk schools in America are a resistance, or are a counter to, the loss of community, how to re-instill a sense of community. I think they may be a response to inequities. I think one of the biggest inequities in the region in which I work is that of economic inequity. Since this is a rural place, and since a lot of jobs historically were related to resource extraction, whether that's fisheries or forestry… systems have very real impacts for individuals in rural places, particularly places whose economies are built on resource extraction. So how do we create other opportunities that are locally centred? Even if it doesn't solve the problem, we can ground people back in their communities? And look inward for some solutions? As we try to work outwardly as well.

The impression that I had gained was that although personal growth and wellbeing played a part in the Institute's mission, the key themes emerging were 'community' and 'place'. I was interested in how Barbara saw the importance of personal growth and wellbeing within the individual, community, global relationship she had described:

> I wouldn't put that as the primary bucket of why we do what we do. I think a bigger driver is creating a space where people can feel connected to others. Feel connected to this place… also feel like there's access to a vibrant community life. In our rural region, isolation can be a real problem. If people don't have the resources to always have a functioning car, you can't get somewhere. Or if you don't have the resources to take a class and to be with people that can be a struggle. It can be easy for people, especially in vulnerable communities in this region, to experience isolation.

From Barbara's reflections on the importance of being part of a community to personal growth and wellbeing, two further themes emerged. First was the idea of 'connectedness' within a community:

> After having one's basic needs met, in order to feel like you're thriving, you have to have ways to be connected that feed your soul in a community. So being able to take an art class with people, being able to do physical activities with people, being able to be part of a book club with people. These are not just meaningful, but necessary social experiences.

Another recurrent theme was that of poverty and how a 'big thrust' of their work is to raise income to counter this and make courses accessible. Barbara considered it important that "people can participate regardless of their economic resources" because 'this is a rural economy, an under resourced area, most of our students are living in families that by our federal standards would be living in poverty, or under the poverty threshold.'

Barbara told me that she is not from the Maine region, and I was interested in how she had become such an integral part of the Institute:

> I was living in my hometown, and I was a little nervous that if I didn't make a decision to go do something radically different, my life could be predictable, comfortable, yet I think still totally meaningful. But I did feel like I needed to make a decision to stretch and grow myself… I decided I wanted to do something different. I'd had the conventional experience in my hometown, and I didn't want more of the same …I really wanted to challenge myself. In the Sierra Club environmental magazine… I saw a very small ad print for a program called the Audubon Expedition Institute[23]…I joined with a faculty and a group of students travelling in a retrofitted school bus to different regions of this country. Learning directly from people in communities and learning directly through your own experience - it was remarkable, it was transformative. And my third semester was an Atlantic Coast semester. We started in this community, where I'm sitting right now. We did a work project here. There were no buildings and the group of volunteers who created the Institute had just bought this property. It was shrubby and we cleared brush, and then we sat down under a birch tree and listened to the stories of these community members and what they wanted to create. That was motivational for me. I ended up coming here to do an internship.

[23] Audubon Expedition Institute is an academic alternative to traditional colleges and universities for undergraduate or graduate students pursuing a deeper ecological understanding of environmental education, leadership and advocacy. Its goal is to create experiential learning communities that inspire informed and compassionate ecological leadership.

The strength of the bond between Barbara and the community she now finds herself working in is evident in the metaphorical language she used to describe that relationship:

> I've found value for me and being like a tree that blew in here as a seed, but then rooted in, and it seems like each year that I'm here, those roots go a little deeper. And you know the heartwood that holds me up and my work here gets just a little thicker and a little stronger, and I'm able to have a have a greater impact.

The content of my conversation with Barbara, whilst correlating with the key emerging themes, presented a different view of folk schools through Barbara's positioning of 'community' as central to the work of the Institute. In some way what she did was provide a different 'lens' on the Folk School tradition.

6. Olivia - United Kingdom

It's education that fails. It's not the learner. It's absolutely education. It's absolutely the teacher. It's absolutely the system. It's absolutely the curriculum. It's all those things.

The College is one of only two adult residential colleges in England, situated in a large city in Central England. It was established in 1909 when George Cadbury Jnr[24] transformed his family home into a place of learning for his workers, encouraging them to increase their knowledge and skills and meet their potential. The college has a mission "To promote social justice by providing adults with an excellent learning environment for personal, professional and political development." The college has a longstanding connection to the Folk School movement, starting with Tom Bryan, the first warden of the College, who pioneered the adaptation of Folk High Schools in an English adult education setting. It is the adaptation of Folk School *praxis* in the context of English Adult Learning that I was particularly keen to explore. Although there are other colleges and schools in the United Kingdom who claim to be inspired by Folk Education, the College is the only one working within the constraints of state education funding, being a local authority provider. Constrained by the same demands of employability outcomes as the rest of the sector, I wondered how exactly the College has managed to marry the two, seemingly conflicting, traditions and what the resulting ethos is. I was also interested by the mention of 'political development' in the college mission statement, as it

[24] George Cadbury Junior, grandson of Cadbury's co-founder John, made Cadbury's first Dairy Milk bar.

is highly unusual for an English Adult Learning establishment to profess this as an aim, and if anything, it would usually be frowned upon. I wondered what this looked like in *praxis*.

The research participant was Olivia who is a senior leader at the college. Starting as an English tutor, Olivia is now responsible for planning the entire curriculum at the College. The starting point for our conversation was the ethos of the college. Olivia explained that "it's all about the learners …it really is learner led. It's absolutely about equipping our learners and getting them to a place where they can advocate for themselves, they can speak for themselves, they believe in themselves." Normally when I speak to other educators about ethos, the result is succinct definitions, but with Olivia her explanation of the College ethos shows a high degree of reflexivity. She explained further that "Before it even becomes about academic or critical thinking, or any of those things, before it becomes about political awareness, it's personal individual growth. And I've not seen that anywhere else. That's real. We have a provision that is very much about that." It is common in English Adult Education to assess learners' starting points in terms of their human capital. I was interested that Olivia positions, 'personal individual growth' as the starting point because what she was describing is a Folk School belief and a three-word definition of *Bildung*. I asked her how the process worked:

> Our progression routes are different, because generally, your progression route really is core subjects, then move on to level one, level two, level three. It's not like that here at all. And it shouldn't be like that anywhere, to be quite honest, in my opinion. Our progression route is if you need something for you, first of all, and to then get you in a position where actually you feel confident enough to come back to learn, this is what we've got. We then start branching in different directions. We've got loads of the work skills stuff and the academic stuff, also art for emotional wellbeing.

I asked Olivia what she meant by "needing something for you" and she explained this meant "people being able to understand their anger or being confident enough to go into the shop and buy something, or to walk out of the front door, or I don't know, to understand their anxiety". Later in the conversation I asked her if there was a 'type' of college learner:

> Generally, it's a type of learner that has been excluded from education for one reason or another. Usually, our learners are in recovery, or have experienced abuse, or are experiencing poverty. People like single parents, for example, or people who are homeless learners … there's an influx of younger learners that have been diagnosed or have gone through heavy EHCs[25], or have gone through situations… The one thing in common is that every learner has either been failed by education, failed by life, failed by someone they love, failed by society, public services, etc. I always say to a new tutor, if you go into a mainstream college, one of our learners will probably be in a group of twenty. If you come into college, they will be all twenty, and that's the difference.

[25] An education, health and care (EHC) plan is for children and young people aged up to 25 who need more support than is available through special educational needs support.

What became apparent throughout our conversation was that, despite claiming some uncertainty, Olivia frequently references the folk school belief that individual enlightenment leads to public enlightenment or being equipped to thrive in a community. As the Folk School saying goes, ''Light always comes before the life'' (Grundtvig as cited in Davies, 1931 p89). Olivia refers to this concept on numerous occasions in our conversation:

> It's an ethos of personal growth, personal advocacy, personal responsibility, getting back into the world… then further it's social responsibility and political engagement. But it's not necessarily big international ideas, but more on a local level, such as if you're having issues with your council, here's how you write to them for yourself. If you're trying to access support services, here's what advocacy is about. Our activism is on a personal activism level, or like a personal advocacy level, and then it grows into more.

Olivia elaborates on this belief at another point in our conversation:

> It is wonderful, learners progressing the way that they need to and then they can move further into what they're doing. We've got a lot of partner engagement as well. A lot of our learners have volunteered within the organizations that have helped them. So, another part of our ethos is really to bring in that community responsibility.

A key idea in the College ethos seems to be that of respect and acceptance, both of 'self' and within a learning community that Olivia refers to as 'an oasis' that 'learners call an escape':

> It's also an ethos of enabling our learners to use their experiences, negative as well as positive… let's enable people to grow in a way that they can show that expert knowledge…. We just want to add to what you already are so you can go out and be who you are.

It was clear that College's role in personal growth extends to the staff also. Although one would hope that this is always the case, Olivia's acknowledgement of this took on a more personal tone:

> But everything I did allows me to be so broad minded here. When I walked into this college, it was like I was home. And I literally just thought, this is like you're giving me the ability to be able to do these things that I wish I'd had for myself, to have the power in myself. The growth I've experienced working here, sometimes just being thrown into stuff. I like to think I've enriched College as well with some of my own experiences and beliefs. I would say, 90% of our staff have lived experiences that they bring.

I was interested to know more about Olivia's 'lived experiences' and how they had come to make her believe that she 'was home':

> I had a great upbringing, great life, brilliant parents, very low-income family. Brilliant life, though I never knew I was low income really, even when we couldn't afford Christmas. And my mum got a loan afterwards. I didn't even realize we couldn't afford Christmas because I was in a very happy life. I got to about fourteen, made lots of friends and went wild…I never went to school from about the age of fourteen and a half. I hated it and didn't see the point. I still don't see the point of being in that school at that point if I'm completely honest because I wasn't ready.

> I didn't know what I wanted to do. The things I was studying bored me and I had other things on my mind. To be quite honest I just wanted to live my life, as a lot of people do. And I didn't see education as part of living my life. Sort of getting in the way. I then got to sixteen and met a guy. He was very nice to begin with, and then became violent, abusive, etc.

On several occasions Olivia referenced her own disengagement with schooling as an enabling her to understand learners who were similarly disengaged in their youth. Whilst sharing her own 'life experiences' Olivia also explained her own feelings of being powerless and voiceless:

> I did the thing of defending him, hiding things, absolutely loved him, absolutely trusted him, all of these things. Your typical kinds of abusive relationship, making you think otherwise, knocking my confidence. I had three kids three in a row, within three and a half years, got to being pregnant with the last one and I split up with their dad. He would disappear, turns up again for a little bit. A couple of my girls went through some abuse. While I went through the courts, I absolutely did not stand up for myself. And this is before I knew that my daughters had gone through some abuse as little girls. And then he disappeared.

As Olivia spoke, she turned to her experiences of change and hope that have undoubtedly been valuable in her career as an educator. As she explained, "I'd argue this to anybody that if you've lived those things, you just get it more":

> I thought- What am I doing? I need some money; I need a job. I can't exist like this. I went days where I had no food, couldn't afford to eat, couldn't pay bills, got into a lot of debt, all these things that happen and didn't know what to do. And one day, I got myself into college and started to study. I remembered what I loved about English, and I just fell straight back into it. I was lucky enough to be in a college where the people teaching us were the same. The guy teaching me had been a taxi driver and then had gone into a degree…I met somebody, and he encouraged me to pursue the idea of teaching… I started supporting and my tutor, Alexis, gave me the chance to do some delivery with her on the access course. And then you just say come on, just have a go and I sent an email and walked into teaching and didn't look back.

I felt privileged that Olivia had shared so much of her story with me and having earlier discussed the ethos of the college she then moved on to reveal how her own experiences have given impetus to her own personal mission as an educator:

> I talk about these things, especially on the first day of access, when they feel sick, they're nervous, like I did, my mum locked me out of the house when I went to access because she said, 'You're not coming back in' …I just say 'Look, I get it I understand'. So that's where it's all coming from. I just think I wish I'd had a voice. I wish I'd known how to speak up. I wish I'd known how to challenge authority. I wish I'd known how to get healthy and what direction to go in. And wish I'd known, once I was going in that direction, what do I do next? I wish I'd known how to advocate for myself personally, professionally, all these different things.

I was interested to know how Olivia's 'lived experiences' found their way into her professional epistemology and her pedagogic approaches. Key beliefs quickly began to emerge once I asked

Olivia about this. Firstly, the idea that learning should be active, and also that as educators we should be responsive and flexible:

> From a delivery perspective, I really feel that people need to feel it, and either see it or do it. For example, I was delivering Hamlet the other day, everyone hates Shakespeare, and I don't pretend I like it. None of them had a clue of the synopsis. So, another thing I do is flex what I'm doing and have an active scheme of work… a completely change what you're doing on the spot thing, because it's about what they need, and it's about the reality of their lesson… So, for me, it's about people living in it. We performed it, I lay dead, poisoned on the floor and got a round of applause …people need to be in the learning and not just talking about it. I really don't like to lecture.

Olivia elaborated further on the idea of being adaptable 'on the spot' and I notice that her language had an abundance of vocabulary that referenced this through words such as 'flex', 'flip' and 'change':

> I hate this idea of I've got half an hour for this, about 20 minutes for this, if you want to discuss something, we'll do it quick for three minutes, and then it's gone. What if something comes up? And it's triggered from what we're doing …and there's a level of openness you can have, and it's an educational opportunity… We were talking about word appropriation the other day on social media, and that led to cultural appropriation. And that led to cultural capital...how do you learn if you silence people?

Giving people voice was another common theme in our conversation and there would appear to be a link between Olivia's own experiences of "wishing I'd had a voice" and its centrality to her own professional epistemology. She again spoke about this with a sense of dynamism and a belief that giving voice to learners is part of a healthy, functioning society:

> The whole point is that you say what you think, talk about what you know and if you're not sure, it's all right. Tell me more about that or just let me have a look. And I think that's the difference. There's no fear. We're all educating each other, we're all challenging each other, and we might not all agree, but what you think matters.

Olivia gave an example of the type of class conversation that shows not only an opportunity being seized 'on the spot' but also that College values a learning environment in which diversity is discussed:

> But what came out of that was there was a learner who was massively educated, who came up with a classic comment 'It's just a hair style' when we were talking about Afro hair… rather than how dare you, that's my cultural heritage, it was let me let me support you to move forward. I personally think that's the flip learning element as well and a lot to do with making them educate each other as well, I think that those conversations should be happening.

I was reminded of a passage in Myles Horton's autobiography '*The Long Haul'* (1991, p155-6), in which, during a Highlander Folk School[26] workshop, "a tall white Texan" is struggling to say the word 'negro' correctly because of 'cultural and social habits'. Despite "riling some of the people up" he is taught to say the word correctly and understand the offence from the other participants point of view. I was struck at other points by how closely Olivia's beliefs aligned with passages from the same book. One particularly good example can be found when comparing the Highlander ideal that "people have within themselves the potential, intelligence, courage and ability to solve their own problems" with:

> We're not here to teach qualifications. We're here to teach people how to live in this world, but also how to challenge this world. How to be who you are in society, how to be the version of yourself that you want to be and how to advocate for yourself.

It is through these skills of challenging each other, advocating for oneself and finding voice that the college fulfils its mission to develop learners politically as a natural continuance of self-understanding. Again, this fits well with the Highlander ideal that people and communities have the "potential, intelligence, courage and ability to solve their own problems" (Ibid, p153).

Another point in which Olivia referenced a Folk School ideal was when highlighting the importance of equality and mutuality in teacher/learner relationships:

> I love to be educated by the students as well. And if someone says something and I don't know what it means. I'll ask them. I'm not going to go 'Quick check Google and pretend' because I don't know. I'll say- What are you on about?

A further influence on Olivia's thinking as an educator may come from the Quaker roots of the College's founders and the residual traditions that remain. Core Quaker principles include a belief in equality, social justice and peace. Tom Bryan was originally invited by the Friend's settlement at Woodbrooke, Birmingham to join them because of his previous educational work with the poor and disadvantaged in London. The settlement was new and had its origins in the Summer School movement[27] in the Society of Friends. Acknowledging this influence on the ethos of the college allows us to draw parallels with Christian origins of the Danish Folk High Schools. After all, Grundtvig was a minister at Vartov Church from 1839 till 1872 and is credited with writing more than fifteen hundred hymns. Furthermore, the Quaker belief in the concept of 'inner light' can be compared with the Grundtvigian Folk High School belief that "'light always comes before the life" and the 'self-enlightenment' of *Bildung.*

[26] Established near Monteagle Tennessee in 1932 Highlander's programs were based upon the conviction that education could be used to help ordinary people build upon the knowledge they had gained from experience and work collectively toward a more democratic and humane society. This approach made the adult education center a source of inspiration and the most controversial school in modern United States history.

[27] The Friends Summer Schools are weeklong residential Quaker events for young people that offer sports, discussions, creative workshops, worship, co-operative activities, music and drama.

Our conversation has given me much food for thought and I was pleased that Olivia felt the same. However, in many ways I felt that I had only scratched the surface of a college that, unlike others that follow the Folk School tradition, has largely done this as a solitary oasis rather than within the solidarity of a national movement.

7. Daniel - Tanzania

When I'm teaching in class sometimes, I'm telling them my experience… even if you fail in the formal system that does not mean the end, you can use an alternative way. Sometimes you use that alternative pathway to reach your dreams.

Daniel is a teacher of mathematics, entrepreneurship and life skills whilst also being the principal of a Folk Development College in southern Tanzania. A network of colleges was founded in 1975, after a presidential visit by Julius Nyerere[28] to Sweden several years earlier, and currently there are fifty-four colleges in rural locations. One of their original aims was to "advance adults' knowledge so that they could make better decisions in personal and public matters" (UNESCO, 2017), but they have now re-orientated to focus primarily on community development and employability, with each college offering a mix of Folk Education courses and vocational training programmes. The college offers a mix of longer residential courses and short evening class courses which partner Folk School pedagogies with VET courses such as electrical installation, motor vehicle mechanics and tailoring. There is also provision for what might be called second chance secondary education. With a staff of twelve, the college enrols approximately seven hundred learners each year. Although the college receives government funding, learners still need to make a financial contribution with yearly fees amounting to TSh 250,000s per year (£79.50)[29].

Our conversation started with Daniel explaining to me what he saw as the purpose of the Folk Development Colleges:

[28] Julius Kambarage Nyerere (13 April 1922 – 14 October 1999) was a Tanzanian anti-colonial activist, politician and political theorist. He governed Tanganyika as Prime Minister from 1961 to 1962 and then as President from 1963 to 1964, after which he led its successor state, Tanzania, as President from 1964 to 1985. Ideologically an African nationalist and African socialist, he promoted a political philosophy known as Ujamaa.

[29] A person working in Tanzania typically earns around 1,260,000 TZS per month. Salaries range from 319,000 TZS (lowest average) to 5,640,000 TZS (highest average).

> Specifically, in the folk development colleges it helps a lot when you are teaching them different careers, or vocational training. It is better if you teach them entrepreneurship and life skills, so that they can support themselves when they are in the world of work.

Unlike my previous conversations, this was the first time that preparation for vocational work had been presented as a central Folk School aim. I noticed that he had used the phrase "life skills" and I was interested to know what he considered these to be:

> In life skills we have different topics. For instance, the first topic we are teaching them is health, specifically for those kids who get pregnant, and they fail to continue. So, we are trying to teach them how they can prevent themselves from getting unexpected second pregnancies… we also teach them how to live in society, so that they can cope in society. How they can cope with stress, how they can deal with stress so that it cannot affect their thinking, and also have different views. We're teaching them the issue of gender and how they can fit in society, how they can cooperate within the society.

The phrase "how can they fit in society" struck me as a classic Folk Education reason for learning. Although our conversation had revolved less around personal growth, it was clear that the Folk Development Schools' interpretation was more focused on community and democratic participation.

Daniel explains to me that he had worked in education for more than fifteen years and before working in a Folk Development College he had worked in a secondary school and then a school for learners with disabilities. I was interested in his opinion of the differences between mainstream schools and the colleges, and he started by explaining to me the types of learners who enrol at the colleges:

> So, we have classes up to form five and six in secondary schools, but when you come to folk development colleges, specifically in Tanzania, we normally enrol those who failed to continue with the formal system in form one, form two or even those who have completed in the formal system, even up to a diploma or degree, but they are not employed… While in secondary schools, we are not preparing them for work we're just preparing them for higher learning… Anyone regardless of his or her age can join a development college. Age is it is not a criterion. In secondary schools for instance, specifically the girls once they get pregnant, they are not allowed to continue in the formal system[30]. But in folk development colleges we normally help them because we are sure that they have skills, they have talent, they have knowledge, so they can even go further. We are creating an environment in which different groups can get knowledge and skills.

[30] Tanzania's education regulations permit the expulsion of students when a student has committed what it considers an offense against morality.

As I work for a local authority Adult Education service that teaches learners who might be considered to have failed or been failed in mainstream education, I was interested in the barriers that Tanzanians face in accessing education:

> Some of them they failed to continue due to maybe poverty. Some of them will find that the school is too far from them[31]. So, the barrier to acquiring knowledge is lack of conducive environments. Sometimes they fail, not because they are unable, but because of the environments which affected them in acquiring the knowledge. Because of poverty they fail to continue.

We returned to the differences in approach:

> The way we are treating them in secondary schools sometimes may be harsh, with even sometimes caning and something like that… the teacher is each and everything. But in folk development colleges, because we're dealing with adults, we first expect that they have their own experiences. First, we encourage them to share their experiences, but also the methods we are teaching them is to share their experiences and encouraging them how to learn. So, there is a very conducive environment in folk development colleges.

I asked Daniel if he could give an example of how this looks in *praxis* and he explained that:

> We find that some of them, they have this skill in the streets, but they are not recognized because they don't have certificates, but they have the experience, and they know it. So first, we start by asking them, how do we do this? For instance, for the case of electricity, they then explain we are doing this and this and this. We are not just sharing the experiences but also correcting them for those small very small mistakes. And the second thing we are saying is that we are sharing the experience, some of them they are doing jobs without attending the colleges, but they have the experience of doing it, although it is not professionally.

Daniel consistently referenced his epistemological belief that adults come with valuable experience that should be recognized and built on in the learning process. It occurred to me that what Daniel was describing was an acknowledgement of learners having already formed a professional *Bildung* through previous experience.

Daniel explained further that often teachers come to work in the Folk Development Colleges and because the teaching methods are different, they need to be re-orientated in the teaching techniques that are used:

> What I'm telling them is that the first thing is that you are teaching an adult, so you are not allowed to use those methods in secondary school like caning, like using the harsh language. So, we are telling them to use the polite language, we are telling them to make sure that you share the experience with them. You start by sharing the experience, then you add what they are

[31] Most of Tanzania's population remains condensed in rural areas far away from secondary schools which makes journeys to school of 20-25 kilometres not uncommon. It is estimated that 5.1 million children between the ages of 7 and 17 are not in school, with lower-secondary level school enrolments being only 33.4 percent of the eligible population in 2016.

> lacking into the experience… They are normally dependent on using the lecture method but here we are telling them it is better if you use a small group discussion, you use also other methods like cooperative learning. We encourage teachers to act as a facilitator and to make sure that the knowledge is acquired through discussing. Instead of just using the so-called banking system, you are just depositing the materials and you want to them to retrieve as it is in the exam. So, this is not the way of teaching in colleges… in secondary schools the focus is to make sure that the students are passing the exams. Our focus is not getting a certificate, our focus is not only passing the exams, but we also want them to have the skills because once they've completed here, they will be either employed or employ themselves in different corners.

In this passage Daniel not only referenced Paolo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* but also positions discussion, in typical Folk School Tradition, as central to the learning process. He also makes an important point about exam and qualification focused teaching as being secondary to the mastering of skills that can be applied in employment.

During the presidency of Julius Nyerere, Tanzania introduced the Ujamaa[32] policy which started an ideologically socialist process of Villagization, a programme of collectivization of farming and other economic activity. Although we did not discuss this, I thought that it was interesting that the policy was introduced in the same period as the founding of the folk development colleges. Daniel explained to me that "one of the tasks we are required to do is to do research around the community, trying to see their problems, trying to see their needs where they are in the community and try and solve them." I asked him to give me an example of a community need being met:

> Most of the community around our colleges they are cultivating cash crops, coconut trees, and even coffee. Sometimes they are lacking proper skills or knowledge of how to make sure that the cash crops are gaining profit from what they're producing. So, we are trying to teach them the proper methods of keeping the farms. Making sure that they get more crops and gain more money. And even the food crops the way they are, sometimes they are using the local methods in such a way that they get products which are not of a good standard, so they sell it in bulk for a very low price. So, we are just going there and organising them and trying to educate them in good methods.

I couldn't help being reminded of what I'd read about the experiments with potato growing at Rodding School over one hundred and seventy-five years before. Comparisons can also be drawn here between the early days of the Danish Folk High Schools, when they catered almost exclusively for the rural communities, and the Tanzanian colleges which are still doing exactly that.

Having been established as part of a political agenda, I was interested to know if political citizenship was part of the current curriculum, particularly because one of their current foci is on the "political and cultural development of the community" (UNESCO, 2017):

[32] Ujamaa means 'cooperative economics', in the sense of local people cooperating with each other to provide for the essentials of living'.

> The subject is called civics. In this subject, we have different topics in which we are teaching. For instance, the first topic we are teaching is called our nation. We are teaching our students and adults, how to know the nation, the different size of the nation and so forth, but also, we are teaching the topics of national constitution, democracy, gender issues and also responsible citizenship within the country. This is where we are teaching them different values as Tanzanians and as Africans, how to behave, and also, we are teaching them sometimes those bad practices within their communities. For instance, some of the tribes practise the circumcision of women[33]. So, we are trying to teach them that this practice is not good. We are telling them the different effects and how we want them to avoid it. Also, we show them the importance of attending the general election, why it is important to elect a leader, the qualities of a good leader… we are encouraging them to be elected within the colleges. Mock democracy is in the college.

The emphasis on nationhood at the beginning of this chapter is reminiscent of the Danish Folk High Schools' early motivations for protecting a national identity threatened by dominant neighbours. It also adds to a key research theme of 'identity' formation, whether it be individual, community or national.

I wondered about Daniel's background and how he had started teaching. He explained to me that he was from a poor background, "My mother was a farmer, and my father worked in a tobacco factory as a technician." This had an impact on his own progress to completing degree studies. As he explained:

> I remember, once I'd completed form six, I had good results… those who were rich, they joined the private universities, but myself because I was not able to pay the fees for universities, then I started first on a diploma and then being employed as a teacher… I was teaching in secondary schools and after being employed as a teacher I used the money for learning the degree and the higher programs.

He told me that as a teacher he draws on this experience of having to fund his own learning:

> When I'm teaching in class sometimes, I'm telling them my experience… if you fail even in any formal system that does not mean the end, you can use an alternative way. Sometimes you use that as an alternative pathway to reach your dreams.

Such ontological statements underpin his belief that 'becoming' is a process of finding and following pathways to overcome barriers.

Towards the end of our conversation, it struck me that most Folk Schools I know have emerged as part of a popular movement or as an act of resistance, rather than having been founded by a government agenda. This is perhaps why they have always been cautious of any form of

[33] Tanzania criminalized female genital mutilation in 1998. The country has also adopted a National Plan of Action to end Violence against Women and Children and is committed to ending violence against women and children in all its forms, including female genital mutilation, by 2030.

standardization or control. I wondered how true this was in Tanzania and to what extent each Folk Development College has formed an identity which reflects the community within which it is situated:

> It depends on the focal development of the colleges. There are fifty-four in Tanzania and the vocational programs are differing from one college to another, we are not the same. It depends also on the community in which the folk development colleges are in. Some of the programs are the same, but some of the programs are different. For instance, the government colleges around the lake, they'll be also having the programs of fishing.

Daniel was the first research participant not of European descent. Although the contrast between a cold and rainy Northumbrian winter and the bright Tanzanian sunshine and greenery that I could glimpse behind Daniel could not have been more striking, what was more apparent was our commonality. Just as in Tanzania, funding for Adult Learning in the United Kingdom and Europe in general is almost exclusively directed towards increasing human capital, particularly for those who have failed or been failed by the education system. What I had learned from Daniel was that Folk School *praxis* can be applied successfully in educational settings where there is an overt employability agenda. What had also become apparent was the adaptability of the Folk School approach and that, regardless of setting or motivation, its humanistic principles are universal.

8. Dr. Ramesh - India

The overall objective is that we want to build up a service mind among its students. They are not really developing just for themselves but for their family and the community. Because the objective of the whole institution is to create a spirit of being involved in community activities, they should be an active member in the community.

Ramesh has been the principal of a People's College since 1998. Established in 1996 with the cooperation of the Association of Danish Folk High Schools, the People's College integrates the ideas of the Danish Folk High Schools and the Indian Guru Kula system of education. The college's focus is on activities that are "based on day-to-day needs to ensure living interaction and practical learning as envisaged by N.F.S. Grundtvig, M. K. Gandhi, and Rabindranath Tagore". The college, which teaches approximately one hundred students annually, is part of a larger education based non-profit organisation that was originally founded in 1956 in a village in Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala. Today the mother organization covers fifty acres of land and houses a residential school for tribal children, the People´s College, The Farm Science Centre, The Rural Technology Centre,

training cum production centres such as the bakery, fruit processing centre, pottery and coconut fibre activities. The name of the college comes from the Sanskrit for 'Home of Friends'.

We started by Ramesh explaining to me the types of programme that the college runs:

> In India, the concerns are mainly related to unemployment. So, we have students from the poor socio-economic background and students who have mostly dropped out from the formal system of education. So, those are the people who are really in need, and they want an alternative model of education. So, we have followed the folk high school philosophy, but we have also incorporated the needs of the students. From that perspective we have developed our own curriculum that contains both life skill development and livelihood skill development. And it is a residential program also. So, a combination of life skills and livelihood. Normally in Danish folk high schools they are more focused on life skill development, personal development but here it is the on-the-job training and vocational skill development, because sustenance is also very important. We have integrated both… it is very important to build their confidence so that they have the right attitude to go ahead with jobs or go ahead and continue their higher education. They select one skill in which they undergo continuous training, for example, say carpentry or water and sanitation or automobile mechanics or electricals or agriculture. So, they specialize and learn that job.

In this passage of conversation, Ramesh articulates an emerging research theme by highlighting that the focus of Folk High Schools depends on socio-economic factors, just as in Tanzania 'livelihood' training is a key educational driver in less affluent communities. Having given 'life skill' and 'livelihood' development equal weighting, I was interested to know what activities life skill development encompassed:

> Communication development is one of the main things in the life skill development, developing the communication skill of the candidate students, because they often keep quiet, because they come out of the normal school, and they drop out from the normal school because they cannot understand anything, or they are behind, and they cannot compete with other students. So, normally they keep silent in the classrooms, and they feel that 'Oh, I don't know anything, I have no confidence like that.' So, we start with what skills they have. Then we give some communication exercises and techniques so that they will come out and speak…this includes practice in public speaking, practice in group discussion, practice in preparing the assignments and coming and presenting in the classrooms…different types of activities such as debates and discussions. They start speaking, we want them to speak, they speak out. So as the main output, at the end of the program, or after two years, or three years or more, the main thing we want them to achieve is to believe 'I am now a good speaker' or 'I can speak out'.

It was no surprise that Ramesh positions 'talk' as the most important life skill, in true Folk School Pedagogy 'living word' tradition. I noticed that Ramesh had already stressed the importance of community on several occasions in our conversation and I wondered how central to the college's mission it is and to Ramesh's own ideas on social epistemology:

> The overall objective is we want to build up a service mind among them. They are not really developing just for themselves but for their family and the community. Because the objective of

> the whole institution is to create a spirit of being involved in community activities, they should be an active member in the community. We are not expecting everybody should do that but at least one out of 10 will have that attitude, because our overall institution is a non-profit. Students should have that service mind so that they can be an active member in the community.

I had noticed in previous conversations that whereas some Folk Schools focused mostly on the school and global community, others positioned the local community as the most important to their work. I was interested to know the types of community outreach activities the college undertook and what he considered the local community to be:

> The whole institution is also involved in community activities because our target group includes farmers, artisans, youth and women but currently it is mainly focused on young people and women. We have a number of woman self-help groups and through those groups we are linked with the community. We continuously organize programs or involve them in development programs or some support of livelihood development… we used to call our motto 'Community based education in an education-based community'. We are a community living together in a community. This community is promoting community-based education.

I was most interested in the emphasis that Ramesh places on community gain over personal gain and that, even though qualifications are awarded, the college views education from a more of a functionalist[34] than meritocratic perspective. Following on from this he began to describe the local community and that of the college itself:

> We used to say that we are a community of five hundred people living and working together, this includes the floating population; we used to call it the floating population, because there were a lot of visitors including volunteers from outside the country coming and staying here for a short period of time. Today, because of Covid, the number of people is less now; there are about two hundred people always living and working together, but during the daytime we have more people because people come from home for work. The village is in total about twelve thousand people, it is a commune actually… India is a very big country and Kerala is a densely populated state… we cannot differentiate towns and villages, because urban areas and villages are all connected.

I was interested to know what Ramesh saw as the types of problems that exist within the local community:

> When we started this institution in the year 1956, the problems were different and at that time problems were mainly unemployment, poverty, illiteracy, ill health and all different problems were there. Now things have changed. Now Kerala has become one of the best states in India, where there is 100% literacy[35]. We have very good health coverage, and we have a sufficient number in employment in the informal sector, not in the formal sector. If unemployment is there, it is educated unemployment, but if anybody wanted to work in an informal sector there

[34] Functionalism posits that society is more than the sum of its parts; rather, each aspect of it works for the stability of the whole.

[35] The state of Kerala has the highest literacy rate in India of 96.2% in 2021.

> are a lot of opportunities. So, we cannot call the whole community a poor community because they are able to earn their bread through working in the informal sector. Today, almost three million people from the northern part of India is migrated to Kerala and working in the southern part of India because there are opportunities for menial jobs, cleaning, unskilled jobs, and that means jobs are available here. Today the present generation is educated. Earlier, there were a lot of school dropouts. Now, there is no school dropout. That means the level of primary education, secondary education is coming up. So, broadly, the community is not very poor at this point of time.

It was interesting to hear Ramesh identify transitioning the local population from informal to formal employment as the problem and I reflected on my assumption that the transition would be from unemployment into employment. What I had not realized was that over 80% of all employed people in India making a living by working in the informal sector and have no access to social security benefits.[36]

I knew that the college philosophy took inspiration from the thinking of Gandhi, Grundtvig and Tagore. From my own experience in the United Kingdom, after leaving university I cannot recollect any fellow educators mentioning Piaget or Vygotsky, let alone any notable philosophers. I was particularly keen to know more about how this philosophical inspiration emerged in *praxis*:

> Arthur Morgan[37] was an engineer and educationalist who promoted small communities. In fact, we have imbibed the small community idea from Arthur Morgan. So, he believed very strongly in small communities promoting small communities, not macro communities, instead micro communities, who are mutually dependent, who are getting lots of opportunity to interact with each other…we are a community actually, we are living together, working together, learning together, interacting together, so that there are a lot of opportunities to learn things outside the classroom. We have not only learning in the classroom, but we are also learning from the community. So, we developed a community environment to learn.

Having never come across Morgan's ideas on community, it was fascinating to hear Ramesh's explanation of his thinking and the functionalist approach taken by the college began to make sense. I was equally unaware of Gandhi's promotion of 'hands-on' on learning:

> Then in the case of Mahatma Gandhi, who is the father of Indian Nation, you know very well, from him his philosophy of education is called a new education, which is actually basic education or briefly, it is a craft education or hands on education; he wanted the students to learn things by doing things. So, we also promote crafts in addition to the vocational skill which they are learning. For example, we have a school in which the students every week are engaged

[36] Close to 81% of all employed persons in India make a living by working in the informal sector, with only 6.5% in the formal sector and 0.8% in the household sector.

[37] Arthur Ernest Morgan was a civil engineer, college educator, and social philosopher. In 1942 he published, *The Small Community*, which promote his ideas about economic development and social improvement centered on small-scale enterprises, small towns, and family life.

> in learning crafts skills, like weaving or coconut fibre-based activities. So, craft-based activities, that is from Mahatma Gandhi.

The thinking of Rabindranath Tagore was also new to me, particularly his belief that the arts are a conduit to realising our potential:

> From Tagore[38], we mainly learn craft art, because he believes that the people have a lot of potential, and we should give them opportunity to explore their product potentials. We all have the same potential, what are the skills and cultural identities of the people that have to be promoted, that is to be imbibed? So, Tagore has given flexible opportunities for the students to learn art, culture, music. He has given a lot of importance to music as well as to drama and other cultural activity.

We finished our discussion on the impact of influential thinkers with two emerging research themes. Firstly, an acknowledgment that Grundtvig's belief that dialogue is a foundational pillar of pedagogical *praxis* in Folk Schools, and secondly, that learning is a communal activity rather than an individual meritocratic pursuit:

> As far as Grundtvig is concerned, we mainly focus on dialogue. I talked to you about the communication skills. Not dead books, but lively education, lively interaction for which he has given more importance… Ideas of these dialogues, we have adopted, but of course, the idea of small community it is already there in the Indian education system, it is called a Gurukula system of education. One hundred years ago, the education in India was that you are learning under a guru, under a teacher, he is a spiritual teacher. … they say that kind of school it is called the Gurukula system of education. It means being focused on the learning family and also focused on a particular teacher and learning under him.

Ramesh told me that he was born into a professional family, with his father being a politician and his mother working in government. I wondered if community development had always been a passion:

> Yes, because my studies were connected to that, then I worked for one year in a government program, in a state illiteracy mission, Kerala state's literacy mission. That mission is promoting literacy and creating 100% literacy among all the people including old age. Later I joined another organization as an anthropologist, and I was working with a tribal community for two years. So, it is education and development that are the areas I am used to.

I ask Ramesh what he saw as the main differences between state and folk school education:

> The difference between the secondary school teachers and teachers in folk high schools is that secondary school teachers are working inside the circle, there is a syllabus, there is a

[38] Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was a celebrated Bengali poet, short-story writer, song composer, playwright, essayist, and painter. He was highly influential in introducing Indian culture to the West and vice versa, and he is generally regarded as the outstanding creative artist of early 20th-century India. In 1913 he became the first non-European to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature.

> curriculum, there is a formal system. There are examinations and so it is within the framework, but in The People's College it is highly flexible. We say that anybody can join here irrespective of their education and socio-economic background and there is a flexible curriculum, because more than focusing on curriculum or syllabus, we are focusing on output.

I was most interested in Ramesh's ontological statement that state education works "inside the circle". Not at any point had Ramesh dismissed qualifications as unimportant. His point, with true folk school thinking, was that qualifications reduce our ability to offer a flexible curriculum and that education is about so much more than what is in the circle.

The college is a non-profit organization and charges 40,930 INR (£404) for a year's board and tuition on partially subsidized programmes[39]. I wondered if this was difficult to pay and if the college gave scholarships. Ramesh explains to me that each year they usually give four or five scholarships and that:

> Most of the students' parents are working. They are working in the informal sector as either unskilled workers or skilled workers like electricians, plumbers or rickshaw drivers. And so those people save the money. They do not have any assets or resources; they have to save money and pay because they want to invest money for their children's education. So, they have saved and found money for their children's education.

More than a month's salary is no small financial commitment, particularly considering the socio-economic status of the student population. We had time for one final question, and I was interested to know Ramesh's view on another emerging research theme of national identity. I asked him if they taught the equivalent of 'British Values' or the Tanzanian 'My Nation' at the college:

> That challenge is not with us now. During the British rule, of course, I could not say that… our objective is to actually build the individual for himself, his family and the community, to be an active member in the community. And, along with that, build up his livelihood. That is the only thing we focus on, to become an active person in the community.

This was the second time that a participant had played down the importance of education as a tool in the formation of national identity in preference to its role in community empowerment. I wondered which determining factors influence Folk Schools to focus on community, national or global citizenship.

Every research conversation inevitably includes at some point an observation on the weather outside. Thirty-four degrees and a fan flickering in the background again contrasted with the February drizzle. Ramesh had been the first Asian research participant and the first to reflect on how Folk Schools develop in different contexts. More than anything, our conversation contributed to a growing realization that, despite their shared educational philosophy, each individual Folk School is uniquely representative of its local community and culture. In doing so, Folk Schools are in

[39] The average wage for a person working in Kerala is typically around 34,900 INR per month.

some ways a collective celebration of educational individuality, rather than a standardized attempt in educational empire building.

9. Afam - Nigeria

In the traditional system, everybody had a niche and did something for the community, contributing something somehow, for in the community, you didn't have that kind of sampled uniformity… traditionally, nobody was considered useless.

The Institute is a non-profit, non-governmental Adult Learning organization founded by Afam's father in 1984. On his passing in 2011 the running of the organization, including its secondary school and polytechnic, which was founded in 2019, was taken on by his son Afam. The Institute's mission is to "equip students with vocational skills and assist them to rediscover themselves and to develop a sense of real self-worth, merit and ability". The Institute is located in a rural town in south-eastern Nigeria, close to the Niger river[40]. This region of Nigeria is home to one of Nigeria's largest ethnic groups, the Igbo. As the only Folk School in West Africa, I was interested to know how the institute had originally come to be founded and asked Afam why his father was determined to introduce Grundtvig's ideas, despite people initially thinking that "it was crazy for him to abandon his well-paid job to pursue such ideas":

> If they failed the exams, they were considered failures[41]. And there wasn't much provision for them. They were just called failures, and some would take to prostitution, some to crime. With this in his mind, because he was one of the top officials there, he felt bad about it. And he kept on thinking that there had to be some other kind of education that could give these people their self- esteem and let them understand more about life. It was turning around in his mind until just one evening, he was in the pub with some friends, and someone who had been to a conference in Denmark was talking about folk schools. So that's serendipity. He collected all the documents from the conference and read them. And when he was reading it also had a resonance with our traditional system of education. Because traditionally, nobody was considered useless.

This was the third occasion that I had heard a research participant reference 'traditional' education and I was keen to know more about this:

[40] The Niger River is the principal river of West Africa. With a length of 2,600 miles (4,200 km), it is the third longest river in Africa, after the Nile and the Congo.

[41] Nigeria has over ten million out-of-school children, which is the highest in the world. Over 30% of the population are illiterate.

> Traditional African education in our own culture, before it was organized in terms of age grades, if it's for example the female, you might need to learn things about agriculture or farming, or foods as well, useful foods. So, in the traditional system, everybody had a niche and did something for the community, contributing something somehow, for in the community you didn't have that kind of sampled uniformity, that you have to pass just one exam which is what we have now inherited from the colonial system, where those who failed a particular exam were considered failures and they couldn't go forward.

Interestingly in the context of this research, traditional Igbo governance was, rather than being feudalistic as is commonly the case in West Africa, based on a quasi-democratic republican system of government which, in close knit communities, guaranteed its citizens a degree of equality (Furniss & Gunner, 1995). It was clear that Afam still valued such an inclusive and equal social ontology, despite erosive factors, which he would go on to explain.

I was interested in knowing more about how traditional education and Grundtvig's educational philosophy complemented each other, and the resulting curriculum offer:

> It's a vocational school, you know, vocation simply because it's something cultural. When people hear about the Folk schools, where people go to just discover themselves and spend time, they just say they are going there to waste their time. We are still faced with certain harsh realities of life. We also don't have the kind of social safety nets which many European countries have. There is no welfare system. There are no pay-outs. So, we have to combine some elements of utilitarianism[42], some elements of learning skills with Grundtvig's education for life …it was originally that they were learning a trade, you know, like the Danish farmers.

This approach drew comparisons with the approach taken by Folk Schools in both India and Tanzania, whilst also being one of the key delineators between North American and European Folk Schools and those outside these regions. I was curious to know more about how life skills are taught:

> We have curriculum that takes the form of what Grundtvig would have called the living word. So, we have lectures, we have talks, we have interactions, but what distinguishes them is that it is not informed by anything academic, it's not informed by anything vocational. It's moral interests, expanding the knowledge and values. We have things such as people that change their societies. And under that program, students or staff can decide to talk about anybody …So during the awareness programs, when we get together, a student can lead that session, it could be a student, or it could be a staff.

[42] Utilitarianism is a theory of morality that advocates actions that foster happiness or pleasure and oppose actions that cause unhappiness or harm. When directed toward making social, economic, or political decisions, a utilitarian philosophy would aim for the betterment of society as a whole.

This epistemological belief that dialogue is the primary way that we make sense of the world is consistent with the epistemology of all the research participants in this study. Afam expanded on this further, becoming more focused on cultural identity:

> We also have things like how news events actually affect us, at the personal level. And you also have things like culture and society, which is very, very beautiful, because one of the main things to do is to build a sense of cultural identity, cultural pride, as well. Then we have programs like democracy and human rights… sometimes during those events we could take items of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and discourse. In each of these cases, we are applying them and considering them from the point of view of our own local realities. I think that's key.

Having mentioned the key research theme of 'culture,' I was interested to know more of Afam's thoughts about culture in terms of 'local realities':

> Now, where identity comes in is that when you consider where we are coming from, in terms of colour, in terms of colonialism, you know, and the experience we had before, it had the effect of making people to look down on their own culture. There were many things that were passed on wrongly and we had the idea of looking down on our own culture or looking down on our way of doing things. And I think, in a way, even Grundtvig himself had something like that going from time to time. He wanted to stick to his own language. In the same way to people, even our local language, it's becoming more fashionable to say, I can speak it… it has been looked down like in Grundtvig's own time…like the elitist language. Danish was looked down on… We are also trying to let people recognize the meaning of identity and that there is good in what you have as well. Like our own language.

Afam was the first research participant to elaborate on the role of Folk Schools as a way of countering the continuing impact of colonialism. In doing so he had added another dimension to the research theme of 'community'. He elaborated on this further by explaining that:

> The strong commonwealth ties, the fact that it's almost routine, you don't have old people's homes, you just have that strong community, these values which we have, but in the mad rush for Westernization, some of those things are just overlooked. So, when we do talk about identity, it is that we should recognize the good things we have… even when you do play in the global environments, you still know that you have something good, rather than a situation where you are looking at what you have from the colonial-to-colonial lens.

To clarify the point that one of the roles of Folk Schools is to celebrate national and local culture, Afam gives two particularly interesting examples:

> There are many things, like now we talk about the Greek gods, we talk about Greek and Roman gods, Zeus, Poseidon, and all that. Before colonialism, we had that in our local religion. So, we still have our own god Amadioha[43]. In Scandinavia, it's called Thor. But when the colonialists came, these things were called pagan practices. We have considered the best form of dressing,

[43] Amadioha is the Alusi (God) of thunder and lightning. The name in the Igbo language means 'free will of the people'.

> Western dressing…Sometimes I wear suits as well. But it doesn't mean that our own Isiagu [44] is bad… Don't look down on your own. Because you can equally develop by also recognizing and developing our own.

I ask Afam if it is less about being Nigerian and more about being African or from the place that you're in now. He emphasized that it is about "Your traditional culture wherever your culture is". Earlier Afam had mentioned the Biafra wars (1967-70) when, fearing marginalization within the Nigerian state, the Igbo-majority provinces declared independence as the Republic of Biafra. The ensuing blockade on food and supplies entering the republic led to a humanitarian crisis that gained global attention (Uzokwe, 2003). This threatening of cultural identity is reminiscent of the early folk school's role in strengthening the Danish national identity.

Returning to the vocational strand, I was interested to know more about the types of vocation offered and ambitions for students on leaving the institute:

> They learn fashion, for instance. We have cases of students who have finished and set up their own fashion outfits or their tailoring house… also those who have learned computer studies with us, and who have set up their own outfits. they can even do work from their own house, which means they could be doing the supplying, they could do wedding cakes, they could do venue decorations. It enables them to be independent. It also enables them to seek paid employment if they want. Some of them also work in hotels.

Knowing that the institute is in the heart of the Igbo speaking region of Nigeria, I asked about the student intake:

> They mainly come from the local community because the local community is quite vast. Denmark is a small country, even Britain is small compared to Nigeria. The Igbo speaking parts are mainly where the bulk of students come from.

He explained to me that student numbers are approximately five hundred each year, most of whom are residential and attending two-year courses. Semesterly fees are approximately $100[45], which students can pay as instalments. The institute also offers some scholarships.

Many Folk Schools are community focused and, having spoken about the importance of celebrating cultural identity, I was interested to know more about the institute's community work:

> The one that stands out was published in the newspaper, do you know how it was published? 'Grundtvig movement lights Oba community after years in darkness'. In our local village, the transformer that gives them electricity was damaged. And for years, they were appealing to the government to replace it. You know what it's like with corrupt governments. They didn't do anything. So, what happened was that they brought this to our attention. Over after a few years

[44] The Isiagu, also called Chieftaincy, is a pullover shirt.

[45] A person working in Nigeria typically earns around 142, 800 NGN (£260) per month.

> we succeeded in buying a new transformer for the community and installing it so that they could have electricity again… Another thing is waste disposal, we do waste disposal for the community. Sometimes we also have tried to do sanitization campaigns also.

Having visited Nigeria I was aware of the impact that corruption[46] can have on day-to-day life. I was also curious to know what Afam considered to the crucial issues impacting on the maintenance of a thriving local community. He identified urban migration as a key issue:

> Because of the usual rural urban migration, which we are told about in economics… even right now, that is one of the things that I'm nostalgic about, it's my own hometown. That's where my father, my forefathers, that's where we come from. We have our ancestral home in the town. But when we were growing up, and we were still children, we had members of the family resident fully. Right now, in my own generation, we hardly have anyone of my generation resident now. It makes it lonely because everybody has migrated to the cities. So, for those who are left behind there are limited opportunities.

I wondered if one of the main drivers for strengthening communities was that, without a social security system, this migratory drift of the local population was eroding the traditional family network of support.

I knew that Afam had completed his PhD at Newcastle University, but I had not realized that he had been a successful writer prior to taking over from his father:

> It's Literature and Creative Writing. I was pursuing a very promising career as a writer, then my father died, and I had to fully spend more time and pick up this you understand. I had a very flourishing writing career; I had written a novel and some short stories. I won awards, the Commonwealth Story Prize in 2010. My first UK award was with the Arts Council.

It struck me that in following the path of creative writing, he had bucked the cultural trend that he had outlined earlier of learning as a purposeful pursuit of financial sustenance. This is a point that he makes well:

> It's perhaps cultural but also because a lot of the existential issues, survival issues, are more stuck in this part of the world. Because it's considered a luxury saying you just want to go and study creative writing.

Because Afam had spent time in Denmark, I was interested to know his interpretation of the terms *Bildung* and *Dannelse,* and it was the latter with which he was familiar. We spoke about the aspect of the term that suggests that learning should have a high degree of personal choice and he gave me an example of how *Dannelse* emerges in *praxis:*

> In our awareness curriculum we have a framework where people can discuss what they really want to learn about or what they really want to know, or what they want to share. So, in that

[46] Nigeria is considered to be the second most corrupt country in West Africa after Guinea and is ranked at 150 on 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index with a score of 25 out of a possible one hundred.

> way, our awareness curriculum is not as prescriptive as the academic curriculum, like for example, if it is biology, then you have to learn certain things, whether you like it or not, as long as you're learning biology, but in the awareness curriculum, it has that room for people to actually discourse and learn about what interests them…I'll give you an example. I think, two weeks or three weeks ago, some students wanted to discuss Idi Amin…When you do discuss these things, it's not necessarily people that changed your society for the better. It could be people that affected it in any other way. After all, I think it was the atrocities of Hitler that gave life to the United Nations.

It was a rare day in which the sun was shining during the course of the research conversations that I had undertaken. Without the usual drizzle, the main contrast on this occasion had been the thermometer difference of thirty degrees, as Nigeria basked in its hottest month of the year.

Our conversation left me pondering the liberatory role that Folk Schools have and still play, and the adaptability of Grundtvig's educational philosophy in such a wide range of contexts. I was particularly struck by the idea that traditionally in Igbo society every citizen had 'worth' within the local community, particularly in comparison to the current meritocratic paradigm which currently dominates the political and social high ground in the UK, in which it is almost inevitable that some people must be deemed to be failures in order to maintain economic, social and political structures and relays of power. I wondered if the educational balance should not shift from 'creating' individual worth to 'recognising' community worth.

Chapter Six: Research Results

The first revolution is when you change your mind about how you look at things and see there might be another way to look at it that you have not been shown.

Gil Scott-Heron (1949-2011)

Overview of the Results

Scott-Heron (above) reminds us that changing our mind is perhaps one of the most courageous things a person can do. Learning how to see the world and the people in it in different ways can help us to live in a more measured way with the environment we live in and others in the world with whom we share our existence. In the course of this research, I have learned to do both.

The results of the study are presented in the form of narratives for each theme that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the conversation commentaries in chapter four. The themes are then further divided into subthemes that describe the main ideas discussed by the participants. For each theme and subtheme, the findings of the analysis are illustrated by quotations from the participants. The quotations are intended to be as accurate and authentic a representation of the content of the conversations with participants as possible, and whilst implicit information can be interpreted from these results, this is saved for the discussion. The analysis of the conversation transcripts and subsequent conversation commentaries yielded four main themes: The first three themes cover the Folk School movements promotion of the interconnected *Bildung* dimensions of: Individual Becoming, Community Contribution and National and Global Citizenship and *Bildung*. Interwoven into these themes are the pedagogical approaches used by educators working within the global folk school movement.

Theme 1: Individual Becoming

Sub-theme: Journeys and pathways

Sub-theme: Self-Knowledge

Sub-theme: Speaking up

Sub-theme: Escape from failure

Sub-theme: Craft learning

Theme 2: Community Contribution

Sub-theme: Serving our community

Sub-theme: The uniqueness of place and a sense of belonging

Sub-theme: The benefits of being community minded

Sub-theme: A response to inequities

Sub-theme: The living word

Theme 3: National and Global Citizenship

Sub-theme: Social cohesion

Sub-theme: Questioning society

Sub-theme: Cultivating a national identity

Theme 4: Defining *Bildung*

Quotation Conventions for the Results Section

Quotations taken from the interview transcripts are identified by either being presented as block quotations or between quotation marks. Following each quotation, the page location of the excerpt within the conversation commentaries chapter is shown in brackets. Quotations are preceded by the participant's number and the country within which their folk school is located.

Theme 1–Individual Becoming

This theme details the participants' views on the role that Folk School education takes in promoting and developing personal growth. In turn it is divided into the three sub-themes of 'Pathways', 'Knowing Ourselves', 'Speaking Up', 'Escape from Failure' and 'Craft Learning'.

Sub-theme: Journeys and pathways

The conversations were rich in the language of pathways and direction. Participant 2 (Finland) explains that the most important outcome of their course was "that the students should know about themselves, and they also know the things in which they are weak, and they can then somehow know where they are going next. This is more important than cloning self-sufficient people." Participant 6 (United Kingdom) also speaks in terms of education setting learners in the right direction:

> I wish I'd known how to get healthy and what direction to go in. And wish I'd known, once I was going in that direction, what do I do next? I wish I'd known how to advocate for myself personally, professionally, all these different things. (p.30)

Participant 8 (India) uses the phrase 'go ahead' to suggest that education sets students off on a future pathway, "it is very important to build their confidence so that they have the right attitude to go ahead with jobs or go ahead and continue their higher education." (p.43)

Participant 4 (Norway) uses the metaphor of life being a journey and education as a preparation for that journey:

> The New Travel Life', is the name of the course. But I tend to turn these words the other way around and say, 'to travel life'. I'm trying to prepare them for the rest of their life journey, not only traveling physically, but to give them different elements, different methods to try to integrate in their own lives. (p.17)

Expanding on this idea Participant 4 (Norway) also questions the notion that as individuals we have freedom of choice over which pathway that we take:

> Because people mostly have one path or one education. It's realizing that individuals are individuals. It's a kind of a political view in Norway that everybody should be treated equally, everybody stood the same opportunity, etc. But they don't have this because there are so many different aspects, preventing them from reaching their goals. So non-conformity has to do with also seeing the individual and seeing the needs of the individual. (p.21)

The idea that we are free agents is also questioned by the Indian and Nigerian participants. Participant 8 (India) explains that there are economic realities to the pathway that we choose:

> Normally in Danish folk high schools they are more focused on life skill development, personal development but here it is the on-the-job training and vocational skill development, because sustenance is also very important. (pp.41-42)

This was a view supported by participant 9 (Nigeria) who adds to this utilitarian theme:

> It's a vocational school, you know, vocation simply because it's something cultural. When people hear about the Folk schools, where people go to just discover themselves and spend time, they just say they are going there to waste their time. We are still faced with certain harsh realities of life. We also don't have the kind of social safety nets which many European countries have. There is no welfare system. There are no pay-outs. So, we have to combine some elements of utilitarianism, some elements of learning skills with Grundtvig's education for life …it was originally that they were learning a trade, you know, like the Danish farmers. (p.48)

The theme of pathways is also spoken about in terms of having options and alternatives with Participant 4 (Norway) explains:

> …that taught me that if we decide the plan, then it often doesn't happen that way. But if we see all the alternatives, all the things that are happening that are good… we shouldn't be so focused on one narrow road because then we won't see all these sideways that are so important in our lives. And that was a real revelation. (p.20)

Having alternative pathways in life is also spoken about by Participant 7 (Tanzania) in terms of having options when life does not go to plan:

> When I'm teaching in class sometimes, I'm telling them my experience… if you fail even in any formal system that does not mean the end, you can use an alternative way. Sometimes you use that as an alternative pathway to reach your dreams. (p.39)

Participant 6 (United Kingdom) suggests that once confidence has been built, learners then begin to branch out in a direction of their choice:

> Our progression routes are different, because generally, your progression route really is core subjects, then move on to level one, level two, level three. It's not like that here at all. And it shouldn't be like that anywhere, to be quite honest, in my opinion. Our progression route is if you need something for you, first of all, and to then get you in a position where actually you feel confident enough to come back to learn, this is what we've got. We then start branching in different directions. We've got loads of the work skills stuff and the academic stuff, also art for emotional wellbeing. (p.30)

The idea that as individuals we should be open to, and aware of, multiple pathways in our lives is an idea applied by Participant 4 (Norway) to his learning plans when explaining "I don't use very detailed plans. I don't do that because then it prevents me from going in the direction I feel is

correct at the time." (p.21) A similar idea is presented by Participant 6 (United Kingdom) who speaks about the need to be responsive to the moment when commenting that "I hate this idea of I've got half an hour for this, about 20 minutes for this, if you want to discuss something, we'll do it quick for three minutes, and then it's gone. What if something comes up?" (p.33)

Sub-theme: Self Knowledge

A second sub-theme is that of 'self-knowledge'. Participant 1 (Denmark) speaks about this in terms of understanding what our purpose is:

> The Native Americans had a saying that your life goal or your purpose of life was to fill up your holy grail. Like your inner spirit. That's the only thing you have to do in life. When young people are asking 'What's the purpose of my life? What do I need to do?' and stuff like that, the response would be- it's to become a better human. All through your life. You never stop learning and never stop getting better. (p.4)

Education being about individual growth and awareness before any academic achievement is an idea expressed by Participant 6 (United Kingdom), "Before it even becomes about academic or critical thinking, or any of those things, before it becomes about political awareness, it's personal individual growth. "(p.29)

Participant 4 (Norway) also speaks about this by giving examples of the questions we should ask ourselves based on his own experiences of coming to terms with setbacks in his life:

> How can you contribute as a person? …I asked life, what have you to offer me? The answer came, what have you to give? …the more you give, the more you're offering, the more you receive, the more joy you experience in life. (p.20)

Participant 7 (Tanzania) expands on the idea that part of individual development is learning how to operate in society by grounding it in the barriers faced young Tanzanian mothers:

> In life skills we have different topics. For instance, the first topic we are teaching them is health, specifically for those kids who get pregnant, and they fail to continue. So, we are trying to teach them how they can prevent themselves from getting unexpected second pregnancies… we also teach them how-to live-in society, so that they can cope in society. How they can cope with stress, how they can deal with stress so that it cannot affect their thinking, and also have different views. We're teaching them the issue of gender and how they can fit in society, how they can cooperate within the society. (p.36)

Participant 6 (United Kingdom) builds on the idea that knowing yourself is about accepting who you are and what your starting point is:

> It's also an ethos of enabling our learners to use their experiences, negative as well as positive… let's enable people to grow in a way that they can show that expert knowledge…. We just want to add to what you already are so you can go out and be who you are. (p.31)

Knowing ourselves before seeing our place in society is couched in terms of sustainability by Participant 1 (Denmark):

> When you talk about sustainability, it's so complicated, because you can talk about it individually, you need to function well like being sustainable in yourself, before you maybe can start looking out and into the society in the world. (p.4)

Participant 2 (Finland) raises a similar point about the need to be individually sustainable as a precursor to any societal contribution:

> In normal life, we give away the responsibility of what kind of food we are eating and almost everything …and then I came to the result that actually the only responsible life is to take back all these delegated things. (p.8)

In doing so he also explains that this self-knowledge can help us understand the extent to which we might feel comfortable being a part of wider society:

> I'm not really living in a community because I prefer to live abroad from the community. But when I see something, or I have a thing that I should tell, then I go into the community, but after that I withdraw again. Thirty years ago, I didn't know if I should be in the community. Or where should I be? What is my role? It lasted for many years until I got a feeling that my position in the community is not really at the centre of community. It's at the border. (p.8)

Sub-theme: Speaking up

A third theme within this category is that of finding the confidence to speak up. Participant 6 (United Kingdom) speaks about this from her own personal experience:

> I talk about these things, especially on the first day of access, when they feel sick, they're nervous, like I did, my mum locked me out of the house when I went to access because she said, 'You're not coming back in' …I just say 'Look, I get it I understand'. So that's where it's all coming from. I just think I wish I'd had a voice. I wish I'd known how to speak up. I wish I'd known how to challenge authority. (p.32)

Participant 8 (India) sees this as central to the work of their college in seeing the act of 'speaking out' as a sign of increased confidence:

> Communication development is one of the main things in the life skill development, developing the communication skill of the candidate students, because they often keep quiet, because they come out of the normal school, and they drop out from the normal school because they cannot understand anything, or they are behind, and they cannot compete with other students. So, normally they keep silent in the classrooms, and they feel that 'Oh, I don't know anything, I have no confidence like that.' So, we start with what skills they have. Then we give some communication exercises and techniques so that they will come out and speak…this includes practice in public speaking, practice in group discussion, practice in preparing the assignments and coming and presenting in the classrooms…different types of activities such as debates and discussions. They start speaking, we want them to speak, they speak out. So as the main output, at the end of the program, or after two years, or three years or more, the main thing we want them to achieve is to believe 'I am now a good speaker' or 'I can speak out'. (p.42)

Adding to the importance of communication in personal development participant 6 (United Kingdom) expands on the idea that being a confident communicator makes us more able to advocate for ourselves:

> It's an ethos of personal growth, personal advocacy, personal responsibility, getting back into the world… then further it's social responsibility and political engagement. But it's not necessarily big international ideas, but more on a local level, such as if you're having issues with your council, here's how you write to them for yourself. If you're trying to access support services, here's what advocacy is about. Our activism is on a personal activism level, or like a personal advocacy level, and then it grows into more. (p.30)

Some participants are less focused on individual development and instead made community development central to their mission. As Participant 3 (Maine, USA) explains "I wouldn't put that as the primary bucket of why we do what we do. I think a bigger driver is creating a space where people can feel connected to others." (p.27)

Participant 6 (United Kingdom) summarises the idea that Folk School education has a social justice dimension to its facilitation of personal development when explaining that:

> We're not here to teach qualifications. We're here to teach people how to live in this world, but also how to challenge this world. How to be who you are in society, how to be the version of yourself that you want to be and how to advocate for yourself. (p.34)

Sub-theme: Escape from failure

All but two of the participants discuss education in terms of the second chance that Folk Schools give and how mainstream education can create a sense of individual failure or disillusionment.

Participant 3 (Washington, USA), although talking about their experience in community education highlights the need to recognise peoples' individual competencies:

> There are many barriers for folks that don't have a high school diploma, they're paid miserably, that sort of thing. On the high school 21 program the way that we did it was we assumed if you're an adult, living your life, you probably have these competencies. So, one of the things that we did was when people came in and said, 'Hey, I want a GED, I need to take this test and get my high school diploma, because my job is requiring it, or I want a better job', I said, 'Well, you can do the GED, which is a test that if you're a good test taker, I'd recommend that route. But if you're not a good test taker, or have had some barriers in your background, then maybe look at high school 21'. They would meet with a counsellor and go through their work history and talk with them about their life and what they had done and how many kids they have. Trying to get the holistic picture of a person. Then we could give high school credit according to what evidence of competency was in their job descriptions, and evidence of competency that could be validated through their story… we'd award credit and say you've got this left to do in order to get your diploma. They could do these standard modules that we had or work with a faculty member to figure out how to demonstrate that competency. One of the examples that I that I like to give is that there was this guy who was learning how to do his own brewing and distilling. (pp.13-14)

Working in both mainstream and Folk Education Participant 4 (Norway) is well placed to comment on the toll meritocratic qualification-based education can take on learners:

> When I started in 1993, they were writing reports after each journey, and we were writing a lot. Today there is very little writing. I think secondary education has destroyed that in a way because they are so fed up with things when they come here… they want to experience something different…probably 80% of the students coming here are fed up, they're so tired. (p.19)

The role that Folk Education has in offering an alternative curriculum for learners considered in need of specialist provision is exemplified in a programme run by the rural Folk School led by Participant 5 (Maine, USA):

> We have kids who experience social anxiety, or perhaps have experienced trauma. A more flexible family-like environment is conducive to kids who have experienced trauma, who have social anxiety, or even who have perhaps a diagnosis of like ADHD and just need greater flexibility to be able to learn outside, or get up and move, or be a little bit more hands-on in a smaller family-like setting. (p.25)

Adding to this, whilst also discussing learners with socio-economic barriers to learning Participant 6 (United Kingdom) is explicit about the many levels of failure her learners had experienced:

> Generally, it's a type of learner that has been excluded from education for one reason or another. Usually, our learners are in recovery, or have experienced abuse, or are experiencing poverty. People like single parents, for example, or people who are homeless learners … there's an influx of younger learners that have been diagnosed or have gone through heavy HCPs, or have gone through situations… The one thing in common is that every learner has either been failed by education, failed by life, failed by someone they love, failed by society, public services, etc. I always say to a new tutor, if you go into a mainstream college, one of our learners will probably be in a group of twenty. If you come into college, they will be all twenty, and that's the difference. (p.30)

She also expresses no doubt about the role education plays in this failure:

> It's education that fails. It's not the learner. It's absolutely education. It's absolutely the teacher. It's absolutely the system. It's absolutely the curriculum. It's all those things. (p.29)

The theme of failure is continued by Participant 7 (Tanzania):

> Some of them failed to continue due to maybe poverty. Some of them will find that the school is too far from them. So, the barrier to acquiring knowledge is lack of conducive environments. Sometimes they fail, not because they are unable, but because of the environments which affected them in acquiring the knowledge. Because of poverty they fail to continue. (p.37)

Participant 8 (India) adds to the idea that in many countries access to education is a matter of socio-economics:

> In India, the concerns are mainly related to unemployment. So, we have students from the poor socio-economic background and students who have mostly dropped out from the formal system of education. So, those are the people who are really in need, and they want an alternative model of education. (p.41)

Returning to the idea that education can make learners believe they are failures, because exams can be failed and, in many countries, they are also used as a passport to progression into the next academic year, Participant 9 (Nigeria) also highlights the traditional belief that within Nigerian communities everyone was put to some use for the good of the community:

> If they failed the exams, they were considered failures. And there wasn't much provision for them. They were just called failures, and some would take to prostitution, some to crime. With this in his mind, because he was one of the top officials there, he felt bad about it. And he kept on thinking that there had to be some other kind of education that could give these people their self- esteem and let them understand more about life. It was turning around in his mind until just one evening, he was in the pub with some friends, and someone who had been to a conference in Denmark was talking about folk schools. So that's serendipity. He collected all the documents from the conference and read them. And when he was reading it also had a

> resonance with our traditional system of education. Because traditionally, nobody was considered useless.

Sub-theme: Craft learning

A consistent theme that emerged from the conversations was that of craft learning, which was discussed in terms of how we learn, earning a living and its historical context within the movement.

Participant 1 (Denmark) focuses on his belief that we undervalue the place of practical 'hands-on' learning:

> The first time they remember that they learned something was practical, like the first time I rode a bike without help… so it was a bodily feeling more than like, theoretically, I learned how to spell the word blah, blah, blah. (p.3)

He presents the argument that not only has educational curriculum shifted too far towards 'head' learning and linked craft with creativity:

> And that just like made me think quite a lot about the way we teach because we teach only for the head. At the moment when we get our students at the high school, and they want to consider themselves creative people or they have a dream of becoming creative people, doing stuff with our hands… but young people nowadays…they can't use their hands anymore. They don't learn things with their hands anymore because there's so much in our heads. So, we had when I was in school, woodworking classes, and I learned how to knit and sew and stuff like that … I think there's a close connection between our hands and minds. (p.3)

In doing so he also highlights the idea that the development of *Bildung* also relies on us developing experientially through practical craft activities:

> But I'm actually using most of my time to talk about what we're talking about, like that our teaching, and learning skills, of course, to cut with a saw, I can show you how to do it, but you need to experience it yourself. Try it out yourself. You have to make your own paint; you have to highlight your own highlights to actually get the *Bildung* going, to learn and do it your own way. I can show you what I do. But that's just demonstration or teaching or stuff like that. But that's not really *Bildung*. You have to grab, like you have to touch. (p.5)

Participant 2 (Finland) moves this argument on considering how practical activities and skills are interconnected and should be applied within authentic contexts:

> The special thing in our schooling is that we are not teaching certain skills, so much, but more the context around the skills. When we are doing firewood, we are teaching how to make fire, how to save fire, how to arrange your work so that you don't use too much firewood. What you should combine, what works, what should be pushed into winter and what work you should you

> have to do immediately… and so nothing is really separate… this is an associative thing… teaching somehow, like the whole. For this reason, I'm also jumping from things to other things all the time, so that they get to know how one thing is embedded. (p.9)

The relevance that this brings is a theme in my discussion with Participant 5 (Maine, USA) who not only advocates the flexibility that comes from this approach, but also the connection to community that develops:

> In many ways, it's the same kind of content. But the delivery modalities are able to be a lot more flexible. We're able to bring students out in the community and be able to learn directly with experts… we have a flexible setting, and because students don't have to go to one class for 15 minutes, and then a bell rings, and they go to another class for 15 minutes, or an hour, or whatever the schedule is, we can spend a whole entire day in a field. We have a greater opportunity to be hands on and I think students experience their learning as more relevant because they can make deeper connections to the community in which they live. (p.25)

Many North American folk schools offer learning that celebrates local crafts and the passion with which Participant 3 (Washington. USA) speaks about her own craft learning demonstrates a Folk School belief that teaching is as much about passion for the subject than any formal teacher training:

> The grandma that came into our classroom was a weaver and a quilter. On the weekends, I was able to go and stay with the local weavers' guild and watch her weave… she gave me the job of picking the vegetable matter out of the fibre as she was spinning and then it ended up in a rug. I cannot now live without doing fibre arts. There was some of that in my upbringing too. I'm from a family of eight and from my mother we all learned to sew and to crochet. Now I spin my own yarn and that sort of thing. I do that as sort of a hobby on the side. (p.13)

The idea that craft learning is common in all folk schools is dispelled by Participant 6 (United Kingdom) who makes no mention of craft and Participant 4 (Norway) who speaks about the shift he had witnessed away from craftmanship and vocational learning in general:

> When I started travel tourism thirty years ago, maybe if I had thirty students, maybe seven or eight would go on to study tourism, hotel, leadership, etc. But today, maybe one or two. So today it is more like expanding and experiencing… Fifty years ago, there were mostly people from the surrounding villages coming to stay for half a year. They were very different schools and a lot more practical with carpentry, welding, cooking, but it started changing in the late 70s and early 80s. (p.17)

Three participants are consistent in their view that Folk School education should primarily be about vocational training because individuals need a craft or trade to be economically self-sufficient. Participant 7 (Tanzania) discusses his folk school's role in qualifying learners so that they could validate and further the skills already learned informally on the streets. This was good example of recognising individual starting points and respecting prior experience:

> We find that some of them, they have this skill in the streets, but they are not recognized because they don't have certificates, but they have the experience, and they know it. So first, we start by asking them, how do we do this? For instance, for the case of electricity, they then explain we are doing this and this and this. We are not just sharing the experiences but also correcting them for those small very small mistakes. And the second thing we are saying is that we are sharing the experience, some of them they are doing jobs without attending the colleges, but they have the experience of doing it, although it is not professionally. (p.37)

Participant 8 (India) is also clear that learners attending Folk School should specialize in a vocation so they can move into employment:

> They select one skill in which they undergo continuous training, for example, say carpentry or water and sanitation or automobile mechanics or electricals or agriculture. So, they specialize and learn that job. (p.42)

He also makes a direct link with Gandhi's philosophy that education should be hands-on:

> Then in the case of Mahatma Gandhi, who is the father of Indian Nation, you know very well, from him his philosophy of education is called a new education, which is actually basic education or briefly, it is a craft education or hands on education; he wanted the students to learn things by doing things. So, we also promote crafts in addition to the vocational skill which they are learning. For example, we have a school in which the students every week are engaged in learning crafts skills, like weaving or coconut fibre-based activities. So, craft-based activities, that is from Mahatma Gandhi. (p.44)

Participant 9 (Nigeria) adds to the idea that Folk Schools should prepare learners to be financially independent individuals through learning a trade that can support them:

> They learn fashion, for instance. We have cases of students who have finished and set up their own fashion outfits or their tailoring house… also those who have learned computer studies with us, and who have set up their own outfits. they can even do work from their own house, which means they could be doing the supplying, they could do wedding cakes, they could do venue decorations. It enables them to be independent. It also enables them to seek paid employment if they want. Some of them also work in hotels. (p.49)

Theme 2 – Community Contribution

This theme details the participants' views about the role that Folk School education takes in contributing to local communities. In turn it is divided into the four sub-themes of: 'Serving the community', 'The uniqueness of place', 'The benefits of being community minded', and 'A response to in-equities'.

Sub-theme: Serving our community

Participant 2 (Finland) makes the connection between self-knowledge and how we choose to serve, or contribute to, society:

> Service, this is about knowing yourself, and then choosing how you want to live your life, and then deciding where you fit in with society. And if you decide you want to be in the centre of it, or if you decide that you want to be on the edge of it, this kind of knowing yourself makes you know where you're going to be in that community. (p.9)

Participant 6 (United Kingdom) identifies community service, or volunteering, as a natural progression from self-knowledge:

> It is wonderful, learners progressing the way that they need to and then they can move further into what they're doing. We've got a lot of partner engagement as well. A lot of our learners have volunteered within the organizations that have helped them. So, another part of our ethos is really to bring in that community responsibility. (p.31)

Participant 8 (India) places this idea of community service as the central aim of their college which he outlined as follows:

> The overall objective is we want to build up a service mind among them. They are not really developing just for themselves but for their family and the community. Because the objective of the whole institution is to create a spirit of being involved in community activities, they should be an active member in the community. We are not expecting everybody should do that but at least one out of 10 will have that attitude, because our overall institution is a non-profit. Students should have that service mind so that they can be an active member in the community (p.42)

This belief in the Folk Schools' role in serving their local communities is exemplified by Participant 9 (Nigeria) who speaks about a community project undertaken by his Folk School:

> The one that stands out was published in the newspaper, do you know how it was published? 'Grundtvig movement lights Oba community after years in darkness'. In our local village, the transformer that gives them electricity was damaged. And for years, they were appealing to the government to replace it. You know what it's like with corrupt governments. They didn't do anything. So, what happened was that they brought this to our attention. Over after a few years we succeeded in buying a new transformer for the community and installing it so that they could have electricity again… Another thing is waste disposal, we do waste disposal for the community. Sometimes we also have tried to do sanitization campaigns also. (p.52)

Sub-theme: The uniqueness of place and a sense of belonging

Participant 5 (Maine, USA) gives a particularly metaphorical description of how they see their own growth within the community they work in, presenting the idea that the more rooted in a place we are the greater the contribution we can make to it:

> I've found value for me and being like a tree that blew in here as a seed, but then rooted in, and it seems like each year that I'm here, those roots go a little deeper. And you know the heartwood that holds me up and my work here gets just a little thicker and a little stronger, and I'm able to have a have a greater impact. (p.28)

Participant 3 (Washington, USA) speaks in similarly poetic terms about the uniqueness of place being a guide to what a folk school offers:

> Well, here's the quote that I just love, and that I have shared with the Folk School Alliance … you stick your finger in the ground and you smell where you are, there is where you find the needs of the people at a particular time and place. And that is where you find the calling of the folk high school or folk school calling. (p.15)

She also used another interesting term mathematical term to highlight the belief that each high school is unique:

> People ask, what's a Folk School? And I say it could be a lot of things… there's this mathematical term about fuzzy sets and that is what folk schools are like. (p.15)

This idea that Folk Schools are unique to the place they are founded and responsive to local needs is added to by Participant 7 (Tanzania):

> It depends on the focal development of the colleges. There are fifty-four in Tanzania and the vocational programs are differing from one college to another, we are not the same. It depends also on the community in which the folk development colleges are in. Some of the programs are the same, but some of the programs are different. For instance, the government colleges around the lake, they'll be also having the programs of fishing. (p.40)

Participant 9 explains the benefits of respecting the traditions of a place, whilst also making it clear the problems of imposing a uniform, or standardised, approach:

> Traditional African education in our own culture, before it was organized in terms of age grades, if it's for example the female, you might need to learn things about agriculture or farming, or foods as well, useful foods. So, in the traditional system, everybody had a niche and did something for the community, contributing something somehow, for in the community you didn't have that kind of sampled uniformity, that you have to pass just one exam which is what we have now inherited from the colonial system, where those who failed a particular exam were considered failures and they couldn't go forward. (p.48)

Sub-theme: The benefits of being community minded

Participant 5 (Maine, USA) notes that being actively connected to a local community is necessary to thrive as an individual:

> After having one's basic needs met, in order to feel like you're thriving, you have to have ways to be connected that feed your soul in a community. So being able to take an art class with people, being able to do physical activities with people, being able to be part of a book club with people. These are not just meaningful, but necessary social experiences. (p.27)

Participant 7 (Tanzania) introduces the idea that Folk Schools should actively contribute to the prosperity of the local community through development activities:

> Most of the community around our colleges they are cultivating cash crops, coconut trees, and even coffee. Sometimes they are lacking proper skills or knowledge of how to make sure that the cash crops are gaining profit from what they're producing. So, we are trying to teach them the proper methods of keeping the farms. Making sure that they get more crops and gain more money. And even the food crops the way they are, sometimes they are using the local methods in such a way that they get products which are not of a good standard, so they sell it in bulk for a very low price. So, we are just going there and organising them and trying to educate them in good methods. (p.39)

The interaction between a Folk School and their local community is most evident in the importance that Participant 8 (India) gives to the concept of micro communities and the resulting learning community:

> Arthur Morgan was an engineer and educationalist who promoted small communities. In fact, we have imbibed the small community idea from Arthur Morgan. So, he believed very strongly in small communities promoting small communities, not macro communities, instead micro communities, who are mutually dependent, who are getting lots of opportunity to interact with each other…we are a community actually, we are living together, working together, learning together, interacting together, so that there are a lot of opportunities to learn things outside the classroom. We have not only learning in the classroom, but we are also learning from the community. So, we developed a community environment to learn. (p.44)

Participant 9 (Nigeria) introduces the idea that local communities give people a system of support and a shared identity which should be celebrated:

> The strong commonwealth ties, the fact that it's almost routine, you don't have old people's homes, you just have that strong community, these values which we have, but in the mad rush for Westernization, some of those things are just overlooked. So, when we do talk about identity, it is that we should recognize the good things we have… even when you do play in the global

> environments, you still know that you have something good, rather than a situation where you are looking at what you have from the colonial-to-colonial lens. (pp.49-50)

Sub-theme: A response to inequities

The impact of Westernization and colonialism introduced by Participant 9 is an issue echoed by other participants who reflect on the role that Folk Schools play in countering inequities in society:

Participant 3 (Washington, USA) discusses the idea that some Folk Schools are founded to counter the isolation that modern life can create in communities:

> The way that I'm defining that is that late nineties to now is a sort of wave of new folk schools. And when I asked the founders of these folk schools why, they said the way that we are living lives that divide us from our immediate community, whether it's technology or work, the amount of work that we do, and that sort of thing…this desire to find connection with your immediate community. (p.14)

Participant 5 (Maine, USA) adds to the theme of isolation by discussing the idea that lack of financial resources in rural communities can be a key contributor:

> Feel connected to this place… also feel like there's access to a vibrant community life. In our rural region, isolation can be a real problem. If people don't have the resources to always have a functioning car, you can't get somewhere. Or if you don't have the resources to take a class and to be with people that can be a struggle. It can be easy for people, especially in vulnerable communities in this region, to experience isolation. (p.27)

Adding to this Participant 5 also draws attention to the idea that on a micro level communities can work together to overcome inequities and find solutions:

> I would agree that folk schools in America are a resistance, or are a counter to, the loss of community, how to re-instill a sense of community. I think they may be a response to inequities. I think one of the biggest inequities in the region in which I work is that of economic inequity. Since this is a rural place, and since a lot of jobs historically were related to resource extraction, whether that's fisheries or forestry… systems have very real impacts for individuals in rural places, particularly places whose economies are built on resource extraction. So how do we create other opportunities that are locally centred? Even if it doesn't solve the problem, we can ground people back in their communities? And look inward for some solutions? As we try to work outwardly as well. (p.27)

Participant 7 (Tanzania) sees the role of Folk Schools in addressing community problems as integral to their mission, "One of the tasks we are required to do is to do research around the

community, trying to see their problems, trying to see their needs where they are in the community and try and solve them." (p.39)

Participant 8 (India) sees their mission as a continuous delivery of programs targeted at those within the local community in most need of livelihood development:

> The whole institution is also involved in community activities because our target group includes farmers, artisans, youth and women but currently it is mainly focused on young people and women. We have a number of woman self-help groups and through those groups we are linked with the community. We continuously organize programs or involve them in development programs or some support of livelihood development… we used to call our motto 'Community based education in an education-based community'. We are a community living together in a community. This community is promoting community-based education. (p.43)

Sub-theme: The living word

The classic Grundtvigian belief that dialogue should take precedence as a pedagogical approach was a theme present in the majority of conversations. Participant 2 (Finland) when asked if learners spent time discussing life's big issues and questions responds emphatically that, "Yes, we are going very far. Very far. I mean, I think we have nothing we are somehow not dealing with." (p.10)

Other participants also advocate the role that discussing 'life' has in Folk School teaching, Participant 6 (United Kingdom) gives an example of how this does not always have to be planned for and stresses the common understanding that develops:

> But what came out of that was there was a learner who was massively educated, who came up with a classic comment 'It's just a hair style' when we were talking about Afro hair… rather than how dare you, that's my cultural heritage, it was let me let me support you to move forward. I personally think that's the flip learning element as well and a lot to do with making them educate each other as well, I think that those conversations should be happening. (p.33)

Participant 9 (Nigeria) adds to the idea that discussion should be about anything that learners are interested in and see as relevant:

> In the awareness curriculum, it has that room for people to actually discourse and learn about what interests them…I'll give you an example. I think, two weeks or three weeks ago, some students wanted to discuss Idi Amin…When you do discuss these things, it's not necessarily people that changed your society for the better. It could be people that affected it in any other way. After all, I think it was the atrocities of Hitler that gave life to the United Nations. (p.59)

Participant 6 (United Kingdom) gives a particularly broad explanation of the equal standing and openness that discussions should entail:

> The whole point is that you say what you think, talk about what you know and if you're not sure, it's all right. Tell me more about that or just let me have a look. And I think that's the difference. There's no fear. We're all educating each other, we're all challenging each other, and we might not all agree, but what you think matters. (p.33)

Grounding discussions within the lives and experiences of learners is a point made by Participant 7 (Tanzania), who also contrasts such learning with exam preparation by returning to the earlier theme of mainstream education's preoccupation with qualifications:

> First, we encourage them to share their experiences, but also the methods we are teaching them is to share their experiences… We encourage teachers to act as a facilitator and to make sure that the knowledge is acquired through discussing. Instead of just using the so-called banking system, you are just depositing the materials and you want them to retrieve as it is in the exam. (p.38)

Two participants stress the role of stories. The first was Participant 3 (Washington, USA) who in discussing the impact of Spider Woman stories on a young learner references the early Folk High schools use of storytelling through Nordic myths and legends:

> We did a lot of storytelling and writing those stories down and then reading and acting them out. I remember one particular student called Freddie who had some pretty difficult mental health issues. But when we started to do string games, in the wintertime, when the snow hits the ground, then the Spider Woman goes to sleep and, and then the Spider Woman stories come out and the string games come out… I just remember, he could attend to nothing until we got to Spider Woman and string games. Then he was so focused on learning the string games and listening to the stories. There was no expectation that we would, that we would integrate Navajo culture into our classroom practice. (p.12)

Participant 4 (Norway) presents the importance of stories in terms of understanding each other's stories:

> In New York, if we have the opportunity to talk to Native Americans, for instance, what is their story? That is so important, because people have so many different levels of stories, we have this surface story, who are you? What are you doing? These are surface things. And the deeper we get, the more interesting it is, what is the real story? (p.18)

Two of the participants are also explicit in highlighting that the importance dialogue can be directly attributed to Grundtvig. The first was Participant 8 (India) who explains that:

> As far as Grundtvig is concerned, we mainly focus on dialogue. I talked to you about the communication skills. Not dead books, but lively education, lively interaction for which he has given more importance… Ideas of these dialogues, we have adopted, (p.45)

The other was Participant 9 (Nigeria) who also adds to the idea that the topics of conversation should not be dictated by any prescribed agenda:

> We have curriculum that takes the form of what Grundtvig would have called the living word. So, we have lectures, we have talks, we have interactions, but what distinguishes them is that it is not informed by anything academic, it's not informed by anything vocational. (p.49)

Theme 3– National and Global Citizenship

This theme is concerned with how Folk Schoolteachers see the movement's role in promoting national and global growth and responsibility. In turn it is divided into the three subcategories of 'Social cohesion', 'Questioning society' and 'Cultivating a national identity'.

Sub-theme: Social cohesion

Participant 3 (Washington, USA) raises the issue of social cohesion as part of national enlightenment:

> A folk school is what emerges from the people's need. And in North America, the need is this social cohesion around what might be called the historic poetic: the art, the dance, the culture that makes us tied to our place. It's also the way the historic poetic fits into the people's enlightenment. (p.15)

Participant 4 (Maine, USA) expands on the idea that social cohesion can be about bringing cultures together within a community:

> This is a three-nation region. I'm sitting in what's now Maine. This is the ancestral homeland for the Wabanaki people, the indigenous folks of this region, for whom this has been their homeland since time immemorial, or since the glaciers receded. We also border New Brunswick, Canada. So being a three-nation region, the original founders of the organization were Wabanaki folks, Euro Canadian folks and Euro American folks. In addition to being inspired by Scandinavian Folk School models, there was also an emphasis on indigenous forms of education, and experiential education. All of those do sort of have a common thread in that they are education that is locally relevant, intended to meet the needs and interests of people in a place and dynamic enough to be able to change over time to meet the needs and interests of a community. (p.24)

Sub-theme: Questioning society

Participant 2 (Finland) questions the industrialization of modern production and argues for the return to a localised, self-sufficient and community focused methods:

> Everything is connected but we are used to thinking and doing this in an industrial context, which is separating the works from each other, and making them follow one after another… on the farm it is different because many works are connected to each other at the same time, sometimes parallel. (p.9)

Participant 2's (Finland) concern with sustainability and global economics also introduces the idea that we should question the whole process of how food comes to our table:

> If you know, from where the food is coming, and you know, for example, how much work you have to put in into a kilo of something. And then you see what the prices in the supermarket are. Then you will realise that there's a contradiction you can't really solve. And then you start to think, why? How can it be? So, in our society this can't be done in an ethical, or in a responsible work way. (p.10)

This question of how we do things in society is a theme taken up Participant 3 (Washington, USA) in discussing the folk schools' role in challenging the systems that society creates:

> But the people who were setting up these schools are about creating a counterculture, because it's kicking against the state's system. What is the word? It wasn't counterculture that they said, it's a different word. But it's disruption of this trajectory and in our culture in North America. They're disruptors, that's how they saw themselves, although when I asked them if they saw themselves as activist, they were like, 'Oh, no.' (p.14)

Reflecting on his role as an educator in promoting a questioning mindset, Participant 1 (Denmark) explains that "my job is trying to tell people that the society as it is, is not a law of nature, that's people making it, we can change it, we can do it differently, we can build our cities differently, we can build our school systems differently. It's not like a set truth."

Sub-theme: Cultivating a national identity

Participant 7 (Tanzania) introduces the idea that Folk Schools can play an almost paternal role in nation building and creating societal norms:

> The subject is called civics. In this subject, we have different topics in which we are teaching. For instance, the first topic we are teaching is called our nation. We are teaching our students and adults how to know the nation, the different size of the nation and so forth, but also, we are

> teaching the topics of national constitution, democracy, gender issues and also responsible citizenship within the country. This is where we are teaching them different values as Tanzanians and as Africans, how to behave, and also, we are teaching them sometimes those bad practices within their communities. For instance, some of the tribes practise the circumcision of women. So, we are trying to teach them that this practice is not good. We are telling them the different effects and how we want them to avoid it. Also, we show them the importance of attending the general election, why it is important to elect a leader, the qualities of a good leader… we are encouraging them to be elected within the colleges. Mock democracy is in the college. (p.39)

This role of Folk Schools in building an identity, whether national or cultural, and how that fits with being a global citizen, is also suggested by Participant 9 (Nigeria):

> You also have things like culture and society, which is very, very beautiful, because one of the main things to do is to build a sense of cultural identity, cultural pride, as well. Then we have programs like democracy and human rights… sometimes during those events we could take items of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and discourse. In each of these cases, we are applying them and considering them from the point of view of our own local realities. I think that's key. (p.49)

Expanding on this Participant 9 (Nigeria) explores the idea that building a strong cultural identity can also be considered as a form of resistance, particularly in nations which have in some way been culturally oppressed:

> Now, where identity comes in is that when you consider where we are coming from, in terms of colour, in terms of colonialism, you know, and the experience we had before, it had the effect of making people to look down on their own culture. There were many things that were passed on wrongly and we had the idea of looking down on our own culture or looking down on our way of doing things. And I think, in a way, even Grundtvig himself had something like that going from time to time. He wanted to stick to his own language. In the same way to people, even our local language, it's becoming more fashionable to say, I can speak it… it has been looked down like in Grundtvig's own time…like the elitist language. Danish was looked down on… We are also trying to let people recognize the meaning of identity and that there is good in what you have as well. Like our own language. (p.49)

The specific examples that Participant 9 (Nigeria) gives to support this were reminiscent of the importance that Grundtvig gave to celebrating Nordic mythology:

> There are many things, like now we talk about the Greek gods, we talk about Greek and Roman gods, Zeus, Poseidon, and all that. Before colonialism, we had that in our local religion. So, we still have our own god *Amadioha*. In Scandinavia, it's called Thor. But when the colonialists came, these things were called pagan practices… We have considered the best form of dressing, Western dressing…Sometimes I wear suits as well. But it doesn't mean that our own Isiagu is bad… Don't look down on your own. Because you can equally develop by also recognizing and developing our own. (p.50)

Theme 4– Defining *Bildung*

The fourth theme of defining *Bildung* is one that emerges in some conversations. In some cases, teachers were unfamiliar with the term but could give very accurate definitions. Participant 9 (Nigeria) is familiar with the term *Dannelse*, whereas Participant 2 (Finland) uses the Finnish term *Sivistys.*

One of the most secure in their understanding of the term is Participant 1(Denmark) whose definition is very much focused on continuous growth:

> It's a lifelong search, or something like that, to know more and become a more complex human being… actually it's about all of these things, like teaching, learning, schooling, education, but also, like good behaviour, and being a nice person and being nice to the environment and stuff like that… you constantly are getting more and more bits and pieces for the complexity in yourself… like philosophising, as we do, is also *Bildung*… because every time you open your eyes and look into another subject or another person's opinion, you'll learn more. And then of course, the task is like, you could just reject it and say, I totally disagree. So, I'll just reject that and put it in the corner. But you can also take some of it in and say maybe they're right. And in my opinion, that's how *Bildung* starts, you're not like stone. How do you say? That everything is not carved in stone, you have always your eyes and mind open for other opportunities. (p.4)

Participant 2's (Finland) emphasises our role in serving or benefiting society. Initially Lasse was unsure about the term *Bildung*, until I realised that the term, although familiar in Finland, is more commonly known as *Sivistys.* He explains to me that to him it meant 'culture' and "also about a good life, I mean, in a moral way…not selfish… you want to serve other people." (p8)

Participant 3 (Washington, USA) introduces the idea that developing *Bildung* is more than 'becoming' a person and is also about community 'becoming':

> It really didn't hit me until later about the significance of culture, learning and identity, and becoming a person and becoming part of a group, a community. (p13)

An idea explored by Participant 3(Maine, USA) is that of questioning our assumptions and understanding who we are and in what context. Noticeably making the connection between self, local community and global society:

> I really think that what the folk high schools are doing on a massive scale with their population is to create a population of philosophers. This is the process of finding out who you are, who you are in your society and in your small community, and then taking that out to the broader world global perspective. And doing it in a way in which you create and you're critical of yourself… Is this assumption still true here? Is this true for me? Is it true for my society? Is it true for everyone? (p.15)

Expanding on this idea of understanding where we fit in society Participant 4 (Norway) explains that:

> It's respect and attitudes to other people. It's understanding your position in life. It's working for other goals than where are right now and thinking how should we reach them? And it's also very focused on letting young people think positively about themselves. (p.19)

Participant 5 (Maine, USA) sums up the themes of continuous growth in the context of continuous change within society. In doing so they raise the point that we have to learn to operate collaboratively on a community level:

> The mission of this organization is to create opportunities or to offer up education opportunities, to support individual, community and global wellbeing… create responsive educational opportunities, that word responsive is important to us. As an organization, we don't imagine ourselves being static. The needs of people in this area, the issues change. Our political landscape has been dynamic over the last six or so years… which results in increased polarization as people march into their camps and implant their flags and have a hard time listening to one another. So, one of the places that we think that we can focus in on is how can we as a community organization work to bring people together? To try to decrease that polarization by being in community together, not to say that people who live in communities need to agree, but how can we have our separate viewpoints and still be able to operate productively and civilly? And that we feel does come from the model of Scandinavian folk education of how we respond to economic or social or political issues, as local communities and do productive work in communities, and if we can do productive work in communities, that translates to being more productive and how we solve common problems across the globe. (p.26-27)

Participant 8 (India) makes the connection between individual growth, community participation and employability. This is of particular interest within the context of educational systems which focus on the development of human capital:

> Our objective is to actually build the individual for himself, his family and the community, to be an active member in the community. And, along with that, build up his livelihood. That is the only thing we focus on, to become an active person in the community. (p.46)

Chapter Seven: Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

I do not want to be a part of this cult of individuality, or this new age thing… knowing yourself isn't actually good enough. You have to know yourself before you can trust others, but it's the second part of the equation that's most important. Well, it's not most important, because that's like putting the cart before the horse, but if the only reason you're looking into yourself is to improve yourself… that "Californian dream"… well, you can stuff it up your arse, because I'm not interested in that.

Steve Ignorant (Crass) as cited by Ian Glasper in "*The Day the Country Died"*, 2014.

Discussion

This research was borne out of a personal frustration with the neo-liberal, employability driven, qualitatively accountable further education sector in which I work. My starting question of – What is a good education? - now seems hopelessly naïve in its breadth. Although far from being a refined research question, it was on reflection more of a challenge to myself to discover an alternative approach to education. It may seem surprising that at the outset I was unfamiliar with the Folk School tradition and, like many people in the United Kingdom, unfamiliar with the term *Bildung*. In discovering both, the focus of this research has become to reveal to the reader what I learned in conversation with nine Folk School educators across four continents about each of these individuals and the values and the *phronesis* and *praxis* that drive their practice. Whether such an alternative educational paradigm might be considered "good" is of course itself a matter of judgement.

As stated in the previous chapter, two key questions emerged and became my focus. The first of these was - How is *Bildung* developed in Folk School *praxis*? The second was - What can be learned from folk educators? Although I have frequently heard people metaphorically describe their research as shining a spotlight on an issue or problem, I would like to adopt an alternative metaphor taken from the Catalan artist Joan Miro which I believe is more apt for this research as a whole and the following discussion of my findings, considering the organic way in which it has developed and the opportunities for creativity upon which I have tried to capitalise. When writing about creating his paintings in, *I Work Like a Gardener*, Miro wrote that "what matters is that it should have sown seeds on earth... A picture must be fertile" (2017). In much the same way that the Victorian botanist George Forrest (1873-1932) travelled the world collecting seeds and specimens of now common garden plants such as buddleias, anemones and asters, I hope that the following discussion and the recommendations that I offer, can contribute some new ideas to amplify and deepen critical discussion and debates surrounding the educational paradigm currently dominating the discourse in

the UK and that this will find fertile ground and even become established and flourish to the extent that it might be regarded as a serious alternative/addition to existing arrangements.

Individual becoming

The first major theme that I discuss is that of 'Individual Becoming' which is broken down into five further sub-themes.

In the introduction I discuss the shift in name for the document formally known as the 'individual learning plan' to that of 'the individual learning journey', questioning the romanticization of a qualitative assessment document. I also question why government funded Adult Education is so often solely employability focused and I argue for the benefits of a liberal education. The metaphor of learning being a 'journey' subsequently became not only a theme in both the literature review and the methodology, through my discussion of the *Bildung*sroman genre, but also through conversation with many of the participants. Although my initial assumption had been that the Folk School movement would interpret the idea of a learning journey as one of personal discovery akin to that of a typical *Bildung*sroman protagonist in believing that, "One ought, every day at least, to hear a little song, read a good poem, see a fine picture, and, if it were possible, to speak a few reasonable words" (Goethe, 1795-6), data from conservations in the research , instead led me to consider to what extent such a romantic ideal is adopted is dependent on cultural, political socio-economic factors.

The Nigerian participant refers to this as being "faced with certain harsh realities of life". This division appears to be between those Folk Schools who consider their purpose to facilitate a journey of 'self-discovery' akin to Biesta's (2002) definition that education is a process of continual realisation and self-discovery rather than training, or alternatively that it is a journey towards 'future economic security'. This is not to say that any Folk School judged that either was not important, but it was clear that the latter took precedence in non-European Folk Schools. It is a divide in opinion that was starkly expressed by the Indian participant when explaining that "Normally in Danish folk high schools they are more focused on life skill development, personal development but here it is the on-the-job training and vocational skill development, because sustenance is also very important". The Nigerian participant, whose school also emphasized the importance of vocational training, suggests the same reason when commenting that, "When people hear about the Folk Schools, where people go to just discover themselves and spend time, they just say they are going there to waste their time… So, we have to combine some elements of utilitarianism, some elements of learning skills". Comparisons can be made with similar views that have been put forward in the United Kingdom, notably by Johnson (2006), as mentioned in Chapter 3, when commenting that "Tai chi may be hugely valuable to people studying it, but it's of little value to the economy". As I will discuss later, although they have chosen to emphasise vocational learning, their commitment to personal and community growth is equally as important. One wonders what Livingston's view would have been considering his statement that, "technical education simply enables us to earn our bread but does not make us complete human beings" (1943, p.69).

The decision to contact Folk Schools in Africa and Asia had been a late one, and as such they formed the final three conversations. What I had not expected was that they would be so overtly employment driven. By complimenting vocational education with Folk School education, their late inclusion was important because what they reveal is how the Folk School approach can work within education systems that equally value employability and qualifications. They also give some insight into the original approach of the Danish Folk High Schools. As the Nigerian participant comments, "with Grundtvig's education for life …it was originally that they were learning a trade, you know, like the Danish farmers."

Within the comments made about 'journeys' it was notable that several of the participants describe the importance of not following what the Norwegian participant calls a "narrow path". He instead highlights the importance of being able to "see all these sideways'; the Tanzanian participant speaks about "an alternative pathway to reach your dreams" and the English participant refers to it as "branching in different directions". Such language counters a view of education that posits that it is a linear process evaluated totally in terms of educational outcomes that can be easily measured.

Whereas the African, Indian and North American participants focus on the importance of community, the European participants repeatedly suggest more anti-establishment or non-conformist views. The Norwegian participant seems to reject meritocracy and conformity when saying that, "It's a kind of a political view in Norway that everybody should be treated equally, everybody stood the same opportunity, etc. But they don't have this because there are so many different aspects, preventing them from reaching their goals." The Finish participant also rejects the learning journey being one of conformity when expressing the view that self-knowledge is "more important than cloning self-sufficient people".

Each sub-theme to varying degrees references a commitment to individual development or what Biesta has called *subjectification*. Within this subtheme three of the participants used such language when speaking about journeys. The Finnish participant suggests that the purpose of the journey was so that learners, "should know about themselves", the Norwegian participant refers to, "seeing the needs of the individual", whilst the English participant uses the phrase, "if you need something for you".

It is noticeable that neither of the North American participants speak about education in terms of it being a journey, although, as discussed later, anti-establishment views were given.

The second sub-theme of 'self-knowledge' is mentioned almost exclusively by the European participants and usually in terms of asking ourselves the question of what we consider to be our purpose in life. The Danish participant explains our purpose as, "to become a better human. All through your life. You never stop learning and never stop getting better." The Norwegian participant expresses our purpose as an answer to that very question when saying that, "the more you give, the more you're offering, the more you receive, the more joy you experience in life." Both participants express the view that integral to knowing ourselves was questioning our purpose. The Finish participant added to this by expressing the view that self-knowledge is also about questioning to

what extent we want to be a part of society. Reflecting on his own experiences he tells me, that "I didn't know if I should be in the community? Or where should I be? What is my role?" The importance given to individual self-knowing is expressed unequivocally by the United Kingdom participant when she gave the view that, "Before it even becomes about academic or critical thinking, or any of those things, before it becomes about political awareness, it's personal individual growth." My perception of the conversation data within this sub-theme is that 'knowing ourselves' seems to be a philosophical question of self-doubt when speaking to the European participants. Only when speaking about sustainability did the conversation become more specific with the Danish participant being specific about self-knowledge as a "need to function well, like being sustainable in yourself", whereas the Finnish participant speaks about it in terms self-sustenance being "the only responsible life".

Again, this sub-theme of "self-knowledge" did not occur within the North American conversations and the Maine, USA participant, when I asked about its importance, explains that "I wouldn't put that as the primary bucket of why we do what we do. I think a bigger driver is creating a space where people can feel connected to others." The only non-European contribution to this sub-theme came from the Tanzanian participant, who, just as the Nigerian and Indian participants had been specific about learning a vocation as the principal goal of the learning journey, was equally specific when talking about 'self-knowledge' being about young teenage mothers understanding their health needs, coping with the stress of their situation, and avoiding second pregnancies. This is another example of an attitude towards education which stresses the need for a clear purpose and outcome.

Within the third sub-theme of 'speaking-up', two of the participants speak about enabling disadvantaged learners to speak up and advocate for themselves. The United Kingdom participant speaks about "knowing how to challenge authority" and "how to challenge this world" by speaking out. The Indian participant speaks about it in terms of how the lack of confidence that comes from school failure can inhibit speaking out and that their school teaches them to believe, "I can speak out." This sub-theme is part of a thread that weaves its way through many of the themes, mainly that of disadvantaged groups resisting power structures within society or seeking to empower their local communities. This links back to the original Danish Folk High Schools giving confidence and voice to the rural community as a popular education movement to challenge the dominant elite within government (Andresén, 1991; Korsgaard, 2004).

Resisting power structures by empowering disadvantaged people also appear within the next sub-theme of 'Escaping Failure'. Although the fact that Folk Schools are fee-paying suggests that the learner population will be from more affluent backgrounds, their original inception was driven by rural emancipation and national identity (Korsgaard, 2002). As a sub-theme it is significant because it highlights that, despite this elitist reputation, the Folk School movement globally still maintains those early radical and emancipatory ideals. It is also significant that it is a theme that binds all the non-Scandinavian Folk Schoolteachers. The Washington, USA participant spoke about it in terms of low paid workers being able to achieve their high school diplomas through the high school 21 program because, "we assumed if you're an adult, living your life, you probably have these competencies." Rejection of meritocracy appears again in the thinking of the United Kingdom

participant who was strident in her belief that learners are "failed by education, failed by life, failed by someone they love, failed by society, public services, etc. Because of poverty they fail to continue." The Indian participant also speaks about poverty being a reason for failure when explaining that his school taught, "students from the poor socio-economic background and students who have mostly dropped out from the formal system of education." Although all three had linked lack of educational success to poverty their main point was that formal education fails the poor. The lasting consequences of this are highlighted by the Nigerian participant when he surmises that, "If they failed the exams, they were considered failures." Such sentiments that express the view that education which is geared towards having winners will inevitably lead to there being losers is also expressed by the English philosopher Mary Midgley (1918-2019) who wrote that "the insistence on individuality that has so enriched our lives degenerates, if we don't watch it critically, into the kind of mindless competitiveness that is so destructive today. It impoverishes lives by locking people up in meaningless solitude" (2003, p.5).

Although the Maine, USA participant does not speak about disadvantage in terms of poverty they also highlight their work with young learners who were deemed to have failed in mainstream school because of social anxiety and trauma. School failure does not appear in the conversation data when speaking to the Scandinavian participants although the Norwegian participant did point out that "probably 80% of the students coming here are fed up".

A final sub-theme related to the 'Individual Becoming' theme was that of 'craft learning'. At their inception, the Danish Folk High schools offered a mix of lectures on humanities subjects such as history and literature, combined with hands-on activity to advance the farming skills of the rural population. Looking through the curriculum offer of Danish folk high schools, they now offer a diverse curriculum that incorporates everything from psychology to kayaking, but little evidence of vocational craft (DFHS, 2022) and I was interested to know if this was the case within the global Folk School community. Although the Norwegian participant tells me that originally the schools had been, "a lot more practical with carpentry, welding, cooking, but it started changing in the late 70s and early 80s", the conversation data suggests that craft learning is still a dominant theme within the wider movement. Having already identified that the African and Indian schools considered the learning of a vocation as their primary orientation, I was unsurprised to find mention of preparing learners to work in trades such as agriculture, electricals, carpentry, mechanics and cake-making. It was interesting that the Tanzanian participant speaks about learners having, "skill in the streets, but they are not recognized because they don't have certificates", observing that they can achieve greater prosperity by being qualified. He also stresses that all learning should not just be about qualifications in our conversation. The Nigerian participant adds to the idea that being qualified in a trade is a form of 'individual becoming' by expressing the view that "it enables them to be independent".

The fact that all three schools vocationally qualify learners through award bearing courses brings into question the tradition of Folk Schools rejecting grades and exams as detrimental to learning (Corl, 1981; Foght, 1914; Kenworthy, 1946; Rasmussen, 2013). Here there are perhaps opportunities to explore the common ground with vocational education in the United Kingdom and further

comparative research into what each system can learn from each other about vocational education's role in encouraging the development of qualities of mind, character and enhancing personal fulfilment. Frank Coffield wrote that "electricians have souls too" in *Just Suppose Teaching and Learning Became the First Priority* (p.43), implying that having a vocation is about much more than the acquisition of Aristotle's term for art, craft or skills - *techne* (Flyvbjerg, 2015, p.341) and instead, as Broadhead and Gregson (2018) advocate, should be about developing the *phronesis* to use what we learn in a productive and empowering way.

The absence of hands-on learning for learners prior to attending his design Folk School is highlighted by the Danish participant, "They don't learn things with their hands anymore because there's so much in our heads." He was the only participant who identifies hands-on learning as being an aspect of developing *Bildung*. He mentions that for *Bildung* to happen, "You have to grab, like you have to touch." The Maine, USA participant speaks about hands-on learning being "more relevant because they can make deeper connections to the community in which they live". This idea of connectedness is added to by the Finnish participant who speaks about the connectedness of sustainable living as, "nothing is really separate… this is an associative thing… teaching somehow, like the whole". The Indian participant differentiates between vocational learning and craft learning and references Gandhi's philosophical thinking when saying that, "it is a craft education or hands on education; he wanted the students to learn things by doing things."

Folk High Schools in all three Scandinavian countries involved in this study emphasize lifelong learning and personal development above all else and the conversation data in this study seems to support the findings of other researchers (Cohen, 1993; Bagley& Rust, 2009). Yet Folk Schools are a global phenomenon, and the data also suggest that the Folk School model of education is adaptable enough to allow for the emphasis on 'self' growth and "community" growth to vary depending on cultural context, and likewise with the emphasis put on leisure learning in relation to vocational learning.

Community contribution

The second major theme is "Community Contribution", which is in turn broken down into five sub-themes. This was a significant theme as the literature review consistently highlights education's role in empowering learners to contribute to their communities (Bernstein, 2000; Dewey, 1981, Lindeman, 1926; Grundtvig, 2012; Tawney, 1966).

The first sub-theme is the idea that we should in some way be 'Serving our community'. The conversation data highlights this sub-theme in two ways. The first of these appear in the conversation with the Finnish participant who connects self-knowledge with understanding how we can serve our communities by explaining that "Service, this is about knowing yourself, and then choosing how you

want to live your life and then deciding where you fit in with society." It is such thinking that makes explicit the connection between individual becoming and community service in the *Bildung* model of growth. Another contribution to this sub-theme came from the United Kingdom participant who speaks about their ethos being, "to bring in that community responsibility" once learners are "progressing the way they need to". Again, this supports the idea that we need to have some degree of self-knowledge before we can start serving our local communities. This is exactly the point being made by Steve Ignorant in the opening quote of this chapter when explaining that community contribution needs to be preceded by a degree of self-knowledge or otherwise it is "like putting the cart before the horse".

The other contributions in this sub-theme come from the Nigerian, Indian and Tanzanian participants who all speak about their commitment to serving their local communities. Just like the Maine, USA participant who places community awareness as a more important driver than self-knowledge, the Indian participant expresses the same sentiment, "Because the objective of the whole institution is to create a spirit of being involved in community activities, they should be an active member in the community". He also explains that their current community focus was on the creation of self-help groups for women. The Nigerian participant is able to give examples of community projects such as raising funds for an electricity transformer and waste disposal projects, whereas the Tanzanian participant speaks about working with the local community to educate them about productive and profitable farming methods. It is noticeable that yet again these three Folk Schools share similar ideas and attitudes. Just as with their shared belief that employability is integral to personal growth, the suggestion is that community contribution is an expectation rather than something that emerges from self-knowledge.

A second community contribution sub-theme is that of the 'Uniqueness of Place'. This theme is of particular interest because, as was discussed in the literature review chapter, the Danish Folk High schools developed independently with caution about any standardization (Moller& Watson, 1945) in contrast to the United Kingdom education sector where standardization is the norm. Both the North American participants use figurative language to present this idea, with the Maine, USA participant speaks about the uniqueness of place in terms of being "like a tree that blew in as a seed" and having greater impact the more established those roots become. The Washington, USA participant expresses the Folk School's uniqueness as, "you stick your finger in the ground and you smell where you are, there is where you find the needs of the people at a particular time and place." As I discuss further, the conversation data suggest that while the Folk School participants have certain beliefs that they all share, there are clear distinctions between the North American, European, and African/ Indian Folk School groupings. In the case of the North American Folk Schools one such distinction is this use of figurative language.

Two further contributions appear within the conversation data for this sub-theme, the first of these being the Tanzanian participant's explanation that in Tanzania folk schools focus on the available employment opportunities within an area, "the government colleges around the lake, they'll be also having the programs of fishing". The Nigerian participant's contribution to this theme focuses

on traditional African education. Having explained at one point that "traditionally, nobody was considered useless" he later expands on this by explaining that "in the traditional system, everybody had a niche and did something for the community, contributing something somehow, for in the community you didn't have that kind of sampled uniformity". It is interesting to compare this type of thinking with that of the European Folk Schools focusing on enabling people to understand their purpose in life. The suggestion is that within traditional Nigerian society 'your' purpose was assigned to you by the community.

Three of the participants spoke about the benefits of being part of a community. All three are non-European and located within rural areas. The first of these is the Maine, USA participant who explains that, "After having one's basic needs met, in order to feel like you're thriving, you have to have ways to be connected that feed your soul in a community". Speaking in such terms again identifies the interdependence between self and community. Having adopted the small community teachings of Arthur Morgan, the Indian participant also makes this connection by explaining that the two are "mutually dependent". The Nigerian participant speaks about how the, "mad rush for Westernization" has threatened his community's "strong commonwealth ties". It is interesting that the contributions to this sub-theme come from non-European participants within small rural communities.

I write about placemaking in an earlier chapter, which is generally defined as a collaborative act of creating, or regenerating, public spaces. Although it is usually considered to be an act of urban regeneration, the conversation data within this theme suggest that the founding of Folk Schools might well be considered to be an act of place-protecting. Further to this point, the then Secretary of State for Education Estelle Morris suggested that, "the vocabulary that dominates our school system – the language of freedom, autonomy and independence – completely loses sight of the sense of place and community that is also essential for schools to flourish" (Morris, 2015). Perhaps this is one area of education from which we can learn something from the Folk School movement.

The sub-theme of 'Responding to Inequities' does not appear in the conversation data of the Scandinavian participants, which may in part be because they rank so highly on indicators of societal wellbeing such as the World Happiness Report (WHR, 2022). For those participants outside of Scandinavia this sub-theme, like many within the theme of 'Community Contribution', reveals a clear sense of purpose. The Washington, USA, participant speaks about modern living disconnecting and isolating people from their communities and how Folk Schools help to meet, "this desire to find connection with your immediate community". The Maine, USA participant supports this when saying that "It can be easy for people, especially in vulnerable communities in this region, to experience isolation". This desire to counter isolation is another example of a difference in purpose between the three regions of Folk Schools. The idea that Folk Schools are an act of resistance was present in the conversation data with the Maine, USA participant, "folk schools in America are a resistance, or are a counter to, the loss of community, how to re-instill a sense of community". The North American participants voicing more overtly anti-establishment views suggests that there is still a residual tradition of Folk Schools seeking to enlighten and empower the rural "folk" and tackle social injustice (Kulich, 1964; Bugge,1999). It is also worth noting that according to the Gini coefficient, which is a

measure of statistical dispersion representing the income inequality or the wealth inequality within a nation, that the USA, with a score of 41.4, is statistically the participant country with greatest wealth inequality (World Population Review, 2022).

This sub-theme also appears in the conversation data in simple phrases such as, "trying to see their problems", by the Tanzanian participant and the Indian participant explaining that they, "continuously organize programs or involve them in development programs", when speaking about their work with young people and women.

The final community contribution sub-theme of the 'Living Word' is significant because the conversation data has contributions from all the research participants. It is also one of the few sub-themes that gives some pedagogical insight into Folk School teaching. The Folk Schools have a long tradition of valuing communal 'talk' as the primary way that we should learn, stemming from Grundtvig's rejection of "dead books" and his belief in the power of the "Living Word" when learning, which can be evidenced in speeches in which he stressed the importance of "a kind good ear, a kind good mouth, and then liveliness to talk with really enlightened people, who would be able to arouse their interest and show them how human life appears when the light shines upon it." (Grundtvig, 1856, as quoted in Borish, 1991, p.18).

The United Kingdom participant puts this idea as, "We're all educating each other, we're all challenging each other, and we might not all agree, but what you think matters." This idea that learning should be communal is supported by the Nigerian participant who comments that they wanted learners, "to actually discourse and learn about what interests them" and by the Tanzanian participant, "we encourage them to share their experiences". The Indian participant refers to Grundtvig when explaining that his school wanted, "Not dead books, but lively education, lively interaction". This tradition of folk school education is also referenced by the Nigerian participant, "we have lectures, we have talks, we have interactions, but what distinguishes them is that it is not informed by anything academic, it's not informed by anything vocational." Adding to these ideas of communal dialogue is also the idea of seeking depth rather than superficial dialogue. The Norwegian participant speaks about this in terms of, "the deeper we get, the more interesting it is, what is the real story?" and the Finnish participant states that, "we are going very far". The Washington, USA participant makes the point that teaching storytelling had a powerful impact on a learner because "he was so focused on learning".

What this conversation data suggest, is that the simplicity of the idea that we should use books less and talk more when learning has given it significant transferability through both time and multiple cultures. This is evidenced in so many participants referencing the importance of talk, and also within the literature view where many commentators on the movement have done so also (Davis, 1931; Davis, 1970; Rasmussen, 2013).

The conversation data within this theme has added significance within the local authority education adult learning sector in which I work because, based on purely anecdotal evidence from the sector, the 'Community Learning' funding allocation is often the least strategically planned and

hardest to achieve. At the start of this research, I spent time speaking with retired and current colleagues amongst whom the consensus was that community learning was a significantly reduced and dying part of local authority provision. I also compared the not dissimilar challenges of providing community learning opportunities with the United Kingdom participant. Part of this seems to come from the confusing guidance that is liberally sprinkled with the word employability, as is most other Adult Learning Guidance in the United Kingdom. I doubt that most Folk Schools would have the same difficulties thinking of ways to spend funding on the development of learning opportunities in their local communities.

The ideas discussed within this theme are for the most part derived from Folk School educators in rural settings and for this reason may not be easily transferable, yet they do show that community learning can be central to an educational establishment's mission. Besides questioning why Adult Learning provision in urban areas finds community learning delivery problematic, a second issue is highlighted in that if the development of *Bildung* requires a form of collective or community enlightenment, derived from active community engagement, then a lack of such opportunities will act as an inhibitor to its growth. Another consideration is why is it that the United Kingdom and Scandinavian Folk Schools, whilst being 'school' community minded, made little mention of their work within the wider community.

I initially assumed that this might be connected to some type of 'West- versus-the- Rest' divide in the importance associated to 'self' and 'community', with Western cultures simply believing that the development of 'self' is more important. I realised that this is too simplistic on reading research conducted by the Culture and Identity Research Network. Involving more than 10,000 culturally diverse participants, spanning all inhabited continents, this research instead suggests that Western cultures tend to emphasize certain ways of being individual, such as being different from others, self-directed, and self-expressive, but not others such as being self-interested, self-reliant, and consistent across contexts (Vignoles et al, 2016). Whilst in comparison the scope of this research is far too small to make any generalisations about how whole nations view the importance of 'self' and 'community', it does suggest that the emphasis schools put on individual and community development might well be dependent on cultural factors.

The idea of facilitating informal yet deep conversations was the inspiration for the Thinking Folk project which I reference in a previous chapter. Prior to the start of the research conversations, I spent time discussing pedagogy with several Danish Folk High School colleagues and they agreed that, as my readings for the literature review suggest, Socratic dialogue techniques are still widely used, although perhaps in less structured ways, and so continue a long tradition dating back to early Folk High School teaching pioneers such as Christen Kold (1816-1870). This can be evidenced more recently in the research of Weiss & Ohrem (2016) who have written extensively on Folk High schools' use of these techniques. For ease of reference some of the main feedback from tutors about the impact of this project appear in Case Study 1. The impact on confidence, collaboration and connectedness were evident in the feedback for this additional action research project that involved more than four

hundred and fifty learners. It also gives an example of the transferability of the 'Living Word' approach to educational *praxis* within the context of the United Kingdom's Adult Learning Sector.

Case Study 1

The Thinking Folk Project Feb – July 2002

Learners need to be given the opportunity through task-based activities to simply throw all their language together and mutually strive for meaning, 'Since risk-taking is an important ingredient of natural learning and the search for perfection and fully defined linguistic goals does not allow for variety' (Willis, 1993). As one tutor commented "Students were so keen to express themselves that they used any words they knew to get their point across to the group." This striving for meaning without feeling anxious about grammatical errors, built confidence and esteem in our learners. One tutor noted, "Everyone in the group spoke, even the least confident student. She is a new student who worries about making mistakes when she speaks. I could see her becoming more confident as the discussion went on and she realised that everyone was listening to what she was saying and not how she was saying it. She has been more confident in class since the Socratic dialogue too."

Tutors also commented on how the conversations generated mutually supportive relationships and shifted the learning dynamic from being tutor directed to one of collaborative learning, "If someone didn't understand a word, the other students automatically explained the meaning of the word to help each other to understand." Likewise, a tutor commented that "I found that the students were naturally turn taking because they were genuinely interested in hearing the opinions of others in the group." We also noticed that the ensuing development of mutual understanding and respect helped with the creation of "a positive classroom environment where everyone can relate better to each other as individuals." Simply put by a learner, "It's good to speak to different people and learn about different countries." Perhaps the most telling feedback, considering the impact of Covid 19 on all our lives, came from a tutor who believed that the conversations impacted on their mental health and wellbeing as "it helps me to feel more connected to others again."

National and global citizenship

Although the *Bildung* theme of 'National and Global Citizenship' appears in less conversation data, it reveals more in the way of political thinking, which had been present to a lesser degree in the other

categories. The first sub-theme of 'social cohesion' is interesting because both contributions were from the North American participants, which is significant in light of societal isolation that they had both highlight in the previous theme. The Washington, USA participant speaks about it as a "people's enlightenment" which is "the historic poetic: the art, the dance, the culture that makes us tied to our place". Within the whole conversation data set this is the only mention of the word enlightenment despite it being a word that is intrinsic to the Folk School movement and a word that appears in Danish Folk High Schools three educational aims of life-enlightenment, popular-enlightenment and democracy (FFD, 2020). The Maine, USA participant, whose school is situated in a three nations region, speaks about the need for "education that is locally relevant, intended to meet the needs and interests of people in a place". Both participants speak about the importance of 'place', connecting this sub-theme to that of 'Uniqueness of Place' and the suggestion that, as highlighted earlier in this discussion, that Folk Schools are an act of educational placemaking.

The idea that the current economic and political ideologies within society should be questioned also appear within the second sub-theme of 'questioning society'. As a professed Anarchist thinker, the Finnish participant argues that "Everything is connected but we are used to thinking and doing this in an industrial context, which is separating the works from each other, and making them follow one after another" and because of this he questions if food can be produced, "in an ethical, or in a responsible work way". The Washington, USA participant is the most overtly political in what she understands as the reasons for Folk Schools being established by explaining that, "it is kicking against the state's system...it is disruption of this trajectory and in our culture in North America". A further contribution to this sub-theme and the role that educators have in promoting a questioning mindset comes from the Danish participant when explaining, "my job is trying to tell people that the society as it is, is not a law of nature, that's people making it, we can change it, we can do it differently".

In contrast to the North American schools, the Nigerian and Tanzanian schools not only had a clear belief that their role is to contribute to the creation of thriving local communities, but also thriving as a culture or nation. They are the only two participants that contribute to the sub-theme of 'cultivating a national identity' within the conversation data. The Tanzanian participant speaks about it in terms of curriculum when explaining that, "we are teaching the topics of national constitution, democracy, gender issues and responsible citizenship within the country". He adds to this by speaking about how this is part of a nation progressing from traditional to modern values "This is where we are teaching them different values as Tanzanians and as Africans, how to behave, and we are teaching them sometimes those bad practices within their communities". In this case the "bad practice" he is referring to is female circumcision. It would have been interesting to know which traditional practices and values he would like to see kept.

The Nigerian participant's conversation data highlight many statements about the need to protect and value traditional culture. He explains that, "one of the main things to do is to build a sense of cultural identity, cultural pride". His reasons for this stemmed from the legacy of colonialism when explaining that "in terms of colonialism, you know, and the experience we had before, it had the effect of making people to look down on their own culture". Another likely reason may stem from the

discrimination faced by his tribe, The Igbo, before and since the Biafra Wars. Considering that the literature review of the Danish Folk High Schools discussed Grundtvig's nationalistic desire to safeguard the Danish language and culture, clear parallels can be drawn between the motivation for those early Folk Schools, and the Nigerian Folk School, through two other statements within the conversation data. The first was "We are also trying to let people recognize the meaning of identity and that there is good in what you have as well. Like our own language". A second was, "Don't look down on your own. Because you can equally develop by also recognizing and developing our own".

What the conversation data within this theme suggest is that although Folk Schools have a shared ideology of *praxis,* they also have a shared stimuli for their founding, which is a concern for empowerment, emancipation from oppression, equity, and most of all, freedom (Bugge, 2001). Whether it is rural North American communities that feel disenfranchised from federal government or the Nigerian Igbo community feeling oppressed, firstly through colonialism and latterly more dominant neighbouring tribes, their impetus shares parallels with the original motivation of Grundtvig to counter the cultural and linguistic threat from more powerful Swedish, Norwegian and German neighbours and establish schools anchored in the Danish 'folk' through his form of 'popular' education (Borish, 1991; Korsgaard, 2004).

Defining *Bildung*

The term *Bildung* was only familiar to the three Scandinavian participants and what I thought might be a valuable direct research question in its own right instead became a theme of conversation data that was comprised of statements that I thought described the essence of the philosophy based on what is written in the literature chapter. I quickly found that either the participant could define the meaning of the word, or my own definition was met by bemusement. This in itself was a useful finding, as was the knowledge that, as explained in the previous chapter, Denmark uses the word *Dannelse* and Finland *Sivistys.*

I looked for certain key words and ideas based on my own interpretation of the word, which were openness, continuous growth, culture and community. I found myself frequently recognising participants speaking about all four and often giving succinct definitions of the *Bildung* philosophy despite not mentioning the term. The Danish participant is able to speak at length and made the most frequent references to the term, firstly referring to continuity, "It's a lifelong search, or something like that, to know more and become a more complex human being" and also openness "you have always your eyes and mind open for other opportunities". The Finnish participant defines *Bildung* in terms of "culture" and "also about a good life, I mean, in a moral way…not selfish… you want to serve other people." The third Scandinavian participant is also familiar with the word and adds to the idea of continual growth, "It's working for other goals than where we are right now and thinking how we should reach them."

The definitions by the Scandinavian participants all focus on individual growth whereas the two North American participants speak about *Bildung* in terms of the interconnectedness between self, community and global citizenship. The Washington, USA participant speaks about this as "becoming a person and becoming part of a group", whereas the Maine, USA participant explains that, "This is the process of finding out who you are, who you are in your society and in your small community, and then taking that out to the broader world global perspective." Perhaps influenced by the writings of Arthur Morgan, the Indian participant refers to the same idea of interconnectedness "Our objective is to actually build the individual for himself, his family and the community, to be an active member in the community."

Conclusion

No job is more fascinating than teaching if you have a free hand at it. Nor did Dorothy know, as yet, that that "if" is one of the biggest "ifs" in the world.

George Orwell*, The Clergyman's Daughter,* 1935, p.183.

One of the starting points for this research was a belief that the United Kingdom FE sector, using the 'Domains of Purpose' model of *subjectification, socialisation and qualification* suggested by Biesta, is too qualification centric, and as a result to the detriment of the first two functions. My introduction contains numerous anecdotes from my own experience working in the sector to evidence this. As a reminder of this, it is worth sharing an anecdote from a painting course that I recently taught. I am highlighting this course for two reasons, firstly because the name changed from 'Beginners Painting' to 'Paint and Ponder' part way through, taking inspiration from the Folk Schools' philosophical leanings. What started as a painting class turned into a class that also gave the learners time to talk about life's big questions. I started by simply introducing discussions as we painted but quickly found that this was becoming a popular and expected part of the lesson. It is in such simple ways that Folk School *praxis* can become part of our own. The second reason for sharing this anecdote is because of the 'impact' section of the course's individual learning document, which started with the following question – "How have the skills that you have developed on this course helped you in daily life, when looking for work or in your current workplace?" The fact that this was the only question on impact surely says something about what our educational priorities are. Unsurprisingly many of the class chose to leave this question blank and for those that did respond the brief answers mostly said that it does not. One learner wrote "I do this course because I get to do something for me that I enjoy, and I get to meet other people. If anything, it helps me switch off from work."

Three years later my thinking has shifted from the belief that we should be trying to balance the three domains. My initial frustration was borne out of a belief that the neo-liberalism of education had led to a creeping invasion of human economic capital language and political values into the sector, often in tokenistic ways. This frustration was also coupled with a belief that this creeping invasion has gradually reduced how much of a 'free hand' educators have. Although I still believe this to be the case, I also concur that because education is intrinsically grounded in cultural, economic and political 'truths', the extent to which an education system chooses to populate each domain is far more complex than any argument about the respective merits of liberal and vocational education as discussed in Chapter 2.

Considering that the purpose of this research was to find an alternative educational paradigm to challenge current thinking, the Folk School tradition most certainly does that through beliefs as simple as eschewing qualifications, as well as more subtle differences such as the importance placed on dialogue and community. However, what this research suggests is that it is not simply a matter of transferring an educational tradition out of one context and into another. This is highlighted in the research findings which show that when educational establishments inspired by the original Danish folk high school tradition have been founded in new cultural contexts, the model has changed to adapt to, "where that stick is put in the ground." To what extent any culture favours each of Biesta's three educational functions is therefore dependent upon those very same cultural, economic and political factors. Simply put, what is perceived as good for one may well not be good for another. However, that does not mean that inspiration cannot be taken from other educational systems and there is much to learn from those schools working within the Folk School tradition.

If anything, one of the strengths of the Folk School tradition is its adaptability and the absence of a standardised approach. In the course of this research, I have been asked many times what a Folk School is and often felt that I was giving a 'fuzzy' description. On completion I now conclude that there are three consistent aspects of the Folk School tradition which demand attention. The first of these is that their very formation is an act of social justice that seeks transformation. Whichever injustices are being countered, notably isolation, poverty and social cohesion within the context of this study, Folk Schools are founded to be an equalizing force in the face of inequities, driven by a desire to facilitate empowerment, emancipation, equity and freedom. In doing so they offer a broader notion of what it means to develop human capital.

A second noteworthy aspect is that despite being from a shared tradition, each school was unique to the place that it was situated in. Rather than being a group of identikit Danish Folk High schools in diverse global locations, each has instead taken inspiration from the Danish tradition and amalgamated it with their own. In the introductory chapter I highlight the Danish Folk High Schools aims of 'self-enlightenment', 'democratic education' and 'popular enlightenment' and, despite rarely being mentioned, within each conversation these elements could be recognised with the interpretation and emphasis given to each depending on the culture and location. As an educational tradition the approach seems to be more one of 'could' rather than 'should' or 'must'. As I have previously discussed, this uniqueness of place and sensitivity to context might well be considered to

be a form of educational placemaking. It also brings into question to what extent education systems should be standardised.

Finally, without doubt the key, and most transferable, aspect of *praxis* was the importance placed by the participants on the spoken or 'Living' word as the primary way that learning should take place, rejecting the primacy of text, both written and printed, in most education systems. Historically this would also appear to be the one aspect of the Folk School tradition that has transcended time and place. Within this commitment to 'lively discussion' can also be found a commitment to philosophy in its most authentic and pure form as people discussing ethics or life's big questions.

I am uncertain if the conversation data that I have interpreted as describing the *Bildung* philosophy does more than add to the argument that it is one of the most ambiguous and vague concepts of German pedagogy (Dohmen, 1965). It is only the Danish participant who directly links the development of *Bildung* to pedagogical *praxis* and this makes it problematic for this research to either suggest ways in which it can be developed pedagogically or even to confidently make comment on its transferability. As already discussed, the data suggests that Folk School beliefs and practices can only be transferred to a certain extent as they become interpreted through the cultural lens of whichever location in which a school is founded. Similarly, I question the transferability of the *Bildung* philosophy as an educational blueprint for the following two reasons: the first is because even within its originating Northern European region of the globe, countries such as Denmark and Finland have adopted their own names for the philosophy as it has been interpreted and assimilated by them. Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, the philosophy in its simplest form, of being a continual process of self-growth that leads to a greater ability to contribute within a community, is not that dissimilar to many other philosophies that can be found in other cultures globally. For instance, the Japanese philosophy of *Ikigai* which translates as 'reason to live' is also conceptually considered to be a continuous path, way of life or journey of personal growth and a means to living a happy and rewarding life (Mitsuhashi, 2017). That is not to say that I dismiss the essence of what the *Bildung* philosophy is suggesting, but more that any search for some form of transferable blueprint is contrary to the spirit of *Bildung,* and that its greatest influence can be that it offers us some guiding principles which allow us to do exactly as Gert Biesta suggests and say, "something different about education" (2002, p.344).

This leads me to conclude that rather than offering something unique, the *Bildung* philosophy instead expresses a set of universal ideals through a Northern European lens. That is not to say that ideas about learning suggested by the *Bildung* philosophy should be cynically dismissed. I for one am an educator in favour of greater agency, autonomy and person-centred *praxis* and as a philosophy that promotes the importance of all three, education can certainly benefit from the debate it has the potential to generate. Certainly, there would seem to be a paradox between a philosophy that espouses the idea of an individual and autonomous lifetime of learning and any attempts to control such a learning process. Although little is mentioned in the literature, there would appear to be striking similarities between the *Bildung* philosophy and that of anarchism-syndicalism, which suggests scope for further research. Parallels can be found in the view expressed by self-described

anarcho-syndicalist Noam Chomsky (2006) who expressed the view that "There is no longer any social necessity for human beings to be treated as mechanical elements in the productive process; that can be overcome and we must overcome it to be a society of freedom and free association, in which the creative urge that I consider intrinsic to human nature will in fact be able to realize itself in whatever way it will" (p.38-9).

The purpose of this comparative education research has been to challenge power structures and the accepted 'truth' of what makes a 'good' education, rather than complimenting that 'truth' as is often the case when methods such as Singapore Maths are heralded as a means to increase standards (BBC, 2016). If anything, despite the complexity of any answer to 'what makes a good education?', it is a question that might well be seen as an essential part of developing professional *phronesis* because of its challenge to continually ask the three previously discussed value-rational questions: Where are we going? Is this desirable? What should be done? (Flyvbjerg, 2012, p.60). With these three in mind any question of what makes a good education is inextricably bound with connecting questions about what is good for all humanity as community, national and global citizens. Whether state education systems allow educators to "have a free hand" to act on any answers to such questions is of course one of the biggest "ifs" in education. The findings of this research suggest that educators working within the Folk School tradition demonstrate well-developed professional *phronesis* through their commitment to addressing all three. The first two of these questions were also the original inspiration for this research and next I turn to recommendations which may offer some answers to the third.

Recommendations and Possibilities for Future Research

What then of the implications for educational *praxis* and the development of educator *phronesis*? The following are tentative recommendations based on the findings of this research.

Brian Simon (1915-2002), the English educationalist and historian, believes that education should help people to think, question and be sceptical. He sees philosophy as a central plank of education (1998). As ethical beings we constantly philosophise, and new learning constantly offers up ethical questions to philosophise about, whether this be in the history lesson discussing colonisation or the environmental science lesson considering the impact of global warming. Therefore, teaching educators to use philosophical questioning techniques and activities should be considered as an essential part of their craft and the development of a person's *Bildung*. This is exactly what the Folk Schools have been doing since their inception.

"When minds meet, they don't just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought" (ibid, p.98). This is why talk, discussion, dialogue, conversation, whichever word is chosen, is so important in learning and why

the Folk Schools have always made it central to their *praxis.* As phronetic educators, we should be able to utilise talk as a key teaching and learning activity and have the skills and strategies to do so. Rather than talk being considered a precursor to written evidence of learning, it should be seen as valid learning in its own right. My view is that currently it isn't. Having recently written a paper for a Canadian philosophical journal where a reviewer questioned my writing such a statement, I certainly believe that therein lies a challenge to investigate to what extent we value dialogue in education.

Most research conducted about Folk Schools has focused on those in Scandinavia and North America. Unexpectedly, this research also included three participants from India, Nigeria and Tanzania who have successfully complemented vocational learning with Folk School *praxis*. This would seem an interesting area for future research, as in the current climate of decolonisation, it would seem highly relevant to acknowledge successful educational initiatives from former colonial countries. Much of the comparative education research that makes its way into mainstream educational thinking, in my opinion, is still derived from countries considered to be 'developed'. For instance, I would challenge any educator working in the United Kingdom to name a single aspect of their *praxis* which has been influenced by research conducted in an African education establishment or system.

Viewing educational establishments as an act of unique community placemaking would appear to be the opposite of state education and its mechanisms of standardisation. Particularly in the case of the North American region the idea that Folk Schools are a celebration of place is central to their mission. Another potentially fruitful area of research is to better understand 'placemaking' in the context of educational establishments. Certainly, in the United Kingdom they are expected to serve the educational needs of their local communities, but to what extent do they celebrate, collaborate, engage and represent the communities in which they are situated?

On several occasions I have been struck by the parallels between the *Bildung* philosophy and that of anarchism, and in particular anarcho-syndicalism. Several searches for literature that compare the two philosophies have proved fruitless, yet the comparisons made in the course of this research suggest that the two have more than just passing similarities and the potential for further research.

A final area of future research is that of vocational *Bildung,* particularly considering the approach taken to vocational education by the Indian, Nigerian and Tanzanian participants. The process of 'individual becoming' as a goal in itself, is often understood as being in opposition to a more labour market orientated and utilitarian view of vocational education (Giesinger 2012, Sanderse, 2021). There is however a different view that can be found in the writing of Eduard Spranger (1882-1963), the German philosopher and psychologist, that suggests that vocational education should also develop our ethical awareness, self-confidence and personal responsibility, and in so doing contribute to our "inner vocation" (1965, p.17). Further to this he proposes that a student's choice of vocation, when fitted to his character, marks the start of the *Bildung* process (Sanderse, 2021). Such thinking and any subsequent research may well highlight common ground rather than further

encouraging the divisive debate on the relative merits of liberal and vocational education as discussed in the opening chapter.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Initial email text

Subject - Educational beliefs within the global folk school community

Hi,

Before the summer break [redacted] from FFD passed on my details asking if you would be willing to spare some time to have a conversation with me about your work as a folk high school teacher. The conversation would take place via Zoom and would last for approximately one hour. We will explore how you teach and what your educational beliefs and values are. The main aim of this research for Sunderland University is to compare the different beliefs of folk teachers globally and share what is learned with the folk school community and the wider adult education community. If you would still like to talk with me, please could you suggest some dates and times over the next couple of months that might work for you.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Best regards

Garry

Appendix 2: Pre conversation confirmation questions

Do you agree to take part in a conversation for the "Educational beliefs within the global folk school community" comparative study?

Do you agree to the interviews being recorded and transcribed and understand that the recordings and transcripts will be treated as confidential and securely stored at all times? I can confirm that only my supervisor and I will have access to them, and the original recordings will be destroyed on completion of the study.

Do you understand that I you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give any reason?

Are you willing to proofread the conversation commentary that I write to confirm that it gives a fair representation of what we discussed?

Do you have any further questions about the project?

Appendix 3: The "Thinking Folk" project

Thinking Folk

(OTLA 8: English, ESOL and Essential Digital Skills)

The Education and Training Foundation's (ETF"s) Outstanding Teaching, Learning and Assessment (OTLA) aims to empower practitioners to undertake action research projects in order to look at effective practice that is helpful in meeting the challenges they face, and to share the outcomes of their activity with the sector to improve professional practice and outcomes for learners. It is open to eligible organisations funded by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Since 2015, there have been more than 200 OTLA collaborative projects, which have tackled a wide range of issues from creating a reading culture to supporting and developing vocational learners" oracy skills.

Summary

This project introduced Socratic dialogues as a pedagogical construct for ESOL tutors to use to develop their critical thinking skills by drawing on the lived experiences of BAME learners. The resulting conversations were soon described as 'real' talk by learners, which, in a process that not only developed the authentic use of English language, also enabled them to recognise the common bonds that make us all human. The project led to a curriculum rethink and a commitment to dedicating one day a week to participatory ESOL learning activities.

Rationale

Our findings from whole service lesson visits revealed that critical thinking and questioning were key areas for development. In addition to this, very few lessons drew on the rich resource of learners' personal histories. When critical thinking was evident it tended to be focused on occasional questions rather than activities designed for the sole purpose of its development. This project introduced Socratic dialogues to ESOL tutors to develop learners' critical thinking skills by drawing on their lived experiences. This activity had originally been inspired by a similar project

implemented by Danish adult educators to counter isolation during the first Covid 19 pandemic lockdown.[47]

Other Contextual Information

Newcastle City Learning is one of the largest local authority adult learning providers in the North-East, and our largest area of provision is for ESOL learners. Our learner demographic is represented by over fifty nationalities, with the Bangladeshi community being the largest group represented. Around 11% of Newcastle's total population are Black, Asian, or Minority Ethnic (BAME), which rises to 24% among school-age children (Newcastle Council, 2021). With a department of over twenty staff, this research activity was contributed to by four tutors and over a hundred learners.

Approach

The Thinking Folk project is focused on developing working practices within the ESOL department but also to stimulate wider appeal across the college. CPD sessions were attended by tutors from a range of subject specialisms. In total approximately thirty tutors attended sessions, along with external stakeholders who work directly with the BAME community, including the local authority's 'City of Sanctuary' active inclusion team. To support sessions, we set-up a Google Classroom as a collaborative space in which resources and successful questions could be shared.

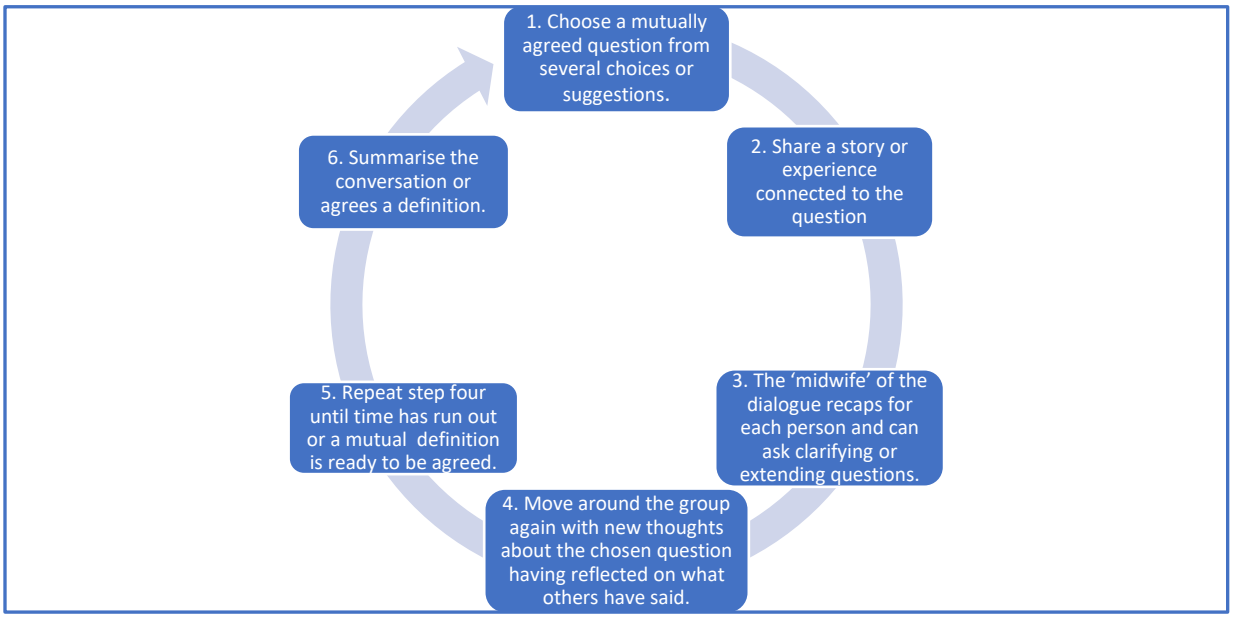
This research activity followed the characteristic steps of a Socratic dialogue. in the tradition of Leonard Nelson (1882-1927) and Gustav Heckmann (1898-1996). In Ancient Greece these dialogues were known as *mauetics*, from the Greek for 'midwife'.

The dialogues follow a deceptively simple process. First, a selection of questions is chosen, either using ethical terms- What is honesty? Or alternatively an open question, such as -Why is time important? Questions are chosen on the premise that participants are afforded an opportunity to reflect on their lives and those of others. Next the dialogue participants are invited to give a personal memory-based narrative, in which they once experienced the topic at stake. In the next phase these narratives are reflected upon and investigated in order to make initial definitions about what the topic means according to each narrative. One tutor noted in their narrative reflection, "*A student gave an example of a country he'd lived in where he thought people were too focused on the past and another country where people live more in the present. He said that living in the present is*

[47] The Danish People's Education Council (2020) *Would you like to share your corona story with Nørrebro Theatre and the National Museum?* Available at: https://dfs.dk/nyheder/nyheder/vil-du-dele-din-corona-fortaelling-med-noerrebro-teater-og-nationalmuseet/ (Accessed 15 May 2022)

better for mental health because you can't change the past, but you can decide what you do now in the present."

This stage is repeated until time has run out or a definition or conclusion has been mutually agreed from the different narratives and reflections that have been shared (Krohn, 2004, p17-20).



Steps of a Socratic Dialogue

Outcomes and impact

Teaching, Learning and Assessment:

ESOL tutors quickly realised that the Socratic dialogues they were leading were conversations that replicated the 'Production' element of the Presentation, Practice and Production Method of language acquisition. Research indicates that expecting people to use 'presented' and 'practised' language effectively in the 'production' phase is unrealistic. As Willis points out, "It is difficult to see how activities can be regarded as truly communicative if the learners' main objective is not to achieve some outcome through the use of language, but to demonstrate to the teacher their control of the target form." (1990:4-5). Instead, learners need to be given the opportunity through task-based activities to simply throw all their language together and mutually strive for meaning "Since risk-taking is an important ingredient of natural learning and the search for perfection and fully defined linguistic goals does not allow for variety" (Willis, 1993). As one tutor commented "Students were so keen to express themselves that they used any words they knew to get their

point across to the group." This striving for meaning without feeling anxious about grammatical errors, built confidence and esteem in our learners. One tutor noted, "Everyone in the group spoke, even the least confident student. She is a new student who worries about making mistakes when she speaks. I could see her becoming more confident as the discussion went on and she realised that everyone was listening to what she was saying and not how she was saying it. She has been more confident in class since the Socratic dialogue too."

Tutors also commented on how the conversations generated mutually supportive relationships and shifted the learning dynamic from being tutor directed to one of collaborative learning, "If someone didn't understand a word, the other students automatically explained the meaning of the word to help each other to understand." Likewise, a tutor commented that "I found that the students were naturally turn taking because they were genuinely interested in hearing the opinions of others in the group." We also noticed that the ensuing development of mutual understanding and respect helped with the creation of "a positive classroom environment where everyone can relate better to each other as individuals." Simply put by a learner, "it's good to speak to different people and learn about different countries." Perhaps the most telling feedback, considering the impact of Covid 19 on all our lives, came from a tutor who believed that the conversations impacted on their mental health and wellbeing as it helps me to feel more connected to others again."

Professional Development:

Professional Standard	How our project outcomes demonstrate this standard
Value and promote social and cultural diversity, equality of opportunity and inclusion.	Our project provided a platform in which social and cultural diversity could be shared, understood and celebrated. Despite following a procedure, the resulting dialogues mirrored the 'café' conversation of everyday life, bringing an authenticity to learning that brought learners and tutors together in greater mutuality.
Build positive and collaborative relationships with colleagues and learners.	Our project was built on the foundation of promoting togetherness. The process of sharing glimpses of learners' lives resulted in participants reporting that they tangibly felt closer and understood each other better. Importantly, the positive relationships were built on equality and in some ways were a naturally occurring by-product of each dialogue. The introduction of a Google classroom resource sharing space provided a space in which tutors not only shared resources but also shared and discussed experiences.

Evaluate your practice with others and assess its impact on learning.	Our project gave tutors the opportunity to talk about and evaluate learning differently. In a profession bogged down by data and administration procedures the project allowed tutors to think with greater professional reflexivity and talk instead about the 'tangible immeasurables' or the usefulness of what Alan Tuckett (2015) called "seriously useless learning".

Organisational Development:

The promotion and celebration of different perspectives and insights was integral to our research activity. What was most striking was the significant impact on how tutors viewed 'talk' as a learning activity. Rather than 'talk' as means to an end those tutors who participated began to understand its value as an end in itself. Despite initial scepticism from some colleagues and subject specialisms, the ease of 'giving it a try' dispelled initial beliefs that the activity might only be suitable for certain subjects or with linguistically competent English speakers. The idea of 'giving it a try' also fed directly into an organisational priority to develop more pedagogical risk taking and was taken up in other curriculum areas such as digital skills and LLDD programmes. Through the sharing of experiences, it became apparent that tutors, regardless of their specialism, could acknowledge that the dialogues led to positive and collaborative relationships that promoted mutual understanding and inclusion. As one tutor commented, "I've never learned so much by feeling that I've done so little". Another theme from these cross-specialist conversations was the shared experience by many of continuing to think about questions after dialogues had concluded. A number of tutors reflected that the conversations "got inside their head", whilst one learner put it as "I keep on thinking afterwards".

Learning from this project

What then of the implications for educational praxis? The following are three tentative suggestions based on this project.

Life is full of 'big questions', and this project taught us to be bold enough to know that they transcend lists of knowledge and skills criteria and appreciate their importance. One of the residual traditions of adult learning is that it should be grounded in, and respectful of, the lived experience of learners, and this project reminded us why.

Brian Simon (1915-2002,) the English Educationalist and Historian, believed that education has the power to help people think, question and be sceptical (1998). Using philosophical questioning

through Socratic dialogues made us realise that we are all philosophers, and that such conversations have the power to develop, not only critical thinking, but also mutual understanding and inclusion. This was evidenced by our learners" comments and our observations of learners expressing their thoughts and feelings, making connections and forming friendships.

"When minds meet, they don't just exchange facts: they transform them, reshape them, draw different implications from them, engage in new trains of thought"(Zeldin, 1998, p98). This simple quote encapsulates why talk, discussion, dialogue, conversation, whichever word is chosen, is so important in learning. The participants in this research activity called it 'real' or 'authentic' talk. Through what we have learned during this project we have now made 'Talk' training and participatory ESOL activities integral to what we do. Sometimes new initiatives change practice and occasionally they truly change thinking. For us it was the later, and as one tutor commented "These conversations stay in your head afterwards and I really wasn't expecting that".

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Appendix 1: Learner Case Studies

Learner Case Study 1:

She comes from Vietnam originally and is in her late 40s. She has only been in the UK since September 2021 and joined her ESOL Entry 2 class with us in January 2022. This is her first experience of attending an English class in the UK. She has had very little previous experience of learning English, having studied the language for only one year in her country. When the learner first started class, she was very hesitant about speaking out, in both small group and whole class situations and repeatedly said that she felt that her English wasn't good. Despite her low confidence, the learner signed up to come along to the Thinking Folk Project discussion in her first week on the course. At the start of the discussion, she said one sentence and then stopped, saying that her English wasn't good. I reassured her that we were all just interested in hearing her ideas and no one was judging how correct her English was. I said that it was ok for her to just listen for a while and then to speak anytime she wanted to. After hearing a few more learners speak, this learner spoke out voluntarily without being prompted to do so and contributed some interesting ideas to the discussion. I could see her confidence growing throughout this first discussion and her fluency improving as her focus shifted from whether she was speaking correctly to wanting to share her thoughts and experiences with the group.

She has now been to several Socratic Dialogue discussions and comes to them as often as she can. She always participates actively now, without hesitation. I have also noticed that the learner has become more confident during lessons since starting to take part in Socratic Dialogues and will speak out in class and ask questions a lot more than before.

In addition to helping the learner's English and confidence, participating in the Thinking Folk Project has helped her to get to know her classmates and settle into the group. As the learner hasn't been in the UK for long, she didn't know many people here. She has started to make friends in the class, and I think that participating in the Thinking Folk Project has helped her to make friends more quickly.

Learner Case Study 2:

He was new to the group and in class he was normally quite shy to speak because the others can be quite vocal. He did not put his name down for the first Thinking Folk session but was interested by what others were saying about it. He came the second week and at the end he told me that it was the first ever 'true' conversation he'd had in English. He was so happy and animated he asked if he could come back the following week. When he came, he talked about the reasons why he had come to the UK, and I found out that he had come for political asylum and that he had written two books. It was so moving when he explained that he felt liberated to be able to talk freely about the situation in his country. His confidence has really grown now, and he asks me more about language issues and misunderstandings. He also speaks much more freely in class than he did before. He now comes regularly because he wants to talk with like-minded people.

Appendix 2: Thinking Folk Conversation Example Highlights

My name is Karen and I come from Newcastle.

My name is Ahmed and I'm from Europe.

Hello everyone. My name is Stefania and I'm from Romania.

Hello everyone. My name is Aisha, I am from Germany. Hello, everyone.

I've got four questions we've got why is it important to welcome people? How do you make people feel welcome? When have you felt welcome? And what does it mean to be generous? Which of these questions would you like to discuss first?

So, let's start with- When have you felt welcome?

Karen (tutor)

I'm thinking of myself, and I've obviously lived in another country as well. And I'm also thinking about when maybe your children start school, or when you start a new job, it's also really important to feel welcome. When you go to another country, you can feel quite alone, you can feel like everybody else knows each other, You can feel a bit stressed, you can feel a bit worried, you have all these very strong personal feelings. So, whether it's starting a new job with your colleagues, and they say, "come in, come in have a cup of coffee, Karen sit down", or when it's children starting school, it's such an important thing to feel that you're not alone?

Ahmed

Just to be kind I think a neighbor is first thing is very, very important. When you live at home, you must be kind with neighbors because this is also your friends and you're saying look the families also but it's not near to you and not in the city isn't another system.

Karen (tutor)

So, neighbours can make us feel welcome. Can anyone tell us about a neighbor who has made them feel welcome?

Aisha

I shipped here from Germany. I am also very nervous because it's totally changed for me language and environment are everything. Then my neighbors really kindly and they make me a comfort now sometimes they every time comes when you need it and help when you want to speak, and we can understand you don't have too much speak good English. It's good experience for you because the first year I was nervous what happened. It's generally to find people in the UK do welcome … in generally there are very good very good people. For example, I have my neighbour, she's old lady, I think she's 80 years now. And she knows my little son for the first time we met I think, and she

know my son from that time and all the time when done go to nursery and the primary school my son say hello. She always say hello and help me.

Karen (tutor)

Can you think of a time Stefania?

Stefania

I apply for my job; in my mind they don't accept me because my language is not very good. And I have a lot of stuff in my mind, and I say oh, no, no, no, this is not for me. And when I heard the interview the manager of the school says okay don't be worried because you are very good and you need to have trust in you and everything is fine okay, I accepted you but why my English is not good? And she said I accepted because I want to give you a chance because you look like a kind person. I want to give you a chance that the language is not important for me it's important how to comfort the children.

The conversation continues and more stories of experience are shared…

Appendix 3: Example questions

What is a good job?

What is happiness?

How is food more than just eating?

What is the most challenging thing about living in a different country?

What makes a good friend?

Why are celebrations important?

In what ways are clothes important?

What are the best and worst parts of human nature?

What does it mean to be successful in life?

How would you like to be remembered?

What is a home?

What is the difference between living and being alive?

What was the greatest day of your life?

What does being a digital citizen mean to you?

Why is time important?

List of Diagrams, Illustrations and Tables