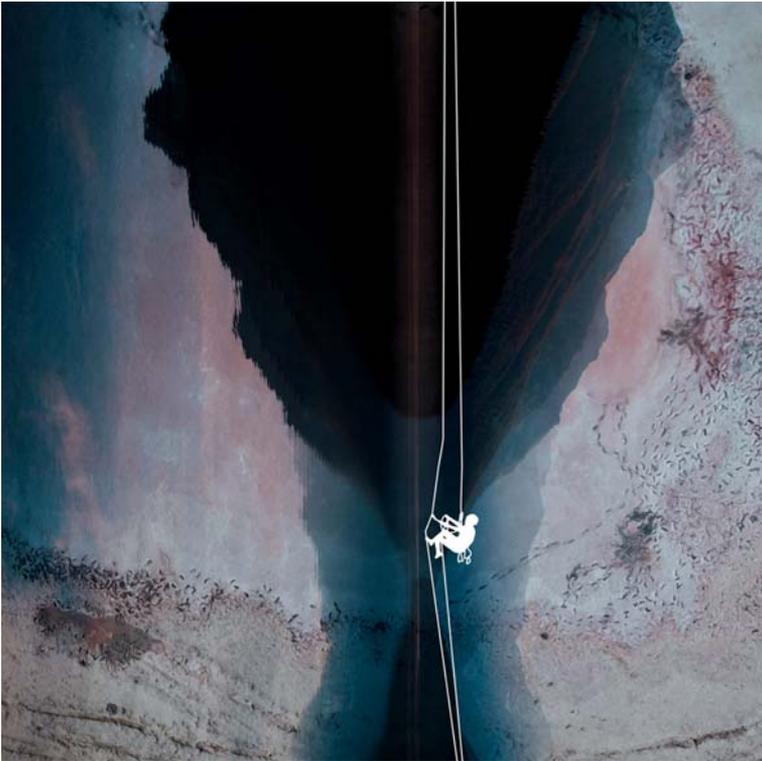


Michael Noah Weiss

Daimonic Dialogues

Philosophical Practice and Self-Formation

A Research Report on a Series of Philosophical Guided Imageries Carried out at a Norwegian Folk High School



Reflective Practice Research

LIT

Michael Noah Weiss
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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

This report presents a research project consisting of a series of seven philosophical guided imageries that was carried out in a Norwegian folk high school. Each imagery exercise dealt with a specific philosophical theme (e.g. meaning of life, the art of living, cooperation etc.) and the participating students were invited to investigate these themes by means of their imagination, intuition and their creative as well as critical thinking. The main research purpose of this project is to examine whether – and if so, in what ways – such imageries foster the overall educational goal of Norwegian folk high schools, which is self-formation (*danning* in Norwegian, and *Bildung* in German).

In the first part of the reports introduction chapter, the general background of this research project, called *Daimonic Dialogues*, will be outlined. The term *daimonion*, which gives the project its name, is briefly described, as is the discipline of philosophical practice from which the methods for this project are derived. Also, a general description of Norwegian folk high schools is given since it was at one of these schools where the research was carried out. In the second part of the introduction, two theoretical and pedagogical key aspects of Norwegian folk high schools are presented, namely, self-formation and dialogue. As it will turn out in the course of this report, these aspects will be of central relevance when discussing the outcomes and findings of the project. In the last part of the introduction, the guiding research question is presented.

In the second chapter, both the methods of intervention (philosophical guided imageries, mainly derived from the Trilogos method

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(see Roethlisberger, 2012; 2013a; 2013b) as well as the research methods (which follow a reflective practice research approach (see Lindseth, 2017) are outlined in theoretical terms, on the one hand. On the other, it will also be described in more detail how these methods have been set out in practice.

In the third chapter, each guided imagery that was used in this project is presented as well as the outcomes of each imagery, in terms of the feedback on how the students experienced these imageries and what they arrived at in the philosophical investigations on each philosophical theme. Here not only the outcomes but also the imagery exercises are described in detail so that experienced pedagogues can try out these exercises for themselves or together with their students.

In the fourth chapter, the outcomes and findings are analyzed with the focus on four key categories: (1) *Feeling calm and safe*, (2) *existential learning*, (3) *self-knowledge* and (4) *challenges*.

The fifth chapter then is about a discussion and a theoretical reflection on the analyzed outcomes and how they eventually relate to *self-formation* as the overall goal of Norwegian folk high schools. The key question in this discussion will be whether, and if so, how philosophical guided imageries bear the potential to foster this overall pedagogical goal.

In the last chapter, concluding remarks on the project are made and a summary, with the focus on possible answers to the guiding research question of this project, is given.

1.2 General background

Daimonion

The writings of Plato are well-known for the dialogues that Socrates had with his interlocutors. These dialogues represent some of the essential roots of Western science. What is interesting in this respect, however, is that in these writings, Plato has Socrates mentioning a

1.2 General background

spiritual resource on several occasions which he valued even higher than his faculty of reason. This spiritual resource he called *daimonion*, which literally means *divine sign*, and in the form of an inner voice, it spoke to Socrates in critical situations in his life (see e.g. Plato, 1997: *Crito*, 44a; *Apology*, 31c-d, 33c, 40a; *Phaedo*, 60e). It warned him and restrained him from certain actions, though it never commanded him to do anything (see *ibidem*). In a certain sense, the *daimonion* can be understood like an intuitive inner compass. For Socrates it was some sort of an impersonal, spiritual faculty or agent that offered him intuitively perceived *signs*, which gave him orientation on his life path.

Today, the idea of such an *inner voice* or *daimonion* might sound quite outlandish to some. Nevertheless, the idea of the Socratic *daimonion* can be found throughout the history of philosophy, though often translated with the term *conscience*. And it is here where it starts to get confusing since one can find a variety of conceptions of conscience, which are quite different from the Socratic *daimonion*, like Kants or Freuds conception of the term (see e.g. Kant, 1991: 183 & 233-234; on Freud see e.g.: Jones, 1966). One of the conceptions which strongly resembles Socrates inner voice, however, comes from the philosopher and psychoanalyst Viktor Frankl, known for his approach to mans search for meaning, which he developed due to his experiences as an inmate in Auschwitz (see Frankl, 2000). For Frankl, conscience represented a kind of transpersonal agent that is perceived intuitively (for example, through a flash of inspiration or through dreams). It can be described as an inner resource of a person, which still goes beyond the personal (and therefore is called transpersonal) and into the spiritual (which here does not necessarily have a religious connotation) (see *ibidem*: 59). Frankl assumed that it is a persons conscience that gives him or her existential orientation in his or her life. Metaphorically speaking, and similar to the Socratic *daimonion*, it can be seen like an inner compass on an individuals search for meaning (see *ibidem*: 61). Frankls conscience, however,

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does not only warn a person of when not to act, but it gives existential orientation in terms of intuitively perceived signs about what to do in the given situation, like sudden intuitions, images, dream sequences etc.

It is certainly not the intention of this research project to give proof of the existence of what has been called daimonion. Furthermore, its description, as briefly presented here, surely falls short of a profound analysis. Nevertheless, the relevance and significance of the human faculties of intuition and imagination in practical philosophy appear to be uncontested throughout history (see e.g. Hadot, 2010: 59). The Socratic daimonion and Frankl's conscience are only two examples; other schools of philosophy, like the Stoics, offered exercises which were of imaginative and intuitive character (see *ibidem*). In other words, philosophizing based on imagination and intuition, and not mere reason, has a long tradition. The present research project, with its specific philosophical dialogues that are based on imagery exercises and intuitive perception, can be understood to be in line with this long tradition. Though these exercises might sometimes slightly differ from those of the Ancient schools of philosophy, the purpose remains the same: to investigate lived life, to find orientation in what we do, who we are, where we stand and finally to develop as human beings, simply because The unexamined life is not worth living as Socrates put it.

Philosophical practice

Practicing philosophy has regained popularity over the past two decades, both inside and outside academia. It often goes by the name *philosophical practice*, which today can be seen as an internationally established discipline of philosophy. One can find university courses as well as academic journals and a diverse range of publications on the subject. Its starting point is in the early 1980s, with the German philosopher Gerd Achenbach as one of its key-figures (see Lahav, 2016: 24). Since its beginnings, several of the representatives

1.2 General background

of this discipline have advocated that philosophical practice is essentially about philosophizing with philosophical laymen about their life-issues and predicaments, like existential challenges, meaning in life or the art of living in general (see e.g. Lahav, 1996; Achenbach, 1995; Mijuskovic, 1995; Segal, 1995; Cohen, 1995). Many of them would agree that by means of this new discipline, philosophy has been brought back to the market square, to everyday life, where it once started. However, it has also been heavily debated among philosophical practitioners worldwide what exactly it is that distinguishes philosophical practice from other disciplines like psychotherapy, which deal with existential issues and the predicaments of life too. Was it really a new and innovative form of philosophizing or just a maverick interpretation of psychotherapy? This is a question that has never found a final, generally accepted answer in the international community of philosophical practitioners, it seems (see e.g. Raabe, 2001: 120f). Already in 2005 Maria da Venza Tillmanns stated that probably each single practitioner has his or her own interpretation of what philosophical practice actually is about (see Tillmanns, 2005: 2). Hence, when speaking of philosophical practice, one has to be aware that it is a quite diversified phenomenon with various approaches. What all these approaches seem to have in common, however, is that they are oriented towards dialogue; that is, most of the modalities used for philosophizing are dialogue formats (see e.g. Weiss, 2015). It would exceed the given length of this introduction to go into the different formats, where some represent one-on-one dialogues, others are group-settings, some are open dialogues, while other formats follow certain steps (see *ibidem*). Also, the purposes and goals of these formats vary greatly, where some intend to foster critical thinking, others focus on gaining self-knowledge, some are more spiritual in nature and others simply intend to solve existential or ethical problems of the participants. Instead of describing these different approaches in detail, I just cut through to my own interpretation of philosophical practice, which I

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also share with several other practitioners. These practitioners see the purpose of philosophical practice in developing towards *phronesis*, that is, practical wisdom (see e.g. Helskog, 2019; Weiss, 2018; Hansen, 2009). And practical wisdom here can be understood in the sense of a capability – or better: an awareness – in order to do the right thing in the given situation, with regards to living a good life overall (awareness in this case means more than mere skills and the knowledge of how to apply them, but rather it also involves caring context-sensitivity as well as intuitive feeling and tact (see e.g. Weiss, 2017a)). Guro Hansen Helskog can be seen as one of the first to investigate pedagogical effects and impacts of philosophical practice in terms of empirical research (see e.g. Helskog, 2011; 2016; 2019). Her research comprises projects with pupils of more or less all age groups as well as with student teachers and teachers. In quite general terms, it can be said that for Helskog, education, no matter whether it takes place in schools or at universities, should always be a process oriented towards the development of wisdom (see e.g. ibidem, 2019). Moreover, for Helskog, the development towards wisdom also represents the main characteristic of what in German is called *Bildung* (in English *self-formation*, and in Norwegian *danning*) (see e.g. ibidem, 2016 or 2019). The intention to develop wisdom in general and *phronesis* in particular has a long tradition throughout the history of philosophy though, and it represents a key dimension of the actual goal, which all Ancient schools of philosophy had in common (see e.g. ibidem, 2019 or Hadot, 2010: 102). This goal was called *paideia* (as the etymological root of the term *pedagogy*), which in simple terms means nothing less than to become the best version of oneself (see ibidem). With this in mind, I understand philosophical practice as an approach that intends to offer people a process to grow as a person, and to develop ethically and existentially (for example, in terms of character building). As such, my approach to philosophical practice has a strong pedagogical connotation, but not in the sense that I would want to teach anyone anything.

Rather, in the sense to give people the opportunity to learn from their own life experiences. That is also why I understand philosophical practice as a form of experiential learning (see Weiss, 2017b). In order to offer such an opportunity for personal growth, philosophical guided imageries appeared to be a proper dialogue format to me (the actual design of such imageries will be described in detail in section 2. *Method*). After working with this form of exercises in different contexts, the idea was to run a series of imageries at a Norwegian folk high school, not least because these types of schools have *Bildung* or self-formation (in Norwegian *danning*), in terms of personal growth, as their explicit pedagogical goal. In order to get a better understanding of these schools, I will outline their main characteristics in the following. Subsequently, I will also go into the main pedagogical conceptions of folk high schools in order to illustrate both the practical as well as the theoretical context in which this research project took place.

Norwegian folk high schools

In all Scandinavian countries, one can find so-called folk high schools (in Norwegian *folkehøyskoler*), and also in the German-speaking countries there exists a similar type of school (in German *Volkshochschule*) though they also differ greatly from each other in their pedagogical conceptions. In some ways, the same applies to the schools in Norway compared with those from Denmark or Sweden, even though they have the same founding father: the Danish priest, pedagogue and philosopher Nikolai Frederik Severin Grundtvig. Grundtvig, a representative of Enlightenment, developed the idea for folk high schools in the beginning of the nineteenth century. The first school opened in 1844 in the Danish town Rødding. Since then folk high schools were established throughout Scandinavia. Adult education can be assumed to be the common denominator of all of these schools. In the following, however, only

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the Norwegian folk high schools will be briefly outlined since the present research project was carried out at one of them.

Today, there exist 78 such schools in Norway. 48 of them are what in Norwegian is called *frilynte folkehøyskoler*, which means that they have a humanistic-oriented value base. The other 30 schools are so-called *kristne folkehøyskoler*, which have a Christian-oriented value base. Both types of schools share a common general office in Oslo. Typical for all schools is that they are one-year boarding schools with students averaging in age between 18 and 22 years. Many of them start at a folk high school after they have finished high school and before they enroll in a university program. One of the distinct features of these schools is that there are no exams or grades. Rather, the educational programs they offer are about a learning for its own sake. Furthermore, the subjects at a Norwegian folk high school are quite different from ordinary school subjects. Some examples are extreme sports, travelling, surfing, snowboarding, outdoor life activities, role play, filmmaking, though more traditional subjects also are taught like philosophy or psychology (but with a slightly different approach). As one can see, it is not a form of formal education that these schools offer. Rather, the courses are oriented towards non-formal learning. The life at the boarding school and at the campus is assumed to be an important socio-pedagogical learning arena, representing a form of informal learning (see Haddal & Ohrem, 2011: 36).

Overall, all Norwegian folk high schools have two common objectives, which are also enshrined in the Norwegian Folk High School Act: general education and public enlightenment (see Folkehøyskoleloven, 2003: § 1). Both concepts are the offspring of a key-concept of Enlightenment called *Bildung*. *Bildung* is a German term which in Norwegian means *danning*. In English an appropriate translation appears to be *self-formation*. *Bildung* or self-formation is the central viewpoint for all (socio-) pedagogical activities taking place at a folk high school. A pedagogical key-approach at these schools is

dialogue, which Grundtvig calls *the living word* (see Ohrem, 2011b: 172). Both self-formation and dialogue will receive further attention in the following subchapter.

1.3 Theoretical background

Bildung

In the Norwegian Folk High School Act, *allmenndanning* (general education) and *folkeopplysning* (public enlightenment) are declared to be the two main objectives of these type of schools (see Folkehøgskoleloven, 2003, § 1). How these two goals are pursued is up to each school, which gives folk high schools a unique educational freedom that is unheard-of in most other type of schools. When taking a closer look at general education as well as public enlightenment then, one finds that both are the offspring of a key concept of Enlightenment that in German is called *Bildung*. *Bildung* is often simply translated as *education* in English, but this translation misses the point because the German term *Ausbildung*, too, is translated as *education*. A better translation for *Bildung* (in Norwegian *danning*) appears to be *self-formation*, while *Ausbildung* (in Norwegian *utdanning*) always represents a certain *education program*. In order to go through a process of self-formation, one does not necessarily need to attend an education program, like a university course. Self-formation can take place due to the life experience that one gains over the years. In the same way one could say that an education program does not necessarily have to contribute to the self-formation of the person who is attending this program. That both *Bildung* and *Ausbildung* are concerned with learning, and that the one can take place without the other was, among others, pointed out by Jon Hellesnes (see 1992). Hellesnes emphasized that the process of self-formation, that is *Bildung*, is open and never finished – it is a form of lifelong learning – while each and every education program has

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a clear start and an end (see *ibidem*: 79f). The necessary openness of *Bildung* has also been brought up by Klafki, a renowned theoretician on the subject matter. When investigating the history of the term *Bildung*, he identified two essential traditions, which for him represented two ends of one spectrum (see e.g. Klafki, 2007: 15f). While one tradition focuses on content (that is, *Bildung* requires that one read certain authors, like Goethe, Schiller etc.), the other one conceptualizes *Bildung* as a process which is characterized by the unfolding of an individual's human potentials (and here human can well be understood in the sense of humanistic) (see e.g. Klafki, 2001a: 39). Though Klafki emphasized the importance of both traditions, he transcended them by introducing what he called *categorical Bildung* (see Klafki, 2001b). According to him, curriculum content must be opened towards the student and the student has to be opened towards the content. It is here where the dialectics between the objective (matter) and the subjective (meaning) starts (see *ibidem*). Only in the dynamic between these two can *Bildung* happen. In particular, Klafki also outlined a concept of *Allgemeinbildung* (*general education* in English and *allmenndanning* in Norwegian), which is one of the two objectives enshrined in the Norwegian Folk High School Act. According to him, the purpose of *Allgemeinbildung* is the cultivation of self-determination, co-determination and solidarity (see Klafki, 2000). In this respect Inge Eidsvåg, former rector at Nansen School, a renowned folk high school in Norway, can be mentioned. When examining the range of studies and subjects offered at folk high schools, he detects a strong tendency towards self-realization, which appears to be close to what Klafki called self-determination (see Eidsvåg, 2011: 164). Today, as Eidsvåg claims, the idea of *Bildung* at folk high schools, as the development of an individual's potentials, is reflected in the great diversity of courses, which all intend to promote the student's self-realization. This idea of *Bildung* is not new, he asserts. It can already be found in the Romantic period, for example in Rousseau's metaphor of the gardener who provides for

the best possible conditions of growth for a plant so that it can grow naturally. In the same way, it appears that folk high schools intend to provide for an authentic self-realization with their students (see *ibidem*). Furthermore, when speaking of the origins of *Bildung*, the concept can actually be traced back to the Greek term *paideia*. Literally, it means the upbringing of children. When taking a closer look, one finds that all Ancient schools of philosophy had *paideia* as their goal, as Hadot pointed out in his renowned book *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (2010: 102). And in these philosophical schools *paideia* was not so much about the upbringing of children. Rather, it signified a development process from a state of unhappy disquiet (*ibidem*) in which man can accede to a genuine life, improve himself, transform himself, and attain a state of perfection (*ibidem*). And in this context, *paideia* is translated with *self-formation* (see *ibidem*). In other words, this is why *paideia* represents the origins of *Bildung*. Furthermore, one of the key characteristics of today's Norwegian folk high schools, as identified by Eidsvåg, namely, providing for authentic self-realization, can already be found as a central goal of the Ancient schools of philosophy in terms of acceding to a genuine life. Though, of course, these schools did not have subjects in any way similar to those offered by folk high schools today. They developed a variety of exercises – spiritual exercises, as Hadot called them (mainly, rhetorical and dialectical techniques of persuasion, the attempt at mastering one's inner dialogue, and mental concentration. (*ibidem*)) In this regard Hadot asserts that In all philosophical schools, the goal pursued in these exercises is self-realization and improvement. (*ibidem*) Insofar, Eidsvåg's idea of folk high schools as schools providing for authentic self-realization resembles the objectives of the Ancient schools of philosophy, and the idea as such seems to be closely related to *Bildung* in terms of self-formation too. However, what has to be added in order to avoid misinterpretations of Eidsvåg's writings is that with authentic self-realization he does not mean some ego-centered exercises. Rather, he understands this

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kind of self-formation in reference to two central thoughts about *Bildung*. The first one is represented in Klafki's work, for example. Namely that a person's uniqueness is and can only be formed through the interaction with others (see Klafki, 2001a: 40). In this regard, it becomes more understandable why folk high schools see the social life at their boarding schools as an invaluable learning arena in order to foster self-formation with their students (see e.g. Haddal & Ohrem, 2011: 25; or Haddal, 2011). The other thought is explicated by Hellesnes, who states that in the process of self-formation (or *Bildung*) we develop through self-understanding and through realizing this self-understanding in practice (that is, *self-realization*) (see Hellesnes, 1992: 88). And here, Hellesnes' practice-oriented concept of self-understanding appears to be relatable to the Socratic *Know thyself*. Self-knowledge, as Shaun Gallagher has pointed out, is a prerequisite in order to develop towards wisdom – especially practical wisdom (that is, *phronesis*) (see Gallagher, 1992: 198f). And here, as mentioned earlier, *phronesis* can be understood as the awareness in order to do the right thing in the given situation with regards to living a good life overall. Interestingly, Eidsvåg describes self-knowledge as one of the five pillars in his program for self-formation for folk high schools (see Eidsvåg, 2011: 165). Ohrem, furthermore, assumes the development towards *phronesis* as an integral aspect of the folk high schools' educational goal of *Bildung* (see Ohrem, 2011a: 45). And finally, Hellesnes, in more general terms, asserts that in a good society, education would lead to self-formation, and with that to wisdom (my translation from the Norwegian: *I det gode samfunn ville utdanning føre med seg daning og dermed visdom.* (Hellesnes, 1992: 79)) Based on these reflections and with regards to the present research project, we can conclude that several concepts from Ancient philosophy, like *paideia* (self-formation), *phronesis* (practical wisdom) or the Socratic *gnōthi seauton* (know thyself), are still of decisive relevance in order to understand the term *Bildung*, as the main objective of Norwegian folk high schools. Since *Bildung* in the

sense of self-formation represents first and foremost a process, the next question is *how* this process is fostered and promoted at these types of schools. This question will receive attention in the next paragraph.

The living word

When Grundtvig, as the founding father of the folk high schools, outlined his idea of this type of school, he explicitly proposed dialogue as its main teaching method. The students should not learn for exams but for life, through authentic conversations with the teachers, which Grundtvig called *the living word*. Today, dialogue still plays a central role in the didactics of Norwegian folk high schools, as emphasized by Sigurd Ohrem (2011b: 172). Several schools do not only actively use this methodological approach but have their teachers trained in it (see Ohrem & Weiss, 2019). A dialogue is not a debate, where the goal is to win it. A dialogue is not a discussion either, where the goal would be to come up with the best argument. A dialogue can be seen as a common investigation of a topic or a question, with the emphasis on *common*. With Mathew Lipmans words, a dialogue represents a *community of inquiry*, which has the goal to get a better understanding of the topic under investigation (see Lipman, 2003: 84). For that, different or even opposing views are not only allowed but necessary (see e.g. Weiss, 2015: 129). Also, Hellesnes understands dialogue in the sense of Lipmans community of inquiry and adds that for *Bildung*, dialogue is necessary and vital (see Hellesnes, 1992: 90f). The reason for that can be found with Klafki, as previously mentioned: According to him, *Bildung* in the sense of self-realization requires interaction with others (see Klafki, 2001: 40), and dialogue represents a form of such interaction (see Weiss & Ohrem, 2016). And when Eidsvåg suggests the pursuit of self-knowledge as a cornerstone of the process of *Bildung* (see Eidsvåg, 2011: 165), then we are reminded of the old Socrates who, according to Hadot, intended to gain self-knowledge through philo-

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sophical dialogue (see e.g. Hadot, 2010: 163 or 269; or Ohrem & Weiss, 2019: 11f).

1.4 Research question

Based on the previously presented, theoretical background of the term *Bildung* as well as dialogue, the question remains how far and in what way dialogue indeed fosters *Bildung*. Furthermore, when Hellesnes assumes a close interrelatedness of *Bildung*, dialogue and practice (see Hellesnes, 1992: 91), then we can ask whether philosophical dialogue in particular – as the central method of philosophical practice – indeed can foster *Bildung* at Norwegian folk high schools. This question has already been investigated when it comes to the specific method of *Socratic dialogue* after Leonard Nelson (see Weiss & Ohrem, 2016; Weiss, 2015: 215f; Ohrem & Weiss, 2019). In the present project, however, the focus will slightly shift to another dialogue format in order to examine whether this format can be understood as a pedagogical philosophical practice that can foster *Bildung*. The research question of this project therefore reads:

- *Can philosophical guided imageries foster Bildung (self-formation) at Norwegian folk high schools – and if so, how?*

In order to find possible answers to this question, the research as presented in this report is structured and organized according to the different steps and chapters as described in *1.1. Overview*. In the following chapter, both the *method of intervention* (philosophical guided imageries) as well as the *research method* (reflective practice research) are presented more in detail.

2 Method and design

This chapter, where the study design is outlined, consists of two parts. In the first part, the *method of intervention* – that is, guided imagery – is presented more in detail. In the second, the *research methods* used to gather the respective data are described. Attention will also be paid to aspects of research ethics relevant to this project.

2.1 Method of intervention

At the center of this project is a series of 7 guided imageries. These imageries were carried out at a Norwegian folk high school in autumn 2019 (for reasons of confidentiality, the name of the school is not mentioned here). In each imagery exercise, between 10 and 20 students participated (all of them between 19 and 22 years old). Altogether, over a period of two months, 5 sessions were held and in the third and fourth session not only one but two imagery exercises were performed. The participation was voluntary, and students were allowed to leave out some sessions or to drop-in on a later session. Furthermore, the students could choose whether they wanted to participate actively in the guided imagery and the subsequent group dialogue, or just be more passive observers in order to get a better idea of what guided imageries are about. In the following, the main characteristics of the imagery technique used for this project is outlined.

What guided imagery means

Today, one can find many different approaches of guided imageries. Therefore, we first have to ask what they are and what they mean in more general terms. To begin with a simple description, I suggest a short exercise:

Imagine a blue elephant. Did it work out? Probably it did.

With this very short example you can see that I guided you in what you imagined. At least partly, because some readers might have imagined a small elephant, some a really big one, some a dark blue elephant and others, one in light blue, maybe almost a turquoise color (see also Weiss, 2017c). Some might have even sensed the smell of an elephant while others could eventually hear the elephant trumpeting with its trunk. These differences are important, as one can see in the course of this project, but my point here is that you were (partly) guided in what you imagined. That is why it is called guided imagery. And though this example is almost oversimplifying what most imageries are about, it points out the essence of this approach.

On the variety of guided imageries

Imagery exercises can be found throughout history, as in Ancient philosophy, for example, where they played a central role, according to Pierre Hadot in his book *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (see e.g. 2010: 59). The term *guided imagery*, however, first became popular after Hans-Carl Leuner developed what he called catathymic image perception, an approach of psychotherapy which actively uses a clients imagination in the therapeutic intervention process (see Leuner, 1969). The fields of application of guided imageries are quite diverse today, ranging from education (see e.g. Day, 1994), sports (see e.g. Morris, Spittle & Watt, 2005) to cancer treatment (see e.g. Murray, 2004), just to name a few. The imageries used in the present

project, however, are more philosophically oriented. They can be understood as exercises of philosophical practice, with the overall goal of fostering a development towards phronesis, that is practical wisdom (see also Weiss, 2017c).

The Trilogos method

In more methodological terms, the guided imageries that were used and written by me for this project are based on and derived from the Trilogos method. This method was developed by the Swiss pedagogue Linda Vera Roethlisberger and is offered in the form of an extensive training program, consisting of four levels and lasting for several years (I attended this program, and then finished it in 2012). The method as such can be located somewhere between adult education and psychotherapy, and it has the technique of guided imagery at its center (see Roethlisberger 2006, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). The Trilogos method has a pedagogical focus since it intends to support individuals to unfold their cognitive, emotional as well as spiritual potentials (that's why it is called *Tri-logos*) with the purpose of personality development (see Weiss, Roethlisberger, Bliemel & Weiss 2011; or Weiss, 2017c) In other words, Roethlisberger assumes what she called a three-fold human potential, which she summarized with the formula $IQ+EQ+SQ=PsyQ$. (Roethlisberger, 2006: 22) $PsyQ$ here represents the overall human potential of a person, consisting of the intertwining of rational intelligence, emotional intelligence (see Goleman, 1996) and spiritual intelligence (see Zohar & Marshall, 2000). Since $PsyQ$ is seen as a potential, according to Roethlisberger, it can be that a person has a high IQ, while still a low EQ or SQ, which then is reflected in the person's $PsyQ$ (see e.g. Weiss, Roethlisberger, Bliemel & Weiss 2011: 16f). If one goes deeper into this method, then one discovers an obvious closeness and relatedness to Human Potential concepts, as outlined by representatives like Abraham Maslow (see 1954), Aldous Huxley (see 1945), Maria Montessori (see 2007) or even Arron Antonovsky with his concept

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of the *Sense of Coherence* (see 1987) that strongly resembles Roethlisbergers PsyQ (see *ibidem*: 19). When it comes to the latter, the difference, however, appears to be that Antonovsky rather intended to develop a theory and empirical tools to evaluate a persons Sense of Coherence, while Roethlisberger developed a training program so that a person can further develop his or her human potential. Furthermore, the Trilogos method, with both its theoretical approach as well as with its training practices, goes beyond conventional psychotherapy and also involves intervention techniques known from transpersonal psychology as well as parapsychology (see e.g. Kraspow & Scotton, 1999). In terms of empirical, quantitative research, studies on the Trilogos method have shown, for example, that practicing Roethlisbergers program can significantly increase ones well-being (evaluated by means of the WHOQOL 100 test) (see Palatinus, 2016). Already here, the Trilogos method would deserve to be critically examined and reviewed, e.g. with regards to its theoretical concepts. However, this is not the point nor the goal of the present research study. The brief theoretical description that is here given on this method should only serve as background information in order to explicate where this approach comes from. Namely, from the tradition of the Human Potential concepts. If one wants to learn more about the Trilogos method, from which the imageries of the present project are derived, then the works of Linda Vera Roethlisberger are recommended (for example, her training program *In Touch with Your Inner Voice*, which can be found on www.udemy.com, or Roethlisberger, 2012; 2013a; 2013b)

Central characteristics of the imageries used in this project

Though based on the Trilogos method, the imagery exercises of the present project also differ from certain guided imageries of the Trilogos approach in some respects. The imageries used for the project were much shorter (for example, they do not include a sequence of body relaxation as long and extensive as one can find in sev-

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eral imageries of the Trilogos method). Also, transpersonal or interpersonal elements, as they are called by Roethlisberger, are not as much present as they would be in certain Trilogos exercises (see e.g. Roethlisberger, 2012: 342f). In principle, the imageries used in this project are like short stories. Each of these stories invited the participants to investigate a central philosophical topic, like the search for meaning, the art of living etc., by means of the participants intuitive imagination. In each imagery, as can be seen in the scripts for the exercises in section 3 *Outcomes and concrete reflections*, there was what could be called a moment of surprise where the participants find an unexpected gift, a piece of art, a symbol or object etc. that is related to the topic under investigation. After each imagery exercise, a group dialogue followed where those who wanted could share their experiences. Then, after one person was finished with the description of his or her experience (with the focus on the unexpected gift, the object or symbol etc. that was found in the course of the imagery), the others in the group were invited to make free associations and to give ideas to that gift or object and the respective experience. In the next step of the dialogue, the participants were invited to formulate definition-like ideas about the topic under investigation (e.g. the art of living) based on the previously made associations. If the topic was the art of living and one person received the artwork of a painting with a strong golden frame showing nothing but a blue bright sky, then association could be into the great wide open, another one full freedom. An idea suggested by the group could then be The art of living is about becoming aware of ones freedom and framing it rightly. This part, that is, formulating more general ideas about the topic and making definition, is not part of a Trilogos guided imagery; rather it resembles certain steps of what is called a Socratic Dialogue after Nelson and Heckmann (see Heckmann, 1981). The goal of this part was to give the participating students the opportunity to philosophize about their experiences by means of their creative and associative thinking. And, as can be seen in section 3 *Outcomes*

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and concrete reflections, they came forward with quite sophisticated and deeply reflected ideas on the respective topic under investigation, which they generated together.

2.2 Research method and approach

The main research method used in this project is *reflective practice research*, a qualitative approach introduced by Anders Lindseth (see Lindseth, 2017). Lindseth is known as a pioneer in the discipline of philosophical practice and with reflective practice research, he is one of the few who developed a research approach derived from philosophical practice.

Reflective practice research is rooted in phenomenology (see ibidem: 249f). That is, one sees a certain practice (e.g. teaching practice, nursing practice etc.) as a phenomenon and intends to become aware of what this particular phenomenon is revealing, what it expresses, what it is essentially about etc. As its name already indicates, reflective practice research suggests that a practitioner or a professional (e.g. a teacher) investigates and reflects on certain of his or her practices in order to get a better and deeper understanding of these practices as well as of his- or herself. The intention behind this approach is to support a practitioner to improve his or her practices and consequentially oneself as practitioner (see ibidem: 244). In the case of this project, it will be the philosophical practice of guided imageries and its pedagogical potentials that I, as both the practitioner who carried out these imageries as wells as the researcher of this project, will reflect and investigate. The purpose of this reflective investigation, as the guiding research question indicates (see section 1.4 . *Research question*), is to see whether, why and how I, as practitioner, could eventually make use of this kind of practice in educational contexts, for example in adult- or higher education, in order to support students in their individual self-formation processes.

Two main sources of data collection

In his works on *reflective practice research*, Anders Lindseth suggests a narrative approach for gathering empirical data (see e.g. 2020). In simple words, he invites the practitioner to write down and formulate cases based on ones experiences with a certain practice. However, in the course of the present research project, I decided to transcend Lindseths suggestion, because I wanted to give those a voice who were involved in the practice of this series of guided imageries, namely, the participating students. I assume the voices of these students – their feedback, their impressions and opinions – as essential parts of the phenomenon under investigation. With only my personal impressions as the main source of empirical data collection, the project would probably have become too self-referential and insufficient in capturing an essential aspect of this practice, namely, what it does to those who participate. Therefore, I decided to focus on two sources when collecting empirical data: One source was the definition-like ideas, which the participants developed in small groups on the philosophical topic under investigation and based on their experiences from the respective imagery. The second source of empirical data was an anonymous questionnaire that was filled out voluntarily after each exercise. Both sources are described further in the following, as well as how the data was further processed and reflected in the course of this research. Also, ethical considerations are taken up in this subchapter.

Definition-like ideas formulated by the students – the first source of empirical data

The first source of empirical data represents the definition-like ideas on the respective philosophical topic of each exercise (e.g. the art of living, meaning in life etc.), which were developed by the participants in group dialogues. In these dialogues, which took place right after each imagery, the students philosophized about the topic

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under investigation, trying to formulate ideas, which would define the topic, based on their experiences and insights from the respective guided imagery. These definitions and ideas were written down on Post-its and put on a blackboard so that all participants could see them. They represented what Lahav called a *network of ideas* on each topic (see Lahav, 2001: 8). And it is the development of such networks of ideas that, according to Lahav, signifies the activity of philosophizing: All philosophers constructed those networks of ideas not on the basis of faith or personal conviction (as in religion), not on the basis of scientific experiments (as in psychology, for example, or biology), but on the basis of thinking. (ibidem: 20) As will be described later in detail in each imagery script, this is precisely what the students did. They developed networks of ideas on a topic, like the art of living, by means of reflecting and thinking about their experiences. Though they did not only employ critical thinking but also creative thinking, as will be explicated later. For now, with reference to Lahav, it only has to be mentioned that it is not least because of the development of such networks of ideas, why the practice of imageries as presented here, can be called philosophical.

Anonymous questionnaire – the second source of empirical data

The second source of empirical data is derived from anonymous questionnaires. The participants could fill them out voluntarily after each exercise, and each participant was invited to mark each questionnaire with one and the same personal symbol, so that the questionnaires of each session could be related to each other without disclosing the identity of the person who filled it out (I did not know which student used which personal symbol). In this way it would be possible to see eventual developments with the respective person, without disclosing his or her identity. The questions included in the questionnaire were the following:

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- 1) *Was it a good session? Yes, because... or No, because...*
- 2) *How did you experience this session? For example, what did you feel and think during the session, and what do you feel and think now?*
- 3) *Could you learn anything new in this session (e.g. about the topic of the exercise)? Maybe you are even motivated to work on a specific personal issue or a certain character trait – if so, which one and how?*
- 4) *If you participated in (a) previous session(s) of the Daimonic Dialogues research project, can you see any personal development that was caused/inspired by this previous session(s)?*

In all sessions, after each exercise, this questionnaire was handed out, filled out by the participants and then placed into a box or envelop, so that I as the facilitator of these sessions could not see or sense who returned which questionnaire.

Processing the data

To have a section on results or outcomes, an analysis and a discussion are common elements in conventional research projects when processing empirical data. Anders Lindseth replaced them with three different steps or parts: *A. Concrete reflection* (narration and presentation of cases) *B. Critical reflection* (investigating what it is that is at stake in the narrated cases) *C. Theoretical reflection* (where the outcomes and reflections of step A. & B. are reflected with regards to relevant theory) (see e.g. Lindseth, 2020). Due to the nature of the empirical data of this project, where the voices of the participants play an essential role, I decided to combine a more conventional approach with the one suggested by Lindseth in the respective titles of the chapters. Therefore, the following chapters read 3. *Outcomes and concrete reflections*, 4. *Analysis and critical reflection* and 5. *Discussion and theoretical analysis*.

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In the next chapter, 3. *Outcomes and concrete reflections*, the projects outcomes in terms of the definition-like ideas formulated by the participants as well as their answers in the questionnaires are presented. Though this will happen in a more summarized way, the idea is to make the voices of the participants heard, as mentioned previously. That is, to let the phenomenon reveal and speak for itself, so to say. Since the students voices, in terms of their ideas and feedback on their concrete experiences from the imageries, already represent a form of reflection, namely a concrete reflection; this term from Lindseths approach is also included in the chapters title. In the subsequent chapter, the outcomes will be analyzed in terms of a critical reflection on eventual trends, tendencies and challenges that came to the fore in the chapter on the outcomes. The goal of this analysis and critical reflection is to get a better understanding of what was actually happening when practicing these imageries with the respective group of folk high school students. In a third step, the insights of the analysis are then discussed and reflected on in more theoretical terms. This theoretical reflection will focus on the pedagogical potentials of the philosophical practice of guided imageries and how to improve this practice. It will be here where the relevance and the challenges of such a practice, when carried out in the context of adult- and higher education, will be discussed. How processing the data, as is done in this project, fits the three essential parts of reflective practice research will be explained in more detail in each of the following chapters.

Ethical considerations

This research project was reported to the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). There, it was approved as a project dealing with anonymous research data. That is, at no point in the project was it possible to relate the gathered data to a specific person. Even the definition-like ideas about the investigated topics that were developed in dialogues in small groups were made in the absence of

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me as the facilitator. Hence, I do not know who contributed with what. Since these definition-like ideas were of general character and since they were a joint product of the small groups, they cannot be related to a single individual in terms of personal beliefs and convictions. Furthermore, the questionnaires were designed to be of anonymous character too. That is, the gathered answers did not have to be anonymized since they already were delivered in an anonymous way. In addition, the name of the respective school at which this project took place is not mentioned on any documents, neither on the questionnaires nor in any research article or the like. Hence, even indirect disclosure and identification of individual-related information is impossible.

Sometimes, as also the outcomes of the questionnaires will show, guided imageries can cause challenging experiences with some participants. For that reason, it was always announced several times during a session that those who faced challenges can and should have a personal talk with me as the facilitator. Several students made use of this possibility and thus the challenges were thoroughly talked through, so that each of the students was in a relieved and stable state after the talk. As the facilitator of these sessions, I saw it as my duty to follow up each student closely to see if the student needed further help, which included the possibility that I would have to contact another professional (e.g., a therapist) to work further with the case. Fortunately, the latter was never necessary; nevertheless, to be aware of ones responsibility as well as ones limitations as a pedagogical professional appears to be one of the major ethical implications when working with such an approach.

3 Outcomes and concrete reflections

In this chapter, the outcomes of this project are intended to be presented in a concise and summarized way. Though these outcomes are not formulated in terms of narrative-like cases, they still appear to be what Anders Lindseth calls *concrete reflections* (see e.g. Lindseth, 2020: 97), since the outcomes represent the students concrete reflections on their experiences from the exercises. These reflections are not told in the form of stories, but still they give a good impression of how the students perceived this philosophical practice of guided imageries, e.g. how these exercises made the students feel, think and do. For that reason, it occurs legitimate to me to call the outcomes of this project also *concrete reflections*, in the same way as this term is used in reflective practice research.

When it comes to the structure of this chapter, each guided imagery exercise as well as the data gathered after each exercise is presented in a chronological manner. Consequentially, there will be seven subchapters within this chapter, with one subchapter for each exercise. Each subchapter then consists of two parts. In the first part, the respective imagery script that was used is presented, so that it is clear what the subsequent outcomes and the concrete reflections from the students are based on. Since certain procedures recur in each exercise, some repetitions of formulations were unavoidable in the different scripts. In order to avoid making the text appear redundant, each script is put into a grey frame so that those interested can read it and those not interested can just hop over to the second part of each subchapter where the empirical outcomes and concrete reflections

3 Outcomes and concrete reflections

on the exercises are presented. These subchapters on the empirical outcomes are again divided into two parts: First, a list of the definitions and ideas on the topic of the respective exercise, which the students developed, is compiled. Second, the feedback on each exercise derived from the anonymous questionnaires is presented (some of them were written in Norwegian which I then translated into English). Furthermore, it has to be mentioned that some exercises were done in one session, so that all in all, five sessions were held, with the third and fourth consisting of two exercises while the rest consisted of one.

3.1 The Quest for Meaning – A Guided Imagery on Meaning in Life

3.1.1 Description of the exercise¹

In the following, a description of the exercise that was done in the 1st session is presented. It was held on 18 September, 2019.

3.1.1.1 Introduction

The quest and search for meaning in life can be understood as a key topic of philosophy. In the last century, it was, among others,

¹ This exercise was published previously in different versions in the following publications and permission for publication in the present monography was given by both publishers:

- Weiss, M. N. (2014): *Damonion – Guided Imagery as a Tool for Philosophical Practice*. In: *Philosophical Practice: Journal of the APPA*, Vol. 9, No. 2, July 2014.
- Weiss, M. N. (2015): *Damonion – Guided Imagery as a Tool for Philosophical Practice*. In: Weiss, M. N. (ed.): *The Socratic Handbook. Dialogue Methods for Philosophical Practice*. Vienna: LIT Publishing.

3.1 The Quest for Meaning – A Guided Imagery

Abraham Antonovsky with his Sense of Coherence (see Antonovsky, 1987) and Viktor Frankl with his Logotherapy (see e.g. Frankl, 2000 or 2006) who contributed important works on that topic. The following guided imagery incorporates some central ideas of Frankl. However, as with all imagery exercises presented here, any pre-knowledge about Frankl's approach or any other philosophical approaches dealing with the quest for meaning was not necessary for the participants. The imagery itself was read to the participants like a short story. They could choose whether to listen to it *a) passively*, that means they left their eyes open and listened to it as they would listen to any other story or *b) actively*, that is, participants closed their eyes and imagined and experienced it in their fantasy. Participants could always open their eyes if they felt uncomfortable during the imagery. Before the imagery was read, participants were informed about its different steps (e.g. welcoming an inner guide, activating one's spiritual/basic trust, continuing to relax or finding a gift, etc.) and that they should be in a stable state in order to listen to the story actively.

3.1.1.2 Guided imagery script

Like most stories, this one begins also with Once upon a time: Once upon a time there was an island somewhere in the Caribbean Sea. It had long white, sandy beaches ... and the water on the shoreline was crystal clear ... beautiful palm trees were growing on the island ... and it was absolutely quiet there ... only the sound of little waves, that were rolling onto the shorelines, was in the air ...

More and more you can imagine this island, with its sandy beach ... the palm trees ... and the beautiful water ... you can almost sense the salty, refreshing breeze that is in the air here ... and the constant sound of the

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waves rolling onto the beach ... you can almost imagine being there ... being at this beach, with your feet in the warm sand.

It is a warm and beautiful day ... and you can make yourself comfortable here at the beach, you can relax ... relax your body, your emotions, your thoughts ... here at this quiet beach you can more and more come to a rest ... you can breathe in soothing and refreshing air – and you can breathe out everything that still reminds you of your everyday life ... all sorrows and wishes you can breathe out ... only to breathe in soothing and refreshing air again.

The sun is shining gently on you here ... you can enjoy being covered by light, so that a soothing feeling of trust begins to evolve in you ... And, inspired by this feeling of trust, you are now invited to make your ritual, your prayer with God, Allah, Atman, the universal force of nature, the Great Nothingness or whatever you call it, so that you feel and know yourself safe and secure, so that you can relax even more.

And while you still relax here on the beach you can sense that a water plane is now landing gently in the water and coming towards the beach – it is your inner guide – a good force who comes to you in unconditional support ... he or she is now out of the plane and joins you at the beach to welcome you friendly ... maybe you cannot see your inner guide yet but you can feel his or her presence or you just know that he or she is here ... you believe and trust that this good force is with you now and you know that if you don't feel comfortable with your inner guide you can always ask for someone else.

Your inner guide tells you now that there is a treasure buried here on the beach – but if you are not up for a treasure hunt and if you just want to continue to relax then

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your inner guide brought you a nice hammock, finds a safe place between two palm trees and mounts the hammock, so you can make yourself comfortable there ... however, if you are curious about the treasure hidden on this beach, then you can sense that your inner guide starts to dig into the sand with a shovel that he or she brought ... while doing that he or she says Meaning in Life can only be found and never be given ... and soon you recognize that there really is a treasure chest hidden under the surface ... It doesn't take long until your inner guide is finished and puts the chest onto the beach.

More and more you can sense what the treasure chest looks like ... is it big or small? Has it a locker on it? If so, your inner guide has the magic key ... your inner guide opens the chest now ... and more and more you can sense what's inside this treasure chest ... what is it that you discover there? Is it something big or small – something old or new, something handmade or something organic from nature? More and more you can focus your inner senses on the content of the treasure chest – and whatever it is that comes to your mind now you are thankful for it and more and more you can concentrate on it ... and should you need any help or should you have any questions concerning the treasure chest and its content then your inner guide is there to help you. (1 minute of silence)

After many interesting ideas and impressions that you received now, it is about time to leave the island again ... that goes also for those who relaxed in the hammock ... you thank your inner guide for the cooperation and say goodbye ... and your inner guide enters the water plane again, while you leave the beach too ... you let go of all impressions that you sensed now ... an important memory remains anyway ... you close the gates to your fantasy

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thoroughly now ... and after you closed the gates to the world of your fantasy, you remember your physical body again which almost fell a bit asleep here on the chair ... gently you wake up your body ... you start to move your fingers – as well as your toes ... you tighten your muscles for a moment and then you relax them again ... more and more your body awakens now ... you breathe in deeply and then deeply out ... and then when you feel ready for it, you open your eyes again and awake well again here in the room.

After the imagery, participants were invited to make notes about their experiences, with the focus on their gift from the treasure chest. Here they were also informed that any experience was worth being written down, even if a participant sensed nothing during the whole imagery, or only feelings or sounds but no visual impressions.

Before the dialogue started (with the focus on the gift from the chest), participants were asked how they experienced the imagery in general. At this point the participants were also informed about how to deal with certain challenges that they eventually faced during certain steps of the exercise (e.g. concerning imagining the different steps, welcoming the inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, choosing just to relax and not finding a gift etc.). If anyone had an absolutely terrifying experience, the person did not need to share it in the group but was offered a private talk with the facilitator after the session.

3.1.1.3 Group dialogue

In the dialogue after the imagery, the following question was investigated: ***What could our gifts from the treasure chest eventually tell us about meaning in life?*** Depending on the group size, this dialogue can be done in plenum or in small groups. In this case the following steps were first performed with the whole group on the

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experience of one person (in order to exemplify how this procedure works). Then, they went into small groups of 4 persons and performed the following steps.

a) EXPERIENCE-SHARING: A first person in the group described his or her gift from the treasure chest in detail (this was done voluntarily and everything that was told had to remain confidential). In this step the gift was approached phenomenologically.

b) MAKING FREE ASSOCIATIONS: After the experience-sharing, the rest of the group was invited to make free associations about the described gift (if a participant sensed nothing or no gift, then associations would be made on e.g. nothingness, absence etc.). According to the saying There are as many interpretations of the truth as individuals (Weiss, Roethlisberger, Bliemel & Weiss 2011: 48), there are no wrong associations. And everything – any ideas, words, metaphors, etc. – that came intuitively to mind could be shared with the group. In this step, the participants creative and associative thinking capacities were activated.

c) FORMULATING DEFINITION-LIKE IDEAS: Based on the gift from the chest and all associations and ideas that were given to it in the previous step, answers on the question What is meaning in life (about)? were formulated in a definition-like style. The definitions and ideas were intended to be based on the gift and the associations – it did not matter if the participants agreed with these ideas personally. Rather, they should be critical and let the gift speak for itself when formulating these definition-like ideas. In this step a phenomenological approach was combined with not only creative but also critical thinking.

d) WRITING DOWN THE IDEAS: After definition-like ideas were formulated, the participant who shared his or her experience wrote them down on Post-its. Then another person described his or her gift and steps a-c were performed again (until everyone in the group had the chance to share his or her experience). At the end of this dialogue, all participants from all groups pinned their Post-

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its on a common wall so that a *network of ideas* (see Lahav, 2001: 8) on *meaning in life* was displayed (which the participants could photograph with their mobiles). This step was the last one in the philosophical movement of going from concrete experiences (from the imagery) to more general ideas about meaning in life (see Weiss, 2015: 215).

3.1.1.4 Summarizing the exercise

Before the session ended, a final step was performed in the plenum. Here, it was about going back from general ideas to the concrete (that is, the everyday life situation of each participant). For that, I as the facilitator read the following words:

Now we come to the last step of this exercise. Again, you can do it with open or with closed eyes. I would like to invite you to remember your treasure chest and its content once again. When you remember the treasure chest now, then what was in the treasure chest – what kind of gift was it? What kind of ideas and associations come to your mind about your gift in the chest – what ideas or associations did you eventually receive from others to your gift? Now, what does the gift or the present in the treasure chest, including all associations and ideas about it, make you aware of – in relation to you and your everyday life? What does this gift mean to you? Are there any new insights or inspirations due to this gift in the treasure chest? To which area in your life seems the treasure in the chest refer too? Maybe there was nothing in your chest – then you can ask yourself what nothingness could have to do with your everyday life. Maybe you want to empty your life from several unessential things or activities? Maybe you just long for some time in which you have nothing to do? As always: There are as many interpretations of the truth as individuals. Whatever

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it was that you became aware of by your gift, you can ask yourself now, how you can put this insight into practice? What would be the next step of action? If you formulate this next step of action in one sentence, then what does this sentence read?

If you gave associations and ideas to other participants about their gift and their treasure chest, then you remember all these ideas and associations, and you take them back to you and ask yourself, what they could have to do with you too? Is there something that you become aware of here?

And then we are also finished with this last part of the exercise. If you had your eyes closed, open them again. And if you could formulate a step of action then write it down.

Could anyone formulate a step of action? Or is there anyone who still has no clue what his or her gift could mean? (If so, a talk in the break was offered).

Now some of you might ask, what has this imagery to do with our topic of meaning? Well, there was this psychotherapist and philosopher called Viktor Frankl, who said Meaning can only be found and never be given. That means I cannot tell you what the meaning in life is – neither I nor anyone else can tell you what is meaningful for you. You have to figure that out on your own. And the reason why we did this exercise now was to investigate how your imagination and your intuition can eventually help you on this search for meaning.

Thank you very much for participating! And remember, if you have any question, just come to me now in the break.

3 Outcomes and concrete reflections

3.1.2 Outcomes from the exercise of the 1st session

3.1.2.1 Definitions and ideas

Seventeen definition-like ideas on the topic of the exercise were developed. Here is a selection of them representing the range of ideas:

Meaning in life is about:

- the little things in life, that make life beautiful and good
- finding your own meaning
- finding the things that complete you
- the focus on life is what *feels* important, not what *should* be important
- dont rush things, wait until youre ready – it will be worth it
- to live in the here and now, to appreciate the beautiful, small things
- self-love and accepting who you are, and dont stress too much

3.1.2.2 Feedback from questionnaire

From 19 students who participated in this exercise, 16 filled out the questionnaire. The answers can be summarized as follows:

1) Was it a good session? Yes, because...:

All 16 responses were positive. Typical answers here were for example *I got insight into my thinking by others, which was very helpful* or *We got to discover some new sides of ourselves*. Several also mentioned the aspect of learning like *Learned something new and worked in new ways which is exciting*, *It was interesting and fun, and I learned a lot* or *It was a new experience that I would like to learn more about*.

2) How did you experience this session? For example, what did you feel and think during the session, and what do you feel and think now?:

The 16 received answers were generally very positive. The big majority used expressions like *calm, relaxed, at ease, peaceful* or *safe* in order to express how they felt during the exercise. Four mentioned certain challenges, like *I felt relaxed physically, but I was thinking a lot and kind of had an inner discussion with myself about how to feel, I had mixed feelings but also safety*. For some, such challenging experiences made sense immediately after the imagery, like one student who noted *I felt a bit stressed and empty. Now I think that I have to calm down, because I have plenty of time and I have to learn to relax properly*.

3) Could you learn anything new in this session (e.g. about the topic of the exercise)? Maybe you are even motivated to work on a specific personal issue or a certain character trait – if so, which one and how?:

From the 13 received answers, only one student claimed not to have learned anything. Many stated that they want to do this kind of exercise more often. The learning fields being mentioned were of existential character. *I think I will learn a lot about myself and how to deal with certain situations*, or *I learned that I might appreciate the little things in life more than I am aware of*, or *I could learn to see things from a different perspective* were typical answers to this question.

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4) If you participated in (a) previous session(s) of the Daimonic Dialogues research project, can you see any personal development that was caused/inspired by this previous session(s)?:

This last question was not answered since it was the first session of the project.

3.2 Ars Vivendi – A Guided Imagery on the Art of Living

3.2.1 Description of the exercise

In the following a description of the exercise that was done in the 2nd session is presented. It was held on 23 October, 2019.

3.2.1.1 Introduction

Ars vivendi is the Latin term for the Art of Living, a key theme in all Ancient schools of philosophy (see e.g. Hadot, 2010: 206, 220, 231). Central philosophical ideas about the Art of Living are also briefly presented in the following guided imagery. However, any pre-knowledge about the topic was not required in order to be able to participate. The goal rather was to make the participants philosophize and generate their own ideas about the Art of Living. As it was with the previous imagery, also this one was read to the participants like a short story. They could choose whether to listen to it *a) passively*, that means they left their eyes open and listened to it as they would listen to any other story or *b) actively*, that is, participants closed their eyes and imagined and experienced it in their fantasy. Participants could always open their eyes if they felt uncomfortable during the imagery. Before the imagery was read, participants were informed about its different steps (e.g. welcoming an inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, continuing to relax or finding a

gift, etc.). They were also informed that they should be in a stable state in order to listen to the story actively.

3.2.1.2 Guided imagery script

Like most stories, this one also begins with Once upon a time...

Once upon a time, on a sunny morning, there was a calm and quiet park ... in the park there were tall, green trees as well as a little pond with some park benches around it ... in the middle of the pond there was a fountain, which made a pleasantly relaxing sound ... a soothing breeze, filled with the refreshing smell of the morning dew, was in the air, while the sun was already shining warm and gently ... and besides the gentle sound of the water from the fountain, it was quiet in this park, absolutely quiet and relaxed.

And more and more you can imagine this park, with its green tall trees ... the sunshine ... the little pond ... the relaxing sound of the water from the fountain in the pond ... and the soothing smell of the morning breeze ... maybe you can almost imagine being there ... being there in the park, which is only reserved for you today, where you can make yourself comfortable on one of the benches at the pond.

Now, sitting on one of the benches and enjoying the morning sun, you can breathe in the soothingly clean and refreshing air (with the smell of the morning dew) ... and you can breathe out everything that still reminds you of your everyday life, all worries, wishes and expectations ... your breathing can more and more come into a gentle rhythm ... you can more and more calm down ... and also your physical body as well as your feelings and thoughts can increasingly relax ... more and more you can en-

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joy this peaceful and quiet place here at the pond with the fountain in the middle.

And while you can increasingly relax and enjoy the almost meditative atmosphere here in this park, a soothing feeling of trust begins more and more to evolve in you ... and inspired by this feeling of trust you are now invited to make your prayer, your ritual with God, Allah, Atman, the universal force of nature, the Great Void or whatever you call it, so that you feel and know yourself safe and secure and that you can relax even more.

And while you still enjoy the peaceful and meditative atmosphere here, you sense that someone is walking on one of the ways in the park towards you ... it is your inner guide, a good force that comes to you in unconditional (love and) support ... and he or she arrives now next to you at the pond and welcomes you friendly ... maybe you cannot see your inner guide, but you feel his or her presence, or you just know that he or she is here ... and you trust and believe that this good force is with you now ... and you know that if you dont feel comfortable with your inner guide you can always ask for someone else.

Your inner guide tells you now that you can either continue to relax here on the bench together with him or her and enjoy the morning sun or you join him or her for a little philosophical walk through the park – you can choose now! ... If you decided to stroll through the park, you start walking with your inner guide on one of the paths while your inner guide begins to philosophize about the Art of Living, telling you that for Socrates, Plato and Aristotle philosophy, as the practice to learn to live a good life, was identical with the Art of Living. Similarly, for the Stoics this art was about how to live a virtuous life. For the Epicureans it was about transcending human fears

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and anxieties. And for Nietzsche it was about becoming an authentic person, while for Goethe life was a piece of art in itself. And when your inner guide tells you, that there are probably as many interpretations of the Art of Living as there are human beings (see Weiss, Roethlisberger, Bliemel & Weiss, 2011: 48), he or she all of a sudden stops ... to your surprise you just came to the entrance of an outdoor exhibition, which takes place here in the park ... Your inner guide lets you know that there is especially one piece of art which he or she wants to show you in this exhibition titled The Art of Living ... And in the moment, when your inner guide tells you that you suddenly can sense an artwork not far from you – what is your first impression of this piece of art? ... When you walk closer now together with your inner guide, can you already sense the colors or shapes of this artwork? Does it appear to be more classical or modern or even digital art? What materials is the artwork made of? Does this piece of art seem to be simple or rather complex in structure? Maybe this piece of art makes a certain sound or even has a certain smell ... maybe also certain feelings are coming up in you due to your impressions of this piece of art? Whatever it is that comes to your mind now, you are thankful for it and more and more you can focus your inner senses on this piece of art ... and should you need any help or should you have any questions concerning this piece of art – (for example, what kind of skills or techniques there were used to make this artwork) – then your inner guide is there to help you. (1 minute of silence)

After many impressions and ideas that you received about your piece of art, it is about time to go back to the pond now ... and on your way back you can clarify still open questions about your piece of art together with your

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inner guide ... arrived at the pond it is time to leave the park again – this goes also for those who just continued to relax on a bench here ... you thank your inner guide for the support and help, and he or she lets you know that you can always come back for a visit to this park ... then your inner guide goes back the way he or she came from, while you are leaving too ...

You let go of all impressions that you sensed now ... an important memory remains anyway ... you close the gates to your fantasy thoroughly ... and after you closed the gates to the world of your fantasy, you remember your physical body again which almost fell a bit asleep here on the chair ... gently you wake up your body ... you start to move your fingers – as well as your toes ... you tighten your muscles for a moment and then you relax them again ... more and more your body awakens now ... you breathe in deeply and then deeply out ... and then when you feel ready for it, you open your eyes again and awake well again here in the room.

After the imagery, participants were invited to write down notes about what they experienced during the imagery and which artwork they perceived. Even if someone sensed nothing during the whole imagery, or only feelings or sounds but no visual impressions, the person was informed that any experience was worth being written down.

Before the group dialogue (with the focus on the artwork) started, participants were asked how they experienced the imagery in general. They were also informed how to deal with challenging situations which they eventually faced during certain steps of the exercise (e.g. concerning imagining the different steps, welcoming the inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, choosing just to relax and not finding a gift etc.). If anyone had an absolutely terrifying experi-

ence, the person did not need to share it in the group but was offered a private talk with the facilitator after the session.

3.2.1.3 Group dialogue

In the dialogue after the imagery, the following question was investigated: *What could our artworks eventually tell us about the Art of Living?* Due to the bigger size of the group, the following steps were first performed with the whole group, with one person sharing his or her experience in order to exemplify how this procedure works. Then, they went into small groups of 4 persons and performed the following steps.

a) EXPERIENCE-SHARING: A first person in the group described his or her piece of art in detail. This was done voluntarily and everything that was shared and said had to remain confidential. In this step the artwork was approached phenomenologically, so to say.

b) MAKING FREE ASSOCIATIONS: In the next step after the experience-sharing, the rest of the group was invited to make free associations to the described artwork (if a participant sensed nothing or no artwork, then associations to e.g. nothingness, absence etc. would be made). According to the saying There are as many interpretations of the truth as individuals (Weiss, Roethlisberger, Bliemel & Weiss 2011: 48), there are no wrong associations. Therefore, any ideas, words, metaphors, etc. that came intuitively to mind could be shared with the group. This step was essentially about activating the participants creative and associative thinking capacities.

c) FORMULATING DEFINITION-LIKE IDEAS: Based on the artwork and all associations and ideas that were given to it in the previous step, answers on the question What is the Art of Living (about)? were formulated in a definition-like style. The definitions and ideas should be based on the artwork and the associations. It did not matter if the participants agreed with these ideas personally. Rather, they should let the artwork speak for itself when for-

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mulating these definition-like ideas. In this step a phenomenological approach was combined with critical thinking since the participants should critically analyze what the artwork was telling.

d) WRITING DOWN THE IDEAS: In the last step, the participant who shared his or her experience wrote down the definition-like ideas on Post-its. Then another person described his or her artwork and steps a-c were performed again (until everyone in the group had the chance to share his or her experience). At the end of this dialogue, all participants from all groups pinned their Post-its on a blackboard so that a *network of ideas* (see Lahav, 2001: 8) on the Art of Living was displayed (which the participants could photograph with their mobiles). This step of the dialogue was the last one in the philosophical movement of going from concrete experiences (from the imagery) to more general ideas about the Art of Living (see Weiss, 2015: 215).

3.2.1.4 Summarizing the exercise

Before the session ended, the final step of the exercise was performed in the plenum. Here, it was about going back from general ideas to the concrete (everyday life situation of each participant). For that, the facilitator read the following words:

Now we come to the last step of this exercise. Again, you can do it with open or closed eyes. I would like you to remember your piece of art from the exhibition once again. What is it that this artwork – with all the associations and ideas that you received to it – makes you aware of? For example: If you see your piece of art as a symbol or metaphor for the Art of Living, then what is this art about? And what can you eventually learn from your piece of art about how you can practice the Art of Living in your everyday life? Is there anything – maybe even a very practical aspect – that you become aware of? If so, formulate it in one sentence, in the sense of a guiding principle or an atti-

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tude that you want to practice now regularly or a character trait that you want to foster.

Finally, you remember all ideas and associations that you gave away to others, about their artworks. Now take all these associations and ideas back to you and ask yourself, what could they have to do with you too? Is there something that you become aware of here?

And then we are also finished with this last part of this exercise. If you had your eyes closed, open them again. And with that we also arrived at the end of this exercise, I would like to thank you for your participation.

3.2.2 Outcomes from the exercise of the 2nd session

3.2.2.1 Definitions and ideas

In the course of this exercise, 22 definition-like ideas on the topic were developed. In the following, a selection of them is presented:

The Art of Living is about:

- *Coping*
- *Controlled chaos*
- *Accepting*
- *Seeing the wholeness in all the small components in life*
- *Accepting the contrasts in life*
- *Believing in oneself*
- *Life is what you make of it*
- *Seeing everything from different perspectives*

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- *Focusing on the many positive sides of life, instead of the few negative ones*
- *Shaping a good life – live well (live for deeds;-)*
- *Not hanging on the dark experiences but bring them with you*
- *Always trying to continue despite major obstacles*
- *Asking for help – no need to be alone*
- *To remember the interests/skills that have always been with you*
- *Moving on even if you dont have all the pieces, and manage to function without them*

3.2.2.2 Feedback from questionnaire

All 20 students who participated in this exercise filled out the questionnaire. The answers can be summarized as follows:

1) Was it a good session? Yes, because... :

Nineteen students wrote something to this question. The great majority used words like *calm*, *safe*, and *relaxed* in order to explain why it was a good session. Several also mentioned that they learned something about themselves and about seeing things from different perspectives.

No because... :

There were three answers, with two students answering the first part of this question too (that is, *Was it a good session? Yes, because...*). While for these two the session was not good because of a lack of concentration and too much thinking, the other person stated that *My thoughts were very dark and terrifying*. However, as it turned out in

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the next question, this person had an important insight at the end of the session and could even formulate a learning target (*I learned that I need to focus on more than the negative*); also, at the end of the whole project, this student had *truly liked this project. A great way to go deeper into yourself and find that others can help you with this.*

2) How did you experience this session? For example, what did you feel and think during the session, and what do you feel and think now?:

Twenty answers were received from which 17 were similar to those given in the first session on this question. That is, these students felt *calm, relaxed, and peaceful* but some also a bit *challenged and curious*. Some also mentioned insights, for example *I felt calm and worriless during the imagery, but now after interpreting, I have more to think about, I think my artwork was very thought-inspiring in the sense that it makes a lot of sense to me*. The three who answered more negatively to the first question, also did so in this question and for the previously mentioned reasons.

3) Could you learn anything new in this session (e.g. about the topic of the exercise)? Maybe you are even motivated to work on a specific personal issue or a certain character trait – if so, which one and how?:

From the 20 received answers, 3 students stated that they did not learn much in this exercise. The others replied with answers like *I found that I think the art of living is about moving on, even if you are missing something, and that maybe, I will find it later, or Learned that these dream journeys can help me to find out how I actually have it, or I think I could start looking more closely at certain things in my life, instead of trying to ignore them*. Other examples are *My artwork that I saw reminded me of a skill that I could have chosen to practice this year but chose something else instead. Maybe my subconscious*

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wants me to be aware of not stopping to do it, or I learned that I have too many situations in my life than I can handle. Therefore, I should ask for help. There is nothing wrong about asking for help. The picture showed that I experienced much and that I have had a big responsibility, and now I have too.

4) If you participated in (a) previous session(s) of the Daimonic Dialogues research project, can you see any personal development that was caused/inspired by this previous session(s)?:

From the 17 received answers, 4 stated that they did not participate last time and 6 did not see any development. The rest could see a development either in terms of being calmer in general or that it has become easier for them to imagine.

3.3 Gnothi Seauton – A Guided Imagery on Self-knowledge

3.3.1 Description of the exercise²

In the following a description of the 1st exercise of the 3rd session is presented, which was held on 29 October, 2019.

² This exercise was published previously in a slightly different version in the publication listed below and is here published with the permission of Cambridge Scholars Publishing:

- Weiss, M. N. (2017): "Learning Practical Wisdom: A Guided Imagery for Philosophical Practice on Self-Knowledge." In: Amir, L. (ed.): *New Frontiers in Philosophical Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

3.3.1.1 Introduction

Gnothi seauton, which literally means know thyself, was a famous inscription on the Temple of Apollo at Delphi where the Delphic oracle performed. Socrates is known for quoting this maxim and referring to the oracle on several occasions in the Platonic Dialogues (see e.g. Plato, 1997: Charmides, 164D; Protagoras, 343B; Phaedrus, 229E; Philebus, 48C). Since Socrates, the maxim remained a central concept in philosophy. The idea behind the following guided imagery is to give a more experiential account of this philosophical maxim and the Delphic oracle at the Apollonian Temple. As with the previous imageries, also this one was read to the participants like a short story. They could choose whether to listen to it *a) passively*, that is, participants left their eyes open and listened to the story as they would listen to any other or *b) actively*, that is, participants closed their eyes and imagined and experienced the story in their fantasy. During the imagery participants could always open their eyes if they felt uncomfortable for whatever reason. Before the imagery was read, its different steps were briefly explained (e.g. welcoming an inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, continuing to relax or finding a gift, etc.). It was also mentioned that the participants should be in a stable state in order to listen to the story actively.

3.3.1.2 Guided imagery script

*Before I start with the story, I would like to invite all those who have your eyes closed now to **formulate a question for yourself – you dont have to speak it out loud** – about something that you are wondering about in your life. It can be a question like: What should I do after this year at folk high school?, What is one of my potentials that I could develop further?, or How can I gain deeper trust? etc. Whatever it is, that you are wondering about, formulate it in one question.*

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After you have formulated the question, you recall it once again ... and then you let it go by symbolically breathing it out... for the moment its not important.

I am going to tell you the story now:

And like most stories, this one also starts with Once upon a time...

Once upon a time, on a warm and sunny day, there was a beautiful garden somewhere in Greece ... many olive trees were growing there, which gave a nice and cooling shadow ... it was quiet here in this garden, absolutely quiet, only some cicadas made a relaxing sound in the distance, while the air was refreshingly clear and filled with the nice smell of Mediterranean herbs ...

And more and more you can imagine this garden, with the sunshine ... the olive trees ... the relaxing sound of the cicadas in the distance ... and the refreshingly clear air, with the nice smell of Mediterranean herbs ... and maybe you can almost imagine being there ... being in this garden on a beautiful summer day.

And you can make yourself comfortable here in the garden – maybe under one of the olive trees in the cooling shadow, where you can relax ... relax your body, your emotions, your thoughts ... here in the garden you can more and more come to a rest ... you can breathe in soothing and refreshing air – and you can breathe out everything that still reminds you of your everyday life ... all sorrows and wishes you can breathe out ... only to breathe in soothing and refreshing air again.

And while you can increasingly enjoy the quiet and almost meditative atmosphere of this place here, a soothing feeling of trust begins to evolve in you ... and inspired by this feeling of trust you are now invited to make your prayer, your ritual with God, Allah, Atman, the universal

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force of nature, the Great Nothingness or whatever you call it, so that you feel and know yourself safe and secure and that you can relax even more.

And while you still enjoy the peaceful and almost spiritual atmosphere here, with the sun shining gently into the garden, you sense that someone is coming into the garden to pay you a visit – it is your inner guide – a good force who comes to you in unconditional (love and) support and who welcomes you friendly ... maybe you cannot see your inner guide but you can feel his or her presence or you just know that he or she is here ... you believe and trust that this good force is with you now and you know that if you dont feel comfortable with your inner guide you can always ask for someone else.

Your inner guide invites you now to visit an old Greek temple nearby because your inner guide would like to show you something there ... but if you are not up for any tourist activities and if you just want to continue to relax here in the garden then your inner guide brings you a nice hammock and mounts it between two olive trees, so you can make yourself comfortable there and enjoy the atmosphere here with your inner guide ... however, if you are curious about the old temple, then you follow your inner guide now who tells you that the whole temple area is reserved for you alone today ...

*... and while you walk with your inner guide, you **remember your personal question again that you formulated before the exercise** ... the walk doesnt take long until you come to the entrance of a temple, where on one of the temples building blocks the inscription know thyself is written ... curiously you enter this old temple together with your inner guide who leads you towards its center ... and while you walk towards the middle of the temple, you*

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already sense that at the center there is a little hole in the ground and from this hole a little cloud or vapor starts to come out ... and curiously about this cloud you observe it now with all your senses and soon you realize that in the cloud something is manifesting and revealing itself to you – what is it that you begin to sense in the cloud? Is it a color, an image, a certain form or symbol, or even a situation from everyday life? Maybe it is a certain smell, or something completely different that you sense now? It could also be that the cloud makes a certain sound while flowing out from the ground ... or you sense a certain feeling – a feeling inspired by this cloud ... and whatever it is – even the smallest detail – that comes to your mind now, you are thankful for it and more and more you can focus your inner senses on it ... and you know that your inner guide is always with you to help you if you have any questions or if you need any support, while you can more and more concentrate on whatever it is that appears in the little cloud now. (1 minute of silence)

Whatever it was that you sensed in the little cloud, the cloud disappears again ... and it is about time to leave the temple now.

On the way back to the garden you can go into dialogue with your inner guide to clarify still open questions about the little cloud and whatever you sensed in it ...

Now back in the garden you thank your inner guide for the cooperation and say goodbye ... that goes also for those who continued to relax in the hammock here ... and then your inner guide goes back to where he or she came from, while you leave the garden too ... you let go of all impressions that you sensed now ... an important memory remains anyway ... you close the gates to your fantasy thoroughly now ... and after you closed the gates to the

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world of your fantasy, you remember your physical body again which almost fell a bit asleep here on the chair ... gently you wake up your body ... you start to move your fingers – as well as your toes ... you tighten your muscles for a moment and then you relax them again ... more and more your body awakens now ... you breathe in deeply and then deeply out ... and then when you feel ready for it, you open your eyes again and awake well again here in the room.

After the imagery, participants were invited to make notes about their experiences, with the focus on the cloud and whatever they sensed in it. If a participant sensed nothing during the whole imagery, or only feelings or sounds but no visual impressions, then he or she was invited to write that down too.

Before the group dialogue started in which the experience with the cloud was further investigated, participants were asked how they experienced the imagery in general. If a participant faced certain challenges during the imagery, then this person was informed how he or she could deal with these challenges (e.g. concerning imagining the different steps, welcoming the inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, choosing just to relax and not finding a gift etc.). If anyone had an absolutely terrifying experience, then this person did not need to share it in the group but was offered a private talk with the facilitator after the session.

3.3.1.3 Group dialogue

In the dialogue after the imagery, the following question was investigated: ***What could this cloud and whatever appeared in it have to do with me and my personal question?*** Depending on the group size, this dialogue can be done in plenum or in small groups. In this case the following steps were first performed with the whole group using the experience of one person. In this way all participants knew

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what they were supposed to do in the dialogues in the small groups afterwards.

a) EXPERIENCE-SHARING: A first person in the group described his or her experience with the cloud in detail. This was done voluntarily and everything that was told had to remain confidential. In this step the cloud and whatever appeared in it was approached phenomenologically, so to say.

b) MAKING FREE ASSOCIATIONS: After the experience-sharing, the rest of the group was invited to make free associations to the described experience with the cloud (if a participant sensed nothing or no cloud, then associations to e.g. nothingness, absence etc. would be made). According to the saying There are as many interpretations of the truth as individuals (Weiss, Roethlisberger, Bliemel & Weiss 2011: 48), there are no wrong associations. In other words, whatever came intuitively to mind – ideas, words, metaphors, etc. – the participants could share with the group. In this way, the participants creative and associative thinking capacities was activated.

c) FORMULATING IDEAS: Based on the cloud and whatever appeared in it and all associations that were given to it in the previous step, participants were now invited to formulate sentences starting with This cloud is about... These sentences should be based on the associations and ideas that came forward in the previous step. For example This cloud is about uncovering deeper layers of oneself could be such a sentence, if uncovering deeper layers of oneself was among the associations given to the respective experience with the cloud. Also, if there were similar ideas or associations, they could eventually be summarized here in one sentence.

d) RELATING THE SENTENCES TO THE QUESTION: In this step, the respective participant was asked whether the sentences developed in the previous step could be eventual answers to the question that the person formulated before the imagery started. This person could then answer with yes or no. Then another person described

his or her artwork and steps a-c were performed again (until everyone in the group had the chance to share his or her experience).

3.3.1.4 Summarizing the exercise

Before the session ended, a final step was performed in the plenum. For that, I, as the facilitator, read the following words:

Hopefully all of you – or at least many of you – received interesting and inspiring ideas and associations to your experience with the cloud.

And I would like you to remember your cloud and whatever appeared in it once again. When you remember your cloud as well as all the ideas and interpretations you received, and refer them to you and your personal question that you formulated before the imagery, then does this make you aware of something? Do some of these ideas and interpretations resonate with you – do some of them appear to be meaningful with regards to this question? Are they giving you an idea what your experience with the cloud could mean with regards to your question? Are you becoming aware of something here?

And whatever it is that you (eventually) become aware of now, try to formulate your insights into a step of action. What is it that you want to work on now or that you want to change? What is your learning target? And what concrete actions do you want to take in order to reach it?

After that, you also remember all ideas and associations that you gave away to others, about their cloud. Now you take all these associations and ideas back to you and ask yourself, what could they have to do with you too? Is there something that you become aware of here?

And then we are also finished with this part of this exercise. If you had your eyes closed, open them now again.

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If you could formulate some insights or even some steps of action or learning targets then write them down now, so you dont forget them. And then we are also finished with this step.

At the end of this dialogue, all participants from all groups were invited to write down short definition-like ideas about self-knowledge based on their experience from the imagery. These ideas were written down on Post-its and then pinned on a common wall so that a *network of ideas* (see Lahav, 2001: 8) on self-knowledge was displayed (which the participants could photograph with their mobiles). This step was the last one in the philosophical movement of going from concrete experiences (from the imagery) to more general ideas about self-knowledge (see e.g. Weiss, 2015: 215).

3.3.2 Outcomes from the 1st exercise of the 3rd session

The 3rd session consisted of two exercises. In this subchapter the outcomes of the first exercise are presented. The topic was self-knowledge in the sense of the Socratic Know thyself.

3.3.2.1 Definitions and ideas

Fourteen definition-like ideas on the topic were developed throughout this exercise. A selection is presented in the following.

Self-knowledge is about:

- *Seeing life from different perspectives*
- *Knowing how you yourself have it*
- *The fact that you know yourself the best and you have to trust your instincts when it comes to what you want to do with your life. You can ask others for advice but they cant tell you what*

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will make you happy, so in the end you have to listen to yourself.

- *Finding different ways to go forwards, and knowing that if you fail you will find another way*
- *Learning and accepting*
- *Some answers you dont have yet*
- *Getting to know yourself through different thoughts and experiences*
- *Finding your own meaning from others knowledge*
- *Aiming for what youre passionate about*
- *Trying to do whats best for you, even though its not what you want*
- *Being able to localize where your inner problems lie, and where they can come from*

3.3.2.2 Feedback from questionnaire

All 16 students who participated filled out the questionnaire. In the following a summary of the answers is given:

1) Was it a good session? Yes, because...:

Fourteen students answered and several of them mentioned that they had certain self-insights and that they learned something about themselves.

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No because...:

Three students had certain challenges. One had the impression that he or she did not get anything out of this exercise. One claimed that for him or her, *it was difficult to imagine everything*. One student fell asleep, even though this student also answered to the previous question that he or she enjoyed the dialogue with the others.

2) How did you experience this session? For example, what did you feel and think during the session, and what do you feel and think now?:

From the 16 answers, 4 students mentioned minor challenges, like being a bit *stressed* at certain points in the exercise or that they could not follow all the time. The rest stated that they felt for example *calm, relaxed, and safe* or that it was *easy to imagine*.

3) Could you learn anything new in this session (e.g. about the topic of the exercise)? Maybe you are even motivated to work on a specific personal issue or a certain character trait – if so, which one and how?:

All 16 participants answered to this question, with 3 claiming not to have learned anything in this exercise. Several of those who learned something mentioned that they found answers or the motivation to work with their personal and existential questions. For example, one student stated that *I found the answer to a question Ive been unsure about for a very long time*, another one that *I refreshed my thoughts I had sometimes before about how I wanted to live my life*, and a third that *I am more motivated on working on an inner conflict I am struggling with by working on my/through my self-knowledge*.

4) If you participated in (a) previous session(s) of the Daimonic Dialogues research project, can you see any personal development that was caused/inspired by this previous session(s)?:

From the 15 received answers, 4 could not see a development. The others mentioned, for example, that they were better at listening or imagining now and also calmer. Others indicated that they could see a kind of self-development, like one student saying, *I feel inspired to become a better version of myself*. Another student stated that he or she would *be calmer in the sessions and trust myself*. Even one of the three who indicated challenges in the answer to the second question stated that he or she *learned something new now too, just as last time*.

3.4 Pantha Rhei – A Guided Imagery about Change

3.4.1 Description of the exercise

In the following, a description of the 2nd exercise of the 3rd session is presented, which was held on 29 October, 2019.

3.4.1.1 Introduction

Heraclitus is known for his sayings You never step into the same river twice and everything flows (pantha rhei) (see Beris & Giacomini, 2014). He was one of the first philosophers who saw change as a central, general aspect of the human condition. Change of course can have many facets, and so the purpose of the following guided imagery was to get a deeper understanding of this philosophical theme. As always, the imagery exercise was read to the participants like a short story. They could choose whether to listen to it *a) passively*, that means they left their eyes open and listened to it as if they would

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listen to any other story, or *b) actively*, that is, participants closed their eyes and imagined and experienced it in their fantasy. Participants could always open their eyes if they felt uncomfortable during the imagery. Before the imagery was read, participants were informed about its different steps (e.g. welcoming an inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, continuing to relax or finding a gift, etc.) and that they should be in a stable state in order to listen to the story actively.

3.4.1.2 Guided imagery script

Somewhere, somewhen, on a warm day in early autumn, there was a little river with chuckling waters crystal clear, gently flowing and flowing ... green grass was growing on its riverbanks, and trees, with their leaves slowly turning into yellow, filling the air with the soothingly refreshing smell of early autumn ... besides the chuckling waters it was silent here at the river, absolutely silent.

And while you can more and more imagine this silent river, you too can get increasingly calm ... maybe you can even imagine being there, here at the riverbank, sitting in the green, warm grass, and leaning your back on one of the tree trunks ... while you can enjoy the late summer sun, the clean, soothing air, and the chuckling sound of the waters.

You can increasingly relax here in this peaceful atmosphere ... relax your body, your thoughts and feelings ... everything that still reminds you of our everyday life you can breathe out ... only to breathe in the clear and refreshing air again. Your inner senses can ever easier focus on the relaxing, almost meditative surrounding of this river ... and a soothing feeling of trust slowly begins to evolve in you ... more and more you can enjoy this increasingly deepening feeling of trust – trust into being ...

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and inspired by this feeling of trust you are now invited to reconnect with the Supreme being, the Absolute, whether you call it God, Allah, Atman, nature, Logos, Nothingness, or whatever. You make your prayer, your meditation in your ritual, so that you feel and know yourself safe and secure and that you can relax even more.

And while still enjoying this meditative moment, you sense that someone is walking along the river towards you ... it is your inner guide – a good force coming to you in unconditional support ... friendly you welcome your inner guide ... maybe you cannot see him or her yet, but feel his or her presence, or you just know that he or she is with you now ... you trust and believe in the presence of this good force ... and should you not feel comfortable with your inner guide then you can always ask for someone else.

*Sitting down next to you, your inner guide tells you that you can now choose between continuing to relax or doing a short philosophical exercise ... if you decided to do some philosophical work now, your inner guide begins to tell you of the philosopher Heraclitus, who became famous for his saying *You never step into the same river twice* meaning that a river is constantly changing and moving, just like life ... and in the moment your inner guide is saying that, you sense that something is washed onto the riverbank – a gift for you from the river ... What is it? What comes to your mind? Your inner guide picks up this gift and brings it to you ... Is it big or small? What colors and shapes does it have? What material is it made of? Is it manmade or something from nature? Maybe it even has a certain smell or makes a certain sound ... How do you feel about this gift? Whatever it is that comes to your mind now, you are thankful for this present ... and should you need help*

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or have questions – e.g., how this gift might relate to the topic of change, then your inner guide is there for you ... while you can increasingly focus your inner senses on this gift and perceive valuable impressions and ideas about it now. (1 minute of silence)

After receiving many impressions about your gift, it is time to leave this peaceful riverbank again ... this goes also for those who just continued to relax ... we all thank our inner guide for the cooperation and say goodbye ... and as your inner guide leaves now, you are leaving too ... You let go of all impressions that you sensed now, an important memory remains anyway ... thoroughly you close the gates to your fantasy ... now you remember your physical body again, which almost fell a bit asleep here on the chair ... you wake up your body by gently moving your fingers, your toes ... for a moment you tighten your muscles, only to relax them again ... your body is now fully awake again ... you breathe deeply in ... and deeply out ... and when you feel ready for it, you open your eyes again and come well back into the here and now, into this room.

After the imagery, participants could make notes about their experiences, with the focus on their gift from the river. Even if participants sensed nothing during the whole imagery, or only feelings or sounds but no visual impressions, they were invited to write that down.

Before the group dialogue started (with the focus on the gift), the participants were informed how to deal with certain challenges that they eventually faced during certain steps of the exercise (e.g. concerning imagining the different steps, welcoming the inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, choosing just to relax and not finding a gift etc.). If anyone had an absolutely terrifying experience, the person did not need to share it in the group but was offered a private talk with the facilitator after the session.

3.4.1.3 Group dialogue

In the dialogue after the imagery, the following question was investigated: *What could our gifts eventually tell us about the topic of change?* Depending on the group size, this dialogue can be done in plenum or in small groups. In this case the following steps were first performed with the whole group on the experience of one person (in order to exemplify how this procedure works). Then, they went into small groups of 4 persons and performed the following steps.

a) EXPERIENCE-SHARING: A first person in the group described his or her gift in detail (this was done voluntarily and everything that was told had to remain confidential). In this step the gift was approached phenomenologically.

b) MAKING FREE ASSOCIATIONS: After the experience-sharing, the rest of the group was invited to make free associations to the described gift (if a participant sensed nothing or no gift, then associations to e.g. nothingness, absence etc. would be made). According to the saying There are as many interpretations of the truth as individuals (Weiss, Roethlisberger, Bliemel & Weiss, 2011: 48), there are no wrong associations. And everything – any ideas, words, metaphors, etc. – that came intuitively to mind could be shared with the group. In this step, the participants creative and associative thinking capacities were activated.

c) FORMULATING DEFINITION-LIKE IDEAS: Based on the gift and all associations and ideas that were given to it in the previous step, answers on the question What is change (about)? were formulated in a definition-like style. The definitions and ideas should be based on the gift and the associations – it did not matter if the participants agreed with these ideas personally. Rather, they should be critical towards their own opinions and let the gift speak for itself when formulating definition-like ideas. In this step a phenomenological approach was combined with critical thinking, as it were.

d) WRITING DOWN THE IDEAS: After definition-like ideas were formulated, the participant who shared his or her experience

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wrote them down on Post-its. Then another person described his or her gift and steps a-c were performed again (until everyone in the group had the chance to share his or her experience). At the end of this dialogue, all participants from all groups pinned their Post-its on a blackboard so that a *network of ideas* (see Lahav, 2001: 8) on the topic of change was displayed (which the participants could photograph with their mobiles). This step was the last one in the philosophical movement of going from concrete experiences (from the imagery) to more general ideas about the topic of change (see e.g. Weiss, 2015: 215).

3.4.1.4 Summarizing the exercise

Before the session ended, a final step was performed in the plenum. Here, it was about going back from general ideas to the concrete, that is, the everyday life situation of each participant. For that, I, as the facilitator, read the following words:

Now we come to the last step of this exercise. Again, you can do it with open or closed eyes:

I would like you to remember your gift from the river once again. When you remember your gift now and all the ideas and interpretations that you received to it, then what is it that this gift makes you aware of? For example:

1. If you see your gift as a symbol or metaphor for the topic of change, then what is change about? How would you define or formulate that?

2. What can you learn from your gift about how you can better deal with change in your everyday life? Is there anything – maybe even a very practical aspect – that you become aware of, with regards to change? For example, changes that you want to make in your life, or how you can learn to better accept change.

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Finally, you remember all ideas and associations that you gave away to others, about their gifts. Now take all these associations and ideas back to you and ask yourself, what they could have to do with you too. Is there something that you become aware of here?

And then we are also finished with this last part of this exercise. If you had your eyes closed, open them now again. And with that we also arrived at the end of this exercise. I would like to thank you for your participation and I would like to ask you to pin your Post-its with your definitions and ideas about change onto this blackboard so that we have a network of ideas. Afterwards in the break we can all have a look at this network of ideas on change or take a picture of it.

3.4.2 Outcomes from the 2nd exercise of the 3rd session

3.4.2.1 Definitions and ideas

Fourteen definition-like ideas were developed in the course of this exercise. In the following several examples are presented:

Change is about:

- *Finding your own pace*
- *Even if you are content in one place, explore other choices*
- *That one goes through a lot throughout life, but deepest inside one remains the same person*
- *Forming things the way you want*
- *To go forward, be creative, try something new*
- *Taking care of oneself in the process of change*

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- *Making change, not just sitting around, waiting for change to happen, but actually going out and making change for yourself*
- *Change is about taking time to honk and breathe and letting change to come to you*
- *Daring to go back to the old you*
- *Finding something or someone who makes you happy in order to move forward*

3.4.2.2 Feedback from questionnaire

From 16 participants, 15 filled out the questionnaire. The answers are summarized in the following:

1) Was it a good session? Yes, because... :

Thirteen answers with positive feedback were received. Several students stated that the gift that they received during the imagery made sense to them. In this respect one student can be mentioned who stated that *I felt like the gift that I got at the riverbank greatly relates to me, and gives me the answer as to how to make changes in my life*. Besides many stating that it is easier and easier for them to do this kind of exercise, some also had important insights. For example, one student stated that *I become more and more aware of which stance I should take towards things in life*. Another one answered that *What I experienced made a lot of sense after we talked about it in the plenum*.

No because... :

Two students faced challenges in this exercise, like the one who stated that *It was very unpleasant*. The same student, however, answered to the third question that he or she could learn something

in this exercise. This can be seen as one of several examples that happened throughout the whole project, where students faced challenges but then it turned out that it was due to these challenges that they could learn something important or gain important insights.

2) How did you experience this session? For example, what did you feel and think during the session, and what do you feel and think now?:

From the 15 answers received, only one student stated that he or she did not feel safe – as mentioned previously, this was the same student who stated on the third question to have learned something in this exercise. The rest of the group felt *calm*, *relaxed* and *safe*, with some also indicating that they have a better understanding of the topic of change now.

3) Could you learn anything new in this session (e.g. about the topic of the exercise)? Maybe you are even motivated to work on a specific personal issue or a certain character trait – if so, which one and how?:

Fifteen students answered this question, with 3 indicating that they did not learn anything. Typical answers to this question were, for example, *I feel I can greatly benefit from these sessions as they teach me more about myself*, or *I felt I became very aware of how I should cope and deal with changes*. Another student wrote *Felt I learned that change is about creating and forming something that you already have in order to go forwards. In order to go forwards, you have to change*. Other answers have been, for example, *I think I have to look more into myself and learned that I might be looking at some aspects of my life in a bad way*, or *I have lighter, clearer thoughts about life but also More motivated to focus on how to change myself for the better*.

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4) If you participated in (a) previous session(s) of the Daimonic Dialogues research project, can you see any personal development that was caused/inspired by this previous session(s)?:

Fifteen answers were received to this question, with 2 students stating that they do not see any development because the time between the two exercises was too short (exercise 3 & 4 were done in the same session). As in previous exercises, many answered to this question that it became ever easier for them *to imagine the sceneries* of the exercise. In general, the answers here were very positive.

3.5 Paideia – A Guided Imagery about Self-development

3.5.1 Description of the exercise

In the following a description of the 1st exercise of the 4th session is presented, which was held on 5 November, 2019.

3.5.1.1 Introduction

Paideia was the common goal of all Ancient schools of philosophy. In *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Hadot translated it as *self-formation* (see e.g. Hadot, 2010: 102), though self-development also appears to be a legitimate translation since *paideia* signifies a development towards wisdom (see *ibidem*). Since younger people often are not familiar with the term self-formation, but rather with self-development, it was the latter that was chosen as the topic of the following guided imagery. The idea behind this imagery was to investigate what self-development might be about, and also to eventually get inspiration on what the next steps in ones personal development could be. The imagery exercise was, as always, read to the participants like a short

story. They could decide for themselves whether to listen to it *a) passively*, that means they left their eyes open and listened to it as they would listen to any other story or *b) actively*, that is, participants closed their eyes and experienced it in their imagination. Participants could always open their eyes if they felt uncomfortable during the imagery. Before the imagery, participants were informed about its different steps (e.g. welcoming an inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, continuing to relax or finding a gift, etc.) and that being in a stable state was mandatory when listening to the story actively.

3.5.1.2 Guided imagery script

Once upon a time there was an old, beautiful library with bright windows so that soothingly warm sunlight was falling into the quiet rooms of this library ... rooms that were filled with many books in many shelves, and some could only be reached over stairs or ladders ... a fine smell of paper and leather covers was in the air ... and many of the books here contained texts and scriptures of all cultures of the world, with thousands of years old wisdom of human kind ... and despite all the wisdom and knowledge that was stored in this library, the room was filled with a deep and soothing silence ... it was as if the time stood still here.

And more and more you can imagine this library, with its bright windows, with all its books and valuable texts, the fine smell of old leather book covers ... and maybe you can almost imagine being there, being here in one of the beautiful rooms in the library with the soothing, bright sunlight falling through the windows, covering you gently ... here in this room filled with wisdom and a deeply relaxing silence ...

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To your surprise you find a nice reading chair where you can make yourself comfortable and inspired by the soothing silence of this room, you can more and more relax here on the chair . . . relax your body, your feelings and your thoughts . . . everything that still reminds you of your everyday life, all worries and wishes you can breathe out . . . only to breathe in clean and refreshing air . . . and by doing so your inner senses awaken more and more, here in this room of wisdom and tranquility . . . with its almost contemplative and meditative atmosphere . . . you can increasingly enjoy being here, being gently covered in sunlight . . . and inspired by the soothing sunlight and the silence of this room, you meditate for a moment in your own, personal way and you are now invited to make your prayer, your ritual with God, Allah, with the Great Nothingness, Atman, the universal force of nature, or whatever you call it, so that you feel and know yourself safe and secure and that you can relax even more.

And while you still enjoy the meditative atmosphere here in the library, sitting in the cozy reading chair, you sense that someone is coming through the library towards you . . . it is your inner guide – a good force that comes to you in unconditional support . . . your inner guide arrives now next to your chair and welcomes you friendly . . . and maybe you cannot see your inner guide yet but you can feel his or her presence or you just know that he or she is with you now . . . you trust and believe that this good force is with you now . . . and you know that if you dont feel comfortable with your inner guide – for whatever reason – you can always ask for someone else.

Your inner guide lets you know now that he or she would like to philosophize with you a bit about the topic of self-development. However, he or she also mentions that if you

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rather prefer to continue to relax here in the reading chair to enjoy the quiet atmosphere and the soothing light in the library instead, then this is also fine. Intuitively you decide what you want to do! If you want to philosophize with your inner guide now, then you can sense that he or she is walking to one of the bookshelves while he or she is telling you that self-development, - in Norwegian called dannelse - was a central topic in all wisdom traditions ever since. The old Greek philosophers for example called it Paideia, and the goal of paideia was to become the best version of oneself and to become wise; after the movement of Enlightenment it was called Bildung, which essentially was about unfolding ones human potentials ... and though the different wisdom traditions sometimes show different understandings of self-development, a common aspect among them all always was to raise ethical awareness , that is to become truly humane ... but your inner guide also mentions that part of self-development also is to figure out what it means for oneself ... and when your inner guide says that he or she picks out one of the many books from the shelves and brings it to you to the reading chair ... What book have you received now, what cover does it have, which colors, pictures or symbols are on it – is it a hardcover, a paperback or even an e-book? Maybe you can also sense its title – is it a holy scripture from one of the wisdom traditions, or a childrens book, a novel or even a cookbook or an audiobook? Whatever book you received now you are thankful for it and you can focus your inner senses more and more on it ... and after you have a first impression of this book, your inner guide opens up a particular page now – or if it is an audiobook, he fast-forwards to a specific passage: What can you sense on that page or in that passage? Your inner guide can even read

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this passage to you ... Is it a specific sentence or word that strikes you, or a picture that attracts your attention? Maybe it is a certain sound that you sense now, or a certain smell or feeling, induced by this page? Whatever it is that comes to your mind now, you are thankful for it and more and more you can focus your inner senses on it ... and should you have any questions – for example, what this page and this book could have to do with self-development and what you can learn from it – you can always ask your inner guide for help ... in dialogue with him or her it becomes easier and easier for you now to focus on this book, its opened page and its (eventual) message to you for a while. (1 minute of silence)

After you received many interesting and important impressions and ideas about your book, it is about time to leave this library again ... should you still have open questions, you can clarify them with your inner guide ...

It is now time to leave, you close your book and your inner guide puts it back into the shelf ... you stand up from the reading chair and thank your inner guide for the cooperation – this goes also for those who continued to relax in the chair ... Finally your inner guide lets you know that you are always welcome back to this place ... Then your inner guide goes back to where he or she came from and also you go back to the world of your everyday life ... you let go of all impressions that you sensed now – an important memory remains anyway ... you close the gates to your fantasy thoroughly ... and after you closed the gates to the world of your fantasy, you remember your physical body again which almost fell a bit asleep and which you now begin to gently wake up again ... you move your fingers gently – as well as your toes ... all the muscles of your body you tighten for a moment and then you relax

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them again . . . your body awakens more and more . . . you breathe in deeply and then deeply out . . . and then, when you feel ready for it, you open up your eyes and awake well again in the here and now in this room.

After the imagery, participants could make notes about their experiences, with the focus on their book and the opened page. If a participant sensed nothing during the whole imagery, or only feelings or sounds but no visual impressions, then he or she was advised to write that down since this can be valuable information in the following dialogical investigation.

Before the group dialogue started, participants were asked how they experienced the imagery in general. At this point the participants were also informed how to deal with certain challenges that they eventually faced during certain steps of the exercise (e.g. concerning imagining the different steps, welcoming the inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, choosing just to relax and not finding a gift etc.). If anyone had an absolutely terrifying experience, the person did not need to share it in the group but was offered a private talk with the facilitator after the session.

3.5.1.3 Group dialogue

In the dialogue after the imagery, the following question was investigated: *What could the book and the opened page eventually tell us about the topic of self-development?* In order to investigate this question further, the following steps were first performed with the whole group on the experience of one person (in order to exemplify how this procedure works). Then, they went into small groups of 4 persons and performed the following steps.

a) EXPERIENCE-SHARING: A first person in the group described his or her book and the opened page in detail (this was done voluntarily and everything that was told had to remain confidential). In this step the gift was approached phenomenologically.

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b) MAKING FREE ASSOCIATIONS: After the experience-sharing, the rest of the group was invited to make free associations to the described book and the page (if a participant sensed nothing or no book, then associations to e.g. nothingness, absence etc. would be made). According to the saying There are as many interpretations of the truth as individuals (Weiss, Roethlisberger, Bliemel & Weiss, 2011: 48), there are no wrong associations. And everything – any ideas, words, metaphors, etc. – that came intuitively to mind could be shared with the group. In this step, the participants creative and associative thinking capacities were activated.

c) FORMULATING DEFINITION-LIKE IDEAS: Based on the book, the opened page and all associations and ideas that were given to it in the previous step, answers on the question What is self-development (about)? were formulated in a definition-like style. The definitions and ideas should be based on the book, the opened page and the associations – it did not matter if the participants agreed with these ideas personally. Rather, they should let the book, and the opened page speak for themselves when formulating definition-like ideas. In this step a phenomenological approach was combined with critical thinking since the participants were invited to reflect critically on what the book and the opened page eventually revealed about the topic of self-development.

d) WRITING DOWN THE IDEAS: After the definition-like ideas were formulated, the participant who shared his or her experience wrote them down on Post-its. Then another person described his or her book as well as the opened page and steps a-c were performed again (until everyone in the group had the chance to share his or her experience). At the end of this dialogue, all participants from all groups pinned their Post-its on a blackboard so that a *network of ideas* (see Lahav, 2001: 8) on the topic of self-development was displayed (which the participants could photograph with their mobiles). This step was the last one in the philosophical movement of going

from concrete experiences (from the imagery) to more general ideas about the topic of self-development (see e.g. Weiss, 2015: 215).

3.5.1.4 Summarizing the exercise

Before the session ended, a final step was performed in the plenum. Here it was about going back from general ideas to the concrete everyday life situation of each participant. For that, I, as the facilitator, read the following words:

Now we come to the last step of this exercise. Again, you can do it with open eyes or with closed eyes:

I would like you to remember your book and the opened page once again. When you remember your book and the opened page now and all the ideas and interpretations that you received to it, then what is it that this book makes you aware of? For example:

1. If you see your book as a symbol or metaphor for self-development, then what is it, or what is it about? How would you define or formulate that?

2. What can you learn from your book about how you can further develop yourself in your everyday life? Is there anything – maybe even a very practical aspect – that you become aware of, with regards to the practice self-development? For example, a certain skill or attitude that you want to further develop now? If so, formulate it in one sentence, in the sense of a guiding principle or goal.

Finally, you remember all ideas and associations that you gave away to others, about their books. Now take all these associations and ideas back to you and ask yourself, what could they have to do with you too? Is there something that you become aware of here?

And then we are also finished with this last part of this exercise. If you had your eyes closed, open them now

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again. And with that we also arrived at the end of this exercise, I would like to thank you for your participation and I would like to ask you to pin your Post-its with your definitions and ideas about self-development onto this blackboard so that we have a network of ideas. And so that afterwards in the break also the others can have a look at it or take a picture of it.

3.5.2 Outcomes from the 1st exercise of the 4th session

Several students could not participate in this session since the school did not inform them about the session taking place this day. Therefore, there were only 11 participants meeting up.

3.5.2.1 Definitions and ideas

Eleven definition-like ideas were developed in the course of this exercise, which are presented in the following:

Self-development is about:

- *Taking your time and doing your own thing*
- *Letting the Golden moments happen, and enjoy them*
- *Keeping contact with your inner child. Also: look in the past to develop your future*
- *That you can always improve yourself. It is your responsibility to fill out your lifeline.*
- *Learning by doing. Self-development more like self-care*
- *Not knocking yourself down*
- *Not dwelling or overthinking whats gonna happen tomorrow or what happened yesterday, but living in the now*

- *Being open to change*
- *Experience things for yourself*

3.5.2.2 Feedback from questionnaire

All 11 participants filled out the questionnaire. In the following their answers are summarized:

1) Was it a good session? Yes, because...:

Besides several students experiencing this exercise as *calm* and *relaxed*, others also mentioned certain insights, for example, *It was a nice imagery where I got something good/enlightening out of*, or *I got a little aha-experience*.

No because...:

There was one student who stated that he or she could not get anything out of this exercise.

2) How did you experience this session? For example, what did you feel and think during the session, and what do you feel and think now?:

From the 11 answers received, 2 students mentioned that they were a bit disappointed about the result. The rest, however, stated that they felt *calm* and *safe*. Some also noted some insights, like one student who stated, *I think I have to accept things/rules and red lines, the way they are set, and not doing everything my way*.

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3) Could you learn anything new in this session (e.g. about the topic of the exercise)? Maybe you are even motivated to work on a specific personal issue or a certain character trait – if so, which one and how?:

Here, 2 students stated that they did not learn anything in this exercise. All the others had some kind of existential insights, like *That my answer lies in my hands. I have to do things and get out of the situation.* Another student stated that *I learned that I have to be more open to change.* For another student this exercise was about *learning to take the wisdom from everyday life and working to be the best version of myself.* A further student noted to have *learned that I'm allowed to take things in my own way,* just to give a few examples.

4) If you participated in (a) previous session(s) of the Daimonic Dialogues research project, can you see any personal development that was caused/inspired by this previous session(s)?:

In the 9 received answers, 3 students indicated that they did not see any development. The others ranged from more unspecific statements like *Yes, I've changed. It's nice.* to more deeper insights like *I feel that in a way I unlock knowledge which has always been there but which I didn't reach/could get hold of.* Another student stated that *I have learned to be more chill and let life do its things. I can't over-think everything and I can't rush things.*

3.6 A Cosmic Journey – A Guided Imagery about the Universal Force of Nature

3.6.1 Description of the exercise

In the following a description of the 2nd exercise of the 4th session is presented, which was held on 5 November, 2019.

3.6.1.1 Introduction

To see life from different perspectives, to get an overview of the whole and to take a step back and distance oneself from the daily hassles in order to understand the world in a bigger picture have been essential procedures in Ancient philosophy. For that purpose, different imagery exercises were practiced. A well-known one is The view from above, as Hadot called it (see Hadot, 2010: 245). The following guided imagery is a version of this exercise, updated and modified for our times. As with all the previous exercises, also this one was read to the participants like a short story. The students could choose between listening to it *a) passively*, that means they left their eyes open and listened to it as they would listen to any other story or *b) actively*, that is, participants closed their eyes and imagined and experienced the story in their fantasy. Participants could always open their eyes if they felt uncomfortable during the exercise. Before the imagery started, the students were informed about its different steps (e.g. welcoming an inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, continuing to relax or finding a gift, etc.) and that they should be in a stable state in order to listen to the it actively.

3.6.1.2 Guided imagery script

Like most stories, this one also begins with Once upon a time...

Once upon a time and shortly before sunrise, there was a new morning breaking, somewhere in the desert ... a gentle red-orange glow was coming up at the horizon, shedding a first light on smoothly shaped sand dunes, while the stars above were still shining in the deep blue of the night sky ... it was silent here, absolutely silent – here at the break of dawn in the twilight of the desert ... only a soothing morning breeze was whispering ... while the air was

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refreshingly clear and the temperature was already pleasantly warm.

... and maybe you can already imagine this peaceful place here in the desert ... with the smooth shapes of the sand dunes, the clear air, the beautiful red-orange glow at the horizon, and the stars above ... and you can almost imagine being there – being on top of one of the dunes, with your feet in the warm sand, while you can increasingly enjoy the peaceful atmosphere here ... more and more you can relax ... and also your body, your emotions and your thoughts can more and more come to a rest now ... everything that still reminds you of your everyday life – all sorrows and hopes – you can symbolically breathe out ... only to breathe in the soothing and refreshing air of the morning again.

And while you can more and more relax here on top of the sand dune, and enjoy the almost meditative atmosphere here out in the nature, a soothing feeling of trust begins to evolve in you ... and inspired by this feeling of trust, you are now invited to make your prayer, your ritual with God, Allah, Atman, the Great Void or whatever you call it ... so that you feel and know yourself safe and secure and that you can relax even more.

And while you still enjoy this meditative and peaceful moment here in the desert, you sense, that someone is walking up the sand dune towards you ... it is your inner guide, a good force that comes to you in unconditional support ... and he or she is now next to you on top of the sand dune and greets you friendly ... maybe you cannot see your inner guide yet but you can feel his or her presence or you just know that this good force is with you now ... you trust and believe in the presence of your inner guide and you know that you can always ask for someone else, if you

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don't feel comfortable with your inner guide, for whatever reason.

Your inner guide invites you now for a little philosophical exercise together with him or her ... But if you are not up for an exercise then this is no problem, then you just make yourself comfortable here on the sand dune with your feet in the warm sand and continue to enjoy the atmosphere here ...

However, if you want to do a little exercise now, your inner guide invites you to sense the stars above you, which still shine in the night sky ... and more and more you can focus on them ... it is as if a window to the universe would open now, and you can more and more become aware of the planets ... become aware of the huge distances between them, become aware of the deep space of the universe ... and you can almost feel and sense the deep, peaceful silence of space now ... sense the infinity of the cosmos, with you on planet earth, with your feet in the warm sand, being a small but integral part of the universe ... being an integral part of nature, of universal nature – being one with the All, being connected with the whole ... and gently you breathe in and out, your inner guide is always with you so that you can feel safe and secure while you can increasingly become aware of the universe – and should you have any questions or should you need any support then your inner guide is always there to help you – while you can more and more enjoy the nature, the universal nature around and within you. (1 minute. of silence)

And whatever it was that you experienced now, it is about time to end this little exercise ... The sun is now above the horizon ... a new day has broken, and you can enjoy being covered in sunlight here on the sand dune, with

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your feet in the warm sand ... And before you leave the sand dune, your inner guide hands you over a little gift, a little souvenir of this exercise, so to speak, that symbolizes universal nature ... What is it that you receive now? What comes to your mind? (10 sec.) ... And whatever it is that your inner guide gave to you now, you are thankful for it ... and the time has now come to return to the world of your everyday life again ... this goes also for those who continued to relax and enjoyed the sunrise ... you thank your inner guide for the cooperation ... You stand up from the sand and say goodbye, and your inner guide lets you know that you can always come by for a visit here at the dune ...

Then your inner guide walks back to where he or she came from, while you leave the dune too ... you let go of everything that you sensed now ... an important impression remains anyway ... carefully you close the gates to your fantasy ... and after you closed the gates to your fantasy, you remember your physical body, which almost fell a bit asleep here on the chair ... gently you wake up your body again ... you move your fingers, also your toes ... you tighten all your muscles for a moment and then you relax them again ... two or three times you breathe in and out deeply ... and then – charged with fresh energy – you open your eyes again and you come well back into the Here and Now.

As always after the imagery, participants were invited to make notes about their experiences, with the focus on their experience with the universe and the gift that they received at the end of the exercise. Here, they were also informed that any experience was worth being written down, even if a participant sensed nothing during the whole imagery, or only feelings or sounds but no visual impressions.

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Before the group dialogue started, participants were asked how they experienced the imagery in general. As always at this point, the students were informed how to deal with certain challenges that they eventually faced during certain steps of the exercise (e.g. concerning imagining the different steps, welcoming the inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, choosing just to relax and not finding a gift etc.). If anyone had an absolutely disturbing or terrible experience, the person did not need to share it in the group but was offered a private talk with me as the facilitator after the session.

3.6.1.3 Group dialogue

In the dialogue after the imagery, the following question was investigated: *What could the gift eventually tell us about the topic of universal nature?* Depending on the group size, this dialogue can be done in plenum or in small groups. In this case the following steps were first performed with the whole group on the experience of one person (in order to exemplify how this procedure works). Then, they went into small groups of 4 persons and performed the following steps.

a) EXPERIENCE-SHARING: A first person in the group described his or her gift in detail (this was done voluntarily and everything that was told had to remain confidential). In this step the gift was approached phenomenologically.

b) MAKING FREE ASSOCIATIONS: After the experience-sharing, the rest of the group was invited to make free associations to the described gift (if a participant sensed nothing or no gift, then associations to e.g. nothingness, absence etc. would be made). According to the saying There are as many interpretations of the truth as individuals (Weiss, Roethlisberger, Bliemel & Weiss, 2011: 48), there are no wrong associations. And everything – any ideas, words, metaphors, etc. – that came intuitively to mind could be shared in the group. In this step, the participants creative and associative thinking capacities were activated.

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c) FORMULATING DEFINITION-LIKE IDEAS: Based on the gift and all associations as well as ideas that were made in the previous step, answers on the question What is universal nature (about)? were formulated in a definition-like style. The definitions and ideas should be based on the gift and the given associations. It did not matter if the participants agreed with these ideas personally. Rather, they should let the gift speak for itself, when formulating these ideas. In this step a phenomenological approach was combined with critical thinking in terms of formulating well-reflected ideas.

d) WRITING DOWN THE IDEAS: After the definition-like ideas were formulated, the participant who shared his or her experience wrote them down on Post-its. Then another person described his or her gift and steps a-c were performed again (until everyone in the group had the chance to share his or her experience). At the end of this dialogue, all participants from all groups pinned their Post-its on a blackboard so that a *network of ideas* (see Lahav, 2001: 8) on the topic of universal nature was displayed (which the participants could photograph with their mobiles). This step was the last one in the philosophical movement of going from concrete experiences (from the imagery) to more general ideas about the topic of universal nature (see e.g. Weiss, 2015: 215).

3.6.1.4 Summarizing the exercise

Before the session ended, a final step was performed in the plenum. Here, it was about going back from general ideas to the concrete (that is, the everyday life situation of each participant). For that, I, as the facilitator, read the following words:

Hopefully all of you – or at least many of you – received interesting and inspiring ideas on what universal nature is about.

And now I would like you to remember your experience of this contemplative exercise once again as well as your

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gift. When you remember your experience and your gift as well as all the ideas and interpretations you received to them, and refer them to you and your everyday life, then does this make you aware of something? Do some of these ideas and interpretations resonate with you – do some of them appear to be meaningful to you? Are they giving you an idea what your experience with this exercise or your gift could mean with regards to you and your everyday life – maybe in relation to one of your character traits or in relation to a certain situation in your life? Are you becoming aware of something here?

For example: If one of the definitions based on your experience was Universal nature is about infinitely possible perspectives, then is the ability of changing perspective of relevance in your current life situation?

*And whatever it is that you eventually become aware of now, try to formulate your insights into a step of action. What is it that you want to work on now or that you want to change? What is your **learning target**? And what concrete actions do you want to take in order to reach it?*

After that, you also remember all ideas and associations that you gave away to others, about their experiences and their gifts. Now you take all these associations and ideas back to you and ask yourself, what they could have to do with you too? Is there something that you become aware of here?

And then we are also finished with this part of this exercise. If you had your eyes closed, open them now again. If you could formulate some insights or even some steps of action or learning targets then write them down now, so you don't forget them.

For those of you, who are interested in the original imagery exercise of the Stoics, as well as in the different ver-

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sions of other philosophical schools: you can read more about that in Pierre Hadots book Philosophy as a Way of Life, in which universal nature is also often defined simply with the term infinity – the infinity of space and time. And the idea behind this Stoic exercise was not only to think about infinity but to experience it – in order to get a more integrated, whole view or awareness of the world and of life.

And with that I would like to thank you very much for your participation. What I would highly appreciate now is, if you all would put your Post-its with your definitions about universal nature here on the wall, so that we all can see what ideas came up in this investigation. And should there be anyone who still has no clue what his or her experience of the exercise could mean, then just come to me afterwards in the break and well have a closer look at that. Thank you very much – I am looking forward to the Post-its now!

3.6.2 Outcomes from the 2nd exercise of the 4th session

Ten students participated in this exercise since one student, who participated in the previous exercise of this session, had other duties.

3.6.2.1 Definitions and ideas

Nine definition-like ideas on the topic were developed in this exercise, as can be seen here.

Self-development is about:

- *So much more than just about us;-)*
- *Letting yourself grow*

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- *Holding on to the small glowing parts of life and using them when you are walking through a desert*
- *That everything is relative and appreciate the small things;-)*
- *The balance between warmth and coldness*
- *To see and feel the bigger frame*
- *Everything being connected and both the good and the bad sides of nature is equally important*
- *Finding the balance between two poles*
- *Looking at the small things in order to see the whole perspective, not just the big ones*

3.6.2.2 Feedback from questionnaire

Ten participants filled out the questionnaire. The answers can be summarized as follows:

1) Was it a good session? Yes, because...:

Here, 8 participants answered. Besides several stating that the exercise was calming and peaceful some also mentioned important insights, like one student: *I got to learn something new and see things differently.* Another student noted that the exercise *gave a good learning experience and made me think.* One even said that he or she *had a heartwarming experience where I realized something epic!*

No because...:

Two students answered here, with one stating that the topic was *hard to imagine* and the other stating that he or she was *disconnected and didnt follow.*

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2) How did you experience this session? For example, what did you feel and think during the session, and what do you feel and think now?:

All 10 students answered this question. Even those two who mentioned challenges in the first question gave positive feedback here, with one stating that *it was nice and fine* and the other one saying, *I felt well*. Another one answered, *I feel motivated to enjoy the beautiful things in life*, and one noted *Now I feel more open*. One student even said that he or she *felt enlightened*.

3) Could you learn anything new in this session (e.g. about the topic of the exercise)? Maybe you are even motivated to work on a specific personal issue or a certain character trait – if so, which one and how?:

From the 10 answers received, 2 students stated that they did not learn anything. Examples of learning outcomes were *I learned to let myself grow*, *I learned more about myself*, *I realized something that I was not fully aware of* or *I learned to look at the small things in life as well as the big ones*. *Personally, I learned that I need to have different perspectives in life*. A further student answered in a similar way: *To see life and the universe as a coherence*.

4) If you participated in (a) previous session(s) of the Daimonic Dialogues research project, can you see any personal development that was caused/inspired by this previous session(s)?:

Four out of ten did not answer this question, mostly because it was the second exercise of this session and one cannot expect major developments in between these two exercises. Two, however, mentioned that their contact and communication with their inner guide

improved. Another student noted that *I see personal growth and how to go deeper into myself.*

3.7 The Acropolis – A Guided Imagery about the Democratic Virtue of Cooperation

3.7.1 Description of the exercise

In the following a description of the exercise of the 5th session is presented, which was held on 12 November, 2019.

3.7.1.1 Introduction

Athens can without doubt be understood as the cradle of democracy, and the Acropolis is an often-used symbol for the latter. In section 1-1 of the Norwegian Education Act, democracy is explicitly mentioned as one of the general purposes of education (Education Act, 1998, § 1-1). Among others, cooperation can be understood as an essential aspect of democracy; and in the following guided imagery, this topic was examined by taking an imaginary trip to the hill of the Acropolis. As with all the other exercises presented here, no pre-knowledge about the philosophical topic under investigation – in this case, cooperation – is required. As usual, the imagery was read to the participants like a short story. They could decide whether to listen to it *a) passively*, that is leaving their eyes open and listening to it as they would listen to any other story or *b) actively*, that is, participants closed their eyes and imagined and experienced it in their fantasy. Participants could always open their eyes if they felt uncomfortable during the imagery. Before the imagery was read, participants were informed about its different steps (e.g. welcoming an inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, continuing to relax or finding a gift, etc.) and that they should be in a stable state in order to listen to the story actively.

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3.7.1.2 Guided imagery script

Probably all of you know the famous Acropolis in Athens – an old temple facility on top of one of the hills of this old town ... its main temple can be seen from almost any point in the city ... and more and more you can imagine the Acropolis now, on a sunny summer morning ... the air is still a bit cool with a nicely refreshing smell of the morning, while the sun already shines its warming beams on this old building on the hill – the cradle of democracy ... on the horizon the Mediterranean sea is presenting itself in a deep blue ... and some birds are beautifully twittering in the distant trees around the temple ... besides that it is silent here, calm and absolutely silent.

And more and more you can imagine the Acropolis, this temple on the hill in Athens ... with the refreshing morning breeze ... the warming sunbeams ... the twittering of the birds in the distance and the deep blue sea opening at the horizon ... Maybe you can even imagine being there, at the hill of the Acropolis which today is only reserved for you.

And here at this silent place you can more and more calm down ... you can relax, relax your body, your emotions and your thoughts ... everything that still reminds you of your everyday life, all wishes and worries, you can breathe out, only to breathe in and enjoy the refreshing morning breeze ...

... More and more you can enjoy the calm and silent surrounding here at this old site ... and in this moment of tranquility you can sense that a soothing feeling of trust – trust into being – is starting to evolve in you ... and inspired by this feeling of trust you are now invited to make your prayer, your meditation, your ritual with God, Allah,

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Atman, the Great Nothingness, Logos or whatever you call it ... so that you feel and know yourself safe and secure and that you can relax even more.

And while still enjoying this meditative moment you recognize that someone is coming up the hill to the Acropolis to pay you a visit ... it is your inner guide, a good force that comes to you in unconditional support ... Now arriving next you, your inner guide welcomes you friendly ... Maybe you cannot see your inner guide yet, but you can feel his or her presence, or you just know that he or she is with you now ... maybe you meet your inner guide for the first time, or maybe you know him or her already ... you trust and believe in the presence of this good force and you also know that you can always ask for someone else if you don't feel comfortable with your inner guide, for whatever reason.

Your inner guide is inviting you now for a little walk through the facility of the Acropolis because he or she wants to show you something ... however, if you are not up for such a walk now but instead just want to relax then this is fine too – in this case you make yourself comfortable here on this hill in order to relax and enjoy the calming scenery together with your inner guide.

All those who want to discover whatever it is that the inner guide wants to show you, start gently walking with him or her between the pillars of the Acropolis ... while walking, your inner guide tells you that Athens once was the cradle of philosophy and here at the Acropolis important principles about democracy were developed ... principles and ideas about how to live together in a society, how to live a good life in community with others, in other words, the virtue of cooperation was quite of importance ... and in the moment your inner guide tells you that, he or

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she suddenly makes us aware of an old artifact from these times, a gift that you almost didnt recognize ... What is it? What do you discover, what do you sense, what comes to your mind? Is the gift big or small, light or heavy, something from nature or human made? Which colors does it have, what shape? What material is it made of? It can also be that this artefact radiates a certain smell, that it even makes a certain sound, or that you can sense a certain feeling – a feeling inspired by this gift. Whatever it is that you sense and perceive now, you are thankful for it – even for the smallest impressions ... and should you have any questions about this gift, especially what it could mean with regards to the topic of cooperation, or should you need any help, then your inner guide is always there for you. You go into dialogue with him or her now, in order to learn more about this gift and what it reveals about the topic of cooperation. (1minute of silence)

And after many ideas and impressions that you received now, it is time to go back to the starting point of your walk ... on the way there you can clarify still open questions about your gift and what it could mean with regards to the virtue of cooperation.

Back at the starting point it is time to leave the Acropolis again ... this goes also for those who continued to relax here ... You thank your inner guide for his or her help and cooperation, and you say good-bye ... Then he or she goes back to where he or she came from ... and also you leave this place again ... you let go of all impressions ... an important memory remains anyway ... you close the gates to your fantasy thoroughly ... and after you closed the gates to your fantasy you remember your physical body again which almost fell a bit a sleep here on the chair ... and now you wake up your body again ... you start to

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move your fingers ... also your toes ... you tighten all the muscles of your body for a moment, only to relax them again ... you breathe deeply in and out three times ... and then when you feel ready for it, you open your eyes again and awake well again here in the room, in the here and now.

After the imagery, participants were invited to make notes about their experiences, having the focus on their gift. Even if a participant sensed nothing during the whole imagery, or only feelings or sounds but no visual impressions, he or she was invited to note that too since it can be valuable information in the following group dialogue.

Before this dialogue started, participants were asked how they experienced the imagery in general. At this point the participants were also informed how to deal with certain challenges that they eventually faced during certain steps of the exercise (e.g. concerning imagining the different steps, welcoming the inner guide, activating ones spiritual/basic trust, choosing just to relax and not finding a gift etc.). If anyone had an absolutely terrifying experience, the person did not need to share it in the group but was offered a private talk with the facilitator after the session.

3.7.1.3 Group dialogue

In the dialogue after the imagery, the following question was investigated: ***What could the gift eventually tell us about the topic of cooperation?*** Depending on the group size, this dialogue can be done in plenum or in small groups. In this session, the following steps were first performed with the whole group on the experience of one person (in order to exemplify how this procedure works); and then they went into small groups of 4 persons and performed the following steps.

a) EXPERIENCE-SHARING: A first person in the group described his or her gift in detail. As always, this was done voluntarily

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and everything that was told had to remain confidential. In this step the gift was approached phenomenologically.

b) MAKING FREE ASSOCIATIONS: After the experience-sharing, the rest of the group was invited to make free associations to the described gift (if a participant sensed nothing or no gift, then associations to e.g. nothingness, absence etc. would be made). According to the saying There are as many interpretations of the truth as individuals (Weiss, Roethlisberger, Bliemel & Weiss, 2011: 48), there are no wrong associations. And everything – any ideas, words, metaphors, etc. – that came intuitively to mind could be shared with the group. In this step, the participants creative and associative thinking capacities were activated.

c) FORMULATING DEFINITION-LIKE IDEAS: Based on the gift and all associations and ideas that were given to it in the previous step, answers on the question What is cooperation (about)? were formulated in a definition-like style. The definitions and ideas should be based on the gift and the associations – it did not matter if the participants agreed with these definition-like ideas personally. Rather, they should be critical and let the gift speak for itself, when formulating these definition-like ideas. In this step a phenomenological approach was combined with critical thinking.

d) WRITING DOWN THE IDEAS: After definition-like ideas were formulated, the participant who shared his or her experience wrote them down on Post-its. Then another person described his or her gift and steps a-c were performed again, until everyone in the group had the chance to share his or her experience. At the end of this dialogue, all participants from all groups pinned their Post-its on a common wall so that a *network of ideas* (see Lahav, 2001: 8) on the topic of cooperation was displayed (which the participants could photograph with their mobiles). This step was the last one in the philosophical movement of going from concrete experiences (from the imagery) to more general ideas about the topic of cooperation (see e.g. Weiss, 2015: 215).

3.7.1.4 Summarizing the exercise

Before the session ended, a final step was performed in the plenum. Here it was about going back from general ideas to the concrete (the everyday life situation of each participant). For that, I, as the facilitator, read the following words:

Hopefully all of you, or at least many of you, received interesting and inspiring ideas what cooperation is about.

And now I would like you to remember your gift once again. When you remember your gift as well as all the ideas and interpretations that you received to them, and refer them to you and your everyday life then does this make you aware of something? Do some of these ideas and interpretations resonate with you – do some of them appear to be meaningful for you, especially with regards to the topic of cooperation? Are you becoming aware of something here?

For example: If one of the definitions based on your gift was cooperation is about asking others for help, then is the ability to ask others for help of relevance in your current life situation?

And whatever it is that you eventually become aware of now, try to formulate your insights into a step of action. What is it that you want to work on or that you want to change? What is your learning target? And what concrete actions do you want to take in order to reach it?

After that, you also remember all ideas and associations that you gave away to others, about their gifts. Now you take all these associations and ideas back to you and ask yourself, what they could have to do with you too? Is there something that you become aware of here?

And then we are also finished with this part of this exercise. If you had your eyes closed, open them again. If you

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could formulate some insights or even some steps of action or learning targets then write them down now, so you dont forget them.

3.7.2 Outcomes from the 5th session

Thirteen students participated in this exercise and all filled out the questionnaire.

3.7.2.1 Definitions and ideas

The following 11 definition-like ideas on the topic were developed during this exercise.

Cooperation is about:

- *Communication and not being afraid of speaking up and letting people know your opinion*
- *Patience*
- *Patience and tactics*
- *Hard and time-consuming work*
- *Cooperating more with myself*
- *Taking control over how much light and how much dark*
- *Engagement*
- *To be more present in the bubble here and now*
- *Cooperating more with the bubble than working against it*
- *Showing where you belong*
- *Helping those in need of help*

3.7.2.2 Feedback from questionnaire

Thirteen students filled out the questionnaire, and their answers can be summarized as follows:

1) Was it a good session? Yes, because...:

From the 12 received answers, most of the students stated that they felt relaxed and safe. Some also indicated that they received something in the imagery that they can work further with, for example *The results I got made sense in many ways and they gave me something to think about*, or *I have learned something about myself and received tips and advices which I took serious and thought about*. In addition, many noted that it was easy for them to imagine everything.

No because...:

One student answered here. He or she noted that he or she was into a deep relaxation but then suddenly was woken up by the student sitting next to him or her. That gave her a strong feeling of anxiety. However, the student talked about the incident with the trainer afterwards, and then it was fine again.

2) How did you experience this session? For example, what did you feel and think during the session, and what do you feel and think now?:

This question received 13 answers, and all of them were positive. Besides several stating that they felt *calm* and *safe*, some also noted that they had a good communication with their inner guide.

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3) Could you learn anything new in this session (e.g. about the topic of the exercise)? Maybe you are even motivated to work on a specific personal issue or a certain character trait – if so, which one and how?:

From the 13 answers that were given to this question, 4 said they did not learn much this time. The rest could see a personal development. One student, for example, *discovered that most, if not all of my imageries were somehow related to my family. I find this relatable, as a lot of my life revolves around my family.* Another student was now motivated to *work on my thoughts and not get too caught up in them.* In a similar way, one student *became more aware of that I have to say my opinions, or say it when I disagree or when I dont want to do something.* One student *learned that something I thought I was finished with, that I still need to work on it.* Another said, *I learned not to live in my daydreams even if its my happy place.* One student remarked *I have to open up more.*

4) If you participated in (a) previous session(s) of the Daimonic Dialogues research project, can you see any personal development that was caused/inspired by this previous session(s)?:

Out of 13 answers, 2 students indicated that they did not see any development. The rest indicated developments, which in one way or another have to do with self-knowledge, like one student who noted *It opened new doors in myself which I didnt know were there.* Another one stated *I have learned a lot about myself during this project, and it has helped me to become a better version of myself.* One student answered, *I have truly liked this project. A great way to go deeper into yourself and find that others can help you with this.* In a similar way, another participant replied *I got many new experiences and knowledge about myself, which I was not aware of. All in all, the sessions have been very thought-inspiring, and they appear to be*

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a nice way to solve inner problems. The answer of another student goes into the same direction, when he or she notes that *I feel more ready with things that my inner wants to make me more aware of. Besides that I got enough to work with in the future, also this time.* In this session one student realized that *I need to close a chapter I thought I was through with.*

4 Analysis and critical reflection

In this analysis, the outcomes in terms of the concrete reflections by the students, as presented in the previous chapter, are evaluated and critically reflected with regards to eventual trends, tendencies and also challenges. In *reflective practice research*, the search for such tendencies is also called *critical reflection*, which is guided by the question, *What is at stake here?* (see e.g. Lindseth, 2020: 97). So, what is at stake in the previously presented outcomes? What comes to the fore and comes to expression in the students reflections that help us better understand the practice of such guided imageries?

In more conventional research approaches, categories are developed in order to see whether there are commonly shared topics, opinions or developments indicated in the empirical data. Due to the more philosophical nature of this project, such categories could also be called *general aspects of the human condition* since investigating such aspects is commonly assumed to be a central task of philosophy, or let us better say, of the activity of philosophizing (see e.g. Teichmann & Evans, 1999: 1). And philosophizing was the activity the students were invited to do in this project. However, philosophizing is also the activity that I employ when carrying out the present reflective practice research project in terms of analyzing and critically reflecting on the gathered data (by asking *What is at stake here – which general aspects of the human condition are addressed, promoted or even provoked when I practice philosophical guided imageries with students?*). A central intention when doing this series of guided imageries together with the folk high school students was to make them philosophize about key topics of philosophy by means of imagery exercises (based on the Trilogos method (see e.g. Roethlisberger,

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2012)). However, when reflecting and analyzing the outcomes of this project, it soon became clear that the learning outcomes, to call it like that, are quite diverse. Even though the questionnaires already preconditioned the direction of answers, in terms of whether the students liked the exercises, how they felt about them, what they learned and whether they could see any development, the answers from the students often related to a wide range of different aspects of life. And so did the definition-like ideas, which they developed on the respective topics. Nevertheless, after several rounds of critical reflection (*What is at stake here?* (see Lindseth, 2020: 97)), there indeed appeared to be a few general aspects or *categories*, in terms of trends, tendencies and challenges, which are revealing themselves in the filled-out questionnaires and the definition-like ideas from all sessions. These categories are:

Category 1: *Feeling calm and safe*

Category 2: *Existential learning*

Category 3: *Self-knowledge (including self-reflection and self-development)*

Category 4: *Challenges*

In the following these categories are described in more detail and with references to the answers of the questionnaires as well as to the given definitions and ideas made by the students.

4.1 Category 1: Feeling calm and safe

In all exercises of all sessions, a great majority of the participants indicated in the questionnaires that the imageries made them feel calm and safe. Several times, many reported that they were at ease during the imageries and that they experienced the exercises as very peaceful. This aspect of feeling calm and safe that revealed itself in the

4.2 Category 2: Existential learning

filled-out questionnaires, appears to be one of the most obvious potentials of the practice of guided imageries. In other words, when it is about relaxing, establishing calmness or creating a safe space – a space of attention as it is sometimes called in philosophical practice (Lindseth, 2015: 47f) – then this kind of guided imageries appears to offer a way to do so. That today there is an obvious need for such a practice is, for example, reflected in the boom of mindfulness training and yoga. However, when it comes to educational settings, then it seems that feeling calm and safe does not necessarily represent a learning process in itself. Rather, being relaxed, at ease and experiencing calmness and safety seem *to provide for* different and probably better learning experiences and development processes than when feeling anxious, under pressure and exposed – something which is frequently reported by representatives from all levels of the education system (see e.g. Napoli, Krech & Holley, 2005 or Barnes, Davis, Murzynowski & Treiber, 2004).

4.2 Category 2: Existential learning

In the answers from the questionnaire of each exercise, the majority of the students indicated to have learned something during and due to the respective imagery and the subsequent dialogue (on average around 80% of the participants). In this way, one can assume such imageries to be a certain form of learning practice. In the answers of the questionnaires, there is certainly a tendency that points to that direction. However, when one takes a closer look at what they have learned, one finds a wide spectrum of answers. Some did not specify *what* they have learned, only *that* they have; for example: *It was interesting and fun, and I learned a lot.* In contrast to these rather vague answers were others, like one student who stated that due to these imagery exercises, he or she was *learning to take the wisdom from everyday life and working to be the best version of myself.* And with this answer, one of the challenges in the re-

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flection process, when developing the respective categories, comes to the fore: When looking at the answers on the third question of the questionnaire (which is about learning), then one can find many answers not only dealing with learning but also with self-reflection, self-knowledge and self-development. The same can be said about several answers on other questions from the questionnaire. However, learning and gaining self-knowledge were not always identical, though very often overlapping. For this reason, I chose to have two different categories, one on self-knowledge and one on existential learning, with the awareness that certain answers can fit both categories. Furthermore, I have added the term *existential* to *learning* because the respective answers from the questionnaires often relate to what can be called human existence; that is, they relate to lived lives, to how these lives are experienced, felt and perceived, with what attitudes, mindsets and values they are lived and how they could be lived and perceived differently (I assume it to be the latter where learning comes in). For example, *I could learn to see things from a different perspective*, or *I learned that I have to be more open to change* as some students put it. All these attributes can be seen as central aspects of *existentialism* (see e.g. Macquarrie, 1972). But it is not only the ability to see life and oneself from different perspectives that was obviously developed in the course of this project; apparently, also quite deep philosophical reflections were fostered, which can be interpreted as a form of existential learning, like in one student who noted, *Felt I learned that change is about creating and forming something that you already have in order to go forwards. In order to go forwards, you have to change*. Another student stated that due to this project, he or she would *have lighter, clearer thoughts about life*. With regards to specific existential aspects, such deep philosophical reflections can especially be found in the definition-like ideas on the topic of the imageries that were developed in the subsequent group dialogues and written on Post-its. Here is a small selection of examples: *Self-development is about: That you can always improve*

4.2 Category 2: Existential learning

yourself. It is your responsibility to fill out your lifeline, or Change is about finding your own pace, or Self-knowledge is about the fact that you know yourself the best and you have to trust your instincts when it comes to what you want to do with your life. You can ask others for advice, but they cant tell you what will make you happy, so in the end you have to listen to yourself. If one agrees with Thomas Flynn, who stated that according to the majority of representatives of existentialism the central virtue promoted by this approach is authenticity (see Flynn, 2006: xi), then one can find this virtue, at least implicitly, in many of the answers as well as the definition-like ideas given by the students. Many of them are about becoming and being true to oneself; they reflect on the truly essential things in life as it seems and how to learn to deal with them. That is why this category received the name *existential learning*. Furthermore, when going through the outcomes, one also gets the impression that many of the students were motivated to reflect and investigate their life stance, that is, their attitude towards life. However, they did so not only with regards to the big questions, like *Is there a God?*, or *Is there a life after life?*, but with regards to their fundamental attitude towards their everyday life and what they can learn there. In this respect a diverse range of answers was given, since the different students realized different learning objectives. That is, they realized for themselves what they wanted to work on and how they could eventually do that. For example, as one student stated, *My artwork that I saw reminded me of a skill that I could have chosen to practice this year but chose something else instead. Maybe my subconscious wants me to be aware of not stopping to do it.* Another one noted, *I felt I became very aware of how I should cope and deal with changes.* Other examples here were: *I think I have to accept things/rules and red lines, the way they are set, and not doing everything my way or I need to close a chapter I thought I was through with.* As mentioned previously, and as can be seen with these last four examples, there were many answers that could both be assigned to this category as

well as to category 3: *Self-knowledge (including self-reflection and self-development)*, which will be the next focus.

4.3 Category 3: Self-knowledge (including self-reflection and self-development)

Socrates is known for the proverb, Know thyself (which he actually had from an inscription of the Apollo temple in Delphi), and Aristotle for his saying Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom. In fact, this tradition of self-knowledge runs from Socrates to Augustine to Descartes. (Hadot, 2010: 66) What makes this form of knowledge unique is that it cannot be passed on from one person to another, and it defies general characteristics in terms of a dogma or teachings (see Gallagher, 1992: 198). In simple terms, you cannot teach self-knowledge to another person. Self-knowledge can only be gained through self-reflection, though the moment of reflection can happen spontaneously and unplanned, and self-insight can occur intuitively. The process of gaining self-knowledge, whether it is intended or not, often leads to a re-orientation in ones life. It suggests changes, big ones or small ones. It makes one aware of yet untapped personal potentials. And it often offers a path of development concerning ones life stance, ones attitudes, beliefs and values. In short, due to self-reflection and self-knowledge, one can – if one wants – proceed in ones self-development. This tradition of Know thyself, as Pierre Hadot calls it, was a central endeavor in Western philosophy ever since. It can also be found in the Ancient concept of *paideia* (that is, the origins of pedagogy, often translated with *self-formation*), and subsequently in what is called *Bildung* (see e.g. Eidsvåg, 2011: 165). With this (very) brief description of the theoretical background of self-knowledge, it might become clearer why distinguishing between the category of *experiential learning* and the category of *self-knowledge* was not always easy in the course of this analysis and critical reflection. However, statements indicat-

4.3 Category 3: Self-knowledge

ing self-knowledge (as well as self-reflection and self-development) cannot only be found in the answers on the third question of the questionnaire, but they can also be identified in the others, especially in the fourth question, which was about development (*If you participated in (a) previous session(s) of the Daimonic Dialogues research project, can you see any personal development that was caused/inspired by this previous session(s)?*) Though the number of students whose thoughts developed in a certain way varied from session to session, it was always a significant majority (if there were two exercises in one session, the experienced development was of course lower than between two sessions). However, just as with the previous category, also in this one, one can find answers that are more abstract and maybe even vague, like *I got insight into my thinking* or *We got to discover some new sides of ourselves*. Others, then, were more specific, like one student who stated that he or she *Learned that these dream journeys can help me to find out how I actually have it*. Similarly, another student answered, *I feel I can greatly benefit from these sessions as they teach me more about myself*. Though these and similar answers are kept quite general and unspecific, it appears to be obvious that they relate to the topic of self-knowledge. Other answers, however, were more concrete, and one can better understand what the respective self-insight was about, like *I think I could start looking more closely at certain things in my life, instead of trying to ignore them*. Another answer points in a similar direction: *I am more motivated on working on an inner conflict I am struggling with by working on my/through my self-knowledge*. As these two statements already show, in the course of this project several students could detect aspects in their life that did not feel right for them. Here, another student can be mentioned who stated: *I learned that I have too many situations in my life than I can handle. Therefore, I should ask for help. There is nothing wrong about asking for help. The picture showed that I experienced much and that I have had a big responsibility, and now I have too*. In this last statement,

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the respective student does not only indicate a self-insight but also an idea derived from the imagery of what to do now (*I should ask for help.*) This *how* is also indicated in other answers, like *I felt like the gift that I got at the riverbank greatly relates to me and gives me the answer as to how to make changes in my life* or *I have learned something about myself and received tips and advices which I took serious.* When one takes a closer look at the section on the outcomes, one becomes aware of the many other statements from the filled-out questionnaires, which deal with the topic of self-knowledge, including self-reflection and self-development. The topic of self-reflection appears to be present in most of the answers in the sense that the students participating in this series of guided imageries seem to be quite reflective, actually self-reflective. Their answers from the questionnaire as well as the variety of definitions and ideas that were developed on the respective topics after each imagery often bear the character of deeply philosophical thoughts about life. They are anything but superficial and shallow, especially for someone at that age. Interestingly, this kind of (self-)reflectiveness came more and more to the fore as more exercises were done. So, when it comes to self-development, a topic indicated in many of the answers, the following statements seem to represent the common tenor of the majority of the participants: *I have learned a lot about myself during this project, and it has helped me to become a better version of myself, I have truly liked this project. A great way to go deeper into yourself and find that others can help you with this, I got many new experiences and knowledge about myself, which I was not aware of. All in all, the sessions have been very thought-inspiring, and they appear to be a nice way to solve inner problems, I feel more ready with things that my inner wants to make me more aware of. Besides that, I got enough to work with in the future, also this time, I see personal growth and how to go deeper into myself* Summarizing the present paragraph on the category of self-knowledge, it can be concluded that a significant majority of participants experienced

self-knowledge throughout this series of guided imageries. Though sometimes not further specified and sometimes supplemented with self-reflection or self-development, self-knowledge represents a distinct trend and tendency in terms of the outcomes of this project.

4.4 Category 4: Challenges

This category does not represent a trend or tendency in the actual sense. In fact, in each session it was a small minority – if at all – that indicated challenges due to the respective imagery. Nevertheless, it appears to be important to also hear and recognize the voices of the few who faced difficult situations in or because of the exercises. The reason why such challenges are mentioned here is simply not to give a false impression of the implications and the risks that the facilitation of guided imageries imply. As a consequence, one has to be well trained in this kind of approach and know what to do in the different situations, on the one hand. On the other, one also has to be professional enough in order to recognize when one has to involve other professionals (something which was not the case in this project). From the difficulties that were faced by a few participants, one can identify the following, general types of challenges: a) difficulties in imagining what was said; b) falling asleep or drifting away during the imagery; c) disturbed by what one was experiencing in the imagery. The first two types of challenges are quite normal for those who do imageries for the first time. It can take a while, but after regular practice, the images and impressions come almost automatically, and over time, it also becomes easier for the participants to concentrate. Of course, it can be disturbing not to sense anything during the imagery while all others had fantastic experiences. This can cause frustration and pressure to perform. Nevertheless, with respective experience, the facilitator of the exercise can handle this quite easily. The third type of challenge might be more difficult to handle: When someone had a disturbing experience during the im-

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agery, the facilitator has to ensure a good follow-up. There were only few participants who faced that type of challenge, but in the course of the whole project, such a challenge often turned out to be important for their personal development. One student, for example, as already described in the section on the outcomes, stated that My thoughts were very dark and terrifying. At the end of the session, however, that person had an important insight from which the student could also formulate a learning target: I learned that I need to focus on more than the negative. In the final session, this student even summarized the project with the following words: I truly liked this project. A great way to go deeper into yourself and find that others can help you with this. This is only one of several examples where challenges actually have triggered learning and development processes, which in concluding terms means that challenges are not negative per se, but they can offer fruitful experiences if a respective follow-up is in place and if the participant is also willing to look closer at what it actually is that caused this negative experience.

4.5 Summary of the analysis and critical reflection

In the present chapter, the outcomes of this project have been analyzed and four categories have been identified. By means of these categories, three significant trends and tendencies could be shown, which occurred as a result of this project. In more detailed terms, these trends and tendencies indicate that guided imageries as used in this project can support the participants *to feel calm and safe*; they can also foster *existential learning* as well as *self-knowledge* (including self-reflection and self-development) with the participants. It was also mentioned and explained why the last two categories somewhat seem to overlap. Furthermore, the category *challenges* do not represent a trend or tendency as such. Rather, it can be understood as an aspect that some participants can eventually face when doing guided imageries. And in this case, the facilitator of such exercises has to

4.5 Summary of the analysis and critical reflection

be well prepared and trained in how to handle challenging situations evoked by guided imageries, because sometimes it can turn out that such challenges can imply a fruitful potential for the personal development of the respective participant.

5 Discussion and theoretical reflection

The last step of the research process in reflective practice research as outlined by Lindseth is what he called *theoretical reflection* (Lindseth, 2020: 97f). In this step the outcomes of the preceding *concrete* and *critical reflections* are related to relevant theoretical approaches. In the following discussion, the previously presented outcomes and categories are reflectively connected with relevant theoretical and philosophical approaches as well as with pedagogical concepts as presented in 1.3. *Theoretical background*. The purpose of this discussion lies in the intention to find possible answers to the guiding research question of this project, namely *Can philosophical guided imageries foster Bildung (self-formation) at Norwegian folk high schools – and if so, how?*

5.1 Learning to philosophize

One important point of this project was to train the students in philosophizing about existential issues and key topics of philosophy (like the art of living, cooperation, meaning in life etc.) by means of their experiences from the imageries. The goal was not to teach them philosophical concepts or ideas. Rather, they should get the chance to develop these ideas for themselves. In this respect, the variety of definition-like ideas about the different topics of the imageries (as presented in 3. *Outcomes and concrete reflections* in each section called *Definitions and ideas*), which the students made in the small groups after each exercise, indicate that they in fact philosophized to-

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gether. Many of these definitions and ideas are quite elaborated and of significant philosophical character. Often, they represent certain understandings of a topic, which remind of established philosophical concepts. Furthermore, several of these definition-like ideas shed an existential perspective on the respective topic. That is, they are not simply sophisticated in theoretical terms; rather they also appear to have a profound footing in human existence, in lived life.

If one understands the activity of philosophizing in terms of an investigation of general aspects of the human condition (see Teichmann & Evans, 1999: 1), then this is what the students obviously did in this project. They carried out philosophical investigations on existential and ethical key topics, like the art of living, based on their experiences from the guided imageries. However, even if one understands the term *philosophizing* literally and in its original sense, namely as a search and development towards wisdom (*philo-sophia* literally means *love of wisdom*), then also this kind of activity can be identified in the course of the project. In particular, it was practical wisdom (that is *phronesis*, also translated as prudence) that was further developed. *Phronesis* is often understood as the awareness or ability to do the right thing in the given situation with regards to living a good life overall (in other words, *phronesis* represents a form of situational, individual wisdom depending on the particular situation (see e.g. Weiss, 2018)). And the self-awareness and the (self-)insights that the participants gained were because imageries often dealt with what to do in their individual, given situations in order to live a better life or to live life better (which again relates to living a good life in terms of human flourishing – the latter a term often used as translation for the Greek word *eudaimonia*, which Aristotle assumed to be the highest goal in life for all human beings).

As Gallagher has pointed out in his book *Hermeneutics and Education*, self-knowledge is prerequisite to *phronesis* (see Gallagher, 1992: 198), and it can be assumed that the students developed towards this form of wisdom due to this series of philosophical guided

imageries. In this way, we can also assume that not only one of the five pillars of Inge Eidvågs *Bildung* program for Norwegian folk high schools, namely, self-knowledge (see Eidsvåg, 2011: 165), was addressed in this project. In the same way, Hellesnes postulated need for an education towards *Bildung* (self-formation) and wisdom was taken into account (see Hellesnes, 1992: 79). As a general insight of this project, it appears to be this development towards phronesis, which Hellesnes suggested type of education seems to be about.

What appears to be interesting in this respect is that, according to Gallagher, already in Platos dialogue *Meno*, we find that phronesis represents a form of knowledge that cannot be taught but only be learned (see Gallagher, 1992: 198). When Socrates investigates the nature of virtue in this dialogue together with Meno (and virtue in this dialogue can be understood in terms of *phronesis*), they come to the conclusion that even though virtue is learnable, it is not teachable (see e.g. Weiss, 2018). Meno then wonders how this is possible. And here, as Gallagher points out,

Socrates obliquely hints at the answer: We are probably poor specimen, you and I, Meno. Gorgias has not adequately educated you, nor Prodicus me. We must then at all costs [language which is reminiscent of 86b-c] turn our attention to ourselves and find someone who will in some way make us better (96d). Obviously, if I turn my attention to myself I will find only one person, me. Socrates suggests that one must look to oneself in order to become virtuous. In effect, the knowledge that one can learn but not be taught is self-knowledge. If virtue is knowledge, it is in some sense self-knowledge. There is no teacher who can tell me who I am in a way that is superior to my own possibility of finding out for myself. (Gallagher, 1992: 198)

With this in mind, the answers from the projects questionnaire, which deal with self-knowledge, appear to be worthwhile to read. While they indicate a form of learning in the sense of a development towards practical wisdom (that is, to know what to do in the given situation with regards to living a good life overall), they also represent

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a form of knowledge that could not simply be handed over to others. What one student received in terms of a meaningful insight would have made no sense for another student. For example, when one student stated that *I think I have to accept things/rules and red lines, the way they are set, and not doing everything my way*, then this insight would have been of no value and even counterproductive for the student who noted that he or she *became more aware of that I have to say my opinions, or say it when I disagree or when I dont want to do something*. These two statements show that these two students are in quite different situations in their lives. What appears to be important for the one to learn to practice, seems to be more of the same for the other. With this example, the Platonic idea of self-knowledge as a form of knowledge that cannot be taught but only be learned is not only well illustrated, it also becomes evident why self-knowledge is prerequisite to the development of phronesis, as Gallagher has noted. In other words, comparing these two statements from the students shows that the development towards an awareness of what to do in a given situation with regards to living a good life cannot take place by means of conventional knowledge-transfer, from one person to another. Rather, this development process requires meaningful insights about oneself when facing the given situation. Therefore, with reference to Lave and Wenger, the development towards phronesis could also be called a form of situated learning (see Lave & Wenger, 1991), and phronesis a form of situational wisdom. What can be learned in a given situation varies from person to person since each person and each situation is individual. The learning process happens through self-knowledge since phronesis does not represent some sort of general knowledge that the individual is supposed to learn to apply in different situations. In the context of the present project, this meant that the students developed their individual learning tasks based on their experiences from the imageries, and by examining self-reflective questions like, *What could this experience have to do with me – what can this experience possibly tell me about myself, my*

5.2 Paideia – working to be the best version of myself

current living conditions, my attitude towards life? In this way, this project shows that even in group settings, the individual challenges as well as the potentials of the different participants can be addressed and further worked on. What has to be mentioned, of course, is that such a form of learning did not happen with all students in each and every session. In this way it can be concluded that such insights, in terms of existential learning as described previously, cannot be guaranteed, predicted or safeguarded by means of guided imagery exercises. That kind of risk – Gert Biesta called it *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Biesta, 2016) – however, is inherent in all kinds of philosophical dialogue approaches. We simply do not know the outcome of a philosophical dialogue in advance, otherwise it would not be a true dialogue. Finally, this is also the reason why philosophy literally means the *love of wisdom*, in the sense of a searching for it without ever having the guarantee to really finding it.

5.2 Paideia – working to be the best version of myself

When it comes to the development of phronesis as a type of learning, then, according to Gallagher, Plato assumed it as *the* essential aspect of education (Gallagher, 1992: 198f). Education in Ancient Greece was called *paideia*. Paideia, as the translation *self-formation* already indicates, was not just something that one received and then possessed (as we today often think of education, e.g.: one *takes* a masters degree at the University of Oxford, or one *received* a PhD in philosophy of science). Rather, it indicated a process – a development process towards wisdom (see Hadot, 2010: 102f). In a literal sense, it is the process of forming ones self, and its central idea was to become the best version of oneself. In this respect one student from the course can be mentioned who explicitly noted twice that he or she was *learning to take the wisdom from everyday life and working to be the best version of myself*. This statement sum-

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marizes both the central idea of paideia as well as of *Bildung*, and it also can refer to Eidsvågs conception of self-realization, which he assumes to be one of the key objectives of Norwegian folk high schools today. In reference to Rousseaus metaphor of the gardener who provides for the best possible conditions of growth for a plant in order to grow naturally, Eidsvåg states that folk high schools should provide for an authentic self-realization with their students (see Eidsvåg, 2011: 164). Furthermore, the statement of this student points out the role that practical wisdom has in this self-realization and self-development process (the latter here is indicated by *learning* to take the wisdom from everyday life). If one assumes the (self-)insights that the participants gained from the imageries as a form of (practical) wisdom from everyday life (that is, phronesis), then they obviously proceeded further in their personal process of self-formation in the course and due to this project. And the importance of further developing phronesis in the educational setting of folk high schools – especially with regards to *Bildung* – has been pointed out by Sigurd Ohrem in his article *Folkeopplysning og allmenndanning* (in English: *Peoples enlightenment and general education*, my translation) (Ohrem, 2011a: 45).

The fact that the existential learning tasks and learning objects, to call them like that, varied from student to student (e.g. to learn *to see things from a different perspective* or to learn *to be more open to change*) sheds an important light on what kind of characteristics the type of education would require that Hellesnes is talking about when outlining *Bildung* (see Hellesnes, 1992). Interestingly, in Ancient Greece paideia was intended to be fostered at what was called *scholé* – the original term of what we today understand by the term *school*. However, a *scholé* was quite different from our present concept of school, often characterized by exams, drill and learning objectives that have to be reached, etc. The term *scholé* as such meant free time – time to think, free from the everyday duties. In other words, the goal was not to acquire knowledge in the way it is done at schools

5.2 Paideia – working to be the best version of myself

today; rather, it was the time when one could reflect about life, question oneself, one's attitudes, beliefs and values, and transform them as well as oneself. This process was thought to *form* the individual (self-formation) in the sense of a quest for (practical) wisdom. A similar thought can be found with Grundtvig when outlining his idea of a folk high school. For him, such a school should foster a *learning for life* instead of a *learning for exams* (see Ohrem & Haddal, 2011: 35f). The insights and developmental processes with the students as represented in this project seem to reveal such a learning for life – a form of existential learning, so to speak. Therefore, on the one hand, such philosophical guided imageries as used in this project appear to meet the requirements for the learning intended by Grundtvig. On the other, folk high schools seem to offer an appropriate learning arena where such personal development processes, as described in the present report, can take place. The decisive point here, of course, is that the students did not only learn for life from their insights of the imagery exercises, but they also learnt *from* and *about* (their own) life (e.g. when one student stated that *I felt I became very aware of how I should cope and deal with changes*, or another student who noted that *I learned that I have too many situations in my life than I can handle. Therefore, I should ask for help. There is nothing wrong about asking for help.*) These aspects (learning *from*, *about* and *for* life) seem to be important in order to contribute to what Klafki called *Allgemeinbildung* (general education) as one of the main objectives of Norwegian folk high schools, that is, the process of cultivation of self-determination, co-determination and solidarity (see Klafki, 2000). That such a process is never finished but that it rather is a form of life-long learning appears to be obvious. In that sense, the learning arenas of folk high schools in general, as well as such of a series of guided imageries in particular, can provide for the process of *Bildung* with the respective students. However, neither of them can guarantee that these students pursue this development process throughout their whole life. What they can do, though, is to sup-

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port these students at least on a leg of their path of life, so to speak, and inspire them on their way further. And this, that is *to inspire*, is what education, in the best case, can do according to Biesta (see Biesta, 2016: 11f). Along the lines of Biesta, an educators job is not to transfer knowledge; it is not to re-create ones own attitudes, stances, convictions and values with ones students. Rather, according to him, it is to inspire ones students to live a good life (and here the literal meaning of the term *to inspire* is interesting: to breathe life into something or someone) (see *ibidem*).

5.3 The living word, or: *Bildung*-promoting dialogues

In his works Finn Thorbjørn Hansen, professor in dialogical and philosophical practice at the University of Aalborg, emphasizes the importance and relevance of getting into a true state of wonderment when philosophizing (see e.g. Hansen, 2015: 218). Interestingly, the starting point for the previously mentioned development towards practical wisdom often was an initial wondering caused by the imagery exercises (e.g. what the experience of an imagery would have to do with the philosophical topic under investigation and how it relates to the participants everyday life). Wonder is the beginning of all wisdom as Socrates put it, which appears to be true for this type of guided imageries too. However, Hansen also points out that true wonderment and wondrous dialogues are not something you can fix or produce by having the right techniques, skills or dialogue tools. (*ibidem*: 217) In other words, the series of guided imageries used in this project should not be mixed up with a tool kit in order to make the participants wonder.

With regards to the present research project and based on the answers from the questionnaires, some participants clearly indicated that they were not in a state of wonder; some of them were puzzled, others were bored, and so on. This, however, should not detract

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attention from the obvious, namely that several of the participants unintentionally got into a state of wonderment in the course of an imagery or in the follow-up dialogues. That wondering – in more mundane words one could also call it being touched or moved – which caused by what these students were experiencing in the imagery, was the reason why they could further engage with the exercise. This, then, often resulted in self-insights and self-knowledge, as described previously.

It has to be noted that the guided imageries did not only consist of the imagery as such; also the subsequent dialogue in small groups were essential in order to develop ideas and even definitions on the topic under investigation. The procedure of these dialogues was similar to those of a Socratic dialogue after Leonard Nelson (see e.g. Heckmann, 1981). In brief words, this means that the dialogues started by sharing personal experiences (in this case the students experiences from the imagery); and then they went on to more general ideas and definitions of the topic under investigation (which were rooted in the personal experiences), only to go back to the personal level (where the students could ask themselves what their experience and the ideas that were generated on it, could have to do with themselves too – in short, this was the part where they performed what can be called self-reflection). Although making free associations and giving spontaneous ideas on the experience that was shared received a more prominent place than in a normal Socratic dialogue, the dialogue procedure as such represents a movement between the concrete and the general that is typical for philosophical dialogues. It is one of their main characteristics (see e.g. Weiss, 2015: 215). However, as has been pointed out previously in this discussion, this philosophical movement, to call it like that, was not the endpoint nor the final outcome of these exercises. Rather, these philosophical imageries can be understood as a form of what Guro Hansen Helskog called *Philosophising the Dialogos Way Towards Wisdom in Education* (2019). With *the Dialogos Way*, she means a dialogue-based

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approach that fosters *Bildung* in the same sense as described previously (see also *ibidem*, 2016). However, similar to Hellesnes (see 1992: 79), Helskog puts a strong emphasis on *Bildung* as a development process towards wisdom (see Helskog, 2019 & 2016). In other words, for Helskog, self-formation (*Bildung*) is intrinsically wisdom-oriented – an idea that can already be found with the Ancient schools of philosophy in the concept of *paideia*, as has been discussed earlier (see e.g. Hadot, 2010: 102). Furthermore, she also argues that guided imageries such as used in this project can foster *Bildung* with participants, something which supports the findings of the present research (see Helskog, 2019: 94). Moreover, she assumes this form of philosophical practice as a mindfulness practice (see *ibidem*: 91f), something which seems to be represented in category 1: *feeling calm and relaxed* in chapter 4. *Analysis and critical reflection* as well as in the answers and definition-like ideas given by the students, which indeed appear to be both thoughtful and mindful.

Finally, if dialogue – *the living word* as Grundtvig called it – is still assumed to be the central pedagogical method of folk high schools, as Ohrem suggests (see Ohrem, 2011b: 172), then the present project appears to be in line with this methodological approach. Moreover, it is not only that the guided imageries of this project represent a form of philosophical dialoguing. Rather, supported by the findings of this research report, it also seems to be obvious that they contribute to the overall goal of Norwegian folk high schools in terms of *Bildung*.

5.4 Critical remarks, validity of the outcomes and answers on the guiding research question

With the last sentence of the previous paragraph, an answer to the guiding research question of the project appears to be at hand. This research question read: *Can philosophical guided imageries foster Bildung (self-formation) at Norwegian folk high schools – and if so, how?* However, is it really that easy to answer this question

with a clear yes? What about those students who addressed challenges in their answers to the questionnaire? Did the project promote their self-formation process? Furthermore, are the findings of this project representative and significant enough in order to give a generally valid answer to this research question? And here, the answer has to be clearly negative. The reason for that lies in the design of the project, on the one hand. Organized and carried out as a small qualitative research study based on a reflective practice research approach, the intention never was to arrive at a generalized valid answer. Rather, the idea was to figure out eventual trends and tendencies that are set in motion with students when I practice philosophical guided imageries with them, and how these trends and tendencies would relate to key approaches serving as theoretical background of Norwegian folk high schools. Here, the concepts of *Bildung* (self-formation) and dialogue have been explicitly mentioned and investigated. On the other hand, even with a quantitative approach and with a respectively higher number of participants, the probability that the outcomes could be replicated are quite low. And this simply lies in the nature of dialogue, as the central methodological approach in this project. The procedures and outcomes of a dialogue cannot be predicted or safeguarded. If they could, it would not be a true dialogue. In that sense, one can conclude with that the tendencies and trends revealed in this particular project point towards a positive answer to the research question. Due to the nature of the research design as well as the nature of dialogue as such, however, the outcomes of this project cannot be absolutized – but this was never the intention either.

Since this research project is based on a reflective practice research approach, the intention rather was to reflect the philosophical practice of guided imageries in the context of Norwegian folk high schools with regards to its pedagogical potentials. And in this respect, the potential of such imageries could clearly be shown in terms of the tendencies and trends that were found. In that way, it

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can be concluded that the practice of the imageries that were used in this project bear the potential to foster self-formation (*Bildung*) with folk high school students.

Another important and critical remark can be made on the philosophical relevance of the whole project. Are the presented guided imageries and the research done on them, with the respective outcome, philosophically relevant? In this respect, one might argue that if one assumes that the activity of philosophizing is about investigating general aspects of the human condition (see e.g. Teichmann & Evans, 1999: 1), then such an investigation obviously took place in this project at several stages. First, the students examined philosophical key topics, like the art of living, which can be seen as such general aspects. They developed networks of ideas around them, an activity that Lahav described to be essentially philosophical (Lahav, 2019:20). Secondly, the analysis, reflection and discussion of the outcomes were centrally about investigating the practice of guided imageries for general aspects of the human condition. The aspects that came to the fore in this examination were feeling calm and safe, existential learning and self-knowledge. One can of course put into question whether these three are relevant for philosophy in general. For the discipline of philosophical practice, however, a practice that can foster existential learning, self-knowledge and subsequently self-formation appears to be highly relevant.

6 Concluding and summarizing remarks

The research project presented in this report was carried out in autumn 2019 at a Norwegian folk high school. For reasons of privacy and data protection, the name and location of this school is not disclosed here. At the heart of this project was a series of 7 philosophical guided imageries, derived from the Trilogos method (see Roethlisberger, 2006; 2012; 2013a; 2013b), which were performed in 5 sessions over a period of two months (in some sessions, 2 exercises were performed).

The projects purpose was to investigate the potentials of such guided imagery practices regarding the promotion of self-formation (Bildung) as the overall goal of Norwegian folk high schools. In order to suit the projects purpose, a qualitative research approach was chosen in terms of *reflective practice research* (see Lindseth, 2017). In each imagery, between 10 and 20 students participated; and the empirical data that was collected in these sessions mainly came from two sources: On the one hand, there were the definitions and ideas on the respective philosophical topic of each imagery, which the students developed in group dialogues after each guided imagery. On the other, when an exercise was finished, qualitative questionnaires with four questions were handed out, which the students could fill out voluntarily.

The outcomes of this study were organized in four categories: (1) Feeling calm and safe, (2) existential learning, (3) self-knowledge (including self-reflection and self-development), and (4) challenges. While the experiences and subsequent reflections from the imagery

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exercises promoted increased calmness, existential learning and self-knowledge with the majority of the participants, challenges were only faced by a small minority. Nevertheless, this category was included in the analysis in order to show what kind of challenges can occur when performing such guided imageries, even if only a few participants might face them.

In the discussion part of this report, the outcomes were reflected and evaluated in order to see whether the participating students could be supported in their self-formation processes by means of these imageries. For that purpose, the outcomes were related to certain concepts of self-formation, which, in the introduction part, have already been presented as central theoretical background for Norwegian folk high schools. In the chapter 5 . *Discussion and theoretical reflection*, the guiding research question of this project could then be answered positively, which read: *Can philosophical guided imageries foster Bildung (self-formation) at Norwegian folk high schools – and if so, how?* In more detail, the answer to this question is that philosophical guided imageries as used for this project bear the potential to foster self-formation with the students at a Norwegian folk high school. However, it has also been pointed out that the outcome of such imageries highly depends on the participants as well as on the facilitator. In other words, the success and failure of such guided imageries do not only depend on the imagery exercises as such but also on those who perform them along with how they are performed. That being said, the project also showed that such imageries, even if they have a common topic and even though they are done in groups, can meet the participants in their different life situations. They can help them to learn to deal with these situations and support them to develop further personally. In this way, such imageries can be understood as a form of adapted education and situated learning (see Lave & Wenger, 1991) with a strongly socio-pedagogical connotation. All in all, the participating students very much appreciated the exercises, even though they sometimes felt challenged but often in a positive

and edifying way. Performing such philosophical guided imageries on a broader and more frequent basis appears to be a promising and fruitful option for Norwegian folk high schools, though the implementation seems to require a proper training of the teachers.

As a final concluding remark, it can be noted that in this research study it was mainly the aspect of self-formation that was investigated. There are, however, other aspects that deserve closer examination. One of them, for example, is the spiritual dimension that without doubt is addressed in such exercises, which in fact represent a form of guided meditation. That imagery exercises have been practiced in several Ancient schools of philosophy and that they can be understood as spiritual exercises has, among others, been pointed out by Pierre Hadot (see e.g. 2010: 183f). Another aspect would be so-called life skills and how they are fostered by means of such an approach. Partly, the development of such skills has already been reflected in the present project, even though this happened more implicitly.

Finally, and in more general terms, it can doubtlessly be assumed that the practice of philosophical guided imageries, which in this case was derived from the Trilogos method (see Roethlisberger, 2006; 2012; 2013a; 2013b), can promote and foster human growth and development. Particularly in times like these, with the Covid-19 crisis and the damage it has wrought, such imageries are of utmost importance. (There are programs that teach ways to perform such imageries digitally, see e.g. the Trilogos training program *In Touch with Your Inner Voice*, which can be found on www.udemy.com). We as human beings need human strength and a visionary mindset in order to tackle the existential challenges that life presents to us.

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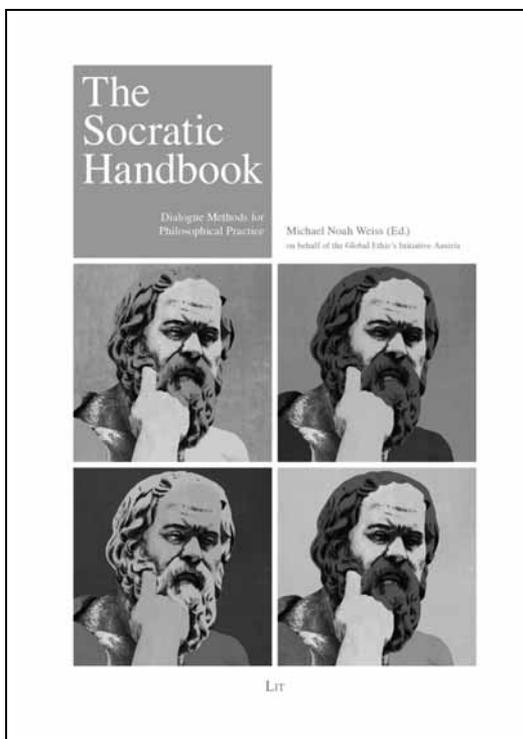
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Michael Noah Weiss (Ed.)

The Socratic Handbook

In this handbook 34 renowned philosophical practitioners, from 20 different countries, present a great variety of dialogue methods for philosophical practice, which never before have been published in such a compact and compiled form. By having Socrates and his method of maieutics – the art of midwifery of the soul as he called it – as one of its main sources of inspiration, this publication intends to offer different methodological approaches in order to make people wonder, reflect, change perspective, to think different. In short: to make people philosophize – about life, the way they live it, and give inspiration on the way towards how they think they should.

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In this research report a philosophical practice project is presented which was carried out in 2019 at a Norwegian folk high school. Its main purpose was to examine whether and how philosophical guided imageries can foster self-formation. In the analysis of the empirical data three tendencies are identified: The participants felt calmer and safer due to this philosophical practice; they developed personally in terms of experiential learning; and several of them could also gain self-knowledge. The discussion then shows how these three tendencies relate and contribute to self-formation.

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