Socrates in the Classroom

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Abstract

Socratic seminars have been practiced by educators as a supplement to classroom teaching. However, how the effects are achieved has not been thoroughly investigated. This study is an analysis of seminars conducted over three years with children five to sixteen years old. The students' group interaction was analyzed closely through a phenomenological approach. The analysis focused on how the seminar culture was taught and learned and shows that the skilled participants shifted their interaction towards an "inquiring" dialogue, and that the rhetorical power changed to a more cooperative communication. The students' learning proceeded through stages, partly different from the anticipated ideal. The facilitator's ability to handle rule breaking, and to create a safe environment for intellectual exploration, was significant. The findings show that "silent" moves like gestures and glances helped maintain a productive and egalitarian culture. The participants developed their thinking skills over time, evolving from relativism to critical examination.

Keywords: Socratic dialogue, habits of mind, group interaction, seminar culture, rule breaking

Introduction

In the western world, discussions about how the educational system teaches ethics, values and democracy to students has increased during the recent years. One explanation for this increased interest seems to be the changes towards less static, predictable norms that are considered general in society (Bäckström et al. 2004, Friedman 2005, Hareide 2002). When society becomes less homogenous, values seem to go from conventions within a group to relativism or to heterogeneous values in many groups. In Sweden, the latest national curriculum stresses the pedagogical importance of working with mutual fundamental values as a foundation for society, "värdegrund" (*Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-school Class and the Leisure Centre Lgr 11*, Tham 2000). The problem is that it is hard to define natural fundamental values (Hedin, Lahdenperä 2002). There are also problems in finding methods to work with values and democracy. The Socratic seminar is one possible way to approach these questions (Frånberg & Kalloós 2002, Hansen 2002, Villa 2001).

We know from various research studies that the teacher's voice dominates the classroom: a teacher talks 70-75 % of the time, even at classroom discussions, and with the following pattern: teacher-student-teacher-student (Dysthe 1996, Gustafson 1977, Liljestrand 2002, Nystrand 1997). Where individual work or work in small groups is practiced, this pattern changes: half to two thirds of the talk becomes "desk-talk", students talking to each other during teacher conducted discussions (Lindblad, Sahlström, 2001, Lindström, Arnegård et al. 2003, Tholander 2002). The conversational pattern of the classroom is often restricted to I-R-E: teacher (I)nitiates question, gives instructions, answers; student (R)esponds, more than half the answers are given beforehand; teacher (E)valuates the answer (Liljestrand 2002). The lessons follow certain "rules" for interaction, during which the teacher dominates (Lemke 1990, Samuelsson 2008). The communication often results in the students

trying to discern from the teacher's action and talk what the required solution is (Edwards & Mercer 1987). One percent of instructional time is devoted to open questioning where students have to interpret, analyze, or evaluate information (Goodlad 1983). Talk moves regarding knowledge or reasoning are relatively prevalent, but talk moves linking participants' ideas are not (Wolf et al. 2006). There are also great differences in verbal participation by students: a small group of students is talking a lot of the time and a large group rarely or never speaks (Dysthe 1996, Sahlström 1999).

The limited previous research studies on Socratic seminars show that the seminars achieve part of the intended positive effects (Billings 1999, Billings, Fitzgerald 2002, Bird 1984, Cashman 1977, Feiertag & Chernoff 1987, Graup 1985, Haroutunian-Gordon 1991, Orellana, 2008, Robinsson 2006, Wortham 2003, Tarkington 1989). However, most of this research has been conducted during a short time (i.e. a year) in groups of beginners and has concentrated on the teacher's role and interplay with individual students. By studying groups which have been participating in seminars for a longer time the reported study challenges and broadens earlier results concerning Socratic seminars.

Method and questions

The following questions were put:

- How are goals and effects of the Socratic dialogues described in literature? How are Socratic seminars described as a method in literature?

- How do the seminars differ from other types of classroom dialogues? How are the effects of Socratic dialogues achieved? What critical events and actions threaten the seminar? How do participants develop and protect the seminar culture?

In a literature study different traditions on Socratic interlocution were reviewed and analyzed from the rationales that guide the methodology of the different Socratic traditions. No overall description had been attempted before. Relevant literature about Socratic dialogue and similar traditions was read and organized from likeness and relevance, and finally compared and analyzed. 16 videotaped seminars with groups of children age five to sixteen, participating in dialogues for three years, were videotaped and the interplay was transcribed. Body language, direction of glances, and verbal group interaction were analyzed closely through a phenomenological approach. The analysis focused on how the seminar culture was taught and understood, and if the intended methodology was important. Closely reported extracts of the seminar actions after a new idea was presented, or after someone had broken the seminar rules, were made. The original transcripts were made in a matrix, where the participants' speech, gestures, and glances were transcribed (see example Appendix B). I used Elliot W. Eisner's (1991) "educational connoisseurship" and "educational criticism" when analyzing. "Connoisseurship" comes from knowing the area under investigation thoroughly, allowing the "connoisseur" to sense the important nuances and features. "Connoisseurship" in this work refers to using my expertise in Socratic seminars. However, this is not enough. The "connoisseurship" has to be combined with a critical approach, where the findings are assessed. Eisner identifies some important dimensions in this work: describing the events or findings so that the reader can visualize and experience them, interpreting the events or findings so that they are decoded as to why and how they occur, evaluating them as to how they contribute to educational value, and finally formulating themes and dominant features, by identifying the recurrent messages. Thus conclusions are made from a qualitative, inductive analysis of the effects, trying to find clusters of reoccurring actions and reactions (Patton 1990). The findings from each film analysis were matched up with the notes made

during transcription and compared to what was intended in seminar, sorted thematically, and presented in six themes: learning the game, teaching the game, rule breaking, playing the game, intellectual habits, and distribution of power, presented in the original thesis (Pihlgren, 2008).

Literature

There are a number of traditions describing Socratic or similar dialogues as a pedagogical method (Pihlgren, 2008). Socrates is the main source of inspiration to the modern attempts to introduce seminars with recurrent methodological features. However, it is of importance to methodology to separate "Socrates voice" (as it is represented in Plato's earlier works) from the voice of Plato (represented in Plato's later works). The later works of Plato, probably displaying Plato's own ideas, consider all learning innate; recovering what is in the soul. The Socratic traditions are not concerned with reaching a final answer or agreement in dialogue; in fact, they seem to almost discourage it. The Socratic traditions also embrace Aristotle's idea that thinking and ethics are learnt as habits, later integrated as virtues and practical wisdom.

Two historic movements have contributed with relevant ideas about learning and thinking, attempting partly the same goals: the progressive pedagogy in Europe and the USA, and the *Bildung/bildning* movement in Germany and Scandinavia. John Dewey's (1997) and Celestin Freinet's (1988) ideas about dialogue in education represent the progressive movement. The deliberative dialogues of today can be seen as modern versions. Here, dialogue is primarily used to reach mutual agreements in the cooperative work of a group. Within the *Bildung/bildning* tradition there are a series of branches. One of these, the Swedish *folkbildning* movement, produced methodological instructions for how the Socratic seminars could be carried out as study circles within the Order of Good Templers and the working class movement (Arvidson, 1985). We know this tradition mainly through the work of Hans Larsson (1925), Oscar Olsson (1911), and Alf Ahlberg (1986). The same methodology was also used by Leonard Nelson (1965) at German universities in *Das Sokratische Gespräch* in the beginning of the 1900's, by Great Books and in the Paideia seminars, chiefly known by the works of Mortimer J. Adler (1990) in the USA, and in the works of professor Lars Lindström (2000) on *Sokratiska samtal* in Sweden. A variation of other traditions working pedagogically with children represent similar methods: Gareth B Matthews (1992) and Matthew Lipman (Lipman et al., 1980), P4C and PWC (Børresen & Malmhester, 2004).

By controlling some contextual and methodological factors the seminars will supposedly achieve positive effects (Pihlgren, 2008). The seminars preferably should be held on a regular basis. The participants should be seated so that all can see each other. The group should not be too big (10-15 participants), and everyone should have an opportunity to speak. Everyone should have a copy of the "text", and all participants should have read the "text" (except in Das Sokratische Gespräch, where "texts" are normally not used). Written texts are favored, but other "textual materials" (art work, music, graphs, and so on) are also considered and seem to work the same way. Choosing an open "text", which allows a variety of ideas and perspectives is very important. A "text" should be rich in ideas, complex but not moral or edifying, and not too easy for the participants to grasp. The "text" should help the participant to establish a distance, but should also allow "identificatory reading", reading to understand oneself and using the reading as a personal experience. The role of the facilitator differs from the role of the participants. Even if he/she is considered a human being in a democratic dialogue, the facilitator must control the methodological steps, so that the dialogue

proceeds. On the other hand, the facilitator should refrain from controlling the content of what is said or the values and ideas evolving in the dialogue.

The Socratic traditions independently describe a set of similar, relatively simple methodological steps to reach the same goals and effects (Pihlgren, 2008). The central ideas are that one learns to think by cooperating and using language in this specific practice and that this will result in intellectual and moral development. Considering all the traditions here presented, there seem to be an agreement on that one of the major goals of staging Socratic (and similar) dialogues is to prepare all citizens to participate in political planning and decision making in collaborative dialogues with other citizens. Most of the Socratic traditions presented here also stress the importance of the dialogues resulting in positive individual effects. One aspect of this is the individual attaining *bildning*, in itself regarded as something making life worthwhile. Fostering individuals with intellectual and moral character is intended as a guarantee for a prosperous society and as means to attain personal goods: living a good life and earning a good living. The presented traditions often have different philosophical or even political origins. It is hard to tell whether the different promoters actually intend the same when using concepts like *democracy* and *bildning*, or if this was ever the outcome of their practices. However, this is not the chief interest of this study, since I am here looking for the intended methodology of the dialogues. All these traditions seem to agree that values and ideas have to be negotiated and tested against life experience and that ethics must be interpreted (Pihlgren, 2008). But one of the major differences between the pragmatic viewpoint and the "Socratic" seems to be a consequence of a difference in philosophical standpoint: Is there one set of lasting, classical ideas OR do ideas always have to change with new conditions? Contrary to the pragmatic (deliberative and progressive) traditions, the Socratic traditions seek no consensus in their dialogues, rather the opposite, since more ideas encourage to further investigations. To the Socratic traditions the ideas are recurrent, but the mission is not to "teach" the right set of ideas but to foster "practical wisdom": finding ways to act, when confronted with a multiplicity of ideas and incongruent values.

The methodology in the Socratic seminars presupposes that learning is interactive: the seminar culture is taught through role models. Through practice the intellectual and communicative habits of mind will be internalized to virtues (abilities) and "practical wisdom" (good judgment). The individual will test and search interpersonally in cooperative interaction but will also test his/her interactive experiences intrapersonally, in an internal, cognitive process. The intellectual process seems to presuppose two ways of coping with interpretation in seminar: interpreting cumulatively (cf. Gadamer 1994, cf. Piaget 1971) and interpreting as adjusting new ideas, insights, or understandings (cf. Piaget 1971, cf. Vygotsky 1978). Both ways start in a pre-judgment, a fore-structure of understanding allowing what is to be interpreted or understood to be grasped in a preliminary fashion. The seminar should make it possible for participants to adjust their ideas in favor of the "better argument" (and not to hold on to and defend one's own, less functional ideas). The cumulative refuting interpretation is a systematic and critical analysis of the ideas, sorting out those which do not pass the test. The adjusting part of refuting interpretation is a result of a creative, intuitive process, where "bold" new ideas are found and tested. This is meant to apply both to the individual (intrapersonally) and to the group (interpersonally). These interpersonal and intrapersonal processes are dependent of each other. The actions of the group will gradually be internalized by the individual: the interpersonal ways of thinking will teach the individual a way to think, a habit that will be a virtue and later result in "practical wisdom" or character. This suggests the group acting as a "master" to the individual, the "apprentice". The dialogue should function as a support to this

internalization by creating an open atmosphere, an arena where intellectual risks can be taken. The seminar is a "game" to be played, with specific rules to learn and master. The methodology in the seminar plan is constructed to promote the desired learning process and to activate different psychological and intellectual processes (Pihlgren 2007):

1. Before entering seminar: Individual reading/interpreting: *Function:* Activate the individual's thinking and refuting. *Psychological process:* Taking a distance from self. *Intellectual process:* Intrapersonal-creative adjustment.

2. & 4. Pre- and post-seminar: Personal and group goals set and evaluated: *Function:* Focus on the "rules" of the seminar, the dialogical virtues. *Psychological process:* Evaluating and improving personal and group behavior. *Intellectual process:* Intrapersonal and interpersonal-cumulative.

3. The Socratic seminar:

   a. First seminar step: Opening question. *Function:* Relate ideas to participant's present pre-judgment, elicit ideas in the "text". *Psychological process:* The participant is here accountable to the pre-judgment with what he/she starts before entering into cooperative group thinking. *Intellectual process:* Intrapersonal-cumulative.

   b. Second seminar step: Textual analysis. *Function:* Make it possible to distance from everyday experience by cooperating in group using critical *elenchus*/ Popper's (2007) critical problem posing strategy examining the text. *Psychological process:* Be free to think differently, not personally held accountable. *Intellectual process:* Interpersonal-creative adjustment

   c. Third seminar step: Relating ideas to self. *Function:* To relate the new ideas to participants" everyday life. *Psychological process:* Personally integrating new knowledge and in-sight. *Intellectual process:* Interpersonal-cumulative.

There is a paired relation between the functions of the steps, se figure 1. The first step in a pair starts a process; this is developed by the functions from other pairs and is finally consolidated by the last step in the pair. The individual interpreting (1) is related to textual analysis (3b), both promoting critical *elenchus,* taking a distance to self, by interlocution with "text". The opening question (3a) starts a process of realizing, challenging and maybe changing points of view that is consolidated when relating the new ideas to self (3c). The goals set (2) will be consolidated when evaluated (4) and this will lead to new goals set in the next seminar.
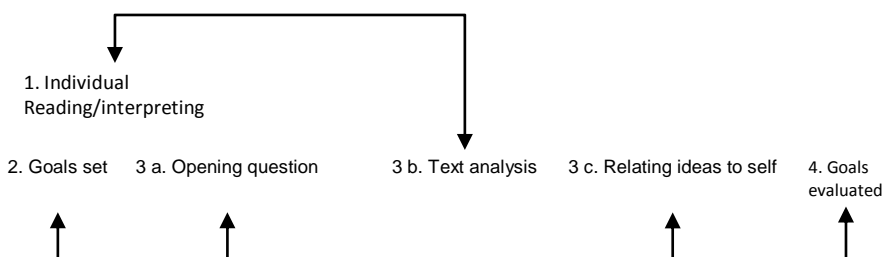

Figure 1. Pair-relations in functions

The goals are set and evaluated outside the seminar circle. The seminar circle is an arena where intellectual and dialogical virtues are trained in action. The process is closely assessed and the outcome is discussed before and after the seminar but not within. Mediation is thereby intended to take place between the steps outside and within the seminar circle. Learning is intended to have impact both on the practice of the following seminars and on general socio-cultural practices over time: the individual's critical thinking, and self-reliance, and on citizenship skills.

The seminar study – extract of five-years-olds discussing literature

I here present the results and analysis of one of the 16 seminars that were part of the study, to give the reader an idea of the material[1]. For further investigation I refer to the original work (Pihlgren, 2008). Sequences of the seminars are analyzed, showing actions after a new idea, which has not yet been heard in the seminar dialogue, or actions when the rules are broken. The original transcripts are not presented in the text. The verbal actions in the sequences are presented as a "manuscript", with some (but not all) comments on gestures and glances. The "manuscript" presented as excerpts in the sequence analyses was consequently not the transcript used when making the analysis. The different steps, types of dialogues and distribution of verbal conversation are accounted for in the original transcript (see example in Appendix B). The original analysis was made on the original Swedish transcript. The group of seven children, five years old, has participated in seminars for three months with a few of them for a year and three months. Martin is participating in a seminar for the first time. The facilitator has conducted seminars for one and a half year. The seminar takes place in a smaller room at the day-care centre. The door is closed. They are seated around a square table. The literature being discussed is the first chapter of the book for children, "Pippi Longstocking". The seminar lasts for 19 minutes.

Participants: Saari (f), Idun (f), Tom (m), Martin (m), Johanna (f), and Anita (f). Facilitator: Anna.

Main outline of the "Pippi Longstocking" seminar

The facilitator starts by reminding the participants that they are to have a Socratic seminar and asks them if they would like to have Pippi as a friend. After a short pause for reflection the participants answer in turn when the facilitator calls their names. Pippi is very strong, you have to watch out. She is great fun, she is a bit crazy. She looks crazy. Martin points out that the facilitator has forgotten a D in her notes (sequence 1, after two minutes). The boys state that they wouldn't play with Pippi because she's a girl (sequence 2, after four and a half minutes). Does it really make any difference how people look (sequence 3, after 5 minutes)? But why is Pippi lying? She might want to impress. Could Pippi be like Tommy and Annika are described: a well-mannered, law-abiding, and nice child? The discussion now turns into an "I-dare-you-contest" when the participants relate how they too have done mischief. How does Pippi feel when she is all alone in her house in the evening? She longs for her mother who is dead. What would you have done in the same situation? Pippi could have gone to her father, but was he drowned (sequence 4, after 15 minutes)? Martin asks how long the seminar will be going on, and the facilitator tells him not to touch the microphone. Do you like Pippi? They shout out YES and NO and the seminar ends in a short evaluation of how they felt talking about Pippi. They say it has been easy and fun. Facilitator returns a couple of times to the importance of listening to each other.

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[1] Appendix A also offers the reader a glimpse into a seminar with three to five year olds.

Sequence 1: Martin correcting the facilitator

The sequence seems to consist of two parts divided between talk turn 5 and 6, both uttered by the facilitator. In the first part, Martin is breaking the seminar rules by not keeping to the subject, he is correcting the facilitator's writing. This happens after a pause of six seconds where the facilitator writes on her note pad and the group is concentrated on her writing, looking:

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4 **Martin:** You forgot the D in the beginning

5 **Facilitator:** m (.) d'ya know (.) I'm just sitting here an' making kinda jotnotes I'm not writing

 wholly fully just small (.) scribble (.)

6 **Facilitator:** Martin then why (.) do you think would you like her as a friend? Or wouldn't you

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Almost all glances are focused on the facilitator or her note pad during this part, with only two quick glances from Anita and Saari at Martin. The facilitator looks at Martin, the note pad and at Johanna alternately. She seems to be confused and not sure how to handle the situation; the speech is inconsistent, accompanied by a lot of gestures. Martin also seems to find the situation embarrassing or hard to cope with: he hides his face in his hands. Martin breaks the standard classroom power balance; he corrects the teacher instead of the opposite. In a way this could be seen as in accordance with seminar rules. It is at least not a break.

In the second part, the facilitator puts the seminar back on track by asking Martin if he would have wanted Pippi as a friend (6), probably trying to show that any answer will be accepted by both nodding and shaking her head. Martin seems a bit uneasy even though his answer is a prompt no. He puts his hands to his face. When he answers that he will not, because Pippi is a girl, he turns to Tom for support. This seems to make Tom uneasy; he looks back and forth at the facilitator and Martin. Tom seems to go for supporting Martin. He answers "no" to the facilitator's question and Martin and Tom support each other by alternately answer no. Looking at the participants' glances during this part, the note pad is still in focus and so is the facilitator.[2] During the first part when Martin is breaking a seminar "rule", the group does not look at him. But in this second part, all participants look at Martin from time to time. Is this why the more experienced Tom decides to support Martin?

The participants move a lot during the whole sequence, some more than others. Martin, who is active verbally, moves almost all the time and so does Anita. It is, however, hard to distinguish any collective patterns in most of the movements. The individuals seem to move their hands, arms, and bodies without much connection to what is happening verbally in the seminar. Idun is an exception. In the second part she starts making movements that finally become "writing" on the table, mimicking the facilitators writing. She ends this by drawing back her hand quickly when the facilitator repeats Martins answer:

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9 **Martin:** Never

10 **Facilitator:** <u>Never</u> (.) why never

11 **Martin:** Becau:::se (.) she's a girl (↑)

After a while she starts moving her hands over the table, "skipping".

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2 Tom's glances were during parts of the sequence not possible to transcribe due to dark film.

Sequence 2: The facilitator challenging and supporting Tom

Tom here alters his idea of why he does not want to be Pippi's friend from saying that it is because she is a girl to saying that it doesn't matter if she's a boy or a girl when facilitator points out that he himself plays with girls:

> 4 **Tom:** She:'sa girl (↓)
>
> 5 **Facilitator:** No but (.) <u>you</u> have friends that are girls
>
> 6 **Tom:** Mm sometimes yah (.) bu' not Pippi

Tom shakes his head to stress the meaning of what he's saying. The facilitator does not seem to hear the change or does not take any notice: she goes on arguing that Tom has female friends. Her verbal communication is very direct; she is contradicting Tom. But her gestures are supportive: she is nodding, smiling, and raising her eyebrows. She is even mimicking Tom's gesture of putting the hand to the neck. Next she confuses Tom with Martin (9), who earlier has argued that he does not want Pippi as a friend because she is a girl.

> 9 **Facilitator:** But but is it really so Mart (.) eh Tom that you think so
>
> 10 **Tom:** Yes
>
> 11 **Facilitator:** You who usually play a lot with the girls
>
> 12 **Tom:** Mm atleast instead smaller boys it doesn't matta if it's a girl or a boy
>
> 13 **Facilitator:** So it doesn't matter

Tom here appears a bit confused both in speech and in gestures. He is not clearly stating why he doesn't want Pippi as a friend. Martin seems to want to point out that it has got something to do with her looks, amplifying his speech with gestures, the facilitator questions him to make his point clearer.

> 16 **Martin:** Pippi (.) one orange 'air and (?) */He signs braids by his ears/*
>
> 17 **Johanna:** <u>Tom</u>
>
> 18 **Facilitator:** Yes
>
> 19 **Martin:** and braids standing right out

The facilitator goes on making her point that Tom plays with girls even though he has changed his mind. Why? She might have missed his message earlier. She might have another purpose. This is Martin's first seminar. Tom has been participating in seminars for more than a year. Is the facilitator trying to make a point addressed to Martin rather than to Tom? She mistakes their names. Martin is the first to express the idea that he does not want Pippi as a friend because she is a girl. He reacts to the facilitator saying that Tom plays with girls. If the facilitator is trying to get Martin to think further, he seems to get the point. He supports Tom by presenting a new idea - that it is because of her looks that he doesn't want to be her friend. In the end Johanna shouts Tom's name twice, causing him and some of the others to look at her. Until Martin speaks, the participants are almost solely looking either at Tom or at the facilitator. The facilitator looks at Tom or the paper.

The participants move a lot during this sequence too, some more than others. Idun moves with wider gestures than the rest. Tom, who is speaking a lot of the time moves almost all the time. Anita moves very little. In this sequence, as in the first, it is hard to distinguish any patterns in most of the movements. Saari's movements are an example of this: she presses her hands against her cheeks, looks up at the roof, leans back, presses her cheeks once more, takes the hands from the cheeks, puts the right hand under the table and up again, puts her chin in her hand. Most of the time her attention is with Tom: she keeps looking at him. Most of the gestures do not seem to relate to what is communicated in the group interaction.

Sequence 3: The facilitator breaking the rules

In this sequence, the facilitator seems to imply that there is a "right" answer in the way she puts the initial question:

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1 **Facilitator:** Butaa (.) doesit really matter how one <u>looks</u>

The question instantly leads to a debate between the girls and the boys, shouting yes and no. The boys state that they see themselves as a unit:

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19 **Tom:** But we think so

20 **Martin:** We think so

The facilitator questions the girls why they think that looks don't matter and they answer by saying they like Pippi. The facilitator's answers imply that she agrees with them:

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25 **Facilitator:** Okay (.) why don'tyou think it matters (.) or <u>you</u> I

   can say why don't you think it matters Anita

26 **Anita:** Because (.) I think she's nice */Idun "writes" on the table/*

27 **Facilitator:** She is ni:ce an' an' that has got nothing to do with how she looks (↑) you like her anyway

   (.) Tom what about you (.) you don't think so or

28 **Tom:** No

29 **Facilitator:** No (.) What about you Saari do you think it matters (.) that she looks the way she does or

30 **Saari:** No I like her anyway

31 **Facilitator:** You like her anyway */She nods/*

Saari gets into a short debate with Anita about whether people dressing up as Pippi is the same thing as Pippi being for real. Tom suddenly shouts out "What about <u>Ricki MARTIN</u>" (37), confusing the facilitator; her utterances become incomplete.

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33 **Johanna:** I think she's ni:::ce

34 **Facilitator:** you <u>think</u> so yeah */she smiles/*

35 **Tom:** Bu'

36 **Anita:** There are persons dressing up as her

37 **Tom:** What about <u>Ricki MARTIN</u>

She then turns to Tom, questioning him on the meaning. His point seems to be that it does matter how you look, someone as handsome and talented as Ricky Martin has a better chance than someone looking like Pippi:

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43 **Facilitator:** a real such (.) but I was thinking now you said Ricki <u>ma:rty</u> do you think he looks like her

44 **Tom:** He's good looking

45 **Facilitator:** He's g

46 **Martin:** He sings we:::ll

47 **Facilitator:** He's good <u>looking</u> buh

48 **Tom:** He sings good if itsounds

49 **Facilitator:** Sings good areya areya (.) are you good then that is

50 **Tom:** Yah you're popular

51 **Martin:** M mhe's my star

Martin agrees. When asked what he would do if Ricky Martin looked like Pippi, he seems to consider it unlikely but he would still like his singing. Tom's shouting "What about <u>Ricki MARTIN</u>" happens after the facilitator implies a right answer by her response. He is not able to express his idea, but with help from the facilitator he is able to clarify it. The facilitator here changes to a more exploring type of questioning. With the girls she has settled on agreeing without questioning their statements. From

seeming to prefer one kind of ("right") answer, she now seems to cope with and encourage more divergent ideas. At this point the girls who have been active in the first part stop talking except for asking what the facilitator is writing.

For most of the time, the participants seem to look at the speaker or speakers. The facilitator looks half of the time in her note pad and the rest at the speaker/speakers. However, there seem to be three interactions going on at the same time during this sequence. The most obvious one is the official seminar interaction described above. There is also an interaction going on concerning the cameras and the microphones, carried out only with gestures and glances. This starts when the facilitator amplifies Anita's view that Pippi is nice (34) and goes on until Tom has shouted "What about <u>Ricki MARTIN</u>" (37). Johanna plays with the microphone, Idun is looking at the cameras, Martin is looking at the microphone. Later Anita and the facilitator participate: the facilitator puts her hand to Anita's arm to stop her from playing with the microphone cord. Anita has actually been trying to stop Johanna from playing with it. Later on Saari takes up the interest for the camera and the microphone. The facilitator then puts her hand on Saari's arm to stop her. The interest in the cameras and microphones appears here for the first time in the seminar. It seems to coincide with the facilitator's breaking a seminar rule. The girls act as teacher support, they all display views that are supposed to be correct in school curriculum – everyone is valuable and looks don't matter. Are they performing for the cameras and microphones? If this is the case, it explains why they are confused when the facilitator suddenly supports Tom's questioning the "right" answer.

The third interaction concerns what the facilitator is writing. Anita, Idun, and Johanna repeatedly ask what the notes say. The facilitator puts her hand on Idun's arm to stop her from asking and repeats this with Anita. Saari and Idun look a lot at the note pad up to "What about <u>Ricki MARTIN</u>", when they focus on the speaker (and Saari after a while on the cameras and microphone). Anita starts focusing on the note pad after "What about <u>Ricki MARTIN</u>"; she has focused on the speaker up till then. Idun "writes" as in sequence 1. The writing later turns into conducting, when she seems to be illustrating Martin's utterance that Ricky Martin sings well (46). Why the focus on the facilitator's notes? Maybe they are trying to grasp what the facilitator values as important in seminar, especially if they have been confused by the facilitator's response to Tom's views. Idun might have realized this, she is making notes when someone is presenting a new idea. She is also illustrating that Ricky Martin sings well. This is later Martin's main point.

Sequence 4: Saari quarreling and the facilitator negotiating
Saari, who has been pretty quiet during the seminar and only spoken very quietly, in this sequence speaks out loudly when she wants to press her point that Pippi's father did not drown. She is contradicting Anita who claims that he has drowned and, later on, Idun who claims that he drowns after floating on the fat. The facilitator speaks for quite a long time (24 seconds), the speech is somewhat incomplete or faltering, with many gestures, turning alternately towards Saari and Anita. She might be confused or unsure on how to handle the strong feelings from Saari, who together with Anita has turned the seminar into a debate. This has happened before, in sequence 3.

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19 **Facilitator:** Well it is like this Saari that you think ((.inhales)) you have watched further on in the
story nownow (.) and Anita is just talking about this chapter that we read <u>yesterday.</u> What you're
talking probably about are different things (.) I think (.) because as it said yesterday the little we read
then she didn't <u>know</u> (.)but you've seen the rest (.) Saari m (.) itwasit probably so (1) I would actually
like to know

She is showing respect to both Saari and Anita by pointing out that they both have points, depending on how much of the story you consider. She points at the book to stress this and Anita later repeats this gesture. The facilitator does not comment on Idun's statement, which is false if one has read the first chapter or the whole book. She has earlier shown support by repeating the wording of Johanna and Saari:

3 **Johanna:** No he hasn' drowned
4 **Martin:** An' check on
5 **Facilitator:** He hasn' drowned
6 **Saari:** No he didn't drown he flu (.) he floats on the fat
7 **Facilitator:** He floats on the fat

The facilitator touches Saari's arm twice, once with the pen and once with the hand, a gesture that has earlier (and in sequence 3) been used as a silent correction. Here it might be a gesture of sympathy but is this the way Saari interprets it? Saari starts talking directly, now even quieter than before, and it is impossible both for the facilitator and the microphones to pick up what she is saying. She is repeating her former statements but seems uneasy. Maybe she does not understand why something seems to have gone wrong.

20 **Saari:** (?) (?) */Anita touches the book/*
21 **Facilitator:** Wha:t?
22 **Saari:** (?) h became king */Anita leans forward over the table/*
23 **Facilitator:** W Whatdidyou say? */She leans towards Saari/*

Anita seems to concentrate on understanding the seminar "code" by watching the facilitator both in this and in earlier sequences. She here confirms that she knows that the story later will show that the dad did survive but that this is not known at this point of the story. The facilitator makes one more move to point out that they are talking about the text that everybody has read, i.e. the first chapter of the book. When Tom comments "Well, he is that" (28) in present tense she repeats him but in future tense (29):

28 **Tom:** Well, he is that
29 **Facilitator:** He becomes that yes you get to know that later on
30 **Anita:** Weh he has been king (?)
31 **Facilitator:** But this thiswas this we did not read yesterday
32 **Anita:** No

Most of the time, the participants and the facilitator look at the person or persons talking[3]. A lot of the attention is focused on Saari, some on Anita, and some on the facilitator. There is however a silent interaction going on at the end of the sequence. Martin starts playing with the microphone when Saari starts whispering, and the facilitator is asking what she is saying. When he stops playing, Johanna instantly continues (26). The facilitator holds her hand out to stop Johanna, still looking at and continuing verbal dialogue with Anita. Looking closer, this interaction seems conveyed mainly by looks and glances. Tom, Martin, and Johanna, who are sitting close, all look at the microphone when Martin plays with it. Anita glances towards the microphone when Johanna starts playing with it. The facilitator seems to notice what is going on by watching Saari who looks at Martin. Saari has earlier looked at the camera. This might be an interest in the camera or the microphones that is not at all connected to what is happening in the rest of the seminar. However, looking at this interaction as

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3 Due to dark film, it is not possible to see what Tom is looking at in turn 1-10, Martin in 10-half 19 and Anita in 19-23.

part of what is going on, putting the microphone in focus might be a comment to Saari, speaking too quietly. Saari in this sequence seems to get insecure after listening to the facilitator's long speech and seem to react especially to when the facilitator says "then she didn't <u>know</u>" (19); this is when Saari looks into the camera.

Idun, who has been moving a lot before, is in this sequence moving less than everyone else. Judging by where she looks, she is concentrating on what is going on between Saari and the facilitator.

Analyzing the "Pippi Longstocking" seminar

The facilitator introduces the different steps in the intended seminar plan in the order that is suggested in the Socratic seminar: opening question, textual analysis and relating ideas to self. The text seems to work well and has been read aloud before the seminar as intended. No personal or group goals are set and the evaluation rather relates to whether the participants appreciated the seminar and what the facilitator considered important (i.e. listening to each other). The pause for reflection after the opening question is short. The facilitator dominates verbal communication, chiefly consisting of questions posed to different participants.

The intellectual process is continued through the seminar; ideas are tested and refuted; and new solutions are found, supported by the facilitator and the participants carrying out the steps intended in seminar. For example, Tom and Martin elaborate their ideas on why they would not want Pippi as a friend, from saying that it is because she is a girl to saying it is because of her looks and later that the main thing is what a person accomplishes (Tom would like to listen to Ricky Martin even if he looks like Pippi). This is a result of the facilitator challenging them by questioning their statements. Anita and Saari also are challenged by the facilitator and also by each other. Anita is able to change and develop her ideas at least when challenged by the facilitator. She states that she likes Pippi because she is nice, but is later able to discuss how Pippi would have to change to become nice. After having had the debate with Saari on whether Pippi's father has drowned or not, she is (at least with help from the facilitator) able to see that there are two different versions. Saari does not seem to develop her views in the same way; she seems confused when contradicted by the facilitator and upset when contradicted by Anita. Participants refer to their own experience both when encouraged by the facilitator and spontaneously, but after sequence 3, the telling about their own experiences turns into a contest. They still need a lot of guidance from the facilitator to be able to stick to the "intellectual virtues".

The participants and the facilitator do not consistently act in accordance with the seminar "rules". The participants seem to break the "rules" when they have different views and are talking directly to each other (Saari and Anita arguing). When the facilitator acts as a mediator there is no risk of debate. The long pause in sequence 1 seems to cause Martin to break the "rules" by correcting the facilitator's writing. There is some confusion from time to time among the participants when the "rules" are exhibited. Martin gets confused after telling the facilitator that she has forgotten a D in her notes. The girls get confused when the facilitator encourages Tom in challenging their view that Pippi is nice. Tom chooses to support Martin, acting as a team for the rest of the seminar. Johanna is trying to team up with Saari without success. This is not according to seminar "rules". The whole group is supposed to work as a team together. Tom's and Martin's move also results in a boy-girl fight during the seminar. Tom is not entirely easy with teaming up; he might be doing it to help the less experienced Martin. The "rules" are not yet transparent to the participants, although they have

been having seminars for 3 months. Maybe they would have been more so, if personal and group goals had been set. They seem to be focused on what the facilitator is writing, probably as a way of decoding what is important (e.g. the girls asking what the facilitator is writing right after Tom has challenged their view of Pippi being nice). Goal setting at start might have been a more productive way of coping with teaching the "rules" than the facilitator telling the participants at the end of seminar that it is important that they listen to each other. On the other hand, the five year olds get tired quickly, and goal-setting would have made the seminar longer. They need the facilitator as a role-model and this probably accounts for her dominating the verbal communication.

The facilitator is breaking the "rules" at some points. She corrects misbehavior in the ongoing seminar (e.g. telling Martin not to touch the microphones). She also seems to have trouble sticking to the "rules" when values she considers important are challenged (e.g. everyone is valuable and listening to each other). She is breaking the "rules" when stating that Tom plays with girls, but this seems to be done for another purpose. She seems to be pointing out an important "rule" in the seminar culture (the demand for consistency) to Martin by working through Tom, probably because Tom is more experienced than Martin. However, in this seminar there is no total breakdown of seminar culture. The reason is that either the facilitator or a participant puts the seminar back on track by acting in accordance to seminar rules.

The most important action the participants take to show what is accepted in the seminar culture in this seminar seems to be to look at the person or persons talking. Not looking at someone is used as a mean to communicate that some action is not acceptable (e.g. the group not looking at Martin in sequence 1) and the group behavior seems to amplify the meaning.

Most of the gestures and movements seem to lack connection to the group interaction. An important explanation is probably the youth of the participants; they can not yet coordinate their bodily movements, and they need to move when sitting for such a long time. There are some patterns: the speaker moves more when speaking. Higher interest in what is happening in group interaction seems to lessen the gestures and movements. Sometimes the gestures are used as an amplifier of what is said (e.g. Martin and Tom showing Pippi's braids when they can't express the idea verbally satisfactorily). Idun exposes another way of using gestures. By some of her gestures she illustrates what is important in the seminar, either by "writing" things down or by showing what is talked of (e.g. conducting in sequence 3). Are there more of this type of gestures that I have not been able to interpret but that the children participating might be able to catch?

The facilitator uses gestures and facial expressions to show her support (e.g. contradicting Tom but nodding, smiling and mimicking Tom's gestures). But she also uses gestures to silently correct behavior that is not acceptable (e.g. by repeatedly putting her hand on someone's arm). This is mimicked by Anita in sequence 3. The facilitator also uses verbal actions to show what is acceptable or not. After Martin has broken the "rules" in sequence 1, she turns to him with a seminar question. If she had wanted to discipline him she might have put the question to someone else. Instead she is putting him as well as the seminar on the right track. When Martin and Tom are trying to express the new idea concerning Pippi's looks she uses questioning, helping them to clarify it verbally. She corrects Tom using present tense to point out that they are talking about this section of the text.

Some messages are conveyed through artifacts (e.g. facilitator and Anita using the book in sequence 4). The cameras and microphones are also in focus from time to time. When looking at where these

incidents occur in group interaction, a possible interpretation is that the technical equipment serves as an artifact conveying a more or less conscious message, (the girls performing in accordance with ordinary school values in sequence 3 and the participants commenting on Saari whispering in sequence 4).

Summary conclusions

Taking all 16 analyzed seminars into account, the study shows that the skilled participants changed their interaction from conversation to an inquiring dialogue, and that the distribution of power in the classroom changed in favor of a more polyphonic and cooperative interaction if the facilitator and the participants realized and accepted the important element of the game and how these were learnt. The intellectual and dialogical skills of participants developed over time in the seminars. It was not a linear process; it differed on an individual basis, depending on the interaction of the group and the skill of the facilitator. The early seminars tended to focus on understanding what the seminar was about. After gaining some experience, the group was less concerned with the intellectual process and seemed to focus almost entirely on the rules of the game. The experienced and functioning seminar group focused almost entirely on the intellectual content of the seminar. The results show that there were age differences when it comes to the use of gestures, language, experience, and ability to interact with the group, but there were even more differences between inexperienced learners of all ages and more skilled participants. The younger children (five to six years old) were more dependent on a close interaction with the adult facilitator, but participants of all ages were able to philosophize and improve this from practice.

Groups of learners often confused the inquiring seminar dialogue with other classroom conversations. The results show that when the seminars were mistaken to be the "classroom game", both teacher and students looked for (and tried to find) a "right" answer. The disciplining was then done in a more concealed fashion. An important result is that when the group left the rules of the "classroom game" without actively using the seminar rules, the interaction was left open to manipulation with negative consequences. Rule breaking tended to have different origins and had different effects on interaction and learning in seminar. Three categories emerged from the material:

1. In the beginning, the participant (and the facilitator) didn't entirely understand the rules and broke them unintentionally, still learning the game. Breaking the rules here promoted learning the game and shed light on the implicit rules. A risk here was the facilitator allowing, or promoting, the group to relapse into "classroom" interaction.

2. After some practice the participant (and the facilitator) understood the rules and broke them intentionally to test the game, or the facilitator's ability to control the situation, or used them for personal purposes (to control, obstruct, disturb, protest, or to harass someone or a group within the seminar). The rule-break was a result of someone deliberately trying to manipulate the interaction. How this was managed was vital to the further seminar practice. The seminar here was threatened if the facilitator didn't guard the seminar well enough, or her actions could be interpreted as if she was going along with the rule-breakers.

3. Further in practice the participant (and the facilitator) understood the rules and broke a rule to protect the seminar, a rule considered more important, or for some-thing else considered to be a higher purpose. Guarding the seminar or a rule was considered less risky and was probably a way of learning the particulars of the game. Imposing a "right value" here threatened the balance of power.

However, as long as the facilitator actively promoted the seminar by treating verbal interruptions in an intellectual manner or, when necessary, used open corrections, the seminar was safe, even if tested. The seminar outcome was dependent on whether the participants considered the seminar to be safe.

There were differences between the good intentions showed by several of the teachers to change towards the seminar practice, and their actual performance- they continued to use "classroom strategies", often resulting in negative consequences for the participants. This suggests that the behavior must be made explicit, visualized, and discussed in teacher education. Not introducing all seminar steps, or introducing them in another order than intended, was shown to threaten the outcome of the seminar, if not the seminar itself. Confusing the seminar game with the classroom game was one of the actions shown to threaten the seminar culture. When learning the seminar process, rule breaking shed light on the anticipated culture and was productive; when rule breaking was used to manipulate, it threatened the seminar. The study shows that it was essential that the facilitator learned to see this difference and how to handle rule breaking productively. Effective strategies were treating verbal actions intellectually or, when necessary, using open correction. The study reveals an interesting paradox: the rules of the game were in ways both the cause and the effect when learning; they were revealed by the facilitator and at the same time constructed by the participants in interaction.

The seminar study shows that it was vital to seminar teaching that the seminar was interpreted as a closed arena, a safe circle for intellectual experiments. This was marked by the seating, a closed room, and by the ritualized structure. The construction of the methodological steps had consequences when teaching and playing the "game". Contrary to some previous research, this study shows that the students developed their thinking skills over time, evolving from relativism to critical examination in the skilled groups. An explanation is that "textual" analysis helped the participants to take a distance to the personal self, and to look at ideas in new ways. Another way to reach a fruitful distance was accomplished by the participants reaching "silent" agreements through gestures and glances. The participants went from stating personal ideas (maybe picking some lines of thought up from others), to building ideas on the previous ideas of other participants. It was essential to grasp that all participants should take responsibility for the entire group's ideas. This relation was built anew in every seminar by following the seminar steps. The skilled group spontaneously shared the roles, "personifying" different values during the seminar, as an effective way of learning to see the different arguments. At length, this probably teaches a strategy when thinking on one's own.

Promoting the mutuality of the game in skilled groups was done primarily by "silent" interaction: actively promoting and protecting the game, and signaling acceptance and cooperation when contradicting another person's statement. The intellectual process was carried out primarily by the verbal participation. The younger participants used more gestures, often expressing things when lacking words. The dialogue showed few differences from everyday conventions. Skilled participants accepted longer verbal pauses, and were not as occupied with "keeping the conversation going" as were the beginners; they were less accepting of manipulative turn-taking, and included several interlocutors at a time. At length this probably trained a strategy to examine the different angles of a problem or a dilemma. The group gradually learnt to cooperate and to use each other when investigating, by building the dialogue in steps like those presented by Karl Popper (2007) for critical, scientific thinking.
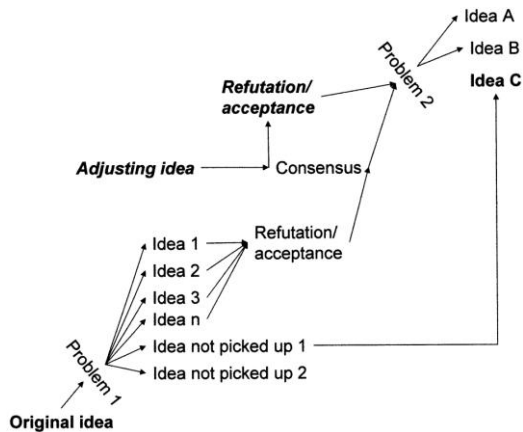
Figure 2. Advanced intellectual process in seminar

Starting with a problem/question, different participants presented different ideas. Some of these were dropped without being noticed or explored, but reappeared later in the discussion (Idea C in figure 3). Some ideas were elaborated and developed, and this resulted in refutation or acceptance. During this part of the process, the group often discussed "cumulatively", building one idea on the other or presenting pro- and counter arguments in response to the idea. The group then accepted a consensus (sometimes with the facilitator's help), a new platform to start off from, when continuing to probe into the questions, and the process started again (problem 2). A participant may have presented an adjusting idea, that challenged the consensus, and this would be refuted or accepted, changing consensus or not, but affecting the rest of the seminar (the ***italicized*** part in figure 3). The cumulative ideas tended to overrule the adjusting ideas. Furthermore, if the facilitator didn't actively promote the intellectual process a new or challenging idea might not be heard. An example of this process is shown in the "Diablo baby" seminar, sequence 1, presented above.

Silent interaction was also used to show what was not accepted in the group. The individuals carried out an advanced "silent" interplay to communicate to each other, to cooperate or to oppose each other. The results show that verbally silent participants were actively participating in the dialogue. This calls for an extended interpretation of the concept of "participation"; it's not a question of talking but of being interactively engaged.

Discussion

Schools around the world today are trying to cope not only with what in most countries is a growing body of students due to an increasing population, but also with the rapid change of technical development, the globalization of communication, markets, and ideas, and the demand for equal education for different groups in society. This calls for good educational practice in every classroom as well as for extensive changes in the structure of the traditional classroom practice, if these challenges are to be met. This paper has presented a study investigating Socratic seminars as a method of promoting thinking, language, social fostering, and character education to meet the demands of modern society. It has also highlighted some of the problems that teachers and students deal with, when introducing a new kind of pedagogy, different from traditional ways of teaching.

Educational research has, at least in the Western societies, during the last half century leant heavily on the clinical practices of the discipline of psychology, tending to skew the interest towards explaining phenomena on an individual, intrapersonal basis and towards occurrences which could be measured and perceived in what could be considered a more clinically objective way. However, if

education is to cope with the modern challenges, it calls for research adapted to the educational settings and conditions, and not only describing but also prescribing how productive education is and should be conducted.

The educational setting is one of life, of movement and changes, of group interaction, of contextual messages, and of hundreds of quick and subtle communicative messages sent and received within the group of students and to and by teachers. The contextual and communicational interplay is a vital part of what will make the educational project at hand successful or not. I believe we actively must try to find research methods to catch this turmoil and the important features which constitute the soul of educational practice. This study has been an attempt to do so, with the intention not only to contribute to pedagogical practice but also to research practice.

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Appendix A. Socratic seminar with three to five year old preschool children

For a couple of days, the group has been watching a sequence from the film Mardie by Astrid Lindgren over and over again. They have been watching the sequence where the maid in the family household, Alva, has been invited to accompany the 19th century middleclass family to the high society Autumn Ball. Alva is looking forward to the ball: she loves to dance. Alva is pretty and at the ball it seems as if all the young gentlemen want to dance with her. However, this is prevented by the actions of the mayor's wife, who acts as hostess of the ball. I am seated in a circle with six children three to five years of age. I ask why they think Alva is happy when she is told that she will attend the ball. Everyone sits quiet for a while. A lot of ideas are then presented. She wants to dance, someone says. Someone else thinks that she is happy because she is to dance with the chimney sweeper. But does she know that she will dance with him? No, she doesn't of course. Maybe she is happy to be together with Mardie. But when she's not allowed to dance later on, that makes her sad. It's the one with the purple dress that doesn't want Alva to dance, the mayor's wife. Why not? She gets cross when Alva comes to the ball. Maybe Alva wasn't invited? Maybe the mayor's wife thinks that she will not get to dance herself? Maybe she wants all the guys to herself? The guys seem to like Alva. That will make it worse for the mayor's wife, if she wants the guys to herself. The mayor has done a number two in his pants earlier in the film: maybe that's why she wants a new man? When nobody wants to dance with Alva, she feels really sad, but then she falls in love with the chimney sweeper! The chimney sweeper is not invited to the ball either, but he goes in there just to dance with Alva. Why does he do that? Maybe he wants to save her. Or he might be in love with her.

If someone had a birthday party and you were not invited, would you go anyway? Everyone thinks silently for a minute or two. No, nobody would, the children agree. But why does Alva go to the ball if she's not invited? She wanted to go and meet guys, so she didn't think about having an invitation, someone suggests. She wanted to dance, someone else says. Did Alva do the right or the wrong thing? She probably didn't want to be home alone and not have anyone to speak to. Maybe it was more fun at the ball anyway: after all she did meet the chimney sweeper. It was not her fault: she did not know that she wasn't welcome. It was actually Mardie's mother who said she could come.

This ended the Socratic seminar and we thanked each other. The dialogue lasted for 20 intense minutes, and we had a lot of fun, but I can see that all are tired. It's hard work thinking. I realize to my surprise that I have discovered a couple of aspects to the film sequence that I hadn't thought of before. That the mayor's wife is jealous of or at least envious of Alva enriches my understanding. I have previously looked at the sequence as a debate about social classes. I had not thought that Mardie's mother was responsible for Alva being exposed to the cruel treatment of the upper class guests until the children pointed it out. She must have known that something like this was bound to happen. When I returned to the day-care centre the next week, Tom, Saari, and Marie wanted to continue the dialogue about the film sequence. They had new ideas that they had discussed together and now they wanted to try them on me[4].

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[4] The text is a translation of Pihlgren (2006), p. 29-30. The film is a chapter from Astrid Lindgren's children's book Mardie's Adventures (1993).

Appendix B. Example of matrix transcript (translated to English)

Verbal communication

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Anders had some-Thing		but like if he's the DEVIL then it must be someone that (.)				
		can predict the future 'cause he has the devil tattooed on his belly		((laugh))		
		Oh ((laughs))	((laugh))	((laugh))	((laugh))	((laugh))
		bu (.) it's like a cross above				((laugh))

Gestures

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
		Points quickly at picture repeatedäly				
Bends over picture, puts down pen	Hands separated, head quickly repeated-ly	Points at picture down	Looks down	Bends over picture, puts hands on table	Lifts the picture	Bends over the picture
						Bends over the picture
		Takes out his card smiles			Smiles	Smiles
	Hands together, wrings		Puts cheek in right hand			

Glances

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
At Anders	At facilitator, then at Anders	On facilitator, then on Lisa	On Anders	On Anders	On Anders	On Anders then on picture
The picture	On picture	On picture, then on Lisa, then on picture, then on Lisa	On the picture	On the picture	On the picture	On the picture
		On the picture	On Lisa			