Cultivating Civic Education

Guðmundur Heiðar Frímannsson

This is an unpublished conference paper for the 4th Annual Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues conference at Oriel College, Oxford University, Thursday 7th – Saturday 9th January 2016.

Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues
University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT United Kingdom
T: +44 (0) 121 414 3602 F: +44 (0) 121 414 4865
E: jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk W: www.jubileecentre.ac.uk

Cultivating Civic Education:
Conversations, Moral Development and Cultivating the Virtues

Guðmundur Heiðar Frímannsson
University of Akureyri

> „My father was himself a college professor and a pedant to the bone. Every exchange contained a lesson, like the pit in a cherry. To this day, the Socratic method makes me want to bite someone.“[1]

In this talk I shall describe a project that I take part in at my university with a number of teachers from pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools in the town of Akureyri in the north of Iceland. After describing the project I shall develop some theoretical claims relevant to this research. They include that dialogue is an effective way to teach young people various subjects but it is also effective in helping moral development. To understand what this involves it is necessary to examine the notion of virtue, the role that conversations can have in cultivating virtues and other methods that we use with the aim of developing children and young people into virtuous agents.

The project is one year old. We call it *Mind´s Play* and it involves using conversations with pupils for learning. There are various things that pupils learn in schools both intentionally and unintentionally but our aim is to use conversations as a teaching method to enhance the learning of traditional subjects that pupils learn in schools. Students in Icelandic primary schools learn all the traditional subjects that students do, history, Icelandic and international, mathematics, reading, Icelandic, grammar, Danish, English, social and natural science. They also practise gymnastics, home economics, sewing and wood carving. But they learn other things as well. They learn how to interact with other pupils, with their teachers and other staff. They learn how to complete their assignments on time (hopefully), they learn how to gather and understand information to answer a question, they learn how some things are such that they have to agree on them or at least how to resolve them if they do not agree and others are up to them, they can decide them as they wish. These are the things that students learn not just in Icelandic primary schools but in schools in other countries allowing for obvious variations.

There is a difference between children going to pre-schools, children going to primary schools and adolescents going to secondary schools. It is not just a difference in development and maturity but also a difference in how these institutions go about their business of encouraging pupils to learn. The pre-schools are more likely to use play to enhance learning among the young children, the primary school can do that early on but gradually develops into an institution that expects its pupils to have learning as an aim in most of what they do and secondary schools can be and to a great extent are more formal and do not expect to have to use as much of their time to motivate their students to learn. These are large generalisations not based on empirical studies but one can question if they apply any more.

In our time I think it is fair to say that as gradually larger parts of each yearly cohort attend school longer the nature of the institutions has subtly changed, primary schools have to take into account the needs of those who find it difficult to keep pace with others of the same age in learning new things and the needs of those who find it difficult to concentrate for longer periods on one thing. This has the consequence that primary schools have to spend more time on motivating their students, using more varied methods to get pupils to learn and the same applies to secondary schools. This development has created problems for the schools resulting in students dropping-out of school. This drop-out rate is an indication of serious problems in the school system concerned.[2] One of the worries is that a high drop-out rate in secondary schools might lead to serious social

[1] Katherine Joy Fowler, *We Are All Completely Beside Ourselves* (London: Serpent´s Tail, 2013), p. 6
[2] J. Martí & P Pettit, *A Political Philosophy in Public Life. Civic Republicanism in Zapatero´s Spain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) p. 77. The drop-opt rate in Spain was 30% in 2003, the average in OECD in that year was 12%.

problems for those leaving school too early and it might also be considered a waste of human resources that adolescents leave school early. Schools have to think carefully about how to decrease the drop-out rate.

What we are interested in studying in the project Mind´s Play is if and how conversations can be a method for learning and how they can deepen and strengthen what students have already learnt. We are also interested in seeing if conversations enable schools to achieve other objectives such as making students see their own conduct from the perspectives of others and learning to take the views of others into account when reaching an agreement on something. The project has two components: It is a professional development for teachers and it is also a research project for investigating possible changes in children´s learning and in their moral development. We started a year ago and the first year was always supposed to be about professional development of the teachers taking part in the project. We conducted eight three hour sessions with the teachers, four in the autumn term, four in the spring term.

There were 17 teachers who started in the project but in the spring term five of them stopped coming, three secondary school teachers giving as their reason that they thought too much time was required of them for this project, one primary school teacher and one pre-school teacher but they gave no reason for them leaving. There are ten female participants taking part, two male ones. There is one pre-school teacher, eight primary school teachers and three secondary school teachers in the group.

The teachers were asked to do some homework, attend the sessions the research group had planned and try out the methods that were discussed and practised in the sessions in their own classes. They should at least use one lesson each week for discussion, preferably two. We also asked them to keep a reflective diary in which they were expected to reflect on their experience of using conversations for learning. The members of the research group observed the teachers and their pupils in class once during the spring term earlier this year. The intention was to form focus groups of students in the autumn term and interview them and to interview the teachers as well. The focus group interviews will take place but unfortunately too late for including anything in this report. We are also writing a handbook on conversation for learning for the teachers to use in their teaching in the future.

The methods that were introduced were philosophy for children, Socratic teaching, questions and interpretations or we might call it the interpretative method. There are others but we did not use them.

We might call all these methods Socratic methods because they are all based on the idea that the teacher engages the children in talking about what they are learning and in so doing enhances their learning and enables indirect benefits of conversations. As is clear to everyone this resembles sufficiently the way that Socrates questioned his contemporaries in Athens so that we can call this way of teaching modern children and adolescents Socratic teaching. But we should be aware that Plato´s Socrates claimed he knew nothing and never taught anybody anything. His interlocutor only learned something new. This has the implication that the interaction between Socrates and his pupil does not involve transfer of knowledge from one who knows to another who does not know. This is how we characteristically describe teaching so this interaction is at least not typical teaching, we might even want to say that it was paradoxical to call it teaching. I do not think we should believe that Socratic teaching is an impossibility but we must be aware that Socrates´ understanding of teaching is different from how it is typically understood today.

It seems that Socrates was not of one mind throughout his career about teaching and what it involved.[3] In the *Apology*[4] the oracle of Delphi is reported to have said that Socrates was the wisest of Athenians because he acknowledged that he knew nothing. In *Meno*[5] Meno compares Socrates to a "broad torpedo fish" that puts a spell on everyone with his constant questioning. In the *Meno*

[3] T. C. Brickhouse, N. D. Smith, „Socratic Teaching and Socratic Method" in H. Siegel (ritstj.) *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) pp. 177-194.
[4] Plato „Apology" in John M. Cooper (ed.) *Plato´s Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), p. 17-36.
[5] Plato, „Meno" in John M. Cooper (ed.) *Plato´s Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), p. 870-897.

Socrates questions the young slave about numbers and makes him see how he wrongly deduces the size of a square from increasing the length of the sides. By inspecting drawings of squares the slave sees that doubling the length of the sides quadruples the square feet of the square. Of course, Socrates knew the correct answer to the question about the relation between the length of the sides and the size of the square. But he claims that he did not transfer this knowledge to the slave by telling him what it was. He claims that he made the slave see the correct answer from the information provided using his own mental gifts unaided. We can have our doubts about this description of the slave but this seems to be Socrates´ understanding of what took place. The third conception of Socratic teaching to be found in Plato´s writings is from *Theaetetus*[6] dealing with the concept of knowledge where Socrates describes himself as a midwife to the opinions of others. The midwife is not giving birth to her own child but helping mothers to bear their own children. In the same way Socrates uses his questioning to help others to express their own opinions or state what they know or think they know.

It is important to remember that modern conceptions of Socratic teaching are not identical to Socrates´ ideas of what he himself was doing. The basic modern idea is that we use questions to get children or adolescents to discuss a certain topic and in discussing it they learn from other children, their teacher and even from themselves more about the topic. It is clear from Socrates´ words in *Meno* that he believes that the slave knows nothing about geometry. It seems also that the slave learns because Socrates knows his geometry even though he does not learn from anything Socrates directly says to him, his questions lead the slave to the knowledge he already possesses. I do not think that Socrates believed that children could learn from each other by discussing certain topics. Children would not be able to direct each other through questioning to the knowledge they possess because they did not realise that they had this knowledge in them. We should remember that Socrates admits that he knows a number of things such as disobeying the law is always wrong as he states in *Crito*[7]. In *Meno* it is clear that he knows what happens when you double the length of the sides of a square. So in asking the slave he knows what he wants him to understand.

There were three methods introduced to the teachers taking part in this project. The first is philosophy for children, the second is discussions of the interpretation of texts, the third what we can call the Socratic seminar.

Philosophy for children is a well-known approach to teaching philosophy to children. It originated in the work of Matthew Lipman and has been developed further by his disciples and other philosophers and educationalists[8]. The method consists in having the pupils read or listen to a text, philosophical or otherwise, or watch something on television. The pupils take some time for discussing how they react to the text or video, what they think about it. Then they formulate philosophical questions about the text. These questions are listed on the blackboard or the computer. Then the group decides which question they want to discuss together after reflecting on them. If they do not come to an agreement they decide which question they find most interesting by voting. Then the proper discussion starts, the facilitator or teacher can ask those who voted for the question that turned out to be most popular why they find it interesting. After such a start the group as a whole or the community of inquiry as Lipman (and Dewey) calls it should discuss the question and try to discover an answer they find satisfying or more than one answer that they might find satisfying. At the end the group should reflect on the answer they have discovered and on how they have arrived at the result they have. In that sense they should understand their answer better and they should learn something about how they found the answer, how they have learnt something from this endeavour.

There are all sorts of variations on this method and it should be acknowledged that there is no one way of using it. It is alright to try out some different approaches. It is clear that the same approach cannot be used for four or five year old children and fourteen or fifteen year old

---

[6] „Theaetetus“ in John M. Cooper (ed.) *Plato´s Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), p. 157-234.
[7] „Crito“ in John M. Cooper (ed.) *Plato´s Complete Works* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1997), p. 37-48.
[8] Matthew Lipman, *Thinking in Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

adolescents. The young ones need to move about, have something to touch and look at something that is connected to what they are discussing. The adolescents can concentrate on one topic for some stretch of time even though they might need to let their attention wander.

The second method is the interpretation of texts. As far as I can see there is no agreement on what this method should be called but it involves asking questions about texts. Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon calls it the art of turning the soul and uses Plato´s way of describing education in the *Republic*.[9] This is as good a description as any of this method. Students in primary and secondary schools need to understand some complex concepts like gravity and the law of gravity, simple equations, percentages, power and democracy. It is not a good way to teach them by having them read or learn by heart definitions of these concepts. They would be just as much in the dark about them after such an exercise. What they need is to see them used in various contexts and try to figure out what is being said in each instance. It is possible for each teacher to use their knowledge and understanding to explain these concepts for her students and I am sure that many of them would learn a lot from such teaching. But it is even better to have them discuss these concepts in various contexts, try their understanding on other students and have them respond and try to articulate their own understanding of the issues. The texts can be really of any kind, they can be fairy tales[10] or parables,[11] news pieces from the media.

This method can be divided into three steps. First, it is necessary to find a suitable text for the students to discuss and learn. The teacher as the leader of the group must prepare questions about the text. These questions can be questions about facts, they can be questions about the interpretation of the text or they can be about the evaluation of the text. There can be, and are, different opinions about what understanding a text consists in but this should not prevent us from going forward with the students. The main thing is to get them to engage the students with the text, make them attempt to understand and form their own opinion of what it is about and what it is saying. These opinions can be argued for on the basis of something said in the text or some interpretation of the text based on the intention of the author if she is known.

The second step is to concentrate on the interpretative questions. It is suggested that the teacher concentrate on these questions and think carefully about what questions are likely to lead the students on to their own interpretation which might or might not conflict with other interpretations. First, the teacher and the students need to figure out what is of importance in interpreting the text. Then the places that support this interpretation need to be looked at and the places that tell against it.

The third step is to reflect on the method used to evaluate if the aims have been achieved. It is not necessary that the students take part in this reflection but it is necessary for the teacher to reflect on her lesson, the method used and if she achieved what she set out to do. She should ask if the students had asked appropriate questions about the text, did they agree about its interpretation, did the students listen to each other and use the ideas of others in formulating their own opinions? Does the class progress in discussing and interpreting texts? In using this method it is important for the teacher to realise that she is not forcing her interpretation on the students but leading them on to their own.

The third method is called Socratic seminar model[12]. It is very similar to the last method in that it concentrates on texts or information that is comparable to a text. Students are guided and supported by their teacher and they construct meaning from the text together using all the relevant information and concepts at their disposal. The progression in this method can be divided into steps as the last one. First, the students explore the text on their own or in small groups. They acquaint

---

[9] Sophie Haroutunian-Gordon, *Learning to Teach Through Discussion: The Art of Turning the Soul* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2009).

[10] Hansjörg Hohr, „Normativity in fairy tales: Scope, range and modes of communication“ *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 57(6) (2013): p. 600-611

[11] Trudy Govier, „Teaching and learning, stories and arguments“ *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 57(6) (2013): 587-599.

[12] Clare R. Kilbane, Natalie B. Milman, *Teaching Models* (Boston: Pearson, 2014) 380-416.

themselves with the material. Second, the teacher starts a dialogue planned beforehand including comparison, exploration of the material, finding contrasts and analysing the major concepts and ideas found there. The teacher would usually plan the dialogue in such a way that her questions would gradually become more challenging by using more open questions. The students would both discuss the topic with their teacher and among themselves.

As should be obvious the second and third method are similar. One might even say that in practice these two methods are indiscernible. But it should be pointed out that their theoretical backgrounds are different. The second method relies heavily on hermeneutic theory to explain the results but the third uses the example of Socrates and the method found in the early dialogues of Plato. The emphasis in all these three methods is on the active participation of the students in the dialogue.

The question is what good is this way of teaching to the students? Are they not just as well off in reading the material or collecting the evidence or whatever they are asked to do? Why spend the additional time and effort on the discussion and dialogue? There are certainly valuable objectives being achieved in the dialogue whichever of these three methods are used. The first is that students learn to listen to others, both the teacher and their fellow students. They also learn to take information and arguments from others and use them in their own expressions in the dialogue. They learn to interact rationally, using the reasons given to formulate their own views, to defend them or even to discard them. The dialogue seems to encourage students to develop their communication skills and they realise better that others can have views different from their own. It seems even to strengthen their metacognition, make them aware of how they learn and how they can use this knowledge to their own advantage. These are strong claims but supported by evidence or at least some of them are supported by evidence. Neil Mercer says about the evidence for the role of dialogue in developing learning and thinking in children: "Overall, then, evidence supports the view that focused, reasoned, sustained dialogue amongst peers not only helps children solve problems together, but can promote the learning and conceptual understanding of the individuals involved."[13] In a review article on the link between talk and indicators of high-level thinking Anna O. Soter et al. say:

> "…findings from the analysis of discourse support the view that productive discussions are structured and focused yet not dominated by the teacher. They suggest that productive discussions occur where students hold the floor for extended periods of time, where students are prompted to discuss texts through open-ended or authentic questions, and where discussion incorporates a high degree of uptake. They also suggest that a certain amount of modeling and scaffolding on the part of the teacher is necessary to prompt elaborated forms of individual reasoning from students."[14]

These results say that structured dialogue both between teachers and students and among students controlled by students for considerable stretches of time is productive. It is necessary that the teacher uses her knowledge to help her students along the way to prompt complex forms of reasoning in individual students. Taking part in structured discussions is likely to lead to better conceptual understanding of individuals.

It is important as a general rule to lay down some principles about dialogue before starting. The students are starting something that is new to them and it may be that they do not quite know what to expect and how to behave. If they can expect to be ridiculed, attacked, shouted at or anything of that sort dialogue is a non-starter. They will not take part and if they are forced into it they will not learn anything from it. So, they must be able to ask questions that they think of without fearing that such questions will have social consequences either in the dialogue or in school generally.

---

[13] Neil Mercer, „Talk and the Development of Reasoning and Understanding" *Human Development* 51 (2008): 91-100, doi: 10.1159/000113158

[14] Anna O. Soter, I. A. Wilkinson, K. Murphy, L. Rudge, K. Reninger, M. Edwards, „What the Discourse Tells Us: Talk and Indicators of High-Level Comprehension," *International Journal of Educational Research* 47 (2008): 389, doi: 10.1016/j.ijer.2009.01.001

We have not managed to complete our research yet. We will continue with it in the first week of December. We intend to interview four focus groups of students and two of teachers to review the process until now. It was never intended to carry out measurements of the performance of the students in the first two years with control groups to enable comparisons. But we carried out interviews with the teachers after the first year to see how they evaluated their students, see if they thought they saw any changes in their behaviour, in how they interacted and how they talked together and how they evaluated the project as such. We had also observed the teachers in their classrooms to see how they handled the dialogue, what their problems were.

We discovered that the teachers used the dialogue for a number of purposes. Some used it to conduct discussions on a specific topic relevant to the children, it could be something from the news or it could be something from the curriculum that they were expected to learn. Others used it to discuss problems in the class itself that had to be addressed. These problems could be noise level, serious incidents in class or in school. Some of the teachers had considerable experience in using dialogue in teaching, philosophy for children has been a part of the toolkit of some of these teachers for years now. These teachers have no problems in using dialogue, those who are not experienced are obviously not as skilled and experienced but all of them found this rewarding and believed these teaching methods are valuable and add something to what they already know and are skilled at. We asked the teachers to write down a plan for each of the dialogue classes and try to record one of them and analyse their own performance and how the children reacted to each other and to the teacher. Recording proved too much for some of them and writing down lesson plans was too time consuming for some of these teachers. Some of them said that they found that their students had changed, they had started interacting differently from before. They said that the students had learnt to reason with each other, expressing their views and expecting others to respond, not just listen politely. We did not ask them to observe for example if they started to use words indicating reasoning like if-then, because, why, how, disagree/agree. So we do not have any idea if such a change happened but it might be that the students themselves believe that such a change took place. But this would only be their own belief about themselves, not a measurement of what really happened.

We could ask if it was too much to ask of children and adolescents that they could argue for their opinions, give reasons for their beliefs. There is the well-known disagreement between John Locke and Rousseau about reasoning with children, Locke saying that children love being "…treated as rational creatures sooner than is imagined…There is no virtue they should be excited to, nor fault they should be kept from, which I do not think they may be convinced of…,"[15] Rousseau arguing specifically against Locke that "…I see nothing more stupid than these children who have been reasoned with so much….Use force with children, and reason with men. Such is the natural order."[16] What should we make of this? I think it can be reasonably said that we now know that force, especially physical force, should be avoided in our dealings with children. We can also state that we now know that children are capable of many more things than we ever dreamed about. This is based on discoveries in empirical research on children.

In the twentieth century it was fashionable to think of babies and children like Rousseau rather than Locke. The most famous child psychologist of that century, Jean Piaget, believed that children´s development could be divided into four stages, starting with the sensorimotor stage, from birth to two years, to the stage of formal operations that lasted from 11 years on. The first stage is characterised by the child learning that physical objects persist in time and it starts to control its own body. It was only at the stage of formal operations that children could start using their reason. But as Gareth B. Matthews has argued there are abundant examples demonstrating that children really are alert to all sorts of philosophical questions from very early on. He calls Piaget´s views and

[15] John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (Edited with and Introduction, Notes, and Critical Apparatus by John W. and Jean S. Yolton) (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1989) 142.
[16] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or on Education* (Introduction, Translation, and Notes by Alan Bloom) (Basic Books: New York, 1979) 89, 91.

others of the same kind a "deficit conception of childhood."[17] He has collected information on children´s conversations demonstrating that they are alert to deep philosophical truths from early on. They may not be able to discuss them and give reasons for their views in the same way as educated philosophers but they understand for example that knowledge involves truth and that there is something wrong with understanding happiness as pleasure that excludes desires for anything else. In pre-schools they develop limits to what they can do to others and what is their own.[18] Eva Johansson does not reject Piaget´s theory as a whole but has serious reservations about it.[19] But her explorations demonstrate that children´s behaviour is governed by their reasonable ideas and they should be treated as rational creatures.

There are other results from empirical research that spell out how capable children are from very early on. It is even stated that they have some of the foundations of morality from the time they are born. It is not just that they are innately hardwired for morality but they are capable of learning very fast from early on. Morality is about our relations to other people and to ourselves. It was often accepted as a fact in twentieth century research on children that they could not understand the views of others. But this is not true. "Literally from the time they´re born children are empathic. They identify with other people and recognize that their own feelings are shared by others. In fact, they literally take on the feelings of others."[20] Facial expressions reflect emotions. Newly born babies can imitate facial expressions and seem to connect the relevant emotions with them. One year olds understand desires and intentions and they understand the difference between intentional and unintentional actions, meaning that they have a fairly complex notion of the constituents of the human mind.[21] Empathy enables very young children to be altruistic and one can even find it in fourteen months old babies. "Two-year-olds can imagine what to do to give other people pleasure or to soothe their pain."[22]

Empirical science has actually shown that children have the capacities for empathy and imitation from very early on, they understand the pain of others and they have the urge to relieve it, they are capable of being altruistic. These are typically moral capabilities and moral behaviour. Children are moral beings from their first year in life and they should be treated as such, as moral and rational beings. They are not selfish beasts in human form that must be beaten out of their beastly habits. This obviously does not mean that children are mature human beings, they are not, they have not yet obtained the necessary experience to mature. It takes time to develop, they need time to learn, it is not until they are adolescents or in their twenties that we can say that are fully mature. This does not mean that they will stop developing at that time but they will have arrived at the point in their own development where they are able to decide what to do on their own terms so to speak, they will have discerned what is relevant in their situation to the decision they intend to take, they understand the principles involved, realise how their action might affect those around them and see how their feelings react to the context they find themselves in. They must also see if their judgement of their situation and their possible action is justified.

It is a fairly long way from feeling empathy for the face you see opposed to yours in your crib to a young human being fully equipped to reflect on and decide morally. In between come a lot of things. We know that experience in early childhood can influence our development in various ways, serious deprivation can warp our development and deeply influence how we turn out as mature adults. Children who suffer violence can become adults who are more likely to resort to violence. Children who have loving parents are more likely to become well rounded mature adults.

---

[17] Gareth B. Matthews, „Philosophy and Developmental Psychology: Outgrowing the Deficit Conception of Childhood" in Harvey Siegel (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 162-176.
[18] Eva Johansson, *Små barns etik* (Ethics of Small Children) (Stockholm: Liber, 2003) 61-65, 136-139.
[19] Johansson *Små barns* 162-167.
[20] Alison Gopnik, *The Philosophical Baby. What Children´s Minds Tell Us about Truth, Love & the Meaning of Life* (London: Bodley Head, 2009) 204.
[21] Gopnik, *Philosophical Baby* 204-206.
[22] Gopnik, *Philosophical Baby* 211.

But the path from youth to maturity is not in any way fully determined by our experience in youth or by our DNA. Environment has enormous effects on how we develop but it seems also to be true that we influence our environment that in turn affects us.[23]

One of the important things in our lives is the development of character and virtues. Character and virtues are stable dispositions that regulate our behaviour. Character is a neutral word that has no opposite but we usually talk about moral character because developing an immoral character is not a reasonable aim in life. The contradiction of virtue is vice. Character can turn into virtue or vice depending on what influences our development over time. So virtues are stable, desirable dispositions, vices are stable undesirable dispositions. But why are these notions important, what do they offer us in addition to the development we have talked about already?

The most important thing they offer us is a description of how we turn into moral human beings when we grow up. This is not a simple series of events in anyone´s life but something that happens over time, varies from one individual to another, from one time period to another, from one society to another. But in spite of that we can find common factors that tell us that the concepts of moral character and virtue really do manage to capture something in our development. Morality is a social institution reaching into the psychological. A rule like 'never lie' is social in the sense that it is an accepted practice in most, if not all, societies. But for it to be effective it must become a part of the psychological make-up of all individuals in those societies. The challenge in education and child-rearing is not to enforce the social rule but to make the rule a reason for the individuals to behave, to make it a part of their soul. Moral development is not completed if the individual behaves according to the social rule but only if she has accepted it, wants to follow it, has made it a part of how she wants to live her life. She knows she ought never to lie and she wants never to lie, she wants to be the kind of agent that never lies. When the virtues have become such a part of the agent´s life she flourishes.

There are various very complex issues that must be tackled if I wanted to flesh out a fully developed theory of character, virtue, flourishing and the good life.[24] But it is clear that possessing a virtue makes you good and it makes scant sense to attribute a virtue to an agent on the basis of one action instantiating a virtue. Virtue must be a stable disposition of character resulting regularly in virtuous actions. But virtues are not algorithms such that if you possess them they result in virtuous actions. We must choose the action in the light of how we evaluate our circumstances, how we see the morally relevant features of the situation. In order to do that we need practical wisdom or practical judgement, Aristotle´s phronesis. This practical wisdom works in tandem with the virtues enabling the agent to choose the right action for the right reason and from the right emotion. Reflection guided by practical wisdom is the key to developing into a fully virtuous agent.[25] The practical wisdom has two features relevant here. The first is that it comes "only with experience of life" and it involves recognising some features of a situation as more important than others.[26] I think it is right that experience of life is a key ingredient in developing into a mature agent and it must involve recognising the morally relevant features of every situation we find ourselves in. Experience, though, covers a lot of things.

It seems to me that the most important part of developing practical wisdom is being able to talk about one´s experience, confusions, decisions and problems. The best way to achieve thinking clearly is to manage to talk clearly. The best way to see clearly the morally salient features of each situation is to be able to talk about them with someone more experienced and wiser than oneself trying to learn from one´s own experience in reflecting on it and from reflecting on what can lie in store in one´s own life. This is an explanation of the importance of Socratic dialogue discussed earlier. There the emphasis was on talk or conversations for learning in general but in the context I

[23] Gopnik, *Philosophical Baby* 169-178.
[24] Kristján Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), see chapter 1, p. 1-43, for a good overview.
[25] Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character* p. 30.
[26] Rosalind Hursthouse, „Virtue Ethics" in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Stanford: The Metaphysics Research Lab, 2012).

have been discussing in the latter part of this essay the emphasis has been on moral character, moral development and the virtues. I take it to be generally accepted that moral dialogue is the method "most useful through the centuries"[27] to cultivate the virtues. There are indications from modern empirical research that it applies generally that dialogue is a useful method for learning, enabling educators to achieve multiple goals such as better learning in the subjects taught and in the moral development of children and adolescents.

[27] Kristjánsson, *Aristotelian Character* pp. 117, see ch. 6 117-128 for a discussion of the role of dialogue in Aristotelian theory.