cover: picasso, *las meninas* (1957)

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dossier "philosophy with children across boundaries"

to meet each other, to know and grow, and to have a good time: insights from swedish pupils with intellectual disabilities who participated in philosophical dialogues

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abstract

This research project aims to answer the following questions: (1) What experiences do pupils with intellectual disabilities (ID) report after participating in education based on philosophical dialogue? and (2) How do these experiences relate to the needs of pupils with ID? To address these questions, an interview study was conducted with 12 pupils, aged 13 to 15 years, with primarily mild ID, attending the Swedish Compulsory School for Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities. The pupils participated in a small-scale intervention program consisting of 12 sessions of philosophical dialogues over 6 weeks, guided by two experienced facilitators. Toward the end of the program, the children took part in semi-structured interviews to share their experiences of the philosophical dialogues. The responses to these interviews were analyzed in relation to identified needs of pupils with ID, specifically the need for cognitively stimulating activities, communication and social skills, and decision-making skills. Thematic analysis of the data revealed the following themes: To meet each other, to know and grow, and to have a good time.

The results indicate that philosophical dialogue holds promise in addressing the identified needs of pupils with ID. Notably, the role of humor in the children's experiences during the philosophical dialogues was of particular interest.

keywords: philosophical dialogue; intellectual disability; thematic analysis; pupils' perspectives.

conocerse, aprender, crecer, y pasar un buen rato: reflexiones de alumnos suecos con discapacidad intelectual que participaron en diálogos filosóficos.

resumen

Este proyecto de investigación tiene como objetivo responder a las siguientes preguntas: (1) ¿Qué experiencias relatan los alumnos con discapacidad intelectual (DI) tras participar en una educación basada en el diálogo filosófico? y (2) ¿Cómo se relacionan estas experiencias con las necesidades de los alumnos con DI? Para abordar estas preguntas, se llevó a cabo un estudio de entrevistas con 12 alumnos, de entre 13 y 15 años, con DI principalmente leve, que asistían a la Escuela Obligatoria Sueca para Alumnos con Discapacidad Intelectual. Los alumnos participaron en un programa de intervención a pequeña escala que consistía en 12 sesiones de diálogos filosóficos a lo largo de 6 semanas, guiadas por dos facilitadores experimentados. Hacia el final del programa, los niños participaron en entrevistas semiestructuradas para compartir sus experiencias con los diálogos filosóficos. Las respuestas a estas entrevistas se analizaron en relación con las necesidades identificadas de los alumnos con discapacidad intelectual, concretamente la necesidad de actividades estimulantes desde el punto de vista cognitivo, habilidades comunicativas y sociales, y habilidades para la toma de decisiones. El análisis temático de los datos reveló los siguientes temas: Para conocerse, aprender, crecer, y pasar un buen rato. Los resultados indican que el diálogo filosófico es prometedor a la hora de abordar las necesidades identificadas de los alumnos con discapacidad intelectual. En particular, resultó de especial interés el papel del humor en las experiencias de los niños durante los diálogos filosóficos.

palabras clave: diálogo filosófico; discapacidad intelectual; análisis temático; perspectivas de los alumnos.

encontrar-se, conhecer e crescer, e divertir-se: percepções de alunos suecos com deficiência intelectual que participaram de diálogos filosóficos

resumo

Este projeto de pesquisa tem como objetivo responder às seguintes perguntas: (1) quais experiências os alunos com deficiência intelectual (DI) relatam após participar de uma educação baseada no diálogo filosófico?; e (2) como essas experiências se relacionam com as necessidades dos alunos com DI? Para responder a essas questões, foi realizado um estudo de entrevistas com doze alunos, com idades entre 13 e 15 anos, com deficiência intelectual predominantemente leve, matriculados na Escola de Ensino Fundamental Sueca para Alunos com Deficiência Intelectual. Os alunos participaram de um programa de intervenção em pequena escala, composto por doze sessões de diálogos filosóficos ao longo de seis semanas, conduzidas por dois facilitadores experientes. Ao final do programa, as crianças participaram de entrevistas semiestruturadas para compartilhar suas experiências com os diálogos filosóficos. As respostas a essas entrevistas foram analisadas em relação às necessidades identificadas de alunos com DI, especificamente a necessidade de atividades cognitivamente estimulantes, de habilidades sociais e de comunicação, e de habilidades para a tomada de decisões. A análise temática dos dados revelou os seguintes temas: encontrar-se, conhecer e crescer e divertir-se. Os resultados

indicam que o diálogo filosófico apresenta potencial para atender às necessidades identificadas de alunos com DI. Destaca-se, de forma especial, o papel do humor nas experiências das crianças durante os diálogos filosóficos.

palavras-chave: diálogo filosófico; deficiência intelectual; análise temática; perspectivas dos alunos.

introduction

While numerous studies have demonstrated the positive effects of dialogical education on critical thinking, reasoning, and reading (e.g., Murphy et al., 2009; Trickey & Topping, 2004), there is limited research focused on pupils with intellectual disabilities (ID). Although some studies have been conducted (e.g., Cassidy et al., 2017a; Gardelli et al., 2023), children with ID often face communication, learning (intellectual), and social challenges, which can compromise their participation in the dialogical approach to education theorized by Matthew Lipman and his colleagues at Montclair University (see, e.g., Lipman et al., 1980). Dialogical education has been shown to benefit other groups in areas where pupils with ID typically struggle. For instance, in terms of cognition, pupils with ID, "have fewer possibilities and opportunities to engage in cognitively stimulating activities" (Lipman et al,. 1980, p. 2; Pucci et al., 2024) as they grow older. Additionally, communication and social skills are often delayed among pupils with ID (Walker & Snell, 2013). Given that there are indications that pupils at a disadvantage can derive greater benefits from philosophical dialogues (Cassidy et al., 2017a; Colom et al., 2014), it is worthwhile to examine the effects of philosophical dialogues on this particular group.

The overarching aim of this research is to explore how the needs of pupils with ID are addressed by education based on philosophical dialogue. One step toward achieving this aim involves answering the following research questions: (1) What experiences do pupils with ID report after participating in education based on philosophical dialogue? and (2) How do these experiences relate to some needs of pupils with ID?

background

education based on philosophical dialogues

The intervention program used in this study is based on Philosophy for Children (P4C), developed by Matthew Lipman and colleagues at Montclair University (Lipman et al., 1980). P4C is an international educational approach that implements dialogical inquiry. It is well-defined and has given rise to many variations of philosophical practice, collectively referred to as Philosophy with Children[1] (PwC). Although these practices vary, P4C and its variations share much in common and are sometimes called "P4wC." In short, the P4wC method is an educational approach characterized by facilitator-guided but pupil-driven dialogues, grounded in reasoning and democratic values. In this article, the terms "philosophical dialogues" or "dialogues" will most often be used to refer to the intervention program because these were the terms employed in communication with the study participants.

P4wC has been shown to have positive effects, including improvements in critical thinking (Murphy et al., 2009), reasoning (Murphy et al., 2009; Trickey & Topping, 2004; Yan et al., 2018), argumentation (Murphy et al., 2009), reading (Gorard et al., 2015; Trickey & Topping, 2004), mathematics (Gorard et al., 2015; Trickey & Topping, 2004), self-esteem (Gorard et al., 2015; Trickey & Topping, 2004), listening skills (Gorard et al., 2015), self-regulation (Cassidy et al., 2017b), cognitive abilities (Colom et al., 2014; Yan et al., 2018), and pro-social behavior (Colom et al., 2014). Research also indicates that the method is particularly effective for pupils with lower cognitive abilities (Colom et al., 2014) and that children with social, emotional, and behavioral needs can engage meaningfully with it (Cassidy et al., 2017a).

intellectual disability

ID is the largest group of disabilities globally (Arvio & Bjelogrlic-Laakso, 2021). In the 2022/2023 school year, 1.4% of all pupils attending school in Sweden were pupils with ID (Swedish National Agency of Education, 2023a). The World Health Organization (1993) defines intellectual disabilities in ICD-10 as an "impairment of skills […] which contribute to the overall level of intelligence, i.e.

[1] For a more comprehensive description, see, for example Vansieleghem & Kennedy (2011).

cognitive, language, motor and social abilities" (sections F70–79). In Sweden, pupils can apply to attend the Compulsory School for Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities[2] instead of a regular school. There are several ways to participate in this school form, ranging from remaining in a regular class while following the curriculum of the School for Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities to enrolling in a class composed solely of pupils with ID. To be accepted into this alternative school, children must undergo a comprehensive psycho-educational, medical, and social evaluation to determine the presence of ID and any overall learning impediments within a regular school setting. Although the evaluation is primarily based on the pupils' IQ-levels, their practical capabilities are also considered when determining the presence of ID. Furthermore, pupils are categorized into one of two groups based on the severity of their ID: those with more severe ID study subject areas (in Swedish *ämnesområden*) and those with mild ID study individual subjects (in Swedish *ämnen*). Most of the participants in this study present with mild ID (Swedish National Agency of Education, 2023b).

ID is characterized by significant variations in learning ability and skills. For example, Djordjevic et al. (2020) demonstrated this in relation to socialization, showing that individuals with moderate ID (IQ between 35–49) had significantly lower socialization scores than those with mild ID (IQ between 50–75).

some needs of pupils with intellectual disabilities

This section presents literature pertaining to both adults and children with ID. While there is substantial research on the needs of adults with ID (e.g., Lee et al., 2024; Mahoney et al., 2021), that concerning children with ID appears to be far less. Using findings related to adults with ID to identify the needs of children with ID can be considered reasonable for at least two reasons: (1) it is likely that some current needs of adults with ID are also relevant to pupils with ID, and (2) the current needs of adults with ID are likely to become future needs for pupils with

[2] It should be noted that in Sweden, attending school is mandatory by law for all children aged 6–16, regardless of disability. The term "compulsory" is used by the Swedish National Agency for Education to describe this in English. The school attended by most children is referred to as "compulsory school." The Compulsory School for Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities aims to adapt the compulsory school system to meet the needs of children with ID.

ID, necessitating preparation on their part. While this approach cannot encompass all the needs of pupils with ID, it is likely to identify some.

need for cognitively stimulating activities

Examples of cognitively stimulating activities within the context of philosophical dialogues include reasoning about novel ideas, evaluating arguments, recalling previous discussions, clarifying meaning, and engaging in conversations to understand others and express oneself. These activities have been shown to yield positive outcomes (see "Education Based on Philosophical Dialogues" for further details), although not specifically for pupils with ID. Furthermore, Colom et al. (2014) argue that pupils with lower cognitive abilities (measured through verbal ability, numerical ability, spatial relations, and abstract reasoning) have a high probability of failing in school, and that improving their cognitive ability can partially remedy this issue.

There are two indicators of an unmet need for cognitively stimulating activities among pupils with ID. First, philosophical dialogues have been shown to be particularly effective for pupils with lower cognitive abilities (Colom et al., 2014). This effectiveness could be because these pupils have fewer opportunities to engage in such activities. While it is unclear whether any of the pupils in Colom et al.'s study were pupils with ID, it can be assumed that if some disadvantaged pupils have unmet needs for cognitively stimulating activities, pupils with ID are at risk of this as well. Second, it is reasonable to assume that pupils with ID face a greater risk of not being provided with opportunities for cognitively stimulating activities, since they can have a lower capacity in certain important aspects, such as working memory (Danielsson et al., 2015).

The possibility that pupils with ID have an unmet need for cognitively stimulating activities is a compelling argument for addressing this issue. This urgency is heightened when considering the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which states that "States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child." (Article 6). Although there may be practical obstacles related to time and financial costs, the phrase "to the maximum extent possible" (Article 6) carries significant weight. This implies that if there is reason to believe that a child's development could be improved, for example, through cognitively stimulating activities, there is a mandate to pursue

this. In the context of education, this means that all children, including those with ID, should be provided with ample opportunities to engage in appropriately challenging activities.

One example of a positive outcome achievable through cognitively stimulating activities is the development of intellectual virtues, as described by Ohlsson and Sigge (2013). These virtues are defined as "desirable attitudes" (p. 50) and are likened to Aristotelian moral virtues. Examples include logical rigor, creativity, impartiality, and intellectual honesty. A central aspect of these virtues is that individuals must practice them to cultivate them, which requires cognitive engagement through both embodying the virtues and reflecting on the process. While it has not been established that these specific virtues are essential for leading a moral life, they align well with the general goals of education. For instance, the curriculum for the Swedish Compulsory School for Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities states that "[a] sense of discovery, curiosity and the desire to learn shall form the basis of the school's activities" (p. 12) and that pupils should be able to "use critical thinking and independently formulate opinions based on knowledge and ethical considerations" (p. 13). These are skills that need to be practiced to achieve proficiency, and engaging in cognitively stimulating activities is one way to do so.

need for communication and social skills

Previous research indicates that communication and social skills are often intertwined, and a lack of these skills among individuals with ID may lead to a decline in relationships, educational achievement, and vocational success (Walker & Snell, 2013). One reason for this could be that individuals with ID often resort to challenging behaviors, which can be seen as a rudimentary form of communication, due to their sometimes limited ability to engage in more advanced communication methods (Walker & Snell, 2013). It is reasonable to assume that a decline in relationships, educational achievement, and vocational success may lead to lower community participation. Williams et al. (2021) demonstrated that reduced community participation among children with ID is linked to a lower quality of life. The authors found that primarily poor eye contact and dependence on others for managing personal needs correlated negatively with quality of life, although

communication and mobility impairments also had some influence. To enhance the quality of life for children with ID, Williams et al. (2021) recommend "[p]articipation interventions that are tailored appropriately for a child's interests and level of disability [that] might include sport-, recreation-, or arts-based activities and would also include opportunities for the child's choice, control, and personal engagement" (p. 93). While these recommendations call for society to meet children where they are, there is also an implicit need for children with ID to develop better communication and social skills to connect more easily with these activities and likely achieve a higher quality of life.

need for decision-making skills

That children need access to education, which shall promote democratic principles such as tolerance and human rights, is evident in policy documents such as the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1946) and the Swedish Curriculum for the Schools of Pupils with ID (2024). Despite this, goals related to democratic and active citizenship were rated as having the lowest importance among all options by Swedish teachers for pupils with ID (Göransson & Klang, 2021). Further reports indicate a lack of societal participation among individuals with ID; they often struggle to find employment (Swedish National Agency of Education, 2023c), and their participation in elections is low (Statistics Sweden, 2015). It is reasonable to conclude that one requirement for changing this trend is to provide individuals with ID the opportunity to develop their decision-making skills.

Regarding decision-making for individuals with ID, a distinction can be made between *substituted* and *supported* decision-making. In short, substituted decision-making occurs when a person with a disability is replaced as the authority over their own life decisions; these decisions are made by someone else. By contrast, supported decision-making does not inherently replace the individual with a disability. Instead, the individual is supported by one or more people who have no more than equal say in legal matters (Gudelyté et al., 2024). Gudelyté et al. (2024) view supported decision-making as a key concept in realizing Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006), which states that "States Parties shall take appropriate measures to provide access

by persons with disabilities to the support they may require in exercising their legal capacity." Given the advantages of enabling individuals with ID to exercise their legal capacity, it is essential that they be afforded this opportunity.

A reasonable step toward enabling individuals with ID to engage in supported decision-making, thereby working toward fulfilling the Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, is to provide them with opportunities to practice decision-making, collaboration, and related skills.

method

participants

The participants were pupils at a compulsory school for pupils with ID in a city in northern Sweden. They all belonged to the same pre-existing group, their regular class. A total of 12 pupils were recruited, consisting of 6 girls and 6 boys, all aged between 13 and 15 years.

intervention

The intervention program comprised 12 philosophical sessions conducted over 6 weeks. Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes and followed the philosophical inquiry procedure outlined by Trickey and Topping (2004, p. 369). The steps of the philosophical inquiry are as follows:

1. Getting started—reviewing, modifying, and agreeing on the rules of the discussion
2. Sharing a stimulus to prompt inquiry
3. Pausing for thought
4. Questioning—the pupils think of interesting and contestable questions
5. Connections—making links between the questions
6. Choosing a question to begin an inquiry
7. Philosophical examination of the chosen question under the guidance of a facilitator
8. Recording the discussion–by graphic mapping
9. Meta discussion–reflecting on the process itself and discussing adherence to the discussion rules

During this intervention, two facilitators were present: a formal facilitator and a participating (informal) facilitator. This dual-facilitator method, as described by Strömberg and Gardelli (2012), involves the formal facilitator acting as the chairperson, leading the proceedings, suggesting different avenues for exploration, and asking for clarifications when necessary. The formal facilitator does not propose answers to questions. By contrast, the participating facilitator serves as a role model for the other participants, is allowed to express opinions, and can offer suggestions. This facilitator is expected to make key contributions when the group encounters difficulties. The two facilitators alternated roles as formal and participating facilitators.

Herein, the nature of the dialogues will be described in more detail. Most sessions began with the pupils being invited to review, suggest, and modify the discussion rules. The facilitators refrained from suggesting rules but might remind the group of previous events to encourage them to find solutions. They also checked with the group on how they wanted the rules to be formulated, as the group's sense of ownership over the rules is vital.

Sharing a stimulus primarily involved a short written story (0.5–1 page long), with a new story presented most weeks. One of the facilitators would read the stories aloud. These stories often featured open-ended narratives with unresolved tension. For example, one story concluded with two friends disagreeing about the existence of ghosts. Most stories were written by the facilitators and tailored to meet the group's needs in developing reasoning skills, as well as aligned with the group's preferences regarding content; for example, participants wanted the stories to be humorous and involve animals or famous figures. After reading the story–sometimes twice–participants were given up to two minutes to formulate contestable questions. These questions could relate directly to the story or address other topics; for example, one participant wanted to discuss how to tell if a cat likes you after hearing the previously mentioned ghost story. The questions were then written on a large sheet of paper and presenting questions was strictly voluntary. Clarifications were provided for the questions, and relevant connections between them were highlighted. Ultimately, a question was selected for discussion through blind voting.

The main part of the session focused on examining the chosen question. Participants took turns contributing suggestions, reasoning, and questions, all under the guidance of the formal facilitator.

At the end of the session, about five minutes were dedicated to a meta-discussion, allowing participants to reflect on the session's proceedings and suggest changes for future sessions. This typically took the form of reformulating discussion rules. Changes were implemented if the majority of participants agreed.

ethical considerations

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Swedish Ethical Review Authority (Dnr: 2023-03805-01) before the intervention began. All pupils, along with their guardians and staff, were informed about the project and signed consent forms. Data was managed in accordance with the data management plan (Dnr: LTU-3993-2024) and research data classification (Dnr: LTU-4398-2024) established during the project's initial phase.

Ethical considerations were continually taken into account during the intervention, requiring various decisions regarding the well-being of the pupils. This was mainly expressed through listening to their wishes when they requested adjustments to the inquiries to better suit their needs. For example, as discussed earlier, changes were made to the content and style of the stories, and a discussion rule was established stipulating that facilitators should not question pupils about their opinions expressed through thumb positions—thumbs up, down, or at an angle. Taking the pupils' wishes seriously aligned with the spirit of the previously stated educational method, which emphasizes being pupil-driven and democratic.

Regarding data collection, another ethical consideration was how to support pupils who might struggle to communicate during interviews. The main concern was ensuring that the voices of these pupils were heard as well. This was addressed in several ways, allowing all pupils to express themselves in a format with which they felt comfortable, either through oral or written interviews, with the necessary support during the process.

data collection

Data collection was performed through ten semi-structured oral interviews and two written interviews, all completed within one week of the last philosophical

dialogue session. In one of the oral interviews, a pupil was unwilling to speak but agreed to be interviewed. This led the interviewer to describe and interpret the pupil's body language responses, such as nodding and shaking their head. The two shorter written interviews took the form of open-ended questionnaires, as the pupils were often uncomfortable talking, a trend that persisted throughout the intervention. One pupil wrote her answers independently, while the other received support from one of the researchers. This assistance involved having the questions read aloud, and when the pupil struggled to produce an answer, she was offered possible responses from which she could select. While there are concerns about the validity of the answers selected rather than produced independently, it would have been ethically challenging not to provide assistance in that moment, and discarding her responses would also have presented ethical dilemmas. The solution was to weigh her answers cautiously during the analysis while ensuring her voice was still represented. A similar approach was applied to the interview with the pupil who was unwilling to speak, as mentioned earlier in this paragraph.

The oral interviews were conducted by two researchers, lasting between 12 and 40 minutes. In one instance, a researcher joined an ongoing interview, remaining mostly silent, as the situation organically unfolded. This approach was determined not to cause additional discomfort for the pupil being interviewed. Both researchers possessed a strong understanding of philosophical dialogues and had attended most of the sessions, which enabled them to make informed judgment calls regarding important topics to address and to connect with the pupils through shared experiences, as recommended by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009). It was beneficial that one researcher had interacted with the pupils before the interviews, because some required special considerations for effective communication; for example, one pupil needed ample uninterrupted time to reflect before responding. The interviewers were also mindful of and adhered to several other qualities that Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) state an interviewer should possess, including kindness, sensitivity, openness, critical thinking, and interpretative skills.

The oral interview questions comprised both open-ended and direct yes/no questions. Examples of open-ended questions are as follows: (1) "What did you think of the philosophical dialogues?" (3) "What did you like least about the dialogues?" (18) "How did it feel when you participated in the philosophical

dialogues?" and (28) "If you were to tell someone about why one should participate in philosophical dialogues, what would you say then?" Examples of yes/no questions are (9) "Do you get to decide things as much during the philosophical dialogues as during other classes?" (11) "Do you feel that others listen to you during the philosophical dialogues?" and (22) "Do you feel that you have learned anything important during the philosophical dialogues?" All questions were, when relevant, followed up with probing questions. Some questions, such as question 28, were leading in nature; these were approached with care and were asked later in the interview after the interviewees had already expressed opinions on many related topics.

In accordance with Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the interview questions were less directed at the beginning and became more focused later on. This progression was also reflected in the follow-up questions formulated during the interviews. The more demanding questions were strategically placed in the middle of the interview, when the pupils were likely to be warmed up but still had energy.

The questionnaire was a condensed version of the oral interview. Some of the questions were "What did you like most about the philosophical dialogues?" "What did you like least about the philosophical dialogues?" and "If you were to write to someone about what a philosophical dialogue is, what would you write then?"

The oral interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed by one of the interviewers. Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) note that having the researcher transcribe the interviews can initiate the analysis process at an earlier stage. Furthermore, this approach reduces the risk of losing meaning during transcription and interpretation. The transcription closely followed the spoken word, although only a few strategies were used to indicate idiosyncrasies in speech, as it was not deemed necessary for this study. The word count after transcription ranged from approximately 1,200 to 5,900 for the oral interviews. Each of the two short written interviews comprised approximately 110 words, including questions.

The language used in the interviews was Swedish. Translation of themes and pupil quotes was conducted as late as possible in the theme construction process. This timing was chosen because the transcriptions retained many grammatical errors and individual speech patterns that are difficult to translate into English. By

substituting their Swedish words with English later in the process, the themes could remain closely tied to the pupils' voices. Some cleanup of the language was performed to avoid confusion, such as correcting grammatical errors and simplifying individual speech patterns in Swedish that lacked clear translations. However, the leading principle was to preserve the essence of the spoken (or, in some cases, written) word and the pupils' voices. Pauses were indicated with unbracketed ellipses, and clarifying comments were added in brackets. Bracketed ellipses can be seen in this text, and in those cases it is made to indicate omitted parts of quotes.

data processing

When analyzing the interview material, a thematic analysis approach was employed, largely following the outline provided by Bryman (2008). In this process, data of interest was entered into a spreadsheet, with statements linked to the interviewee and question number, and subsequently connected to various subthemes and themes. One key difference between Bryman's method and the approach used in this study is that Bryman recommends retaining the language of the interviewees while removing actual quotes to streamline the message. In this study, however, the actual quotes were retained throughout the process. Summaries and refinements of quotes were conducted at the level of themes and subthemes, ensuring the original quotes remained intact. Furthermore, the names of the interviewees were retained in the analysis for an extended period. These decisions—retaining quotes and names—were made to facilitate the rechecking of themes and summaries, ensuring they accurately reflected the interviewees' perspectives.

The first step in processing the interview material involved removing statements that were superfluous to the pupils' experiences of philosophical dialogues. Next, passages were divided into meaningful units, ranging from short sentences to several exchanges between the interviewer and the pupil. Once these units were collected, the compilation was checked for errors, such as passages being copied into the wrong sections of the spreadsheet. Following this, a more detailed analysis was conducted to identify subthemes. This phase was inductive in nature, focusing on listening to the pupils rather than categorizing their statements into

predetermined categories. This approach is considered both empirically and ethically sound, as it reduces the risk of predetermined categories overshadowing the voices of the pupils.

After three major iterations of content-guided interpretation and aggregation, a significant number of subthemes emerged. As Bryman (2008) points out, having a large number of subthemes is not inherently problematic; however, it is essential to analyze what these codes have in common so that they can be combined into higher-order and more abstract codes (p. 552). Some subthemes were further refined into more specific categories (for example, "Listening" was divided into "Listen to others," "Being listened to," and "Listening to each other") or merged with others (for example, "Concentration" and "Learning to focus" were combined into "Concentration"). Although this was the final major revision of the subthemes, the process of adjusting them continued throughout the writing of this article. The formation of major themes primarily occurred after this stage.

result

Three major themes were identified in the interview material: *To meet each other*, *To know and grow*, and *To have a good time*. Each major theme contained subthemes (see Table 1).

Table 1. Thematic overview resulting from the data processing.

Themes	**To meet each other**			**To know and grow**		**To have a good time**		
Subthemes	Relationships	Safety	Collaboration	Learning	Self-confidence	Fun	Boredom	Humor

Source: Author

The theme of *To meet each other* is characterized by the social aspects of the pupils' experiences during the philosophical dialogues. The theme of *To know and to grow* reflects the pupils' accounts of being and becoming capable within the context of these dialogues. The theme of *To have a good time* highlights the pupils' descriptions and calls for activities that are worthwhile in and of themselves, illustrating how philosophical dialogues have been and could be such an activity.

As may be noted, there are some potential overlaps between the themes and subthemes, which are discussed further in the analysis.

The pupils are coded as P1–12, the interviewers as I1 and I2, and one facilitator as F1. I2 also served as a facilitator, but since this individual primarily appears in an interviewing role in this material, I2 is used consistently throughout. I2 is also the analyst and author of this article.

Each subtheme section begins with a description of the subtheme, accompanied by brief examples. Following that, the subtheme is explored in more detail.

to meet each other

The major theme of *To meet each other* is formed from the subthemes *Relationships*, *Safety*, and *Collaboration*. The pupils describe the philosophical dialogues as meetings that are largely communicatively reciprocal, allowing them to connect in often intense yet calm ways with each other and the present adults to solve problems. The term "meeting" is borrowed from one pupil, P9, who used it to describe the dialogues, and it can also be indirectly inferred from the accounts of the other pupils. The word carries both the connotation of a board meeting and a gathering of friends, with both meanings evident in how the pupils discuss the philosophical dialogues.

relationships

In the subtheme of *Relationships*, it is evident that the pupils appreciate getting to know the facilitators and view their teachers and other staff as helpful and safety-creating, although they did not specify what safety meant to them. Their relationships with their classmates remain unchanged but positive in relation to the philosophical dialogues.

Regarding their relationship with the facilitators, the pupils seemed to value the opportunity to be with and get to know them. One pupil expressed appreciation for being with the facilitators:

> I2: How did it feel when you participated in the dialogues?
>
> P1: Good. And we get to be with you and, let me see, we get to talk to other classmates and talk.

Another pupil, P8, connects increased life satisfaction with getting to know the facilitators. P12 thought it was more fun when one of the facilitators was

present and less enjoyable when he was absent. The pupils appreciated when the facilitators inserted themselves into the texts as characters.

The pupils' relationships with their teachers and other staff during the dialogues create a sense of safety and support. Two pupils, P3 and P6, noted that they feel safer when an adult is beside them during the dialogues. P8 remarked that teachers can help one understand: "You can get help from a teacher in some way so that you too understand," and P9 expressed a similar sentiment.

The pupils' relationships with their classmates regarding the philosophical dialogues seem to remain largely unchanged but positive. P12 mentioned her four regular friends in class, stating, "They are the only ones that I hang out with in the whole of class" during breaks and dialogues. "Yeah. I mean I feel most safe with them." One female pupil, P6, finds it easier to interact with other girls, while P4, P5, and P8 expressed that they interact with their classmates in the same way during breaks as they do during dialogues.

P8 shared that he and his friends "have fun and talk a lot." P9 appreciates his classmates: "Yeah, I mean I like it, being with classmates." The classmates are often described as a source of support. For example, P6 said, "I've gotten help. […] From my friends," and P9 noted, "Yeah, they can [help], sure." One pupil finds it interesting to learn about his classmates' opinions and thoughts, with P1 stating, "I get to see what my classmates' opinions are and what they think. […] Get to know them maybe a bit better."

safety

Through the subtheme of *Safety*, the pupils mostly reported feeling appreciated and cared for. They noted that the format of the discussions, which allowed them to contribute with the help of adults, made them feel safe. One pupil mentioned feeling unsafe in one instance, unsure whether others were laughing with or at her when she asked a question. Another pupil reported feelings of nervousness. Overall, the working environment during the philosophical dialogues was described as calm and focused, characterized by a lot of talking and listening. Additionally, there were reports of receiving various kinds of help during the dialogues.

P2 recounted a time when she felt not appreciated: "Once, when everybody started laughing I was like, 'Are they laughing at me or not?' When I was like asking a question, and then I didn't want to ask anything more." In other cases of negative feelings, there were mitigating factors. P3 expressed ambivalence toward the philosophical dialogues; while he wanted a break, he also found the dialogues fun. He mentioned that attending the dialogues could make him feel nervous, but the presence of an adult made him feel safe: "I mean, you have a grownup next to you, that's like […] Then you know that you feel really… safe." Furthermore, P6 found it relieving to participate by speaking privately to the adult sitting next to her.

P12 stated that she feels safest when she is with her regular friends. When asked if they felt that others care about and appreciate them, most pupils responded affirmatively.

Regarding the working environment, the pupils characterized the dialogues as calm. P4's general impression was that the philosophical dialogues fostered a calm atmosphere, enabling the pupils to listen to one another: "I think they were quite calm. […] That it wasn't like much babbling […] You listened to each other." P9 shared a similar sentiment:

> P9: Well, eh, it worked well, because […] it doesn't become like babbling […] And it doesn't become much shouting. It's like we just talk and cooperate and solve these mysteries. In the dialogues.
>
> I1: Yes. Without it becoming loud or babbling, you mean. […] Why is that?
>
> […]
>
> P9: It helps us to focus better and, well, to learn better.

Many participants reported receiving help from others during the dialogues. When asked for specifics, the sources of assistance varied: sometimes from teachers and staff, sometimes from classmates, and sometimes from facilitators. The types of help included making oneself understood, receiving assistance in speaking, being listened to, obtaining suggestions for questions to ask, and collaborating to solve problems.

collaboration

In the subtheme of *Collaboration*, the pupils reported on cooperation and coming together through communication. They cooperated by contributing to

activities, such as generating philosophical questions, and through more intricate interactions where they listened and engaged in conversation. One pupil, P9, described the dialogues as a kind of meeting where participants listen, converse, and solve problems. Recurring mentions of reciprocal listening were noted. Additionally, drawing again on P2's statement about feeling unheard, she recounted an experience where she felt ridiculed and noted that at times other pupils spoke too much, leaving her little opportunity to contribute.

Cooperation is described in two different ways. One approach involves several pupils contributing to an activity, as illustrated by P12, who stated, "Everyone takes turns to say if they have a question or not." The other approach emphasizes more intricate interactions, exemplified by P8: "Talking much. […] With each other. […] And then listening to each other." P9 expressed a similar sentiment: "So, philosophical dialogues are when, it is like a meeting. […] We talk about, cooperate, solve different mysteries […] Talking, and listening to each other. And, yeah. Solve these things we talk about." Several pupils indicated that they enjoyed cooperating during the dialogues. P7 noted that what she liked most was "that we cooperated." P9 shared that he enjoys to "talk about things, and to solve and to cooperate, and to succeed."

P12 presents an interesting case of cooperation, as she enjoys suggesting topics for discussion and then listening while others speak. This approach seems to help her feel included in the conversation, even during moments when she is not speaking.

> I2: Is there something more you think you're good at [when participating in the philosophical dialogues]?
>
> P12: That would be, like, to listen sometimes. […] To come up with suggestions, maybe. […] Yes. Or something else we can talk about. […] Then […] even if I don't want to participate I participate anyway. Then I am not just sitting quietly.

There is also a presence of reciprocal listening in the pupil responses. P4 states, "You listened to each other." P8 notes that one way of cooperating during the dialogues is to "listen to each other." P6 adds, "Mm, they listen to me and I listen to them." P7, when asked if she has enjoyed the dialogues and why, responds, "Yes, good […] Listening to each other."

Some pupils indicated that they felt listened to, but noted it was only sometimes, or that they had negative experiences as well. Once again drawing on

P2 who recounts, “Once, when everybody started laughing I was like ’Are they laughing at me or not?’. When I was like asking a question, and then I didn’t want to ask anything more.” P2 also experienced that one of her classmates dominated the dialogues, making it difficult for her to speak. She identified ways to handle this, such as raising her hand or looking at the facilitators, but felt these strategies were insufficient.

to know and grow

The major theme of *To know and grow* is derived from the subthemes of *Learning* and *Self-confidence*. It is characterized by the pupils’ accounts of becoming capable in the context of philosophical dialogues. Through this theme, the pupils convey that philosophical dialogues can provide an environment conducive to learning to talk and listen, understanding others, and gaining knowledge in general. Participating in these dialogues can also be an opportunity to contribute and exert influence. Although the school setting did not allow for completely voluntary participation, the dialogues themselves were described as providing pupil-directed freedom and influence, as well as an opportunity to prepare for the future. The need for memory support beyond writing is mentioned, along with a desire for longer breaks during extended sessions.

learning

In the subtheme of *Learning*, the pupils reported on their experiences in learning situations. A recurring topic was problem-solving. One pupil, P1, made several comments about learning to understand other people better. In addition, several pupils noted that they were improving their communication skills, specifically how to talk and listen more effectively. P2 mentioned that she had become better at speaking and expressed surprise at her progress. Some pupils shared their experiences of learning during philosophical dialogues, describing it as enjoyable, though they also acknowledged that learning can be difficult. They identified several obstacles, including memory issues, a noisy environment, and the duration of sessions. Two pupils noted that writing information on the whiteboard could help with memory retention, although one pupil indicated that he found this less helpful due to reading difficulties. The contrast between the loud environment

and the calmness of the philosophical dialogues was highlighted, with several pupils stating that the calm atmosphere facilitated their learning. They suggested that longer breaks could help address the challenges posed by the length of the dialogues.

The theme of learning to solve and figure things out emerged frequently. For example, P9 stated, "Well, I mean, I have learned to solve things." When asked what reasons P8 could provide for attending philosophical dialogues, he replied, "One can learn a lot during the dialogues. […] Figuring things out, from the text or from some sentence."

Several pupils also reported learning about social skills and their classmates. P1 mentioned multiple times that he had gained insights into his peers. P2 echoed this sentiment, stating:

> I1: Do you think you have become better at speaking?
>
> P2: Yes. As I didn't know [I could].

P8 expressed a similar sentiment, saying, "Started talking more and more, during the dialogues." P9 added that he has become: "Better at talking, listening, cooperating."

Regarding less specific learning, P4 stated that he had become better at "coming up with things I would say." When asked why someone should attend philosophical dialogues, P4 responded, "To understand more maybe." Some pupils explicitly mentioned their appreciation for learning new things during the dialogues. For example, P10 expressed that he values school a bit more "because we've gotten to know new things," while P11 noted that attending the dialogues can be beneficial because "you get to know something new." P3 highlighted that learning requires effort: "I work well. […] It is very hard."

The pupils discussed several central learning obstacles, specifically memory, a noisy environment, and lengthy sessions, and how these challenges were addressed during the dialogues. Both P10 and P9 remarked that having the questions or rules written down can aid in remembering them; however, P10 also indicated that this was not enough, possibly because of reading difficulties. Regarding the noisy environment, P9 mentioned that it was easier to focus during the dialogues: "It doesn't become much shouting. It's like we just talk and cooperate and solve these mysteries. In the dialogues. […] It helps us to focus better

and, well, to learn better." Two pupils commented on the length of the sessions, but they had different perspectives. P2 shared that she had learned patience during the dialogues because "the dialogues are long," while P12 suggested that more and longer breaks were needed since the dialogues "have been so long […], you don't have the energy to listen."

self-confidence

In the subtheme of *Self-confidence*, the pupils reported various experiences that likely affect their confidence, such as their contributions to philosophical dialogues, encounters with difficulties, experiences of influence, and the development of future competence. They mentioned several ways they felt they contributed, including listening, expressing thoughts, and suggesting topics for discussion. However, some pupils expressed discomfort or nervousness about aspects like writing questions and speaking in front of the entire group. This discomfort could often be alleviated by talking to an adult nearby instead. P3 noted that he felt he did not learn anything if something was difficult. The pupils also reported ways they believed they influenced the proceedings, such as through voting, deciding that the texts should be humorous, establishing discussion rules, and having the liberty to deviate from the main topic during dialogues. P9 stated that he could be successful in philosophical dialogues with his classmates and connected these dialogues to learning and future competence, including the ability to take responsibility and be independent.

The pupils identified several ways they felt they contributed to the dialogues. The primary methods included listening, expressing thoughts, and suggesting discussion topics. P1 mentioned he liked to contribute by "[l]istening and checking what opinions and thoughts the others have," while P8 noted he is good at listening and that it feels "good, to let others finish talking." P10 stated he collaborates with others by "talking with others" and P1 added that "it feels good, to say what I think and feel." P6 specified that she effectively expresses her opinions by showing her thumb at an angle, a communication technique commonly used in dialogues to indicate agreement with a statement. P3 remarked that he excels at sharing important points and that it feels "great" to do so. Regarding contributions through suggestions for discussion, P1 expressed satisfaction when

one of his questions was chosen, P8 felt appreciated when he offered suggestions, and P2 mentioned she is good at "like, asking questions." P12 stated she is good at posing philosophical questions and generating discussion suggestions.

Some difficulties made the pupils feel unsure or nervous. For example, P10 disliked writing questions. Both P2 and P6 found it helpful that they did not have to speak in front of the entire group; instead, they could write notes or talk to an adult seated next to them. P3 stated, "It is hard at times [and then] I learn nothing," indicating that there are moments during the dialogues when he feels uncertain.

The pupils shared some ways they felt they had influence in the dialogues. Several pupils mentioned voting on questions. P12 noted that they had some say in the types of texts the facilitators created. P2 explained that she could raise her hand to vote on which question to discuss, but sometimes lacked the energy to close her eyes for a blind vote. P4 mentioned that he had a say in determining the discussion rules.

P9 emphasized that decisions are made collectively, stating, "It isn't just me that decides. [...] We all decide. [...] What I know is that we all got to decide together."

P9 linked the dialogues to learning and future competence, saying, "I mean they [the dialogues] can help us to learn something about […] that we can like use." Later in the interview, he reflected on whether the dialogues addressed topics he found important:

> P9: The important things I've learnt about myself and, about me and my life. […] Like learning what to do, when I get older. […] Mm. And learn to be on my own. […] Mm. And yes, to take responsibility.
>
> I1: Right. Do you think that you have learnt this during the dialogues?
>
> P9: Yes.

P9 also encouraged others to participate in philosophical dialogues, reasoning, "I mean dialogues like these, they are so that we can learn what we should do when we get older. […] Mm. Learn to take care of ourselves, to like take responsibility." He expressed a sense of success through the dialogues with his classmates: "Yes, I like it, to be with like my classmates. […] Talking about things, and to solve and cooperate, and succeed."

to have a good time

The major theme of *To have a good time* is derived from the subthemes *Fun*, *Boredom*, and *Humor*. It is characterized by the pupils' descriptions of and calls for activities that are worthwhile in and of themselves, highlighting how philosophical dialogues have been and could be such an activity. Through this theme, the pupils convey that having engaging experiences is important to them. While the importance and enjoyment of learning are evident in the interview material, the emphasis in this theme is on the pupils' desire to, in short, have a good time.

fun

The subtheme of *Fun* encompasses the recurring reports of pupils finding the philosophical dialogues enjoyable. At times, this sentiment was expressed briefly, while at other times, it was accompanied by explanations, such as the texts being enjoyable, the fun of learning about others, or the excitement of generating many ideas.

Some pupils expressed their enjoyment simply; for example, P11 stated, "liked the dialogues because I thought it was fun and exciting," and P8 remarked, "The dialogues are fun."

Explanations for their enjoyment included P1, who said, "It was fun to be with the classmates and see what they say and think," indicating that discovering others' opinions was something he valued. He reiterated this idea later in the interview. P4 and P6 also found the texts enjoyable. P10 noted that engaging in discussion and voting was pleasurable, and P8 enjoyed when they collectively "came up with a lot of things" during the dialogues.

boredom

The subtheme of *Boredom* reflects the pupils' recurring expressions of dissatisfaction when the dialogues became tedious. Although the causes of boredom were not always expressed, they identified factors such as prolonged silence, uninteresting texts, and unnecessary repetition of information. It appears that, in general, the pupils do not find the dialogues boring, but there are instances when they do.

To the question, "What did you think about the philosophical dialogues?" P3 responded, "Honestly? […] I just wanted a break." However, he later mentioned that he found the dialogues to be fun. P12 expressed that she liked the dialogues but that "there were some that were more fun and some boring," and they were boring because of a boring text or silence: "I mean, for example, if you take some boring text and everybody sits down and have a boring time and you don't say anything"; this emphasizes that silence can be particularly tedious. P8 referred to one text, describing it as something he disliked about the dialogues because it was "not as exciting" as others.

P1 felt that waiting through a long pause could be boring, especially after having already written down questions. Two other pupils also mentioned that the dialogues could be boring at times. P4 said, "Not that often, but sometimes [we talk about boring things]," and P7 wrote, "Sometimes boring."

P12 found it particularly negative when an uninteresting text was read aloud twice, as well as when the discussion rules were reiterated in most sessions: "It is quite troublesome and irritating to hear it every time. […] It is the same thing all the time. We seldom change anything. […] It takes time."

humor

The subtheme of *Humor* encompasses the experiences of and calls for more humor during the philosophical dialogues. It is clear that humor is a highly appreciated component of these dialogues. Instances mentioned include facilitators inserting themselves into the texts, the overall humor of the texts, and moments when facilitators and participants joke together during sidetracked discussions, leading to collective laughter. The texts are referenced multiple times to illustrate both humorous and unhumorous dialogues.

P2 found it humorous when the facilitators inserted themselves into their narratives, a sentiment echoed by P12: "Some funny texts that are about you guys […] It is funny." P12 also highlighted the importance of humor in other aspects of the dialogue, such as when the facilitator joked: "And that you [I2] do something, that you talk about something funny," or when the group engaged in lighthearted banter:

> P12: That we have a moment to talk about fun stuff […] That we leave the conversation and talk about something fun.

I2: And make jokes and stuff like that.

P12: Yes […] Makes it fun.

Later in the interview, P12 mentioned that having the group engaged in joking together is enjoyable: "We got to say some jokes, like, to each other, for example, this is just an example, if P1 say a joke then someone else also got to say. […] So it's like everybody gets to say. […] Then it gets more fun." Similarly, P1 stated that joking was one of the more enjoyable aspects of the dialogues: "[The most fun] was probably a time when we were joking about something, or something like that." P2 echoed this sentiment, saying it was more fun "when everyone started laughing."

As several quotes have already illustrated, the texts were frequently cited as focal points for the enjoyment of the dialogues. When asked what he liked most about the dialogues, P4 said, "Um… the stories." When posed the same question, P9 referred to a specific text: "About I2 and his sport." He was not only referencing the text but also the entire discussion surrounding it, which served as the central theme of the dialogue. For P12, the texts recurred in her explanation of what she liked and disliked about the dialogues: "I mean for example if you take some boring text and everybody sits down and have a boring time and you don't say anything," and later in the interview: "[…] it was fun […] and sometimes when you have texts we talk and then it is fun."

discussion

The interview material was condensed into three major themes: *To meet each other*, characterized by the social aspects of participating in the philosophical dialogues; *To know and grow*, defined by the pupils' accounts of becoming capable within the context of philosophical dialogues; and *To have a good time*, which highlighted the pupils' descriptions of activities that are worthwhile in themselves, including how philosophical dialogues have served as such an activity.

It is important to note that these three themes are interrelated and often overlap in the analysis of the interview material. For instance, statements about listening can be seen as part of both *To meet each other* and *To know and grow*. Moreover, the voices of the pupils would have been diminished if one or both themes were disqualified to avoid overlap, because it was evident that the pupils

did not communicate only one of these ideas. Although one possible solution could have been to incorporate one theme as a subtheme of another, this would have compromised the integrity of that theme. Thus, although overlaps exist, they do not distort the overall picture of the pupils' experiences. The three themes will now be discussed in detail.

The pupils consistently reported finding the philosophical dialogues thought-provoking and intellectually engaging, as evidenced by their interactions with classmates, active listening, and problem-solving. This was reflected in the subthemes *Relationships* and *Collaboration* (under the main theme *To meet each other*) as well as *Learning* (under the main theme *To know and grow*). Such findings suggest that philosophical dialogue fosters curiosity and wonder among children with ID. This aligns with the recognized need for cognitively stimulating activities for pupils with ID, as argued primarily by Colom et al. (2014). It also underscores the importance of such activities as highlighted by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

The opportunity to actively engage in communication skills greatly benefited the participants. Walker and Snell (2013) note that individuals with ID often struggle with communication and social skills, which can affect their social interactions and activities. Williams et al. (2021) further underscore this need. Active practice of communication skills was a significant aspect of the pupils' experience during the philosophical dialogues, particularly evident in the themes *To know and grow* and *To meet each other*, especially within the subtheme *Collaboration*.

The positive impact of philosophical dialogues on communication and social skills is not surprising, because the pedagogy aligns closely with the recommendations made by Williams et al. (2021) for enhancing the quality of life of children with ID. The authors recommended providing children with tailored opportunities for participation in social activities, considering both their interests and levels of disability. These activities should also "include opportunities for the child's choice, control, and personal engagement" (p. 93). The major themes correspond well to these recommendations: *To meet each other* relates to participation, *To know and grow* pertains to choice and control, and *To have a good time* corresponds to personal engagement.

An important feature of philosophical dialogue is the development of decision-making skills. For dialogical enquirers, particularly those with ID, improving decision-making skills can enhance individual agency in daily life as well as in broader democratic and societal contexts.

The themes *To meet each other* and its subtheme *Collaboration*, along with the theme *To know and grow*, highlight the pupils' reports on improving skills such as problem-solving and teamwork. These skills are crucial for decision-making, particularly when engaging in supported decision-making rather than substituted decision-making, as promoted by Gudelyté et al. (2024). It is important to clarify that engaging in supported decision-making implies recognizing that the person being supported may not be fully capable of making their own decisions, which limits their autonomy. If everyone were fully capable of making their own decisions, the use of supported decision-making would be unethical. However, for individuals who cannot make their own decisions without support, failing to provide that support would be unethical. Furthermore, replacing substituted decision-making with supported decision-making, where possible, helps restore autonomy to some extent. It could be argued that supported decision-making is often more demanding than individual decision-making, because it requires the sharing of information and skills among different people. Philosophical dialogues seem to share many characteristics with supported decision-making; such as exchanging ideas and arguments for various positions, as well as the goal of fostering mutual understanding; Therefore, participation in philosophical dialogues may be a promising way to prepare for supported decision-making.

Of the two interviewers involved, I1 and I2, I2 also serves as the sole transcriber and analyst. Lewis (2009) highlights several factors to consider regarding research worker reliability. For example, it is recommended that researchers be familiar with the research setting and collect data consistently. This was sufficiently the case here, as both interviewers had prior experience with philosophical dialogues and attended several sessions of the study's intervention. Consequently, they had established relationships with the interviewees and were familiar with the setting. The interview guide, created by the interviewers and other members of the research group, included reformulated questions as well as inquiries about both positive and negative experiences. According to Lewis (2009),

the purpose of reformulating questions is to ensure similar answers. While this approach yielded consistent responses in some cases, it also led to a deeper exploration of data, as interviewees provided a broader range of experiences related to the questions. Both interviewers employed follow-up questions to enrich and clarify the interviewees' responses. Leading questions were generally avoided, although they were used sparingly in certain instances. It is important to note that reliability may suffer when data collection is conducted by multiple researchers. Therefore, it would be misleading to claim that the research worker reliability in this study enhances the overall reliability. However, it is deemed not to substantially detract from it.

Regarding descriptive validity, as described by Lewis (2009), the analyst also served as the interviewer in many instances and possessed knowledge of the pupils' idiosyncrasies, even those he did not interview. The interviewers were diligent in verbally noting when interviewees responded through various body languages, ensuring these observations were recorded. They also explained to interviewees the rationale behind this practice in cases where it might seem unusual. This attention to detail is believed to strengthen the validity of the results.

In terms of interpretation validity, Lewis (2009) notes that the questions asked were generally open-ended. When more direct questions were posed, they were followed up with probing inquiries to encourage interviewees to elaborate. An example of this exchange is where I1 prompts P9 to explain his thoughts further:

> P9: Well, eh, it worked well, because […] it doesn't become like babbling […] And it doesn't become much shouting. It's like we just talk and cooperate and solve these mysteries. In the dialogues.
>
> I1: Yes. Without it becoming loud or babbling, you mean. […] Why is that?
>
> […]
>
> P9: It helps us to focus better and, well, to learn better.

At times, the interviewees struggled to formulate or articulate their answers, prompting the interviewers to ask more direct questions. In all these cases, the interviewees had initially been asked open-ended questions and given time to respond on their own.

Continuing on the subject of interpretation validity, some pupils were very communicative during the interviews while others were less so, which was expected. The length of the interviews ranged from 12 to 40 minutes, with transcribed word counts varying from approximately 1,200 to 5,900 words. This discrepancy increased when including the two short written interviews, where the total word count, including questions, was about 110 for each interview. Furthermore, in one interview, a pupil chose to communicate through body language and nonverbal sounds instead of words. It is not always true that using many words results in richer and easier-to-interpret material, but generally, this is the case. It would be misleading to assign the same weight to words spoken in passing as to those uttered after careful consideration, as well as to equate simple agreement or disagreement with more elaborate reasoning on the subject. An example illustrating this distinction is as follows:

> P12: Sometimes it's more educational, sometimes it's not.
>
> I2: Mm.
>
> P12: Or no, it's not that educational, but, yeah, something.
>
> I2: Okay. What were you thinking about when you said "educational"?
>
> P12: No I said wrong.
>
> I2: You said wrong, but you were thinking about something?
>
> P12: No, I wasn't.
>
> I2: No, you just said words.
>
> P12: It wasn't supposed to be there.

Had the pupil not caught herself in saying things she did not mean and clearly stated this, the exchange could have become a central example of a theme. Unfortunately, it is seldom clear whether utterances were made with careful consideration. In some cases, a simple "yes" or "no" can be exactly what the respondent means. Probing was conducted whenever an interviewer felt it was necessary, but during analysis, there is always a risk of realizing that more probing was needed. Two examples of interpretatively challenging situations were the oral interview with the pupil who did not want to speak and the written interview where the pupil received support from one of the interviewers. To aid the pupils in formulating answers, the interviewers had to make statements that the interviewees could agree or disagree with. This is not an ideal situation and led to a higher frequency of instances where the analyst felt that more questioning was required to

interpret all pupil responses as authentic opinions. While there are some flaws regarding interpretation validity, it is deemed that these do not substantially detract from the overall validity of the results.

Regarding theory validity, as described by Lewis (2009), all the researchers had prior experience working in education based on philosophical dialogues. They were also familiar with previous research on this method, which had primarily shown positive results. To avoid only soliciting data that fit their prior experiences, the researchers made a point to ask for both positive and negative experiences and to present these data accurately. The pupils provided examples of both kinds, often without direct prompting, indicating they were not significantly limited in expressing their opinions to the interviewers. Furthermore, to prevent the analysis from being skewed, themes were not determined beforehand. The theme of *To have a good time* is particularly interesting in this regard. All themes emerged from closely listening to the interviewees, but *To have a good time* was not anticipated by previous research. The theory validity is considered to strengthen the overall validity of the study.

It is challenging to conduct interviews without the interviewees being influenced by the interviewer, as described by Lewis (2009). In this case, it was determined that the best outcome would arise from having the facilitators themselves conduct the interviews rather than relative strangers. The pupils would likely find it easier to open up to the facilitators, and any potential downsides could be mitigated through careful handling.

One limitation of this study pertains to how regular classes meet the pupils' needs in general or in comparison to philosophical dialogues. No assertion is made regarding whether the regular classes adequately address the needs of pupils with ID discussed here.

Another limitation concerns the distinction between mild and more severe ID. As mentioned in the background, the needs of individuals with ID are likely less pronounced among those with mild ID than among those with severe ID. While it seems that the needs identified in this study pertain to individuals with mild ID, it is impossible to determine the applicability of the results to those with severe ID. Consequently, it is neither feasible to generalize the findings of this study nor to make strong claims about the effects of philosophical dialogues on children

with ID. However, the results provide insights into how pupils with ID experience philosophical dialogues and highlight directions for future research, such as the prevalence of philosophical experiences and the existence of other experiences within philosophical dialogues. Such research may also help assess how well the needs of pupils with ID are met by education based on philosophical dialogues and address questions regarding their experiences while participating in such educational approaches.

The results of this study indicate that humor can play an important role in philosophical dialogues with pupils with ID, though further research is needed to properly map this connection.

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