

Coaching as central element of a new Didactics of Higher Education

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I. Introduction

Σωκράτης: ... οὐ γὰρ εὐπορῶν αὐτὸς τοὺς ἄλλους ποιῶ ἀπορεῖν, ἀλλὰ παντὸς μᾶλλον αὐτὸς ἀπορῶν οὔτως καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ποιῶ ἀπορεῖν.” (Plat. Men. 80c)

Socrates: ... For I do not know better myself whilst puzzling others, but rather my whole self is puzzled and I make the others puzzle.

Every now and again a Coach's actions are compared to Socratic maieutic (Webers 2016: 78). Important for the understanding as a *μαῖα* (gr. μαῖα “midwife”) is that she neither knows what revelation is given birth to, nor is she able to do the birthing herself (Plat. Tht. 149b). For Coaches, this means, that they cannot have a set goal in mind to which they'll guide their clients. The Goal is to be chosen by the client, as well as the path. All a Coach can and has to do is helping to shed light on that path and its possible pitfalls – and possibly making said path a bit easier. The quote above illustrates that a Coach cannot be a guide on the client's path but rather her/his companion, her/his fellow. He/she contributes to the client's journey by providing an additional set of eyes. He can only make the client doubt (e.g. by showing him/her a hitherto unseen possibility) (Webers 2016: 78) if he him-/herself is or at least had at one point been doubtful of the same thing. Furthermore, Socrates's quote highlights that a Coach always has to be open to the possibility to encounter unexpected, perplexing things – and allow him-/herself to be perplexed, even after years of Coaching experience. Just like a mountain guide a Coach mostly knows a way but he/she can't bear the client over the mountain. And just like a mountain track, a path might change over time. The old, well-trodden road may have become unsurmountable, while new forks may have opened up. This is well exemplified precisely in the Platonic Dialogues. The dialogue Phaedrus, for instance, starts as a conversation about the dos and don'ts in an erotic relationship of a man to a boy and ends with a discourse about the nature of the eternal human soul.

On the other hand, his/her experience allows him/her to cautions the client against dangerous or unfruitful paths. To further quote Socrates:

Σωκράτης: ... Μέγιστον δὲ τοῦτ' ἐνὶ τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ [μαιευτικῇ] τέχνῃ, βασανίζειν δυνατὸν εἶναι παντὶ τρόπῳ πότερον εἴδωλον καὶ ψεῦδος ἀποτίκτει τοῦ νέου ἢ διάνοια ἢ γόνιμόν τε καὶ ἀληθές. (Plat. Tht. 150b f)

Socrates: ... The greatest thing however about our [maieutic] art is that it is able to check whether all the mind of an adolescent is about to bring forth either something phantomous and false or whether the thought is real and true.

Socrates, whilst not having given birth to a revelation himself (Plat. Tht. 150c), has been helping in that process for a long time. Thus, he is able to determine, whether or not an idea may have any value. But the success of Coaching hinges not on *téchnê* (τέχνη) alone (Webers 2016: 77). Socrates emphasizes that his competence as a *μαῖα*, a midwife encompasses just as well to determine, who is the best *μαῖα* for a specific person (Plat. Tht. 151b). This insight is mirrored by findings of modern psychotherapy, which stress that it isn't important, *what* happens between two human beings, but rather *how* it

happens (Heller et al 2016: 2). Thus, the success of Coaching hinges first and foremost on the relationship between Coach and Coachee. This is a trivial revelation, since the relationship between Coach and Coachee is intrinsically, immediately a personal one (Heller et al 2016: 2). Just as trivial is the fact that the personalities of both the Coach and the Coachee are of vital importance whether Coaching can be successful. More profound is the statement that, when Coaches are evaluated, often the personality of the Coach and his actual Coaching skills are difficult to distinguish (Heller et al 2016: 3).

This emphasis on the importance of relationship and, by extension, personality over the assertion of tools fights against a more materialistic, deterministic, machinesque view of man. That view asserts man's proneness to react to certain stimuli, use of certain (pedagogic) tools in a at least somewhat predictable manner (Webers 2016: 77). Coaching, however, is a highly situative, subjective and distinct process. Hence, Coaches like Thomas Webers caution against an over-reliance on tools (Webers 2016: 77).

Yet, with all the experience accumulated over a long activity, one still has to be wary of pitfalls. This can be as well exemplified with Socrates, whose role as the one relentlessly asking uncomfortable questions ultimately made the Athenians sentence him to death. This also shows why one should be cautious to showcase Socrates as the prototype of a Coach. Socrates's response to the allegation that he knew what he does would be potentially dangerous is to liken himself to the demigod Achilles (Plat. apol. 28c f) stating that (potential) danger can never be a factor when deciding what's the right thing to do (Plat. apol. 28e). He is, of course, right when it comes to general ethical standpoints. However, he is decidedly wrong when it comes to the profession of a Coach. As such one has to be acutely aware of his/her as well as the Client's capabilities and limitations (Loebbert 2015: 142f). To further illustrate Socrates's questionable fit as an idol for Coaching, at least in the dialogue Menon he provides a perfect example of how *not* to coach systemically, even though that dialogue portrays him as being successful (Plat. Men. 82a – 84a).

We have established that the Coaching process is personal, subjective and situative. This pertains especially to the usual Coaching setting, where one Coach coaches one Coachee. However, things are a bit different when groups are coached. Here coaching becomes less personal but even more situative, since the Coach is not always intervening but also can recluse him-/herself to just watching things play out (Hoffmann et al. (2017): 57). If he/she intervenes there is usually more than one person affected, hence the less personal tone of the Coach's acting. In fact, Coaching of individuals is not something a Coach in *ZukunftsDesign* (Designing the future, see below) does *expressis verbis*, even though team dynamics, i.e. the dynamics between the individual and the group, are always a possible Coaching topic (s. e.g. Hauser 2016: 35).

This paper takes the master's program *ZukunftsDesign* (designing the future) as an example of Coaching in Higher Education. Taking this course as an example, the following questions are tackled:

How does Coaching actually work? How can Coaching facilitate group learning processes in an interdisciplinary setting? To determine this, we have tried letting our students fill out questionnaires, both qualitative and quantitative, with limited success. So this time we elected to conduct interviews with students to better be able to assess the relationship between the students and their Coaches, as well as a group of students and Coaches. The method of qualitative interviews was also chosen in order to get a glimpse of the students' thought processes while answering the questions. Thirdly, this method was chosen to be able to flexibly react to peculiar things the students say. Three interviews were conducted with students of this particular master's program (here referred to as A, B, and C). As control, one interview was conducted with a student who participated in an interdisciplinary program (called *Coburger Weg*, the Coburg Path) without a Coach, a mentor, a tutor or anything similar (here referred to as D). In the second chapter I will briefly showcase those two programs.

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The Interviews will be quoted in their original German in italics. A translation is written after the quote further down. To keep vagueness through translation at a minimum, alternate translations will be provided in curly brackets (e.g. uncertainty {insecurity} for German *Unsicherheit*). In parentheses there's a time stamp to give a sense for the time flow, especially when a part has been cut. In chevrons (<...>) there will be words inserted, that had not been uttered by the dialogue partners at the time, but help understanding that which is said.

II. The courses: ZukunftsDesign and Coburger Weg

The general structure of ZukunftsDesign is double. On the one hand students attend classic lectures on different topic (i.e. communication, ethics, creativity methods, etc.). On the other hand, students are assigned to different project, ranging from "classical" design project (e.g. develop an individualized pen) to more societal projects (e.g. developing ideas for a monastery to deal with their ageing members). This master's program is expressly interdisciplinary, because it's built on the theory that true innovation happens most frequently when people, who normally would never cross paths, talk, interact with each other. To increase intellectual diversity, the master's program is extra-occupational, so the students can infuse not only their expertise and knowledge into the projects, but also their different job experiences.

What ZukunftsDesign aims to teach can be shown in the following quote by Psychologist Dietrich Dörner:

Es kommt nicht darauf an, einen bestimmten ‚Denkstil‘ zu fördern. Ich hoffe, hinlänglich klar gemacht zu haben, dass man das, was oftmals pauschal ‚vernetztes Denken‘ oder ‚systemisches Denken‘ genannt wird, nicht als eine Einheit, als eine bestimmte, isolierte Fähigkeit betrachten kann. Es ist ein Bündel von Fähigkeiten, und im Wesentlichen ist es die Fähigkeit, sein ganz normales Denken, seinen ‚gesunden Menschenverstand‘ auf die Umstände der jeweiligen Situation einzustellen. Die Umstände sind immer verschieden! Mal ist dieses wichtig, mal jenes. Es kommt darauf an! Den Umgang aber mit verschiedenen Situationen, die verschiedene Anforderungen an uns stellen, kann man lernen. Man kann ihn lehren, indem man Menschen mal in diese, mal in jene Situation bringt und ihre Verhaltensweisen und besonders ihre Fehler mit ihnen diskutiert. Man hat keine Chancen, etwas Derartiges in der ‚wahren‘ Realität zu tun. [...] (Gunther Herr et al. 2017: 22)

It's not crucial to further a specific „way of thinking“. I hope I have made it sufficiently clear that, what often is called “join-up thinking” or “systemic thinking” in a blanket statement, cannot be viewed as a unit, as one distinct, isolated skill. It is a bundle of skills, and, most importantly, it's the ability to train one's completely normal thinking, one's “common sense” onto the circumstances of the situation at hand. Those circumstances are always different! One time one thing is important, another time another thing is important. It depends! The dealing with different

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situations, however, that require different things from us, can be learned. You can teach that by bringing people sometimes in this, sometimes in that situation un discuss their behavior and especially their mistakes with them. There's no chance, to do anything like that in the "real" world. [...]

Negatively, this quote demonstrates, that ZukunftsDesign's goal is to mold personalities. This means that ZukunftsDesign is supposed to be a training ground, a safe space where experiments are both allowed and encouraged. The students are expressly allowed to make mistakes, to fail. Within that safe space, students are regularly exposed to situations that are unknown to them. Neither do they necessarily know anything about the project they are meant to work on in a specific term, nor the people they will be working with. By confronting the students every term with new unknown situations, ZukunftsDesign lets the students practice dealing with the uncertainties, tensions that follow these unknown situations.

Important to note is that the projects themselves are not graded, so as to allow the possibility of projects to fail.

The Coburger Weg (Coburg Path) is described by D as following:

(00:15) I: ... *Wie laufen denn Projekte im Coburger Weg ab?*

D: .. Also, vom Ablauf, von den Unterrichtsstunden, also eine Unterrichtsstunde sieht meistens so aus, dass da am Anfang, die ersten Veranstaltungen, das ist ein Input und Einführung der Dozenten und eh je länger der Coburger Weg aber geht, desto mehr Eigeninitiative ist gefordert, also desto mehr liest man auch eigenen Texte eh tritt auch ein Referat zu forder- vorbereiten, meistens mit anderen noch zusammen, also im Team eh in Teamarbeit, es gibt Diskussionsrunden, also wird darüber diskutiert und dann heben sich auch die verschieden Meinung ab ehm (.) und auch Denkmuster zu dem Thema (.) und am Ende eben [hm] die Prüfung, die (.) ja, recht auf einem, also ein angemessenes Level hat.

(01:01)

(00:15) I: How do project in Coburger Weg proceed?

D: .. Well, if it comes to the process, to the lectures, now, a lecture looks like this most of the time, that in the beginning, the first sessions, there's an input and an introduction from the lecturers and er the longer the Coburger Weg goes on, the more self-initiative is required, so the more you're reading own texts erm steps also requi- prepare a presentation, usually together with others, too, so with a team erm it's a team effort, there are discussion groups, so you discuss about it, and then different opinions and thought patters emerge to a topic (.) and in the end simply [hm] the exam, that is [hm], well, quite on a, well, has an adequate level.

Important to note is, that the exam in the Coburger Weg is a reflection assignment, where the students are required to reflect on the roles the had in that project, and how they partook in that project. Through this a frame is set, that nudges the students from the get-go towards thinking about their

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actions and behavior within a specific project. The quote shows as well that student D lays high emphasis on the aspect of self-initiative and both the ability as well as the requirement to shape a project after one's own interests and purposes.

At the inception of ZD, Coaching was conceptualized as a "new species of a lecturer" (*neue Gattung von Lehrenden*) (Herr et. al. (2017): 21). He/She was thought of as someone who accompanies the groups without leading them, acting as a facilitator and a "hinter" (*Hinweisgeber*) (Herr et. al. (2017): 21). The Coach was thought of as someone who on the one hand should help provide content-based input via the lecturers in the group itself and on the other hand help the lecturers tailor their lectures to the current, actual needs of the students in their current, actual projects. He/She should be link from within the group to the outside world in form of the overall master's program (Herr et. al. (2017): 21). Within the groups, however, the Coaches job was thought to be helping the students grasp their learning progress by reflecting the lectures into the group (Herr et al. (2017) 22).

In the following interviews it will be tested, whether or not the Coaches actually perform these preliminarily thought-of ideas. If so, the paper will reflect whether this is meaningful or whether the same effect could be achieved (better) by different means. If the Coaches don't do something outlined above, the paper will reflect why this is the case and whether the Coaches better should be doing said tasks.

III. Experiencing Coaching

Firstly, the Role of the Coach within the group projects is outlined, as the students understand it. Two students emphasized the role of the Coach in setting the frame of the overall project. Interestingly, both used metaphors derived from traffic to illustrate that role. Student A likened the Coach to a "guardrail" (*Leitplanke*), while Student C preferred the word "hard shoulder" (*Seitenstreifen*). Student C specifically highlighted that a Coach cannot and should not prevent a group from failing. A Coach should, however, indicate that a group might, in his/her opinion, end up in a ditch, if they keep their current trajectory. Though he somewhat softened the Coach's roll when it comes to guiding the group, Student C stresses the role a Coach should have in setting the overall frame. He means that a Coach should be instrumental in establishing what exactly is expected of the students. He/She should express what he/she thinks is his/her role as well as outlining what he/she expects of the students, what the professors expect of them, what the master's program as a whole expects of them and finally, if the project is provided by an external partner, what that particular partner expects of them. Though student A agrees with student C that Coaches should be frame setting, he doesn't extrapolate further, what he understands as such.

Student C makes it abundantly clear that coming into a group and dumping a load of input, is not what a Coach should do. He calls that "bulimic message", a term, he claims, he didn't come up by himself, but rather picked up from another student. Later, in the same interview, he further extrapolates on that point, stating that a Coach should not give input all the time, since this might be perceived as "looking for applause". Student A also makes it clear, that giving input is not the Coach's job. He goes on to saying that the initial approach of some lecturers of going into the groups and dumping a load of ill-fitting information didn't feel particularly helpful. For B, however, the quality of the Coaches content-related input is strongly correlated with the overall quality of the Coaching. She muses, that this might be, because good content-related input shows that the Coach is mentally present and knows

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where the group stands at that moment. On the other hand, C specifically lauds a specific instance where the Coach brought an external lecturer into the group.

It can be said, that the students have a good idea how a Coach should not be. However, when it comes to determining the impact of the Coaches, they struggle. A says in response to the question on the Coach's influence:

(14:54) I: ... *Wie haben die Coaches dich beeinflusst? .. Haben sie dich beeinflusst, sagen wir's mal so (lachen).*

A: . *Das sind schwierige Fragen. Ähm, noch schwieriger zu beantworten. Ja, müssen sie wohl, weil ich komm jetzt aus dem Studium hinten anders raus, als ich vorher rein bin. [hm] Ähm, die Beeinflussung (schnaufe)] nee, da müsstest Du die Frage genauer spezifizieren und das wird wahrscheinlich nicht möglich sein. Wie sollen sie mich beeinflusst haben äh, was sollte sich verändert haben? Und das ehm weil ich, also es gibt keinen direkten Zusammenhang, ne, also wo ich sage, der Coach hat mal das und das getan [hm] und danach hat das und das. Sondern für mich ist das ein Prozess, der über vier Semester ging [hm] und dann so nach und nach eh so die Einstellung zu so solchen Dingen, wie Unsicherheit, Projektarbeit und und und Team, andere Leute, andere Meinungen, solche Sachen, die sich so nach und nach geändert haben.*

I: *Hm, d.h. praktisch, das Studium bildet für Dich so eine Art . Blob, der, wo du gesagt hast, ok, es gibt ein davor und danach [ja] und die einzelnen Teile, also, wie Dich die Lehre verändert hat, wie dich die Projektarbeit verändert hat, wie Coaching dich verändert hat, könntest Du jetzt nicht unbedingt auseinanderhalten.*

A: *Ich könnte es nicht wirklich, ich meine, wenn ich wirklich lange drüber nachdenke, finde ich vielleicht eini- einzelne Ereignisse, aber äh, im Großen und Ganzen gibt's jetzt nix, was so weit raussticht, dass ich sage, hey, das war's [hm], sondern das ist wirklich ein kontinuierlicher Prozess gewesen. (16:17) [...] (16:36) Kein einziges Schlüsselerlebnis, sondern wirklich eigentlich viele kleine [hm], ne. (16:42) ...*

[...]

(23:24) *Reflexion, ja [ok]. Ich glaube, Reflexion ist eins der wesentlichen äh, [hm] oder der wesen- eine der wesentlichen Punkte in diesem ganzen Ding [hm], dass du einen Schritt zurückmachst, sag ich immer, einen Schritt zurückmachst und mal von außen draufguckst [genau], hm [hm] . und der das, wenn's drum geht, wie aktiv ist der Coach in der Gruppe, wie gesagt, für mich, wenn die Gruppe es nicht selbst organisiert und selbst diese Dinge schafft [hm] zu sagen, wir diskutieren jetzt zwanzig Minuten und dann müssen wir zu einer Entscheidung kommen [hm] und wenn wir keine haben, müssen wir uns überlegen, wie kommen wir zu der Entscheidung [hm] o::der wir machen was ganz anderes, ne, also dass die Gruppe s- insgesamt auch reflektiert [hm] . am Anfang der Coach und später sollte die Gruppe das selbst können, ohne dass der Coach aber weg ist.*

I: *D.h. aber, d- die ideale Gruppe bräuchte den Coach nicht. (24:15)*

[...]

(24:24)

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A: *Ok, wenn es die ideale Gruppe gäbe, die genau das könnte, dann bräuchte sie den Coach vielleicht nicht. Das wäre aber die Gruppe, die vorher durch das Coaching durchgelaufen ist [ok], weil erfahrungsgemäß gibt es diese ideale ja nicht [ja, klar] ...*

I: ... How did the Coaches influence you? .. Did Coaches influence you, let's put it this way (laughs)

A: . These are difficult questions. Erm, even more difficult to answer. Yes, they must have had an influence because I'm leaving the course back there different than I previously entered it. [hm] Erm, the influencing (heavy breathing) no, you'd have to specify the question and that might most likely not be possible. How should they have influenced me erm What should have changed? And that erm, because I, well, there is no direct relation, is it, I mean, if I say, the Coach did this and that [hm] and then this and that had. Rather, for me it is a process, that went for four terms [hm] and then little by little erm well, the attitude to such things like uncertainty {insecurity}, group projects {project work} and and and Team, other people, other opinions, such things, that little by little changed.

I: Hm, that means, more or less, the course for you resembles sort of a . blob, that, of which you said, ok, there's a before and after [yes] and the individual parts, so to speak, how the lectures changed you, how the group projects changed you, how Coaching changed you, you could not distinguish these.

A: I could not really, I mean, if I thought about it really long, I might maybe find sever- particular events, but erm, by and large, there's nothing that sticks out so much, that I say, hey, that's it, rather it really has been a continuous process. (16:17) [...] (16:36) No single key experience, but really rather many little ones [hm], isn't it?

16:42) ...

[...]

(23:24)

Reflection, yeah. I think, reflection is one of the core er, [hm] or one of the co- one of the core points in this whole thing [hm], that you take a step back, I always say, take one step back and look at it from the outside [exactly], hm [hm] . and the the, if it's about how active the Coach is in the group, as I said, for me, when the group doesn't organize it themselves und manages these things [hm] to say, we're going to discuss now for twenty minutes and then we have to reach a decision [hm] und when we do not have a decision, we have to think of a way how to get to that decision [hm] o::r we do something completely different, isn't it, so that the group s- as a whole reflects as well [hm] . in the beginning the Coach and later the group should be able to do that, without the Coach being absent however.

I: So, but, th- the ideal group would not need the Coach (24:15)

[...]

(24:24)

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A: Ok, if if the ideal group existed, that would be able to do that, then it maybe would not need the Coach. But this would be the group that had gone through Coaching previously [ok], because empirically this ideal (group) does not exist [yes, of course] ...

It is notable how hard a time Student A has to even approach that question. He arrives much later at the conclusion, that Coaches may have showed him how reflection works. But even here, he starts with saying, that reflection is something "the whole thing" is about. The specification, that this is might be a Coach's job to teach, is almost an afterthought.

This is mirrored by B stating that Coaches influenced her by be thought-provoking. For her, Coaches achieved this through their input, regardless if that input had been aimed at the project's content or team dynamics. B further details how her ideal Coach should be: he/she should be both an inspired as well as inspiring person. He/she should bring the group members into a position to find solutions to problems themselves. This, to her, can be achieved through questions, subject-specific support, through hinting at problems or on an emotional level through trust and encouragement, as she details in an assignment on the perfect Coach (S. 9 in that assignment). Later in the same interview, B states that a Coach should be a paragon or role model (*Vorbild*). However, she cannot say whether she learned something or anything from Coaches, rather she found something that impressed her and wants to learn:

(16:04) I: Ähm . was hast du überhaupt oder generell von Coaches gelernt? (12s)

B: Also, ob ich mir was abgeguckt hab, oder?

I: Mh, jå, was abgeguckt, ja, genau, also, was ja genau, kann auch abgucken sein, ja . Oder, keine Ahnung, eine Methode, die du toll fandest, eine Fragetechnik, oder . eine Sozialform, irgendwas, was ein Coach gemacht hat, wo du wo du dachtest, hey, das finde ich gut, das übernehme ich. (5s)

B: Mh . also jetzt, so spontan, wo ich genau sagen würde, genau das war's, ähm .. hatte ich, glaub ich, nicht (lacht)

I: Ok, also, Coaches haben Dir nichts beigebracht [die], mal andersrum provokant gefragt. (4s) Du hast nichts von denen gelernt. (6s)

B: Also, so würde ich das jetzt auch nicht sagen. Ich würd vielleicht ehm so in der in der Methodik von dem einem mit dem Gespür (.) genau die die Punkte rauszufinden, wann's hakt und wo's hakt und wie man da dann einen Lösungsweg findet, das hat mich auf jeden Fall sehr beeindruckt [hm]. Das wäre jetzt ein Ziel, wo ich sagen würde, okay, das das könnte ich anstreben, aber dass ich jetzt sag, okay, ich hab's jetzt schon gelernt und verinnerlicht [hm hm] würde ich jetzt auch nicht behaupten, ne. (17:45)

(16:04) I: Erm, what have you at all or in general learned from Coaches? (12s)

B: You mean, what I learned by watching him/her do?

I: Mh, yeah, watched him/her do, yeah, exactly, well, what yeah, exactly, could be learned by watching, yes. Or, no idea, a method that you liked, a questioning

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technique or a social form, anything that a Coach did, where you thought, hey I think that's good, I'll adopt that. (5s)

B: Mh, well now, completely spontaneously, where I'd say, exactly this, that's it, erm I think, I did not have such a moment. (laughs)

I: Ok, so, Coaches did not teach you anything [they], to provocatively ask the other way round. (4s). You did not learn anything from them. (6s)

B: Well, I wouldn't put it that way. I'd maybe er, if it comes to methodology of that one and with a sensibility (.), to exactly find those points, when you're getting caught and where you're getting caught and how to find a solution there, that did in any case impress me [hm]. This would be a goal, where I'd say, okay, I could strive towards that, but I'd say now, okay, I have learned and internalized that [hm hm] I would not claim that, is it. (17:45)

Because of the long pauses, one can see that thinking about what one might have learned from a Coach is not something student B has thought about. And the conclusion, where she finally arrives at, is the impression a Coach's abilities to act on team dynamics made on her. This, however, is not taught through methods the Coaches uses, but rather through example. Again, the Coach appears as a paragon for student B. Student C even goes so far as to saying, that a Coach did at times "impress" him, rather than influence. Maybe because of this one could explain, why all three students expressly said they deem Coaching to be of vital importance.

Earlier in the Interview B states that she deems a Coach's ability to grasp a team's dynamics as vitally important to perform Coaching:

(01:45) B: Naja, also, wenn jetzt darum ging im Projektablauf irgendwas besser zu machen, oder so, dann hatten wir jemanden (einen Coach) dabei gehabt, der halt als fünftes von fünf festgestellt hat, das wir uns jetzt im im Kreis drehen [ok] und eh dafür brauche ich ehrlich gesagt keinen Coach [hm], vor allen Dingen zumal er's, wenn er's dann als Letztes merkt [lachen] und ehm dann eh hatten wir halt auch jemanden, der der war zwar au-, sagen wir es mal so, nicht immer da, u::nd ehm hat aber genau an den Knackpunkten, wo jemand anders gesagt hätte „Wir drehen uns im Kreis“ irgendwo einen Ausweg ausgezeigt [hm] und . da halt weitergebracht und quantitativen Input gegeben.

(01:45) B: Well, you know, when it comes to improving something in the project's process, or something like that, then we had someone (a Coach) with us, who as the fifth of five noted {realized}, that we're now going round in circles [ok] and er for that I don't need a Coach, to be honest [hm], the more so especially when he realized that the last [laughs] and erm then er we just had someone, who who admittedly too-, let me put it like this, hadn't always been around, a::nd erm did exactly at the crucial points, where someone else would have said: "We're going round in circles", show a way out [hm] and . helped on and gave quantitative input.

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B especially emphasizes the crucial importance of personal feedback, that caused her to profoundly reflect on herself. A states that he appreciated greatly, when one Coach gave him (and his group) personal feedback. This holds true as well for C, who, as mentioned above, states that it especially “impressed” him, when the Coach seemingly paid close attentions to the needs uttered by group and had taken steps to address those needs.

This focus on the personal shows also in A’s interview, when he describes, how a Coach forced them out of their comfort zone by assigning the members different team roles. Though not liking that method at the time, he states, that looking back he actually really appreciates this.

IV. Conclusion: Differences between concept and reality

The major difference that stick out between how the Coach’s role was envisioned versus how it actually plays out lies in the Coach’s relationship to content. As expressed in C’s somewhat crass statement of “bulimic messages”, the students do not see a Coach’s role as pertaining to providing to input or even just linked to input at all. Neither should they themselves give input, especially unwanted and unfitting one, nor do the students view the Coach’s role as including shaping the lecturer’s input to the students’ need. In fact, none of the student’s say that they learned anything content-related from a Coach. As shown on the example of B, which also is mirrored in A’s interview, the student’s never really thought about a Coach’s relationship to concrete content. This behavior emphasizes the felt alieness of the Coach’s perceived role and any content.

This, however, creates a problem when we think of a Coach as a facilitator. Apparently he/she is decidedly not perceived as someone who helps intertwine theory and practice. Rather, the students see his main focus on team dynamics in general and getting a team unstuck in particular. This problem is further compound when we compare it to student D’s remarks on how and what she learned it the likewise interdisciplinary, project-focused program *Coburger Weg*. Student D claims that she also learned how to work in interdisciplinary teams, how to appreciate a different discipline’s view on a given subject – all without a Coach. Furthermore, she states that no one in those teams took care of team dynamics. And while she had a few negative experiences with other team members, she didn’t find them severe. But here we may encounter a major difference between the *Coburger Weg* and *ZukunftsDesign*. Possibly conflicts in a highly diverse, especially in regards to age, education and profession, group of students, who each have their full-time job and often a family, the overall stress of their life-situations may cause tensions within a team to escalate further and quicker, than in a group of full-time students, who are more or less the same age and in similar personal conditions.

But the worrying details don’t end there, as student D goes on to saying that she also learned new skills, like project management. So even the acquiring of skills, that lie outside of one’s comfort zone, as A had described, can be accomplished without a Coach. The question thus arises: of everything a Coach is supposed to accomplish, can be achieved without him/her, what is his/her business in *ZukunftsDesign*?

The answer to that may lie in the personal feedback, since both student A and B expressed appreciating that greatly and student C reaching for strong terms like “impress” to describe the impact a Coach had on him, when paying close attention to the group’s needs. Also student D says, that to her a Coach is also someone who has an eye for the personal needs of individual group members. This last point may

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as well be one of the main findings – it further highlights the situational and personal nature of a Coach's actions.

Combining what students A, B and C said about Coaches, they should be both inspired as well as inspiring (according to B), challenging and providing new perspectives (according to student C), as well as having a trusting, confidential (*vertrauensvoll*) relationship to a Coach (according to student's A and C).

So here we see again a parallel to Socrates, as he was portrayed in the beginning: A Coach should help the team members going forward, without them specifically showing the way. All students emphasized, that a Coach's job is not about actual contents, it's more about accompanying the students on their way. Also, just as Socrates says about himself, that he only can puzzle others because he is puzzled himself (Plat. Men. 80c), a Coach can only be inspiring by being inspired himself (according to student B), can only show what reflection is, by showing how reflection works (according to student A). The question, however, still remains, if a Coach is at all necessary to achieve that, since, as the example of student D shows, all of this can potentially be accomplished without a Coach. Further research is necessary to determine, whether a Coach can enhance that effect or make sure everyone in a project learns something

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